INTRODUCTION

KENNETH CENTENO AND STEPHANIE ANN Y. PUEN

The liberation theologian and Dominican friar Frei Betto once recalled an encounter with his confrère, Gustavo Gutierrez, who was having a discussion with Sandinista leaders regarding the position of Christians confronted by the social ills plaguing their communities in Latin America. Recalling their conversation on that fateful November 1981, Frei Betto wrote: "If we want theology, talk *about* God, he (Gustavo) said, we must first be silent before God. Out of this silence, which covers the hearts of the poor, is born wisdom. And we must repeat with Job, among so many Latin American crosses and that deep thirst of love: 'I once knew you only by hearsay; now my eyes have seen you.'"[1]

The entanglement of what is considered political with what is deemed as theological is inevitable for the latter demands critical engagement with former in order to concretize the pleadings of justice, righteousness, equal opportunity, and the like in the light of faith. Recognizing that different dimensions of life cannot be rigidly compartmentalized, one has to take into account the nexus of religion, culture, politics, gender, economics, power discourse, and as such, to attain an integral comprehension of reality. The treatises/articles/papers in this series are but the authors' attempt to explore the various convergences mentioned earlier.

Three articles in this issue—that of Lawrence Pedregosa, Levy Lanaria, and Fr. Ramon Echica—are from the 2022 *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya* (DaKaTeo) conference, titled "Filipino Religious Faith and Nationalism/Patriotism: Engagement

[1] Frei Betto, "Gustavo Gutiérrez—A Friendly Profile," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, eds. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 31–37 (36). NB: emphasis in the original.

and Disentanglement." The theme allowed participants to explore how theology and the understanding of nationhood and patriotism, as well as politics and governance, including conversations on populism and democracy in the Philippines. On the other hand, the other three contributions by Kenneth Centeno, Hans Geybels, and Huong Mai Xuan Tran try to articulate the challenges posed by different political scenarios – be it ecclesiastical or societal, popular or liturgical, local and cultural or catholic and magisterial, the lay intellectual and the ruling clerical - to the practice of the received faith and its accompanying practices. After all, "everything is politics, but politics is not everything."[2]

Such a theme continues to be of importance because, whether one agrees with the relationship or not, there is a close relationship between politics and nationhood with religion and theology. Religion, for instance, is part of the way the Philippines is shaped as a nation, starting with its colonial history under Spanish rule where Catholicism played a role in how the Spanish colonized the local communities. The Governor-General, aside from governing the economics and politics of the Philippines, also took seriously the propagation of the Catholic faith as part of their mission.[3] The discovery of the Sto. Niño imagery by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi upon arriving in the Philippines was seen as evidence that the Philippines was predestined to be a Catholic colony and Christianized; however, indigenous counter-narratives developed alongside this narrative of predestination.[4] Even in the revolts

[2] Ibid., 36.

[3] John N Crossley, "The Religiosity of Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas, Governor-General of the Philippines, 1590-1593," *Philippiniana Sacra* 48, no. 144 (January 1, 2013): 241–52.

[4] Christina H. Lee, "Conflictos Discursivos En La Construcción de La Leyenda Del Santo Niño de Cebú Durante La Temprana Colonización Española de Filipinas," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 44, no. 88 (2018): 33–54.

against Spanish colonial rule, religion played a role in encouraging leadership and liberation.[5]

Under the American colonial period, the relationship between religion and politics became more separated, with the Americans legislating the separation of religion, specifically the Catholic church, and the government.[6] Ideas from indigenous religions and beliefs were also used in how the United States governed the Philippines as a colony.[7] In response, Catholic congregations sought to engage in *pro tutela fidei* ("for the protection of the faith"), as Protestant missionaries and the American benevolent assimilation made its way into the Philippines, upending the Spanish theocracy at the time.[8]

In more recent years, the intersection of religion and nationhood is present in debates and conversations on the separation of church and state when it comes to legislation on reproductive health, divorce, and block voting, to name a few examples.[9] In 2012, the reproductive health bill was passed into law, amidst controversy and division among the government, academics, and religious institutions such as the Roman Catholic church. The extrajudicial killings during the Duterte presidency's war on drugs, which certain religious institutions opposed, and the

[5] Kathy Nadeau, "Peasant Resistance and Religious Protests in Early Philippine Society: Turning Friars against the Grain : Special Section on Liberation Theology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 75–85.

[6] Yiwei Xiao and Yuanlin Wang, "The Separation of Church and State as an Imperial Project in the Philippines during the Early American Colonial Period.," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (August 1, 2024): 1006, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15081006.

