

Redeeming the Vernacular Doing Postcolonial-Intercultural Theological Ethics

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Postmodern discourses while opening up a space for hitherto marginalized voices to be heard has ironically led to the problematizing of cultural identity and thus the project of inculturation as well. One particular approach that has come under attack is vernacular hermeneutics.¹

Vernacular² interpretation makes use of the reader's cultural resources and social experiences to understand the biblical narratives and the broader Christian tradition. This can draw on three dimensions of the culture: ideational (worldviews, values and rules); performantial (rituals and roles); and material (symbols, food, clothing, etc.). Vernacular hermeneutics prioritizes the indigenous in order to recover a people's tradition and self-esteem.

¹ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 175-202.

² What can be considered "vernacular" is relative and moveable depending on who is using what and against whom. Sugirtharajah, 178-81.

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It is postmodern in its attempt to decenter the North American/European logos and in privileging the local as “site of creativity”. It is postcolonial³ in its resistance against foreign and universalist discourses and its thrust to decolonize the mind..

R.S. Sugirtharajah, Sri Lankan theologian, notes how vernacular hermeneutics has made “culture an important site for hermeneutics.”⁴ It has enabled Christians to inculturate Christianity and helped re-valorize the wisdom in indigenous cultures which many missionaries denigrated. It also helped enrich biblical interpretations through alternative visual and non-rationalist modes of interpretation. Also, vernacular hermeneutics is not just addressing the academe but more importantly the local Christian communities. On the negative part, in its stress on a hermeneutics of appreciation, it tends to overlook the death-dealing ways in which a cultural text/artefact is used. Secondly, in privileging the “insider” perspective as the authentic one, it tends to be suspicious of anything that comes from the outside, thus making mutual enrichment impossible. Lastly, it espouses an essentialist view of culture as it aspires to recover the cultural soul or essence of the nation which has been degraded because of colonization. When people lived settled lives and inter-cultural interactions were minimal, it seemed rational to think of cultures as monolithic wholes. Today when there is so much intermingling of cultures, the impossibility of thinking of cultures as homogenous entities has become more apparent. The divide between the local and the global, the vernacular and the metropolitan is no longer that clear. As the Filipino anthropologist Fernando Zialcita would say, “We are all mestizos.” Sugirtharajah captures the spirit of vernacular hermeneutics with the phrase: “desperately seeking the indigene”.⁵

This article, nevertheless, argues that the vernacular remains to be an important source of energy for marginalized communities toward solidarity. As the saying goes, “the baby should not be thrown together with the bathwater.” In the field of theological ethics, those who engage in post-Vatican II vernacular theological ethics in the Philippines have manifested varying degrees of

³ Postcolonial theory interrogates how colonial interests are represented or reinforced in cultural texts.

⁴ Sugirtharajah, 182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 175. See also Daniel Franklin Pilario’s critique of the use of dynamic equivalence in certain modes of inculturation in the Philippine context. “The Craft of Contextual Theology: Towards a Conversation on Theological Method in the Philippine Context,” *Hapag* 1, no. 1 (2004): 26-31.

awareness of the contested nature and construction of cultural discourses based on class/caste, gender, ethnicity, race, age etc.⁶ Toward a more ideologically critical inculturation and as one way of doing postcolonial-intercultural ethics,⁷ this essay advocates the employment of discourse analysis both on the vernacular and the Judeo-Christian tradition. To further illustrate the use of discourse analysis, we shall theorize the theological praxis of Gawad Kalinga, a faith-based community which has successfully harnessed vernacular resources for social transformation.

⁶ Dionisio Miranda has been the most prolific in the area of vernacular theological ethics: *Kaloob ni Kristo: A Filipino Christian Account of Conscience*, Manila: Logos Publications, 2003; *Loob: the Filipino Within: A Preliminary Investigation into a Pre-theological Moral Anthropology*, Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1988; "Kailan ako may Pananagutan?" *Diwa*, 13, no. 2 (October 1988): 109-120; "Sa Harap ng Mahiwagang Loob." *Diwa* 14, nos. 1-2 (May/November 1989): 38-67. "Hindi Kusang Loob." *Diwa*, 15, no. 1 (May 1990): 11-30; "Inculturation and Moral Theology," *Philippiniana Sacra* 28, no. 83 (May-August, 1993): 289-309; *Pagkamakabuhay: On the Side of Life: Prolegomena for Bioethics from a Filipino Christian Perspective*, Manila: Logos Publications, 1994, 57-58; "Hindi Maatim: Conscientious Objection in Health Care," in *Conscience, Cooperation, Compassion*, ed. Fausto Gomez et al, Manila: UST Department of Bioethics, 1998, 33-52.

