

THE THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS OF DAMDAMING KATOLIKO SA TEOLOHIYA IN LIGHT OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY AND AD THEOLOGIAM PROMOVENDAM

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This essay reviews the vision-mission, conferences, and more than 20 journal/book publications of the Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya (DaKaTeo) or the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines since its inception in 2000 to the present, to glean elements of synodal theological praxis, in light of the 2023 Synod on Synodality and the 2023 Ad theologiam promovendam (To Promote Theology). The following characteristics of DaKaTeo's praxis manifesting a synodal approach to theologizing have been identified: (1) contextual; (2) discerning in its employment of critical, appreciative, and liberative hermeneutics; (3) prophetic; (4) dialogical and inclusive; (5) transformative praxis-oriented education and pastoral actions; and (6) a safe space for collegial fellowship and theological kinship. The paper also identifies challenges or areas for further improvement in DaKaTeo's theological praxis.

Keywords: Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya, DaKaTeo, prophetic theology, liberationist-intercultural hermeneutics, 2023 Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis Ad Theologiam Promovendam

INTRODUCTION

The immediate impetus for writing this paper came from the first phase of the Synod on Synodality, including the three-year processes leading to the meeting in Rome in November 2023.¹ The

¹ "Synodal Church: Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/vademecum/Vademecum-EN-A4.pdf>; henceforth referred to as *Vademecu*.

2023 Synthesis Report on the Synod, *The Synodal Church in Mission*, can be viewed as a theological product that is a fruit of discernment on the Church as “communion, participation, and mission.”² According to the working paper for the synod, synodality is not just about a new way of being church but a “practice: a “journey,” “a process,” and a “concrete experience” (e.g. *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 17-18).³ It needs to be embodied in attitudes, structures, and processes (Preparatory Document no. 27).⁴

While the Synod Synthesis Report does not explicitly discuss theology or specifically the role of theologians, it has a lot of bearing on the why, what, who, how, and where theology should be done. The more expressive explanations are contained in the 2023 *motu proprio* of Pope Francis, entitled *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (To Promote Theology).⁵ What may be important is that the 2023 apostolic letter was issued just three days after the conclusion of the first phase of the Synod on Synodality, thus establishing continuity or link with the ideas of the Synthesis Report in a more concrete way regarding the “paradigm shift” that should take place in Catholic theology given great changes in

² XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops First Session (4-29 October 2023), *Synthesis Report*, “A Synodal Church in Mission”, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.1.0.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>; henceforth referred to as “2023 Synod Synthesis Report.”

³ *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf.

⁴ Jos Moons, SJ, “A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality: Reconfiguring Ecclesiology and Ecclesial Practice,” <https://theo.kuleuven.be/apps/press/ecsi/files/2023/05/Moons-2022-Comprehensive-Introduction-to-Synodality.pdf>.

⁵ The major ideas in the instruction echo the direction set forward by Pope Francis in 2017 in his “Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on ecclesiastical universities and faculties,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2018/1/29/veritatis-gaudium.html>; henceforth in this essay, abbreviated as VG.

modern and contemporary culture. Pope Francis calls on theologians “to prophetically interpret the present and to see new itineraries for the future, in the light of Revelation,” amid profound cultural transformations. “Ecclesial Synodality,” Pope Francis states, “commits theologians to do theology in a synodal form, promoting among themselves the ability to listen, dialogue, discern and integrate the multiplicity and variety of instances and contributions.” For this to happen, there should be spaces where one can live and experience theological collegiality and fraternity (no.6).

It is in the context of the synodal movement that this essay seeks to address the question, to what extent do DaKaTeo’s theological processes, attitudes, and structures resemble the characteristics of a synodal and theological style in light of the Synthesis Report of the Synod on Synodality and the *motu proprio Ad Theologiam Promovendam*.⁶ To answer this question, it examines the history and theological praxis of DaKaTeo in the more than twenty years of its existence. The analysis will be confined to the published papers from twenty-six DaKaTeo’s conferences from 2002 to 2023, including its public statements on various social and ecclesial questions. By examining DaKaTeo’s theological productions, this work provides insight into the emerging orientations, preferences, elements, structures, and processes of DaKaTeo’s way of “doing theology.” Lastly, it serves as a foresight or pointer for future directions of the theological association.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (On Promoting Theology), November 1, 2023, trans. Christopher Evan Longhurst, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christopher-Longhurst/publication/378710067_AD_THEOLOGIAM_PROMOVENDAM_On_Promoting_Theology_-_English_Translation/links/65e6fe6eadf2362b63780c56/AD-THEOLOGIAM-PROMOVENDAM-On-Promoting-Theology-English-Translation.pdf.

BEGINNINGS AND VISION AND MISSION OF DAKATEO

“GROEP FONSKÉ” AND THE INAUGURAL SYMPOSIUM OF 2022

Between 2000 and 2002, a small group of Filipin@ alumni from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL, Belgium), called “Groep Fonske,”⁷ gathered to reflect on the state of theology and the work of Catholic theologians in the Philippines. Their meetings led to a realization of the need for a forum dedicated to serious theological discussions about the intra- and extra-ecclesial issues facing the Philippine Church that call for enlightenment and critical analysis.

The group knew there had been previous attempts to establish a theological association, but these efforts failed due to differing theological perspectives and varying levels of professional training among members. Groep Fonske, therefore, decided it would be beneficial to start with a community of friends who shared similar orientations and levels of training in theology, specifically those with doctoral and licentiate degrees in theological disciplines.

Furthermore, those who obtained their doctoral or licentiate degrees upon their return to the Philippines were usually assigned to administrative jobs in seminaries, schools of theology,

⁷ *Groep Fonske* was composed of Jimmy Belita, Agnes Brazal, Dennis Gonzalez, Emmanuel S. de Guzman, Jose de Mesa, Manuel Ginete, Manuel Pajarillo, and Daniel Franklin Pilario. The late Prof. Em. Georges de Schrijver, SJ, of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven who mentored many of *Groep Fonske*'s members, encouraged them to form an association inspired by his experience with an Indian theologian association. “Fonske” is a statue in the center of the university city of Leuven, Belgium. It is the short name for “*Fons Sapientiae*”, Latin for “Source of Wisdom.” The image represents a student who, reading through a book, runs the wisdom in the form of water through his head.

universities, and dioceses, leading them to shelve their interest in research and writing. Perhaps the formation of an organization could provide a space for theological reflections and praxis and foster a “writing culture” among theologians. A forum could serve as a support group and a “pressure” group for theologians to continue producing creative and relevant theological research.⁸

Most importantly, there was the question of what “greater good” should a network of theologians be formed. Groep Fonske believed that “an association of Catholic theologians, when they speak in one voice, would be a formidable force in shaping theological reflection in this part of the world, in drawing attention to the real questions that face the Church and our faith, and in evaluating the answers being offered, particularly on theological topics that cry for enlightenment and critical analysis.”⁹

To this end, *Groep Fonske* organized an inaugural symposium titled “Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church,” which took place on October 25-26, 2002, at De La Salle University in Manila. At this symposium, theologian alumni from other universities were also present and showed a strong interest in joining the proposed theological association.¹⁰ The group quickly

⁸ Agnes M. Brazal, “An Introduction” <https://www.dakateo.com/history>.

⁹ Manuel Ginete, CM, “A Message from the Organizers,” in Dennis T. Gonzalez, ed., *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church* (Manila: DAKATEO De La Salle University, 2004), xi.

