STUDY

Inculturating Vincentian Charism and Ministry in the Asia-Pacific Contexts: A Methodological Proposal

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The Case of Collaborative Servant-Leadership

Live with confreres so cordially and simply that no one,
on seeing you together, may guess who is the Superior.
Do not settle any business matters,
however unimportant they may be,
until you have first sought their advice....

(SV VI, 66)

Introduction

When I was given this topic to develop, I felt some excitement to be given the opportunity to reflect about 'collaborative servant-leadership' for the whole Asia-Pacific Region. In the end, however, I found out it was an impossible task. If inculturation (of a charism, a ministry or of Christianity itself) is to be done, it should be done in its specific context, and the people who can do it are those who are there where the action is. So, what I will offer here are mere methodological pointers on how to do inculturation on the ground — hoping that, with this, we can start the process ourselves. To start

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the ball rolling, I volunteer an attempt to reflect on the theme from my own context, the Philippines, also knowing that mine is not the last word, and never should there be. This paper has three parts: (1) a discussion on the methods of interpretation; (2) a search for a viable theory of culture for inculturation; (3) an attempt to apply this appropriated framework on our theme.

1.   The Challenge of Interpretation(s)

The project of inculturation needs hermeneutics or a theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics traces its origins to Hermes' role of unraveling to humans the messages of the gods. Hermes, thus, traverses both worlds[2] — a posture which is also present in any hermeneutical act: the world of the 'text' and the world of the interpreter. The problem of hermeneutics therefore is to establish a dialogue between these two worlds separated as they are by time, space and cultures. It is only through this dialogue that understanding happens. The project is not as simple as it looks. For one, both worlds need to be deciphered. This is clearly understand-able with the world of the text. Since the 'text' is produced in the past, there is a need to interrogate that past in order to understand it. But interpretation is equally necessary with the supposed-to-be familiar world of the interpreter. Contemporary horizon (or what we call 'culture') where the interpreter inhabits itself needs interpretation. This makes inculturation (i.e., the interpretation of the Christian tradition in our cultures) quite a complex process. Hermeneutics has a long history. Let me outline in a cursory manner these methods in order to figure out for ourselves a basic framework for our own purposes.[3]

1.1. Grammar and Allegory: Hermeneutics as Exegetical Method

Hermeneutics can be traced to as early as the first attempts of human beings to understand themselves and their world. We do not, however, intend to go back that far in prehistory. We can start with the so-called 'religion of the books' since it is these institutions that

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[2] "The function of Hermes was therefore an important one since the misunderstanding of the message from the gods could prove fatal to mortal men. He had to adapt the message to the language of his hearers. Hermes, since then, has become symbolized as the messenger charged with a mission, the success of which depended heavily on the manner in which this message is transmitted." EMERITA QUITO, *The Philosophers of Hermeneutics* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1990), 8.

[3] I am indebted to WERNER JEANROND, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press, 1994), in the following section.

enthrone the 'text' at the center of their existence. From the very beginning, we notice two tendencies in methods: (1) *grammatical interpretation* which emphasizes the 'text,' its linguistic devices and the structural relations within it, and (2) *allegorical interpretation* which tries to decipher the hidden meaning of the text aided by interpretative criteria outside it. Even though in the Jewish context, we see four overlapping exegetical methods for the Torah — literalist, midrashic, peshar and allegorical interpretations[4] — we can group these into two directions. The *midrash* which comes from the rabbinic schools widens the notion of *literal* interpretation by looking at the context and parallels. Both their criterion, however, is 'intra-textual,' thus, can be considered of the same kind. The *peshar* model which originated from Qumran claims special gnosis as criteria for the application of the Scriptures into present events. It is thus related to *allegorization* whose search for spiritual meaning of the text is guided by the concern for God's transcendence (Philo of Alexandria). The Jewish exegetical debate revolves around those who privilege the text and its grammar and those who prefer to base the meaning outside the text itself.