See also Ma. Christina A. Astorga, "Culture, Religion, and Moral Vision: A Theological Discourse on the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 567-601; Agnes M. Brazal, "Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*: An Exploration of Its Potential for Promoting Respect for Plurality and Difference," in *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church*, ed. Dennis T. Gonzalez, Manila: Dakateo, 2004, 50-70; "Ne pas 'perde la face', tendre vers une harmonie sociale," *Mission de l'Eglise* 148 (April 2005); "Gender and Migration: Theological Challenges," *Exodus Series 13: A Resource Guide for the Migrant Ministry in Asia*, ed. Fabio Baggio, Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2010; Ferdinand Dagmang, "Hiya: Daan at Kakayahan sa Pakikipagkapwa," *MST Review* 1 (1996): 66-90; José M. de Mesa, "'Pandaraya' as Sin: A Contextual Interpretation," *Hapag* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 117-67; Monica Jalandoni, "Fortitude in the Philippines," in *Transformative Theological Ethics: East Asian Contexts*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal, Eric Marcelo Genilo, sj, Aloysius Cartagenas and James Keenan, sj, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2010; Carlos Ronquillo, CSsR, "Spirituality in the Social Movement," in *Fired from Within: Spirituality in the Social Movement*, ed. Ton Danenberg, Carlos Ronquillo, CSsR, José de Mesa, Emelina Villegas, ICM and Maurice Piers, Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2007, 327-56. Read as well the articles on chastity, obedience and poverty in *At Nanahan sa Atin: Coming Home to the Roots of the Filipino Religious*, ed. Quirico T. Pedregosa Jr., OP, Gerard P. Timoner III, OP, Clarence C. Marquez, OP, Quezon City: Asia-Pacific-Dominican Formation Center, 2002.

⁷ Most theologians that engage with postcolonial theory are in the fields of missiology, feminism and biblical studies. This article would be among the few, if any, in the field of theological ethics.

A Postcolonial View of Culture

Culture, according to the postcolonial theorist Stuart Hall, is primarily concerned with the practice of “the production and exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group.”⁸ Hall, however, rejects the static view of culture in culturalist models where society is understood as a homogenous and unified totality corresponding to a particular experience: a set of particular political interests, roles and actions as well as a set of what is considered authentic cultural practice and/or position in the economic sphere etc.⁹ In line with the thoughts of the Italian neo-Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1973), and in critical dialogue with structuralist and post-structuralist thoughts, Hall stresses the heterogeneity and complexity of societies.¹⁰ There can thus exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought in a given society.¹¹ Hall underlines that a cultural analysis must therefore be attentive to historical specificities and ideologies¹² which shape various modes of representations.

Hall also recognizes how globalization has brought about the pluralisation of cultural codes and fragmentation of identities.¹³ Even as identities get fragmented in a global society, identity remains important, according to Hall, because it defines a place or space from which people speak. Identities however should no

⁸ Stuart Hall, “Introduction,” in *Representation: Cultural and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, London: Sage, 1997.

⁹ Idem, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms, *Media Culture and Society* 2, no. 1 (January 1980): 57-72.

¹⁰ Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, Keynes: The Open University, 1997, 12. Society is to be analysed as a differentiated and complex totality with multiple and contradictory determinations that are historically particular. Each level of articulation or special form of practice (economic, political, ideological, etc.) has its own relative autonomy.

¹¹ Hall rejects as well the “dominant ideology thesis” which posits that there exists one unified wholistic ideology which permeates everyone. The ‘dominant ideology thesis’ is announced in Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848): ‘the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class’ (VI, 503).

¹² Ideology is defined here in a neutral sense, referring to both practical and theoretical reasoning that helps people make sense of their lived experience and social relations.