[7] Jeffrey Wheatley, "US Colonial Governance of Superstition and Fanaticism in the Philippines," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 21–36, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341410.

[8] Salvador M. Evardone, "Pro Tutela Fidei: St. Paul of Chartres's Missionary Zeal during the American Colonization of the Philippines (1904-1946).," *Philippine Association for the Sociology of Religion Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2023): 40–51.

[9] Roberto E. N. Rivera, "Philippine Catholicism as Disruptive Public Religion: A Sociological Analysis of Philippine Catholic Bishops' Statements, 1946 to 20001.," *Philippine Sociological Review* 58, no. 1–4 (January 1, 2010): 75–96.

voicing out of certain bishops and parishes in support of particular candidates running for public positions have all received attention, either in terms of praise or vilification: praising for either "speaking truth to power" or vilification for "meddling in politics," depending on how they saw the relationship between religion and politics. All these recent events continue to point to how entangled religious institutions are still with how the country is governed and how the Philippines understands itself as a nation. The different strands of theology that Filipinos consciously or unconsciously practice continue to support particular ways of being in the world for many Filipino communities, whether within the country or abroad.

The papers of Centeno, Pedregosa, Lanaria, and Echica thus offer spaces to explore these entanglements and how theology and religion have affected our country as a nation and state. In forging the identity of an emerging Filipino nation at the end of the 19th century, Centeno presents the case of "the missing hell" on how local epistemics such as *loob* and *kapwa* were employed by the *indios* in rethinking the Catholic faith in the light of the national aspiration for sovereignty from the shackles of Spanish colonialism. Pedregosa discusses the concept of "*bayani*" and how it is used to describe Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), critiquing their contributions to how our nation is shaped, given how OFWs themselves still hold on to their traditional values and regional culture. Lanaria's paper, on the other hand, delves into populism in the context of former president Rodrigo Duterte's governance style. Lanaria argues that Duterte's particular brand of politics finds parallels with the understanding Jesus Christ's suffering and death as redemptive violence, and thus there is a need to return to the Sermon on the Mount in order to respond to this way of understanding soteriology and its support for the iron fist and machismo rule of the Duterte government. Lastly, Echica's paper explores the concept of martyrdom in the Catholic church, questioning the concept of "*odium fidei*" as a condition to be

considered a martyr, which ends up excluding from canonization martyrs who, inspired by their faith, died for their political convictions; thus using the notion of political holiness of Jon Sobrino, Echica argues that being "inspired by faith" may be a more appropriate condition for consideration in martyrdom.

The papers of Geybels and Tran reflect, likewise, the entangling of the different knots and knurls of political claims and religious beliefs. This same act of resistance against the imposing hand of church orthodoxy that Centeno discusses in his article is echoed by Geybels in his exploration of Belgian faithful insisting on the practice of the popular devotion as their expression of lived faith. Tactile spirituality does not automatically connote lower sacrality compared to ecclesiastically approved devotions. Lastly, by critically examining the Confucian notion of self-sacrifice levied on the identity of Vietnamese women, Tran questions the hidden patriarchal imposition on womanhood that has been, unfortunately, essentialized as love in the form of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice, if it is to be truly faithful to Christian teaching, has to understood in very being of God manifested in the immanent and transcendent dimensions of Divine Love.

Exploring the points of convergence between politics and religion requires one to mimic the gesture of a hunter who needs to "bend down to hear the sound vibrating through the earth."[10] The act of bending down requires the different muscles of the body to assume certain positions that might not only be uncomfortable, but even painful. Nevertheless, the very dislocation brought by the position allows one to scrutinize not only the dynamics of that which is being observed, but also its interactions with the different elements through the trails and traces left behind. This imagery aptly depicts what the authors tried to do in grappling the intersections of politics and religion. In the process, ideologies were

[10] Mark D. Jordan, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2015), 17.

unmasked, unholy alliances brought to light, and convictions reexamined. Religious discourses are not simply about moral heritage or transcendental certitudes. Believing entails binding oneself to certain claims of legitimacy that cements the ontological construction of the self and community, which may lead to either perpetuation of oppressive system, critical collaboration with power holders, or contestation that aspires for social transformation.[11] Thus, we hope that, in these papers, we provide a space for people to reflect on how religion and nation interact, and how that continues to affect people's everyday lives.

Kenneth Centeno
St. Vincent School of Theology
Tandang Sora Ave., Quezon City
kenneth.centeno@adamson.edu.ph

Stephanie Ann Y. Puen
Ateneo de Manila University
spuen@ateneo.edu

[11] Albert Doja, "The Political Appeal of Religion: A New Awareness of What is Missing," *Implicit Religion* 24, no. 1 (October 3, 2022): 35-62.