The same oscillation between these two poles (i.e., grammatical and allegorical) can be found among early Christian thinkers particularly in the debate between the Antiochene and Alexandrian traditions. While theologians from Antioch (e.g., Theodore of Mopsuestia) assert the historical reality of the Scriptures, (thus, the significance of the literal), the Alexandrians (e.g., Origen) highlight the mysterious language of symbols, thus, giving weight to the spiritual and the allegorical.

It is this double direction which Augustine tries to pull together in his semiotics and Christian hermeneutics. For Augustine, a conventional 'signum' (to which biblical language belongs) may be taken either literally or figuratively. A biblical text, for instance, should be taken in its context with the help of all available means to understand difficult passages (the Antiochene strand). In case of figurative expressions (Alexandrian theme), "what one reads should be carefully considered until a reading is established which reaches the kingdom of love."[5] It is this praxis of love in the context of the Church that is the criterion of interpretation. Thus, it is this hermeneutical principle that lives on in the Church throughout the medieval times: the reading of Scriptures serves as a guide to Christian praxis while this same praxis of love becomes the viewpoint with which to correctly read the Scriptures. The problem with this

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[4] See RICHARD LONGENECKER, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995).

[5] SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana* III, 23.

approach, however, is that the supposed-to-be reliable criterion for interpretation (i.e., faith-love praxis of the Church) is never a monolithic reality, thus, in itself needing interpretation. Also, due to Augustine's neo-Platonic paradigm, there is a tendency towards allegorization in actual practice. The rediscovery of Aristotle swings the hermeneutic pendulum back to the 'literal' side as shown in the works of Thomas Aquinas.

> *"In the holy scripture no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one — the literal — from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory, as Augustine says. Nevertheless, nothing of holy scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the scripture in its literal sense."* [6]

This move in Thomistic hermeneutics is made in response to adopt theology to the new paradigm of science during those times. From Abelard onwards, dialectics (i.e., logic and philosophy) has become the theological handmaid (*ancilla theologiae*). *Summa Theologica* thus gives us a sense of how Scriptures should blend with theological reflection. But Thomistic move is also ambivalent. On the one hand, Saint Thomas' rejection of allegorical interpretation has narrowed down the chasm between biblical texts and the often spiritualized direction in theology. On the other hand, the prominence given to logic and philosophy has separated theology again from biblical interpretation. This direction reaches its peak in the manualist theologies of the late scholastic period where the Scriptures only serve as 'proof texts' for theological speculation. Thus, while theology was imprisoned in its often stale academic enclosures, the fertile field of biblical interpretation was taken on by the imaginative and symbolic worlds of popular religion. In effect, the original dialectical relationship of the two poles in interpretation theory came to be collapsed into the same hermeneutic pole by the now two competing theological paradigms, i.e., scholastic theology which only needs Scriptures to substantiate its own dogmatic claims and popular devotion which also uses the bible for its own pious concerns.

1.2. 'Behind' the Text: Philosophical Hermeneutics

The concern of Jewish and Christian hermeneutics we discussed above was exegetical, i.e., how to understand scriptural texts. Beyond this quite practical preoccupation, modern hermeneutics displays a much wider focus: the nature of understanding itself. It asks a more basic philosophical question: "What is human understanding and

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[6] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 1. a. 10.

how does it happen?"[7] Hermeneutics thus is viewed as the 'art of understanding.' The first thinker to reflect along these lines was in fact a preacher and theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). For him, hermeneutics is an act of reconstructing the original meaning intended by the author but also in a sense of making explicit what the author him/herself takes for granted. There is a need thus for a methodologically controlled process in understanding the dynamics of linguistic texts. Language for him possesses two dimensions: the patterns of linguistic conventions and the actual performance of the work by the individual author. In effect, Schleiermacher posits two phases in the interpretation of texts: grammatical and psychological. Thus, in order to understand a text, one first needs to examine its grammar (i.e., the genre, structure, linguistic rules, etc.) in the time the text was written. Second, the interpreter needs to comprehend the peculiar combinations that characterize the text as a whole. This bears out the uniqueness of the work as it emerged from the author's mind, thus, leading us into the intentions of the author him/herself (i.e., psychological dimension). In this twofold movement, one aims "to understand the text first as well and then better than its author did."[8] What is at issue is to grasp the sense of the text in the author's mind which can never be achieved without grammatical interpretation.