¹³ Globalization processes are producing hybrid identities not only in the centres of the global system but even in the peripheries. While identity choices is more extensive in the West, the pluralizing effects of globalization is felt too in the peripheries, albeit, at a slower and more uneven manner.

longer be understood in the sense of a unified stable core. Cultural identity is not the “collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”¹⁴ Engaging with the resources of history, language and culture is important in expressing “the process of becoming rather than being”; our route rather than our “roots”; “not ‘who we are’ nor ‘where we came from’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.”¹⁵

Linguistic Turn in Culture

If culture is the practice of the production and exchange of meanings, language is the primary means by which this occurs. Hall’s notion of how language produces meaning can be classified under the constructionist approach to representation.¹⁶ The constructionist model of representation posits that it is social actors that construct meaning by making use of representation systems, “languages” or signs.

The premise of what is called the “linguistic turn in [understanding] culture”, is that cultural texts/artefacts communicate meaning and to this extent, they as in language, make use of signs. They can therefore be analyzed using Ferdinand Saussure’s linguistic concepts like signifier, signified, langue/parole distinctions, underlying codes and structures and arbitrary nature of sign.¹⁷

Hall acknowledges the importance and in a sense, determining pressure of linguistic structure (e.g. shared codes), even as he underlines that these are subject to changes as well.¹⁸ While shared

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Jonathan Rutherford, ed. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, cited in Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, London: Sage, 1996.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” 4.

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation*, 17.

¹⁷ The Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure, (1857-1913), considered the father of modern linguistics, underscores that the production of meaning depends on language. While Saussure himself confined his study to linguistics, his theories have been applied to a broad range of cultural artefacts and practices and this science has been referred to as semiology. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, London: Cape, 1972, for examples of the use of the semiotic approach to the reading of cultural objects or practices.

¹⁸ John Fiske, “Opening the Hallway: Some Remarks on the Fertility of Stuart Hall’s Contribution to Critical Theory,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley, New York: Routledge, 1996, 217.

codes allow for the possibility of dialogue, they do not assure the stability of meanings especially as different groups further accent meaning depending on their social interests.¹⁹ For Hall, semiology grounds meaning in the text, but only partially for there cannot be a fully objective reading of the text.²⁰

Discursive Approach

While the semiotic approach focuses on how representation can be analysed by looking at the function of the word as sign in language, the discursive approach will shift attention to representation's connection with questions of power. The discursive approach to representation coincides more with Hall's rootedness in the neo-Marxist tradition of Gramsci and the accent he gives to historical specificities.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault contributed to this new approach to representation by shifting the focus from meanings to the production of knowledge and from language to discourse. A discourse, for Foucault, refers to several statements that provide a language to talk about a topic at a particular historical conjuncture. Discourse prescribes what can be talked about and in what way it can be talked about, as well as, rules out ways of speaking or constructing knowledge on the topic.²¹ It is important to note that a discourse here is more than a linguistic concept; it is produced by discursive practice which includes institutional regulations that regulate conduct. A discourse however is not a closed system; rather, it gets elements from other discourses translating them into its network of meaning.

Influenced by Foucault, Hall highlights the link between knowledge, power and the body. Power is implicated in deciding on issues of what constitutes knowledge. Likewise, this knowledge has the power to regulate conduct (i.e. of particular bodies), restrict as well as discipline practices.²²

Hall's Theory of Articulation

One contribution of Hall himself to the clarification of the process of representation is what is known as the method or theory of

¹⁹ In his elaboration on this struggle over meaning, Hall integrates V. N. Vološinov's multi-accentual model of language. V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik, New York: Seminar Press, 1973.

²⁰ Fiske, "Opening the Hallway," 217.

²¹ Hall, ed., *Representation*, 44.

²² Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse on Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, Cambridge: Polity, 1992, 293.

articulation. The term “articulation” seems to have originated from Gramsci who posits that cultural forms and practices are not simply determined by the socio-economic processes but rather, possess relative autonomy. It is articulation which describes how relatively autonomous practices get linked.

Hall defines articulation as:

the form of the connection that can make unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’. The ‘unity which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected.²³

Hall thus employs the term “articulation” in its two senses of (1) speaking and (2) linking or joining of parts that are not necessarily connected to make a unity. Since there is no necessary correspondence among the elements, it is important to analyse why connections are established at a particular historical moment.²⁴

For example, there is no necessary link between women and inferiority or between childbearing and childrearing. This does not mean denying how these have been linked in many societies and have formed the cultural and ideological basis of particular power structures. In these societies, the ‘lines of tendential force’²⁵ articulating women with inferiority or childbearing, with political, economic and ideological structures are strong. One cannot therefore just separate women from this particular historical embeddedness. If you want to re-articulate it in another way, you are going to come across all the grooves that have articulated it already.”²⁶ Texts are not simply free-floating; no text is free of its previous structure of encoding or articulation or what we can call its ideological history.²⁷

²³ Ibid., 53.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tendential historical relations are not fixed forever. They simply define the historical structuring of a given terrain. Hall, “The Problem of Ideology,” in *Stuart Hall*, 42-43.