¹⁰ Notable key figures in education and church renewal were consulted about the feasibility of such an association, including Lode Wostyn, CICM (+), Andrew Gonzales, FSC (+), Sr. Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, Bishop (now Cardinal) Luis Antonio Tagle, and Bishop (recent Cardinal-elect) Pablo “Ambo” Virgilio David. They became convenors of what would be called DaKaTeo in 2002. Br. Gonzales saw the significance of the event in this manner: “Let us, as a result of this initial symposium (on Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church), organize ourselves into a new group that will stimulate our students from all walks of life and from all lifestyles, and let a thousand flowers bloom, to bring about a new Pentecost in our midst.” (Andrew Gonzalez, FSC, “Welcome Remarks,” in Dennis T. Gonzalez, ed., *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church* (Manila: DAKATEO De La Salle University, 2004), x.)

grew into what is now known as DaKaTeo, an association of Catholic men and women specializing in various theological disciplines, with doctorate and licentiate degrees for their professional training from different universities both in the Philippines and internationally.

TOWARD A JUST AND INCLUSIVE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

After the 2002 conference, the now larger group of theologians from various theological institutions met multiple times to draft a Constitution. The association's Vision and Mission were further refined during a gathering in 2004 at the De La Salle guesthouse in Tagaytay City, resulting in the following Vision and Mission Statements:

Vision Statement

The *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya* or DaKaTeo is an association of Catholic Theologians in the Philippines which promotes theologies for a just and inclusive Church and society.

Mission Statement

To achieve the vision, DaKaTeo (a) supports creative and scholarly theological research and its dissemination, (b) promotes theological reflection and discussion on current issues and questions in society, and (c) fosters fellowship among its members and solidarity with the oppressed and excluded.

DaKaTeo is specifically oriented to theological research and practice that dialogue with varied contexts, disciplines, social movements, and faith traditions from a liberative perspective.

During the discernment meetings, the founders further discerned what kind of theology they would want to develop and promote, with whom, and for whom. Who benefits from their theological discourse? A consensus was reached that the members would be remiss in (their) vocation as theologians if (their) theology will not be conducted in dialogue with the poor and the excluded and in solidarity with their just interests and aspirations.”¹¹ While a theologian can produce scholarly papers with various intentions and perspectives, DaKaTeo appropriates a specific theological orientation – *it is a community of friends committed to a just and inclusive Church and society, standing in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized and promoting a liberationist and intercultural approach in theology*. In the same gatherings in Tagaytay, the association's name was formulated – *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya* (DaKaTeo; translated as the “sense of the Catholic faith”).¹²

THE THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS OF DAKATEO

Instead of simply “practice,” the word “praxis” is preferred here as this refers particularly to historically and critically informed practice, in this case theological practice, toward social and ecclesial transformation. This section of the paper highlights the theological orientations, preferences, methods, and approaches of DaKaTeo. The following characteristics of DaKaTeo’s praxis manifesting a synodal approach to theologizing have been gleaned: (1) contextual; (2) discerning in its employment of critical, appreciative, and liberative hermeneutics; (3) prophetic; (4) dialogical and inclusive; (5) transformative praxis-oriented education and pastoral actions; and (6) a safe space for collegial fellowship and theological kinship.

¹¹ Agnes M. Brazal, “An Introduction” <https://www.dakateo.com/history>.

¹² Later in a year or two, the official logo designed by Dr. Jose de Mesa was adopted, with the last letter “o” stylized in the Greek “theta”, representing or symbolizing theology (Θ or Θ; θ; θ).

LISTENING TO THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality reiterates the call of Pope Francis to listen to the signs of the times from which and through which God speaks to us, especially in “the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount.”¹³ The 2023 Synthesis Report underlines that to become a listening and accompanying Church, we must listen to people who suffer the many different forms of poverty, exclusion, and marginalization.

In line with this, Pope Francis’ *motu proprio* indicates that a synodal missionary church requires an “outgoing” theology, standing on the “frontiers,” going beyond a “desk theology”. Theologians must “smell of the people and the street and by their reflection pour oil and wine on the wounds of humanity.” Integral to listening and accompanying is the task of understanding the reasons or forces behind the cry of people. The Pope urges the development of a theology that does not close itself in self-referentiality, which leads to isolation and insignificance, but instead dialogues with other disciplines and knowledge.

Since its inception, DaKaTeo’s way of doing theology has been congruent with a theology that is listening, accompanying, missionary, outgoing, and contextual. DaKaTeo members have been reflecting, writing, and discerning current questions, issues, and concerns affecting the everyday lives of ordinary people. This includes their macro-context – the secular and socio-cultural world,¹⁴ world religions’ ecumene, and suffering humankind. Immersing in what Pilario coined as the “rough grounds of praxis”

¹³ For a Synodal Church: *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/vademecum/Vademecum-EN-A4.pdf>.

¹⁴ Georges De Schrijver, “Fundamentalism: A Refusal to Recognize a Religious Dimension in ‘Secular Existence’,” in Dennis T. Gonzalez, ed., *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church* (Manila: DAKATEO De La Salle University, 2004), 1-28.

or the historical and social experience of people in the margins,¹⁵ theologians learn from the faith reflections and perspectives especially of the poor and the marginalized. Danenberg challenges us to see the face of the poor as the face of the other as “other.” This face cannot be manipulated. It demands granting them the privilege of knowledge and it urges a response from us.¹⁶

Understanding people’s concerns and problems further requires comprehending the root causes of their situation through engaging with other disciplines, with their various tools of social, historical, cultural, and structural analysis that link the local, global, and ecological dimensions of human living.¹⁷ For many theologian-members of DaKaTeo, the poverty and suffering of people are

¹⁵ See, Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriation in Contemporary Theology,” for “Theological Conversations in Post-colonial and Global Contexts,” ed. Dominador Bombongan Jr. and Ramon D. Echica, *Hapag* 5, nos. 1-2 (2008): 9-51; and Emmanuel S. de Guzman, “The ASEAN Integration’: Challenges to Ecclesial and Theological Praxis,” for “Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context,” ed. Emmanuel S. de Guzman and Ruben C. Mendoza, *Hapag* 12, no. 1 (2015): 41-74.

¹⁶ Ton Danenberg, “... As if we were Refugees. That is, perhaps, the ultimate form of nobility (Emmanuel Levinas,” for “Marginalization, Exclusion and Suffering,” eds. Dominador Bombongan Jr. and Ramon D. Echica, *Hapag* 5, no. 1-2 (2008): 97-138. See also de Guzman who assesses the context of the “ASEAN Integration” and the challenges it poses for theology as the nation-members fully embark on closer economic ties with its negative impacts on labor and education. Emmanuel S. de Guzman, “The ASEAN Integration’: Challenges to Ecclesial and Theological Praxis,” for “Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context,” eds. Emmanuel S. de Guzman and Ruben C. Mendoza, *Hapag* 12, no. 1 (2015): 41-74.

¹⁷ See, Dominador Bombongan, Jr, “Social Exclusion: The New Name of Poverty?” for “Marginalization, Exclusion and Suffering,” 9-34; Ferdinand Dagmang, “Reasonable Solutions of the Social Order: Causes of Suffering for the Poor,” for “Marginalization, Exclusion and Suffering,” 39-153; Randy J.C. Odchigue, “Doing Filipino Theology Amidst Global Technocracy,” for “Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context,” 25-40; Reynaldo D. Raluto, “The Earth Photographs and Ecological Theology,” for “Art and Theology at the Crossroads,” ed. Miguel B. Lambino and Lope A. Lesigues, *Hapag* 9, no. 1 (2012): 139-158; Agnes M. Brazal, “Reinventing Pakikipagkapwa: An Exploration of Its Potential for Promoting Respect for Plurality and Difference,” in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, 50-70.

intimately connected to the exploitative global capitalism that leads to “social exclusion.” For other theologians, the rough grounds are also conditioned by larger forces of “globalized technocracy.” The over-arching technocratic rationality is homogenizing rationality whereby the lifestyles and choices of people are manipulated and controlled for the benefit of the capitalist-driven market system. Moreover, with its extreme anthropocentric perspective, technocratic rationality has devastating effects on other earth beings. The interrelationship of life on Earth is ignored, denied, or worse, damaged by human beings’ irresponsibility.