²⁶ Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation,” 142-43.

²⁷ Stuart Hall, “Reconstruction Work,” Ten-8: 16, cited by Lawrence Grossberg, “History, Politics and Postmodernism,” in *Stuart Hall*, 160.

These previous encodings can be considered as cultural signposts and traces of past struggles which have marked the various inflections of a text. While not determining future articulations, it is important to learn how to read them if we are to take seriously ideology as a contested terrain.

In his theory of articulation, Hall negotiates between two extremes - culturalism and poststructuralism. On the one hand, in line with a poststructuralist approach, he deconstructs culturalism's structural unity and identity and instead views society as a "network of differences" operating on the micro level. Similarly, the subject is fragmented and decentered. On the other hand, in line with structuralism,²⁸ Hall recognizes the importance and in a sense, determining pressure of linguistic structure (e.g. shared codes), even as he underlines that these are subject to changes as well.²⁹

Hall's model of articulation underlies his method of discourse analysis. To sensitize theologians to the discursive construction of cultural texts, this essay proposes his method of discourse analysis as an alternative way of reading a text/artefact from a cultural materialist perspective that highlight meaning as a product of contestation and as implicated in power relations. Below, we systematized Hall's method of discourse analysis for use in theology and integrated some more insights he appropriated from Foucault. The analysis blends a semiotic and a discursive approach to the text.

Discourse Analysis

The following elements in Hall's "circuit of culture" are important heuristic guides in analyzing any cultural text/artefact: representation, identities, production, consumption and regulation.³⁰

Representation. What are the significant ways in which the text or cultural artefact has been represented in language - oral, visual, written?

²⁸ Structuralism analyses the interlinkage of some fundamental elements on which are based mental, linguistic, social and cultural structures, and by means of which meaning is produced.

²⁹ Fiske, "Opening the Hallway," 217.

³⁰ du Gay, et al, *Doing Cultural Studies*, 24-25.

The use of various representational strategies can be explored:

- how meanings have been extended from something known to something new in what can be referred to as 'the chain of meaning'
- the expansion of the meanings of a text or an object via an association with various discourses or semantic networks
- marking the similarity and difference of a text from other concepts/objects
- the articulation with a number of key themes in the broader society

Identity. What are the identities (based on class/caste, ethnicity, gender, race, age, etc.) connected with such representations? Whose interest does the representation promote?

Production. What is the condition of the production of the discourse? Why was this discourse produced? In relation to *Production*, one also analyzes how the meanings various groups have encoded on the text are related to shared conceptual maps³¹ or previous encodings. Here we look at the cultural influences in the meanings that are produced. How is this encoding linked to rules that govern ways of talking about this, for example in different disciplines? How can one describe the symbolic power of the groups who produced these discourses and in relation to consumption, the extent their definition has become common sense or dominant ideology?

Consumption. How are these representations decoded (appropriated/ contested/ negotiated with) by other social groups? Here we deal with the reception by the consumers or the process of decoding whereby the other person interprets the meaning of a text. People give meaning to things by the way they make use of them in everyday life. They are not merely passive receptors in the face of a dominant ideology. They can accept, oppose or negotiate the meaning of a text.³² The meaning encoded in production is not necessarily the meaning received in consumption.³³

³¹ The conceptual map is a set of correlations of objects, people and events with concepts or mental representations. This system of representation comprises not of individual concepts but of various ways of organizing or clustering which make use of principles of similarity or difference.

³² Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. and intro. John Storey, 2nd ed., Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1998, 446.

³³ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media Texts: Authors and Readers*, ed. David Graddol and Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Clevedon: Adelaide in association with The Open University, 1994, 201.

Regulation. How have these various meanings regulated or shaped social conduct? Who are the subjects that are supposed to embody the attributes these discourses gave on them?