DISCERNING: CRITICAL, APPRECIATIVE, AND LIBERATIVE READINGS HERMENEUTICS

DaKaTeo’s theological praxis takes Scriptures and Christian tradition as the norm of theologizing. This entails not simply citing biblical passages and teachings as if they are unchangeable truths applicable to all peoples and at all times. The process involves *re-interpretation* by studying the texts’ historical, philosophical, anthropological, and cultural contexts to make them relevant and responsive to present-day questions, issues, and concerns.

This requires a posture that is both critical and appreciative. Critical in the sense that there could be harmful elements in the usual way Scriptures and tradition have been interpreted, appreciative in the sense of foregrounding positive or life-giving elements.

Rereading Scriptures. Biblical themes have been studied in retrieval and reconstruction for their meaning and challenges for today. For instance, Tuazon suggests a recovery of the Christian tradition of the prophets and mystics who are most sensitive to the

promptings of the “interruptions” of the Spirit.¹⁸ They are indispensable models who awaken the people’s religious and moral imagination towards personal and ecclesial conversion and social transformation today.

Another biblical theme is the “*imago Dei*” in the context of the experience of vulnerability of victims-survivors of sexual violence. Rather than seeing vulnerability as a weakness, Francisco and Aseneta propose it as a positive virtue. Vulnerability is the condition that allows us to ‘hear, encounter, receive, or recognize the other to the point of being injured.’¹⁹ This perspective on vulnerability foregrounds a vulnerable God in whose image and likeness humans are created, making it possible for victim-survivors’ experiences to be redemptive.

Echica highlights the need to use tools of cultural anthropology to understand people’s histories, socio-economic issues, social hierarchies, etc., and recourse to non-canonical sources in the search for the historical Jesus toward a better appreciation of Jesus of Nazareth.²⁰

In the context of the increased awareness of ethnic identity and the inter-ethnic conflicts in the world today, Fortes offers the experience of Jews and the Samaritans, as told in Jn 4:42 and Jn 8: 12-59.²¹ Fortes shows how Jesus goes beyond stereotypical pluralism when he challenges Jews and Samaritans to redefine their ethnic identities. The “hybridization” of identities is a positive reconstruction of ethnic identities that refuses exclusivity but a

¹⁸ Rolando A. Tuazon, “Religious Traditions and Their Place in Secular Societies,” for “Religious Traditions in Dialogue,” 11-41.

¹⁹ Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J., and Anatoly Angelo R. Aseneta, “Victim and Survivor, Power and Vulnerability,” in forthcoming, “Breaking the Silence.”

²⁰ Ramon D. Echica, “Interdisciplinarity in the Current Search for the Historical Jesus,” for “Interdisciplinarity in Theology,” 133-144.

²¹ Rex F. Fortes, “A Samaritan Jew? Hybridization in the Jewish and Samaritan Identification of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,” for “Religious Traditions in Dialogue,” ed. Manuel F. Ginete, *Hapag* 17, nos. 1-2 (2020): 43-66.

learning process of taking the positive elements from one another's ethnicities.

Catholic Social Teaching. DaKaTeo theologians challenge the Church to view Catholic social teaching as evolving. They employ critical and appreciative hermeneutics from a liberative perspective.²² Cartagenas challenges the Church to expand its sources to include as well non-canonical and non-written sources, such as social praxis, movements for liberation and solidarity, liturgy and music, etc. In so doing, we can speak of "social tradition" of the Church beyond simply "social teaching."

DaKaTeo theologians, for instance, weigh various angles of Pope Francis' 2016 Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) and its implications on families. While Lanaria appreciates AL's empathy for the actual situations of families, in his view, it still adopts an essentialist stance that does not recognize the diversity of forms of marriage and family life. Drawing on faith norms of mercy and compassion, loving service and sharing, inclusiveness, and equality, he proposes to discern the presence of the seeds of the Word in different family forms, structures, and situations in light of Jesus' envisioned "new family."²³ For Gonzalez, while AL urges families in their role and mission to other families or society at large, it falls short of mentioning or addressing the realities of clannishness, tribalism, and dynastic families that characterize Filipin@ families. He proposes the practice of the "gospel of

²² Aloysius L Cartagenas, "The Challenge of Interdisciplinarity to Catholic Social Teaching," for "Interdisciplinarity in Theology," 103-131. See also, Aloysius Cartagenas, "Catholic Development Ethics Forty Years after Populorum Progressio: Cross-Cultural Revisions and the Prospects of Global Solidarity," for "Marginalization, Exclusion and Suffering," 35-85.

²³ Levy L. Lanaria, "The Family, Still in *Amoris Laetitia*?: Back to Jesus' Family," for "Sexuality, Marriage, and the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*," ed. Dennis T. Gonzalez and Rolando A. Tuazon, *Hapag* 12, nos. 1-2 (2016): 9-33. See also, Delfo C. Canceran, OP, "Careful Reading of the Synod on the Family," for "Sexuality, Marriage, and the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*," 71-83.

hospitable family” toward the poor, the stranger, and the estranged.²⁴ Echica explores the question of Eucharistic communion for remarried divorcees. He offers the theological concepts of personal grace and fundamental options as considerations for the praxis of compassion and pastoral care for remarried divorcees.²⁵

Interdisciplinary / Multidisciplinary / Transdisciplinary Theologizing. The Synodal process necessitates a dialogue with people from the worlds of economics and science, politics and culture, arts, and sport, as well as the media and social initiatives, to better understand the “signs of the time.”²⁶ DaKaTeo theologians advocate a creative and constructive engagement between theology and the other sciences.²⁷ The process goes beyond mere juxtapositions of scientific facts and theological reason, standing apart from each other without meaningful engagement, but instead the production of new knowledge and praxis that will benefit the poor, the excluded others, and the silent voices. *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* challenges theologians to engage in transdisciplinarity (a strong form of interdisciplinarity), that “of being able to make use of new categories developed by other knowledge, to penetrate and communicate the truths of faith and

²⁴ Dennis T. Gonzalez, “Proclaiming the Gospel of the Hospitable Family,” for “Sexuality, Marriage, and the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*,” 35-48.

²⁵ Ramon D. Echica, “Eucharistic Communion for the Remarried Divorcees: Is *Amoris Laetitia* the Final Answer?” for “Sexuality, Marriage, and the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*,” 49-69.

²⁶ The 2023 Synod on Synodality underlines that “it is crucial to promote anthropological and spiritual visions capable of integrating and not merely juxtaposing the intellectual and emotional dimensions of faith experience, overcoming any and all reductionism and dualism between reason and feeling. It is important to clarify how conversation in the Spirit can integrate the contributions of theological thought and the humanities and social sciences, alongside other models of ecclesial discernment that are used such as the “see, judge, act” approach or the steps of “recognize, interpret, choose.”

²⁷ Agnes M. Brazal and Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, “Disciplines, Interdisciplinarity and Theology,” for “Interdisciplinarity in Theology,” 13.

transmit the teaching of Jesus in today's languages, with originality and critical awareness." DaKaTeo theologians' sources for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary engagement include the following: sociology of religion, evolutionary sciences, quantitative empirical research, feminist intersectional analysis, cultural-linguistic sciences, and cultural anthropology.²⁸ Lesigues underlines that what can make theological endeavor significant is neither the "inter" as separation nor the "inter" as convergence but the interstitial "thirdness" the "'surplus' fields that provide the richness of discourse, that is, unexplored fields that may not be fully decipherable even by interdisciplinary tools of research,"²⁹

Cultural categories have also served as a resource for transdisciplinarity that transforms the language of theology to provide people with a sense of identity, history, and continuity. Examples from DaKaTeo publications are de Mesa's *pandaraya* – which refers to any deceitful action (*gawang panlilinlang*) or obscuring or distorting the truth to deceive – as sin,³⁰ and Cacho

²⁸ See, Manuel Victor J. Sapitula, "Doing Research in Global Village: Assessing Present Realities and Future Trajectories," for "Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context," 9-24; Jimmy A. Belita, "Value-Driven: The Grounding of Morals in Evolutionary and Religious Narratives," for "Interdisciplinarity in Theology," 61-79; Jimmy A. Belita, "Value-Driven: The Grounding of Morals in Evolutionary and Religious Narratives," for "Interdisciplinarity in Theology," 61-79; Rico Ponce, "Interdisciplinarity in Theology from an Empirical-Theological Perspective," for "Interdisciplinarity in Theology," 145-173; Kristine Meneses, "Hidden Axes: Systematic Limitation of Access to Rights of Deaf Victims of Violence," in forthcoming, "Breaking the Silence." ; Jose Mario C. Francisco, "Integrity and Creation: Cultural, Scientific, and Religious Perspectives," for "Reimagining Christianity for a Green World," eds. Randy J. C. Odchigue and Eric Marcelo O. Genilo, *Hapag* 8, no. 1 (2011): 39-56.

²⁹ Lope Florente A. Lesigues, "Foucault's Fable: Under the Wings of Inter-Disciplinary Ruminations," for "Interdisciplinarity in Theology," 221-246.

³⁰ See, Jose M. de Mesa, "How Far Does Context Impinge on 'Truth'," in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, 29-49; Jose M. de Mesa, "Pandaraya sa Sin: A Contextual Interpretation," *Hapag* 3, nos. 1-2 (2006): 117-167; Rebecca Cacho and Estela Padilla, "Kapag 'Ganda' ang Pinag-uusapan: Isang Mungkahing Dulog sa Pagtetelohiya," for "Art and Theology at the Crossroads," 47-76.

and Padilla's article on the potential of *ganda* (beauty) and *magandang buhay* (abundant life) to speak about salvation brought about by Jesus Christ as expressed in the Christian tradition.

PROPHETIC THEOLOGIZING

Within the church's life, it is striking that Pope Francis used the term *parrhesia* to refer to the kind of courageous, straightforward, and free speech demonstrated by the apostles after the Pentecost. *Parrhesia* speaks boldly, even at the risk of alienating authorities, and is essential in a discerning community because the Spirit can speak through any one of the participants.³¹ The Synod on Synodality invites us "to speak with authentic courage and honesty (*parrhesia*) to integrate freedom, truth, and charity" (*Vademecum* 2, 3).

Embodying *parrhesia*, some DaKaTeo theologians have published hot-button issues like the Reproductive Health Law.³² Aseneta looks into the divisive debates surrounding passing the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2013 (RH Law). He offers the moral vision of a "consistent ethic for life" for Church leaders to develop a more comprehensive framework of socio-pastoral strategies to systematically and consistently address various threats to human life. On the same topic of the Reproductive Health Law, Lanaria calls out Church authorities and

³¹ Pope Francis, "The gift of the Holy Spirit: frankness, courage, *parrhesia*," Homily, 18 April 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200418_lafranchezza-dellapredicazione.html. *Parrhesia* is a word-conceit which Pope Francis has made very much his own in the course of his pontificate.

³² Anatoly Angelo Aseneta, "A Consistent Ethic of Life for Philippine Church Leadership," for "Not to Be Served but to Serve" (Mt 20,28): Rethinking Leadership and Ministry in the Church beyond 500 Years of Catholicism in the Philippines," ed. Ruben Mendoza, *Hapag* 20, nos. 1-2 (2024) at <https://www.svst.edu.ph/hapag/issues/article/a-consistent-ethic-of-life-for-philippine-church-leadership-228>. .

the laity to become a “listening” and “dialoguing” church by engaging with the voices of ordinary Filipinos directly affected by health and reproductive problems.³³

On the issue of clergy sexual abuse, Cartagenas points out how this is a subset of various types of violence deeply ingrained in the Church’s discourse and polity and sanctioned, if not reinforced by cultural elements through the process of socialization to sexuality, gender, and power.³⁴ He offers the pastoral trajectory of healing-forgiveness-repentance-transformation of victims and perpetrators. This demands a firm and persevering commitment to challenge the patriarchal core of our collective religious life, where we have allowed religion to serve a patriarchal ideology and practice. Gonzalez further points out the importance — as, for instance, in the case of clergy sexual misconduct — of transparency in the Church as a “structural way for leaders to practice humility.”³⁵

Others identify the roots of the negative use of power in the Church in the absolutization of religious authority. Beyond merely treating the abuse of power as personal, it can be seen as systemic or institutionalized in the culture of a Church that has become privileged, anonymous, faceless, and distant from the

³³ Levy L. Lanaria, “From Ecclesia Discens to Ecclesia Docens: The Reproductive Health Bill – Turned Law Case,” for “Vatican II After Fifty Years: Philippine Experience,” eds. Rebecca Cacho and Rico Ponce, *Hapág* 11, no. 1 (2014): 55-88.

³⁴ Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, “Sexual Violence against Women by the Roman Catholic Clergy: A Challenge to the Church’s Synodal Journey,” in forthcoming, “Breaking the Silence” See also Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, “A Dying to What is Sinful’: Synodality and Its Challenges to the Philippine Catholic Hierarchy/Clergy,” “1964 to 2024,” from *Lumen Gentium to the Synod on Synodality: The Church on Its Way...*, eds. Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas and Emmanuel S. de Guzman, *Hapág* 21, no. 1 (2024): 113-114.

³⁵ Dennis T. Gonzalez, “Humility and Transparency in Leadership and Power,” in *Theology and Power: International Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Bullivant, Eric Marcelo Genilo, Daniel Franklin Pilario, and Agnes M. Brazal (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 49-66.

plight of the people, especially the grassroots communities. The Church can be more honest and daring to clean itself from elements that breed abuse.³⁶

Theology also must exercise self-reflexivity so that its discourse remains dissenting against any all-embracing system of hegemonic narratives. For Vasquez and Brazal, this self-reflexivity may also require a critical reading of certain streams of spirituality that have reinforced the discriminatory tendency against women in Roman Catholicism and cultivated mindsets complicit in bringing violence about.³⁷ There is an appeal to explore major symbols within modern Catholicism that have been associated with suffering and try to probe into their liberating and empowering potential for Christians working in the social arena. With a prophetic orientation, Christians are invited to a search for holiness amidst the struggles of people. To “walk the muddy earth”³⁸ means not to be afraid to critique the Christian tradition of its elements that are dogmatically unsympathetic to the everyday concerns of ordinary people. While it is acknowledged that Christian churches, especially their leadership, have the authority

³⁶ Ramon D. Echica, “Elements in the Barrel that Produce Rotten Apples,” in *Theology and Power*, 137-54. See also, Randy J. C. Odchigue, “Church Power, People Power: Hegemonies and Resistances,” in *Theology and Power*, 103-122; Lode Wostyn, “A Dictatorship of Relativism? Roger Haight’s Encounter with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,” for “Theological conversations in Post-colonial and Global Contexts,” 169-183.

³⁷ Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, and Agnes M. Brazal, “Suffering and Symbol: Portals of Transformation,” in Agnes M. Brazal, Daniel Franklin Pilario, and Stephanie Ann Puen, eds., forthcoming publication in 2025. See also, Amelia Vasquez, “Theology as a Way of Life: A Response,” for “Seeds Sown and First-Fruits” Contributions of Wisdom Figures of the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines,” eds. Ruben C. Mendoza and Levy L. Lanaria, *Hapág* 15, nos. 1-2 (2018): 127-128.