One of the aims of discourse analysis is to identify conflicts or struggles over meaning so as to avoid sacralizing a meaning that reinforces the oppressive powers of dominant groups.³⁴

Theorizing the Theological Praxis of Gawad Kalinga

In this section, we shall employ discourse analysis in theorizing the theological praxis of Gawad Kalinga which successfully harnessed vernacular resources to promote housing for marginalized communities. It is a second-order reflection which means that GK did not necessarily self-reflexively went through the discourse analysis. Their reinvention of the vernacular makes sense however and can be further deepened when theorized employing discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is further refined here with the application of a hermeneutics of appreciation and suspicion, from a standpoint shaped by the effective history of the Gospels. A hermeneutics of suspicion critiques the manner in which a discourse has been used to promote the interest of dominant (colonial/metropolitan) groups and thus serve to marginalize those on the periphery. A hermeneutics of appreciation, on the other hand, will be sensitive toward how a text has been used to resist colonial/metropolitan discourses and engages in a reconstructive activity that integrates liberation concerns and the active agency of the sub-altern or marginalized groups. It retrieves or reinvents the ways in which a particular discourse can be employed in life-giving or humanizing ways.

We call this method post-colonial-intercultural³⁵ because it stresses mutual listening and dialogue between the local culture and the Christian tradition and a consequent positive transformation in

³⁴ The importance of discourse analysis even within a certain national culture is illustrated in the Indian inculturation of Christianity within the Brahmanic tradition, which was later criticized by other voices as the Dalits for reinforcing the caste system.

³⁵ This approach is more akin to the third stream of postcoloniality as identified by Sugirtharajah. The first stream focused on resisting colonial control and domination to attain sovereignty. The second stream aimed to recover the soul of a nation. The third stream, influenced by postcolonial theory, highlights the hybridity emanating from the intertwined histories of the colonizer and the colonized; the metropolis and the periphery. Sugirtharajah, 248-50.

the view of the other. This implies mutual transformation between the metropolitan/periphery and the dominant/vernacular cultures. It thereby goes beyond essentializing identity and culture (e.g. East vs West). It further recognizes that the gospel and the local culture are not monolithic wholes and therefore the dialogue is occurring between multiple cultural orientations.

Gawad Kalinga: Harnessing Vernacular Resources Toward Solidarity

Gawad Kalinga (in English, giving care), a faith-based non-government organization, started out as a social arm program of the trans-parochial group Couples for Christ. It hopes to address poverty in the Philippines by transforming and empowering poor communities through its housing and community building program.³⁶ Its goal is to build 700,000 homes for the homeless in 7,000 communities in seven years. Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation and its executive director Antonio Meloto received the 2006 Ramon Magsaysay award for community leadership in providing homes to slum dwellers. The Ramon Magsaysay award is the Asian equivalent to the Nobel Peace Prize.³⁷

Vernacular Discourse Analysis

It is not difficult to discern in the Gawad Kalinga discourses, *bayanihan* (cooperative endeavour) as among the local cultural resources that drive the spirit of the group. A module on *Bayan* (nation), *Bayani* (hero) and *Bayanihan* is given to workers, volunteers and residents of GK villages.

***Bayanihan* (cooperative endeavour)**

When Filipinos hear the term *bayanihan*, the first image that usually comes to mind are neighbors helping each other move a house or farmers helping one another in harvest. The context of this discourse is the agricultural rural setting where mutual aid is necessary for people to cope especially with major agricultural tasks.

If we employ semantic analysis, *bayanihan* comes from the root word *bayani* – hero. The suffix “an” indicates each one being a

³⁶ Their program includes: 1) shelter and site development; 2) value-based education for pre-school children and the youth; 3) health program; 4) productivity- “*Bayan-anihan*”; 5) GK *Kapitbahayan* (Neighborhood) Empowerment; 6) Environment; 7) Community Values Formation

³⁷ GK was also among the thirteen finalist for the 2009 Hilton Humanitarian Award considered the world’s largest humanitarian award.

“*bayani*” or a “hero” to one another. A hero is one who lives and dies for his country. Modern-day heroes in Philippine discourses however include those who bring honor to the country like Manny Pacquiao³⁸ or those who sacrifice for their family and contribute to the nation’s economic survival as the overseas contract workers.³⁹

Gawad Kalinga ingeniously draws from the nationalist discourse on hero as one who loves and makes sacrifices for his/her country and expands its meaning to embrace a person who “bleeds for the cause”; a person who devotes time and resources to initiate work with the community.⁴⁰ Here another vernacular concept is tapped: *padugo*.