³⁸ Emmanuel S. de Guzman, “Walking with Feet on the Muddy Earth,” for “Politics and Christian Tradition,” eds. Aloysius L. Cartagenas and Emmanuel S. de Guzman, *Hapág* 7, no. 1 (2010), <https://www.svst.edu.ph/hapag/issues/article/walking-with-feet-on-the-muddy-earth-73>

to proclaim and interpret divine revelation, there is also the “magisterium of the poor, the inarticulate, and the excluded” who teach us about the truth of God.

Moreover, the ecological crisis calls for a prophetic theological approach as well.³⁹ A problematic issue is the anthropocentric orientation of the Church, which emphasizes the centrality of humans, their dignity, values, and structures over and above other beings on Earth. Raluto offers a framework of integrated ecology in understanding and responding to the climate crisis.⁴⁰ Cajés argues that a relevant theology of “communion” can help provide an ethos in addressing the global ecological crisis. In particular, the Eucharist can be seen as the protection and sanctification of creation that calls on Christians to act on everyday concerns, including caring for the environment in a “communion of creatures”.⁴¹ Odchigue invites theologians and the Church to learn from the Indigenous Manobo spirit worldview as a postcolonial framework in the advocacy against ecological degradation. Their spirit-worldview and Christian discourse of *εκόταόις* can serve as a framework of resistance against the

³⁹ See, Karl M. Gaspar, “To Speak with Boldness,” for “Reimagining Christianity in a Green World,” 13-38; Reynaldo D. Raluto, “The Church’s Need for Integral Ecological Response to the Pandemic Challenge and Climate Crisis,” for “Being Church During a Pandemic,” ed. Ruben C. Mendoza, *Hapag* 18, nos. 1-2 (2012): 91-116; Reynaldo D. Raluto, “The Church-Based Ecological Struggles and the Bishops’ Pastoral Letters on Ecology in the Philippines: Are They Inspired by Vatican II?” *Hapag* 11, no. 1 (2014), <https://www.svst.edu.ph/hapag/issues/article/the-church-based-ecological-struggles-and-the-bishops-pastoral-letters-on-ecology-in-the-philippines-are-they-inspired-by-vatican-ii-117>; Prisco A. Cajés, “The Eucharist and Ecological Crisis,” for “Reimagining Christianity for a Green World,” 81-112; Randy J.C. Odchigue, “Sacramental Relationality: Eco-Theological Possibilities,” for “Reimagining Christianity for a Green World,” 113-133.

⁴⁰ Reynaldo D. Raluto, “The Church’s Need for Integral Ecological Response to the Pandemic Challenge and Climate Crisis,” for “Being Church During a Pandemic,” 91-116.

⁴¹ Prisco A. Cajés, “The Eucharist and Ecological Crisis,” for “Reimagining Christianity for a Green World,” 81-112.

violation of the integrity of creation.⁴² Against the overly dualistic anthropocentric outlook, eco-theological interrelationality can help us re-imagine a contextually relevant articulation of a contemplative praxis where resistance against ecological destruction becomes simultaneously a faith-response and a faith-action.

DIALOGICAL / INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY

As Pope Francis exhorts, “[T]heology can only develop in a culture of dialogue and encounter between different traditions and knowledge, between different Christian denominations and religions, openly engaging with everyone, believers and non-believers.” How have DaKaTeo theologians tried to be dialogical and inclusive in their theological praxis?

Lo Cotidiano (Everyday Life) and Popular Religiosity. At the DaKaTeo, there is a conscious attempt to give space to the experience and categories of ordinary Filipinos as a source of theological reflections, such as Candelario’s church as *ka-puwang*, Brazal’s nature or other earth creatures as *kapwa*, Rebastillo’s *bahala na* as embodying the God-talk of Filipinos in diaspora, and De Guzman’s study of transparochial communities where many ordinary Filipinos take part.⁴³ Some DaKaTeo theologians focus on

⁴² Randy J.C. Odchigue, “Sacramental Relationality: Eco-Theological Possibilities,” for “Reimagining Christianity for a Green World,” 113-133.

⁴³ See: Jessica Joy V. Candelario, “The Pandemic Puwang: Reshaping the Church in the New Norma,” for “Being Church During a Pandemic,” 9-30; Jessica Joy Candelaria and Estela Padilla, “Kapwa, Bayan, at Simbahan: The Dance of the Trinity Today,” for “Not to Be Served but to Serve” (Mt 20,28): Rethinking Leadership and Ministry in the Church beyond 500 Years of Catholicism in the Philippines,” ed. Ruben Mendoza, *Hapág* 20, nos. 1-2 (2022), <https://www.svst.edu.ph/hapag/issues/article/kapwa-bayan-at-simbahan-the-dance-of-the-trinity-today-233>; Brazal, “Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*: An Exploration of the Potential for Promoting Respect for Plurality and Difference”; Rowan Lopez Rebastillo, “Filipino Migrant Cyberchurches in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Preliminary Exposition of Two Cities (Brussels CFC-ANCOP and Athens’s MMC),” for “Not to Be Served but to Serve” (Mt 20,28):

the popular religiosity of Filipinos; they suggest a realignment of devotional practices to be more biblically based, historical, and socially relevant.⁴⁴

Ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and intercultural networking. The dialogical and inclusive praxis of DaKaTeo is also demonstrated in the conduct of its conferences where theologians from other faith traditions and religions (such as Evangelicals and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente) and experts from various fields of disciplines engage in conversations for mutual enrichment. DaKaTeo members have also published the following: (1) a critical analysis of concepts of mission among Christian Evangelicals and Buddhists and the need for dialogue by Capucao;⁴⁵ (2) on how online interfaith dialogue platforms help foster inter-religious/interfaith understanding by Brazal;⁴⁶ and (3) the need to take seriously the experiences of the indigenous people by studying their philosophy, anthropology, theology, religions, and cultures. Among the theologians of DaKaTeo, it is Gaspar, with his vast

Emmanuel S. de Guzman, "Philippine Transparochial Communities: Forces of Renewal of Blocs of Resistance in the Church," in *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines: Quo Vadis*, ed. Eric Marcelo Genilo, Agnes M. Brazal, and Daniel Franklin Pilario (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 74-91.

⁴⁴ See, Ramon D. Echica, "The Political Context of the Infancy Narratives and the Apolitical Devotion to Santo Niño," for "Politics and Christian Tradition," ed. Aloysius L. Cartagenas and Emmanuel S. de Guzman, *Hapag* 7, no. 1 (2010); Ramon D. Echica, "The Political Context of the Infancy Narratives and the Apolitical Devotion to Santo Niño," for "Politics and Christian Tradition"; Daniel Franklin Pilario and Lucimendaa Baldicimo, "Jesus in PCP II, Jesus of the Margins," in *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, 27-53; Levy Lara Lanaria, "Jesus as *Mangangisda* in the Shallow Waters of Globalization," for "Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context," 75-104.

⁴⁵ See: Dave D. Capucao, "Mission in Various Religious Tradition," for "Religious Traditions in Dialogue," ed. Manuel F. Ginete and Emmanuel Serafica de Guzman, *Hapag* 17, nos. 1-2 (2020): 95-126.

⁴⁶ Agnes M. Brazal, "Building Peace through Online Interfaith Dialogue: The Kusog Mindanaw Yahoo Group," in *Theology, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, ed. Daniel Franklin Pilario, CM (Quezon City: St. Vincent School of Theology - Adamson University, 2019), 193-211.

experience of working with and for indigenous peoples in Mindanao, who brings the plight and hopes of the indigenous people to the center of anthropological-theological discourses by highlighting their knowledge, skills, practices, and spirituality.⁴⁷

In terms of conversations and networking with theologians in other countries and cultures, DaKaTeo has partnered with institutions and organizations such as the International Network of Society for Catholic Theology, European Society of Catholic Theologians, European Society of Women in Theological Research, Ecclesia of Women in Asia, and the regional Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference.

Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups. The theologians' dialogue with marginalized and vulnerable groups can be an experience of "interruption", upsetting or subverting their orientations, allowing the injured and suffering to turn their world upside down and discover the presence of God in a different and liberating way.⁴⁸ The 2008 conference on sexual violence stands out as an example of such a dialogue with vulnerable groups.⁴⁹ The conference was participated in by victims-survivors of sexual violence who gave testimonies of their experiences. They were provided with a safe space to share their pains and hopes in emotional, heart-wrenching ways while the representatives of some institutions of care and healing, social scientists, and the DaKaTeo

⁴⁷ See: Karl M. Gaspar, CSsR, "The Relevance of Indigenous Faith and the Spirituality of Wholistic Well-Being in the Context of the Pandemic," for "Being Church During a Pandemic," 45-70; "Reactivating the Dangerous Memory in a Landscape Exemplified by Living Dangerously," for "Vatican II After Fifty Years: Philippine Experience, ed. Rebecca Cacho and Rico Ponce, *Hapag* 11, no. 1 (2014): 27-54; "To Speak With All Boldness," for "Reimaging Christianity for a Green World," 19-36.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel S. de Guzman, "Interruptions on Trivialities: Pre-Theological Ponderings," in forthcoming, "Breaking the Silence."

⁴⁹ Rizza E. Cases, Manuel Victor Sapitula, and Daniel Franklin Pilario, eds., *Sexual Violence Against Women: Victim-Survivors and Faith-based Responses* (Quezon City: St. Vincent School of Theology – Adamson University, 2023).

theologians listened empathetically and compassionately. In a highly interactive conference, only after the resource persons shared did the theologians offer the impact of the stories on their lives as persons, Christians, and theologians and on their sense of God's presence, wisdom, love, and care in their lives of the victims-survivors.⁵⁰

Other conferences worth remembering are the theological conversations with theologians from other countries and contexts, such as the situation of families in the 2015 "The Lineamenta on the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World" and the question of "Gender and Ecclesiology: An International Dialogue" in 2016. The 2015 conference provided married and separated individuals with a welcoming space to express their questions to theologians in the spirit of fostering a more compassionate church. In the 2016 assembly, theologians from DaKaTeo and other continents engaged in conversations on gender issues and how the Church responds or should respond to the realities of various sexual identities and orientations.⁵¹ While many of DaKaTeo's theologies focus on the poor and marginalized, some voices remained neglected in the academe, including in DaKaTeo. Meneses has focused her theological research on the experience of the Deaf and persons with disabilities.⁵² She challenges the Church and theologians to actively engage and include the PWDs in its pastoral planning and mission.

⁵⁰ Forthcoming, "Breaking the Silence."

⁵¹ See Gunter Pruller-Jagentuefel, Sharon Bong, and Rita Perintfalvi, eds, *Towards Just Gender Relations: Rethinking the Role of Women in the Church and Society* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2019).

⁵² Kristine C. Meneses, "Disability Inclusion: Re-envisaging Solidarity with Deaf People and Persons with Disability," for "Being Church During a Pandemic," 117-133.

TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS-ORIENTED EDUCATION AND PASTORAL ACTIONS

DaKaTeo theologians learn from the people of God as well as offer their expertise to equip them with theological anchoring for their engagements.

Service to the People of God. Most DaKaTeo conferences are open to people from the pastoral, educational, and grassroots levels. These are called “People of God Assemblies”. Usually, the first day of the conference is allotted to presenters who are not DaKaTeo members. They share and discuss their thoughts in various fields of endeavor. Non-presenting participants are also welcome to listen and converse onsite or online. DaKaTeo members further serve the Church by acting as consultants and researchers in aid to various church institutions, such as the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Basic Ecclesial Communities, the CBCP National Synodality Team, and the various discernment teams on “controversial issues,” the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and the Vatican Synod on Synodality Session and Study Groups.

“Synodalizing” the Philippine Church. DaKaTeo has organized three conferences on the Synod on Synodality. Two conferences dealt with the continuity of Vatican II Councils’ *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) to the Synod on Synodality in light of the synodal journey of the Philippine Church.⁵³ Along this theme, Cartagena calls for communal discernment on the current theology of Orders, particularly the presbyterate and the diaconate, that continue to exclude women and the married. Furthermore, if the synodal pathway of participation places power and authority of the church’s leadership

⁵³ See, Aloysius Cartagena and Emmanuel de Guzman, eds., “1964 to 2024. From *Lumen Gentium* to the Synod on Synodality: The Church on Its Way...” *Hapag* 21, No. 1 (2024).

in the trajectory of co-responsibility and accountability (*Lumen Gentium* 32), it is propitious to create mechanisms that promote and defend the right of the laity to assess the conduct of their ordained ministers, evaluate the effectiveness of their prior pastoral decisions and current church programs, and redress their grievances in the event of discrepancies and abuse.⁵⁴ Cardinal David also urges DaKaTeo theologians to re-exercise the Christian tradition of *sensus fidei fidelium*, or the sense of faith of the faithful. Taking insights from the experience of the Council of Jerusalem, he invites theologians to follow the way of Pope Francis in balancing the magisterium and the *sensus fidei*, and the ministerial and common priesthoods as well, in a way that enhances their respective reciprocity, especially in working harder for the active participation of all in decision-making structures, life-processes, and mission activities of the Church as a whole.⁵⁵

Rethinking Church Leadership and Ministry. DaKaTeo theologians help in the building up of the local church in the Philippines in line with the Second Vatican Council's image of the church as people of God. While there are clear attempts to concretize Vatican II's vision, particularly in the life of priests in the Archdiocese of Cebu, Echica pointed out the need for urgent reforms in theological education which should gear away from the neo-scholastic methodology toward participatory, socially oriented, and missionary modes of teaching and learning.⁵⁶ Reflecting on abuses of power in the Church, Belita proposes a "kenosis ecclesiology" that mandates the Church to a "purification of memory". This involves self-examination of how the Church, as a

⁵⁴ Aloysius Lopez Caratagenas, "A Dying to What is Sinful: Synodality and Its Challenges to the Philippine Catholic Hierarchy/Clergy," for "1964 to 2024" 113-114.

⁵⁵ Pablo Virgilio S. David, "Synodality: Pope Francis' Way of Balancing Magisterium with Sensus Fidelium," for "1964 to 2024," 43-59.

⁵⁶ Ramon D. Echica, "Vatican II and the Ministry of the Presbyterate: The Cebuano Experience," for "Vatican II After Fifty Years," 9-26.

whole, shared the destructive power of collective blindness, sinful patterns, mechanisms, and structures reflecting distorted, biased policies against the abused and the weak.⁵⁷ In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cacho retrieves the biblical and ecclesiological model of the “household of God” (see Acts of the Apostles 4-5) as a hospitable home for all its members, especially to those who are distant from the Church.⁵⁸

Formation in Basic Ecclesial Communities and Classrooms of Theology. All members of DaKaTeo are involved in the teaching and pastoral ministries of the Church in different capacities. In a way, theologians can listen to people on the pastoral and popular levels toward refining or recasting their theological knowledge.⁵⁹ Some members work with and for basic ecclesial communities, which, as Picardal points out, are potent embodiments of the “new way of being Church” that exercise stewardship and co-responsibility in caring for the earth.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Jimmy Belita, “When Sin Defines a Church: Towards a Kenosis Ecclesiology in Post-colonial Age,” for *Theological Conversations in Post-colonial and Global Contexts*, 185-204.