***Padugo* (bloodletting)**

Padugo literally means bloodletting. It refers to the animal sacrifice made to ward off evil spirits and to honor *Ginoo* (a traditional way of addressing God). For instance, this ritual is performed at the start of a construction for the safety of the workers in the duration of the project. Among indigenous groups as the Subanons, the ritual is solemnized by a *baliyan*, a native priest or a shaman.⁴¹ It is also performed by fisherfolks in Bohol to bless a new boat. The blood of an animal is sprinkled at the helm of the boat to assure a bountiful catch and to protect the owner from bad weather. The family and friends of the owner then share the cooked animal after the *padugo* ceremony.⁴² Many architects even in the cities also perform the ritual of *padugo* (bloodletting) or sacrificing an animal to ask permission and appease the spirit inhabitant in the site of construction.

³⁸ He currently holds the title as the world’s best pound-for-pound boxer.

³⁹ Suspicions have been expressed regarding the hailing of overseas contract workers (OCWs) as heroes. This has been used by the government to promote the export of labor, which reduces unemployment while not seriously attending to the need to curb corruption to develop the Philippine economy. One cartoon in the internet says “*Bayani nuon, pulubi ngayon*” (A hero before, a beggar today) because when they come back to the Philippines, there are still no job possibilities for them.

⁴⁰ Mitchell Bonavente, “Colegio Honors Outstanding Alumni Anew,” *Letran News* November - December 2007 <http://www.lettran.edu/newsarticle.php?newsID=559&newsCategID=2>; accessed April 2008.

⁴¹ TVI Mining Donates Water Supply System In Southern Philippines Monday, April 23, 2007 03:31:30 PM

⁴² “50 Rhythm of the Sea,” <http://74.6.146.127/search/cache?ei=UTF-8&p=padugo%2C+Philippines&xa=OvodQNKpWPw1hbo6AGJOSA-%2C1242103745&fr=yfp-t-501&u=www.oneocean.org/download/20001123/chap5.pdf&w=padugo+philippines+philippine&d=I0d7g0xISsd8&icp=1&.intl=us>; accessed April 2008.

Padugo has also been used in protests. In Bacolod City, in 2008, angry farmers sacrificed a chicken to drive away the evil spirits that were manipulating against the proposed extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.⁴³

For a gangster cult in Sampaloc, Manila, though, *padugo* refers to the “sacrificial lamb” or the victim of the gangster cult. Before the *padugo* or blood-letting, the gang members would get high on shabu (hydrochloride methamphetamine) after which they look for their sacrificial lamb.⁴⁴

Drawing on the element of “sacrifice” involved in bloodletting, GK creatively reinvented *padugo* to express bleeding for the cause or bleeding to give life.⁴⁵ Bleeding for the cause may mean volunteering to build a house with the poor or donating money or land where the houses can be built. At other times, it is expressed in overcoming great odds and danger as in the case of volunteers who dare to go to conflict-ridden Moslem areas to build houses for the poorest of the poor.⁴⁶

Re-articulation within Judaeo-Christian Discourses

The vernacular discourses on *padugo* and *bayanihan* are used as lenses by GK to articulate in a more culturally intelligible manner the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Jesus' Padugo

In the Hebrew culture, blood protects life (Ex 4:24-26; 12:27), intercedes (Is 56:7), establishes relationships (Gen 15; Ex 24:3-11), and atones or restores life.⁴⁷ This is rooted in the understanding of blood as integral to life. It is in this context that the early Christian communities made sense or found meaning in Jesus' death.

⁴³ “Central RP Peasants End Long March,” http://www.mindanaoexaminer.com/news.php?news_id=20080131054746; accessed April 2008.

⁴⁴ Chito Lozada, “Gangster Cult Terrorizes Communities in Sampaloc,” <http://www.tribune.net.ph/metro/20081117met1.html>

⁴⁵ Bonavente “Colegio honors outstanding alumni anew”.

⁴⁶ Jose Ma. Montelibano, “GK Bayani Challenge: Sulu—Only for the Brave,” <http://gk1mb.multiply.com/journal>; accessed November 2009.

⁴⁷ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God so Loved the World,” in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 42-43. In the Philippine pre-colonial context, unlike in other cultures, the bloodletting of women, menstruation, which is important for conceiving life, is not considered as something impure. A blood compact also seals agreements in pre-colonial Philippines.