⁵⁸ Rebecca Cacho, “Revitalizing the Household of God as Model Church,” for “Not to Be Served but to Serve” (Mt 20,28) in <https://www.svst.edu.ph/hapag/issues/article/revitalizing-the-household-of-god-as-model-church-230>. On the need for the church leadership to be resilient, see, Dennis T. Gonzalez, “Leadership for Resilience in Our Calamitous Times: Some Biblical and Pastoral Insights,” for “Being Church During a Pandemic, 31-44.

⁵⁹ Lope A. Lesigues, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Appearance: An Insight into Surban’s *Apir*,” for “Interdisciplinarity in Theology,” 101-138.

⁶⁰ Amado L. Picardal, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: A Reception of Vatican II Ecclesiology,” for “Vatican II After Fifty Years: Philippine Experience,” 127-151; Amado L. Picardal, “The Environmental Praxis of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs): Ecclesiological Perspective,” for “Reimaging Christianity for a Green World,” 57-80. See also Padilla’s exploration of the image of a boat (“*balangay*”) to articulate the creative and empowering journey of the BECs in the Philippine Church. Estela P. Padilla, “BECs in Vatican II and Beyond: Rowing, Navigating Rivers, Sailing On,” for “Vatican II After Fifty Years,” 89-126.

Regarding education in the context of the rise of fundamentalism, Belita endorses an approach to teaching theology or faith formation that consists of the elements of story, play, dialogue, and conversation. This taps into the imagination of “fundamentalists” and invites them to reconstruct their world and open up to possibilities and choices in a pluralistic setting.⁶¹ Gonzalez also points out the need to train teachers and formators on how to read, reflect on, reflect over, and talk about biblical texts in a dialogic way to develop in them a dialogical attitude or habit in daily life.⁶² De Guzman recommends the creation of “multi/inter-contextual theological communities” in theological education. Classrooms of theology may function as a contrast community, which calls into question dominant assumptions, norms, and structures and where the community of students and teachers — attentive to their contextual differences — reveal, explore, and negotiate these differences to come up with mutually shared knowledge.⁶³ For Odchigue, Catholic education must move beyond its administrative and organizational concerns to address educational equity and equality, employing a pedagogy critical of the dominant neo-liberal and technocratic paradigms. He suggests that teachers and administrators need to get out of the confines of the schools to do academic extension work in small parochial or mission schools by sharing their expertise for free through seminars or even by handling a subject or two. This way, schools from the peripheries can improve their standards without investing in expensive human resource requirements. The value of catholic

⁶¹ Jimmy A. Belita, CM, “Teaching Religion as if Fundamentalism, Matters,” in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, 110-125.

⁶² Dennis T. Gonzalez, “Introduction,” in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, viii.

⁶³ Emmanuel S. de Guzman, “Fundamentalism and Multi-Contextuality in Classrooms of Theology,” in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, 126-158.

charity and inclusive learning can be nurtured in the process.⁶⁴ Bombongan addresses what he calls “cosmopolitan (theological) education,” which involves “learning more about ourselves by learning from others.”⁶⁵ This kind of education encourages educators to expose students to familiar ideas, places, and cultures and bring them to unfamiliar territories. The collaboration between church-based institutions and local churches, such as that between Bukal ng Tipan Center and German dioceses, has resulted in a theology that nurtures friendships and a community that bridges differences. Using the metaphor of cooking and eating food, Padilla sees the interactions between theologies in a globalized, intercultural world as producing “edible theology,” nourishing both partner communities.⁶⁶

Socio-Political Questions and the Church. A transformative theological praxis cannot but be involved in socio-political questions. DaKaTeo has issued public statements or manifestos on various socio-political issues in the country, such as” the “Agra Resolution: A Show Window of Impunity,” “A Plea for and in behalf of the Women-Victims of Sexual Abuse,” “Statement of Solidarity with Bishop Pablo David,” “Arrest of a Missionary Nun is an Attack on the Church of the Poor, Vigilance: The Call of the Times,” DaKaTeo Statement on the “Ousting of the Chief Justice,” “One with the Resistance: DaKaTeo Statement on the Charges against Church People,” “DaKaTeo Statement Against the Anti-Terrorism Bill,” “Statement of Support to USC-CFIU,” “Pahayag ng Suporta ng Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya -

⁶⁴ Randy J.C. Odchigue, “It Takes a Village to Educate a Child: Pandemic and Catholic Education,” for “Being Church During a Pandemic,” 135-154.

⁶⁵ Dominador Bombongan, Jr., “Cosmopolitanism, Globalization and Theological Education/Formation,” for “Interdisciplinarity in Theology,” 195-220.

⁶⁶ Estella Padilla, “Edible Theology: Reflections of a Pastoral Center on Doing Theology with German Dioceses,” for “Challenges to Filipino Theology in the Globalized Context,” 105-127.

DaKaTeo - sa Kandidatura ni VP Leni Robredo sa pagka-Pangulo ng Pilipinas,” “Statement of Solidarity with the Victims of Bombing of MSU Main Campus, Marawi,” and “DaKaTeo Statement on the War of Israel Against Hamas”.⁶⁷

The question of political involvement of Catholic clergy in electoral politics in 2022, has been a subject of discussion within the association. Building on Canon Law’s exceptions in matters of clergy political partisanship, Pilario argues that Canon Law and other magisterial documents provide an exception to clergy political partisanship in cases when the protection of the rights of the Church or the promotion of the common good requires it. Building on this, he provides concrete conditions and guidelines for priests who wish to take a partisan position during elections.⁶⁸ Taking a different route, Genilo notes that the actions of some clergy in the 2022 elections were contrary to the proper role of the clergy in politics and undermined the Church’s moral credibility and pastoral mission. He posited that priests’ “public partisan political activity” might negatively affect the Church’s identity, moral authority, and mission. He is concerned that priests’ “public partisan political activity” and “illusion of their political influence”⁶⁹ may negatively affect the Church’s identity, moral authority, and mission. Genilo calls on the vocal and engaged laity to push for “necessary change in the clergy’s political attitudes and practices” that display “improper” political interventions.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For the public statements, see <https://www.dakateo.com/>.

⁶⁸ Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, “Can Priests and Religious Endorse Political Candidates?” for “Religions, Politics and Culture,” ed. Jimmy A. Belita, CM, *Hapag* 19, nos. 1-2 (2022): 13-26. This essay was not presented in a DaKaTeo conference but it was widely spread among the members.

⁶⁹ Eric Marcelo Genilo, “Illusions of Influence: Clerical Partisan Engagement During the 2022 Elections.” The paper was read during the 2022 conference of DaKaTeo but was published in *Loyola Papers* 4, no. 1 (2023): 1-26.