In a similar manner, GK makes use of the vernacular discourse on *padugo* to understand *Jesus' Padugo* – his passion on the cross as the ultimate act of self-giving. Meloto referred to “Jesus’ passion on the cross as the ultimate act of self-giving and the best model for heroism to build a nation. In Gawad Kalinga, we call this brand of heroism *padugo* or bleeding for the cause – the passion to serve others out of love... without counting the cost and beyond self-interest.”⁴⁸

We should note though that this *padugo* ethics/spirituality requires a qualification: God did not will the death of Jesus. Jesus’ *padugo* is not a sacrifice to appease God’s wrath and negotiate for our salvation – the theology behind Anselm’s satisfaction theory of atonement. In the satisfaction theory, suffering, “bloodletting”, or Jesus’ crucifixion in itself is necessary for our salvation. This theological discourse has been used by dominant groups to justify the suffering of colonized peoples, battered women, etc.⁴⁹ On the contrary, Jesus’ *padugo* is not in his commitment to death but to life, that is, to bringing about God’s Reign. With historico-critical exegesis, we now know more of the political milieu in Jesus’ time and how his death was a consequence of his preaching about God’s Reign. It is not a bloodletting that would reinforce or glorify unjust suffering.⁵⁰

Multiplying Bread with Bayanihan

Meloto made use of the cultural resource of *bayanihan* (being a hero to one another) to re-read the multiplication of the bread. Recognizing the need for a faith-based model for sustainable development, Meloto reinterprets the feeding of 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fishes as the gospel’s version of the Bayanihan spirit.⁵¹ Meloto himself did not elaborate on his

⁴⁸ Antonio Meloto, “I Want to be a Good Catholic,” <http://gk1mb.multiply.com/journal>; accessed April 2008.

⁴⁹ Brown and Parker, “For God so Loved the World,” 40-42.

⁵⁰ Referring to the murder of Jesus, the Catechism for the Catholic Church 312 qualifies that: “In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures....But for all that, evil never becomes a good”: Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994; The Catechism for Filipino Catholics 496-97 further explains: “The Exodus liberation...is the background for Jesus’ saving work as the new Moses.... But how did Jesus actually liberate? First, he exposed the enslaving, corrupting power of riches.... Second, Jesus taught that any power not rooted in mutual service was enslaving and oppressive.” Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1997 *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, Manila: ECCE Word and Life Publications, 1997.

⁵¹ Meloto, “I Want to be a Good Catholic”.

rereading of the multiplication of the bread. But indeed, it would have been an equally astounding miracle had Jesus inspired the crowd to bring out their packed lunch and share with their neighbors. With everyone sharing, no one need go home hungry that day. This is indeed truly *bayanihan*! This re-reading also jibes with a postcolonial hermeneutics which focuses on the agency of the marginalized instead of highlighting a unilateral or one-directional empowerment.

Bayanihan and the Pentecost

Bayanihan can also be rendered as a mode of expressing solidarity (SRS 38).⁵² The concept of solidarity presupposes that society is a community of diverse elements where all are called to cooperate together for the common good. This call is based on the fact of our interdependence (SRS 38) and our sharing a bond of common origin. Even as the elements are diverse, solidarity involves a deliberate, free choice to link together (SRS 33).

The GK *bayanihan* is a new Pentecost, where people of different languages and races can be in solidarity with each other for a good cause. One GK volunteer expressed amazement over the fact that: "People who can't even speak a common dialect find a way to work together to get the building done! And everyone is smiling, despite the heat." In a similar manner, in the GK-led Peace Builds in Mindanao, Christians, Moslems and indigenous Filipino volunteers have built hundreds of homes for displaced Moslem brothers and sisters. Montelibano noted: "This is a new covenant of brotherhood (sic) among Filipinos where old fears and prejudices are set aside to forge radical ways to find peace and build a nation."

The new Pentecost includes too non-Filipinos who have been likewise inspired to be in solidarity with the GK communities in helping rebuild the Philippines. For example, the citizens of the small island of Maltese, mostly non-Filipinos, have already donated for over 100 homes to GK.⁵³

Heroism vs Holiness? Evangelization vs Nation-building?

Some concerns have been raised regarding the stress on heroism in their spirituality for nation-building instead of focusing on

⁵² John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1988, henceforth referred to as SRS; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html (accessed January 2010).

⁵³ Dylan Wilk, "GK Global Update,"; http://www.gawadkalinga.org/gk_news/gk_news_view.php?id=0601-002; accessed March 2009.

holiness. Meloto responds: "I do not see how you can separate one from the other. To be holy in the Philippines is to be a hero for the poor."⁵⁴ In support of this, Ateneo de Manila President Fr. Ben Nebres, SJ, speaks of the need for such "a development model that merges faith and patriotism, spirit and science, holiness and heroism. He is not referring to a self-centered religion and family ties that only seek the interest of kin which can be barriers to development but about the capacity for caring and sacrifice that Filipinos are capable of because of their love for God and devotion to family. It is about loving the Philippines and pride in being Filipino."⁵⁵

Nationalism has taken on a basically negative connotation in Europe with the experience of the monocentric German Nazi nationalism during the Second World War. But in the context of the deeply-ingrained colonial mentality among many Filipinos, a healthy sense of nationalism which fosters national consciousness and self-determination is not only important but is compatible with Christian discipleship.⁵⁶

GK brings the good news to the poor but also evangelizes the rich by engaging them in their work with the poor to bring them to a deeper conversion. Furthermore, it is not only the rich Filipinos that are called on to help the desperately poor but all individuals and groups from all races and nations. This mode of evangelization cannot be separated from nation-building, according to Meloto, as Jesus himself commissioned his disciples to "make disciples of all nations." (Mt 28: 19)⁵⁷

Generating Political Energies

With a renewed understanding of the faith rooted in *bayanihan* (being a hero to one another) and Jesus' *padugo* (bloodletting), GK taps political resources, opting to embrace the help of various sectors - government and non-government organizations,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Antonio Meloto, "Gawad Kalinga: the Spirituality of Nation-Building," http://www.gkswiss.org/attachments/GKThe_Spirituality_of_Nation_Building.pdf; accessed April 2008.

⁵⁶ See "Christianity and Nationalism" for an elaboration on the compatibility between Christianity and a polycentric nationalism which acknowledges the equality of all peoples regardless of culture or race but at the same time respects the validity of divisions into various ethnicities. <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1026.htm> (accessed June 2009)

⁵⁷ "CFC and GK," http://www.cfcfl.org/documents/documents/CFC_and_GK-1.pdf; accessed April 2008.

corporations, universities, migrants, peoples of other faiths and nations—to bring about social change.⁵⁸ It is important to note that the reinvented discourse on *bayanihan* and *padugo* is more than a linguistic concept; it is produced by discursive practice which includes institutional regulations that regulate conduct. GK has organized communities and built alliances that enable people to practice in a more systematic and institutionalized manner the virtues of *bayanihan* and *padugo*.

Conclusion

Our postcolonial-intercultural approach of negotiating with the vernacular is similar to what the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha would call, “vernacular cosmopolitanism.” A vernacular cosmopolitan is engaged in translating between cultures and dialoguing with traditions

from a position where ‘locality’ insists on its own terms, while entering into larger national and societal conversations. This is not a cosmopolitanism of the elite variety inspired by universalist patterns of humanist thought that run gloriously across cultures, establishing an enlightened unity.⁵⁹

What we have advocated in particular in this essay is the use of discourse analysis in doing postcolonial-intercultural theological ethics.⁶⁰ Discourse analysis presupposes the multiplicity of discourses on a cultural text/artefact accented by various contexts/interests. In theological ethics, it can be employed—nuanced by a hermeneutics of appreciation and suspicion – in the retrieval, reexamination and reinvention/rearticulation of the vernacular within the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

⁵⁸ GK seems to have been effective with urban poor communities. But with indigenous peoples, it still needs to study more their ways to be better responsive to their needs. See Martin Perez, “The Myth of Gawad Kalinga: the Sitio Target Disaster,” <http://martinperez.asia/2007/04/10/the-myth-of-gawad-kalinga/>; accessed April 2008.

⁵⁹ Homi Bhabha, “The Vernacular Cosmopolitan,” in *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa*, ed. F. Dennis and N. Khan (London: Serpent’s Tail), cited by Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 195.

⁶⁰ For another example of doing postcolonial-intercultural theological ethics from below, see forthcoming Agnes M. Brazal, “Harnessing Cultural Resources Toward Solidarity,” *MST Review* (2010). Employing discourse analysis, we also theorized the praxis of a Christianized indigenous group (Obo-Manobos), that is, how they harnessed energy from their traditional practice of dancing which led to cultural regeneration, as well as their filing and eventual granting by the government of their ancestral land claim.