⁷⁰ Though not a DaKaTeo-presented essay, Genilo offers guidelines for discussion and discernment on the absolute divorce bill (House Bill No. 9349), pending in Congress. See <https://jjcicsi.org.ph/talking-points-on-the-absolute->

For the Church to exercise its role as a moral guide or companion, it must transform its structures to foster democratic participation and decision-making. Moreover, the Second Plenary Council also recognizes the need for an ideology (a concrete vision of society)⁷¹ and for Christians to imbue ideological groups with gospel values, but it falls short of encouraging Christians to join cause-oriented political parties to contribute effectively to social transformation.⁷²

The role of religion in conflicts and peace-making in society is another special concern of DaKaTeo. Theologians-members advocate the positive role of religion in social change by looking for “signs of hope” (that) are found in marginal places or “fragile spaces” where power is less exercised, and real people continue to resist to survive.”⁷³ Examples of this are found in “peace zones” of local villages that assert and protect communities against violence from external armed groups. Internet platforms, like the *Kusog Mindanaw* where women and indigenous peoples participate, can be used effectively as a conversation platform for peace.⁷⁴ In the context of State-supported violence in Guatemala, Trinidad foregrounds how foreign missionaries are compelled to redefine their personal, collective, and Christian identity, mission, and

[divorce-bill-house-bill-no-9349-from-a-catholic-perspective/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF_3oVleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHZeo5QpKZ1_guWw-k89pz4zELjAPIG0o3eW8-hc6H0UzH5MrkCrp07uh7Q_aem_Lm5RTV9-g473v-ulJ5lcRw](https://www.cbcphilippines.com/divorce-bill-house-bill-no-9349-from-a-catholic-perspective/?fbclid=IwY2xjawF_3oVleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHZeo5QpKZ1_guWw-k89pz4zELjAPIG0o3eW8-hc6H0UzH5MrkCrp07uh7Q_aem_Lm5RTV9-g473v-ulJ5lcRw).

⁷¹ Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, no. 368, Acts and Decrees of PCP 2 | CBCP Online.

⁷² Agnes M. Brazal, “Between Faith and Politics: What Happened to the Mediating Structures,” in *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, 92-111.

⁷³ Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Religion, Symbolic Violence, and Peace,” in *Theology, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, 3-24.

⁷⁴ Agnes M. Brazal, “Building Peace through Online Interfaith Dialogue: The *Kusog Mindanaw* Yahoo Group,” *Theology, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, 193-211.

ministry among the marginalized peasants and the popular revolutionary movements.⁷⁵

Collegial Fellowship and Theological Solidarity

Ad Theologiam Promovendam points out that,

[E]cclesial synodality, therefore, commits theologians to do theology in a synodal form, promoting the ability to listen, dialogue, discern, and integrate the multiplicity and variety of instances and contributions among themselves. It is, therefore, important that places exist, including institutional ones, in which to live and experience collegiality and theological alliance.

DaKaTeo began to strive to be not only an association of scholars but also a community of friends. It provides a laboratory and safe space for the exploration of new ideas. It has provided a community of support for members wrestling with issues related to their dioceses, theological institutes, universities, pastoral centers, etc. To foster a sense of camaraderie, an outing has always been scheduled after the conference whenever the venue is outside Manila.

Most recently, DaKaTeo has also promoted the co-authorship of senior and younger scholars for the publication of the book on theological reflections on sexual violence against women. This is a collection of essays reflecting on the stories of victim-survivors presented during the DaKaTeo conference in 2008

⁷⁵ Mario Trinidad, "Al Fin Sufren Ahora La Misma Suerte Que Su Pueblo Humillado: Finally, They Suffer the Same Fate as Their Crushed People. Filipino Missionaries in Guatemala During the Civil War (1960-1996)," for "Religious Traditions in Dialogue," 127-159.

and will only be published next year. In the meantime, some of the original member presenters were already ill, losing sight, or too busy, so younger theologians helped them to update and revise their articles.

CHALLENGES

“Theologians are like the scouting party sent by Joshua to explore the land of Canaan” (Book of Numbers); “they are charged with finding the right paths toward the inculturation of the faith.”⁷⁶

As a scouting party that is finding the right paths, DaKaTeo has room for further improvement. First, there is a need to strengthen DaKaTeo’s dialogue with local bishops so that this could be integrated into its annual/regular activities. In the past, DaKaTeo has invited local bishops to grace the opening of its conferences but not so much to dialogue with them on pressing issues that demand new theological investigations. For the Synod on Synodality, in response to the call of the national synodality team, individual DaKaTeo members volunteered to help in the discernment of key controversial issues such as sexuality, complicated marital situations, end of life, artificial intelligence, and women diaconate. The door has been opened as the Church strives to be more synodal and receptive to what professional theologians can offer.

Second, DaKaTeo can explore more topics related to the above “controversial questions” that the 2023 Synod of Bishops

⁷⁶ Cindy Wooden, “Church needs theologians who grapple with modern world, pope says,” <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/vatican-news/church-needs-theologians-who-grapple-modern-world-pope-says>, May 10, 2024.

identified as needing further discernment and analysis.⁷⁷ In particular, the LGBTQ+ issues, especially in light of the SOGIE (Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression) bill and the growing solidarity of the youth with the LGBTQ+ community, are worth exploring from anthropological, theological, biblical, moral, and ethical perspectives. The question of “permanent women diaconate” is another pressing concern for theologians. Additionally, a Filipino Cardinal has suggested that DaKaTeo theologians study the issue of relaxing the restriction of the ordained priesthood to celibate candidates that has not entered the synodal discussions but is another major concern that needs further investigation.

Third, there is a need to dialogue more with people of other Christian faiths and religions or faith traditions. An annual DaKaTeo conference can be ecumenical and interreligious with paper presenters from other Christian faiths or religions. If they have made a significant contribution to theology or religious studies in Christianity, they can also be invited by DaKaTeo to become members.

Fourth, DaKaTeo members can be encouraged to cite fellow Filipin@s/theologians based in the Philippines to promote Filipin@ theology and theologians. It is striking that authors in the global south still cite more authors from the north than from their regions which contribute to maintaining the invisibility of scholarships from the south. What we did in this paper is a starting point in acknowledging and using the members’ works for our continuing theological research.

Fifth, DaKaTeo should open itself to individuals who come from other academic disciplines, with or without higher academic degrees, especially those in the pastoral and popular or grassroots level, willing to engage with us, theologically and

⁷⁷ *Synod Synthesis Report* no. 15.

pastorally, and subscribe to and promote the vision and mission of the association. The idea of “Friends of DaKaTeo” (not as regular members with voting rights) can be the right expression for this “opening of doors” from an exclusive association to a missionary community in service to the world.

Sixth, DaKaTeo can partner with organized grassroots communities or marginalized groups to be with them, learn from them, and accompany them in their concrete life situations, problems, needs, and concerns, especially in promoting a just and inclusive church and society.

Lastly, DaKaTeo should nurture its free space for academic freedom and community solidarity among the members. As a community of friends, they should not be afraid to express their thoughts and feelings, be it in theologies, professional or personal experiences, and to be courageous in standing up for one another to fulfill its mission of “foster[ing] fellowship among its members and solidarity with the oppressed and excluded,” including those among our members who are afflicted in any way. We have done this a few times but only with a handful of members listening and during the “wine or beer and cheese” moments of our conferences. We can make this a regular event in our Corporation Meetings where members experiencing afflictions, even caused by fellow members, can share their experience freely in a trusting, listening, and supporting environment.

CONCLUSION

This essay has shown that long before synodality became a buzzword in the Church, DaKaTeo has already been striving toward a synodal approach in theologizing in its listening, discerning, prophetic, dialogical and inclusive, transformative, and collegial praxis. However, doing this within a Church that is consciously

striving to become synodal affirms and challenges DaKaTeo to explore how it can further improve its theological practice.

Some of our members have gone ahead, and some of our founders are facing health challenges or in the twilight of their lives. It is up to the middle and younger generations to carry the burden on that rough ground of praxis, even if the road is winding, dusty, or muddy, and the future is unclear. DaKaTeo is still young, 22 or 24 years old. We, the founders, never thought that DaKaTeo would last this long. We look forward to another 20 years of the association. However, beyond our human efforts, the Spirit of God must have accompanied us on this journey. As the saying goes, if it is good, it will last. How else can we explain our continued existence when we all have our personal and professional priorities?

May the words of the late Gustavo Gutierrez, a pioneer of liberation theology, instruct us on our posture to the continuing revelation of God in our midst: “To hope does not mean to know the future, but rather to be open, in an attitude of spiritual childhood, to accepting it as a gift.”

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