Schleiermacher's disciple, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) pursued the interests of his master by making hermeneutics the foundational theory of the human sciences. In a time when the scientificity of the human sciences was put into question by the then dominant 'objectivist' direction in natural sciences, Dilthey argued for a separate methodology to claim some autonomy for the former. While natural sciences (*Natuurwissenschaften*) aim at explanation, human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) focus on understanding. In other words, while physics, astronomy or biology try to explain (*erklären*) natural phenomena, philosophy, literature or history intend to understand (*verstehen*) human life in all its complexity. These are two separate fields with altogether different methods. Hermeneutics thus presents itself to be the method of *understanding* life itself through individual works of authors. It presents itself to be the method for human sciences. For Schleiermacher as for Dilthey, "the

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[7] "Since the art of speaking and the art of understanding stand in relation to each other, speaking being only the outer side of thinking, hermeneutics is a part of the art of thinking, and is therefore philosophical." F. SCHLEIERMACHER, "Hermeneutik," in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts from the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (London: Blackwell, 1986), 73-97, 74.

[8] *Ibid.*, 83.

final goal of the hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself; a statement which is the necessary conclusion of the doctrine of unconscious creation." [9] Beyond Schleiermacher, however, Dilthey's emphasis on historicity and the peculiarity of human life leads him to rely both on descriptive psychology and externalized creative 'expressions of life' as aids to understanding the text-production of an author. The bottomline, however, remains the same: the aim to recover the objective intention of the author by taking into account all the factors that went into the production of his/her text (e.g., grammar, structural and linguistic conventions, the psychology of the author, socio-historical context, etc.). To be able to understand, the interpreter needs to overcome the temporal, spatial and cultural distance, i.e., our historical situatedness, in order to be contemporaneous with the author and his/her text. [10]

But is this project of recovery possible? Through some methodologically controlled processes, can we really transcend the spatio-temporal and cultural distance to be 'in the shoes of the author' himself? Furthermore, do we really need such overcoming in order to understand? Gadamer answers 'no'!

1.3. 'Front' of the Text: Hermeneutics as Retrieval and Suspicion

Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1900-2002) *Truth and Method* [11] is the classic work in contemporary hermeneutic theory. Following his teacher, Heidegger, Gadamer raises the realm of hermeneutics towards the 'ontological' level beyond its status as a philosophical method (in Schleirmacher and Dilthey). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, understanding is the basic condition of our being-in-the-world. It is not simply a method for grasping psychological or historical meaning. It is the only way in which humans exist in the

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[9] WILLIAM DILTHEY, "The Development of Hermeneutics" (1900) in DAVID KLEMM, *Hermeneutic Inquiry*, Vol. I: *The Interpretation of Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 93-105, 104.

[10] "Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey identified the meaning of the text or action with the subjective intention of its author. Starting from the documents, artifacts, actions, and so on that are the content of the historical world, the task of understanding is to recover the original life-world they betoken and to understand the other person (the author or historical agent) as he understood himself. Understanding is essentially a self-transposition or imaginative projection whereby the knower negates the temporal distance that separates him from his object and becomes contemporaneous with it." DAVID LINGE, "Editor's Introduction," in HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), xiv.

[11] HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998).

world (i.e., a constant process of interpretation towards human self-understanding). In this context, language is crucial. Language here is no longer viewed as an instrument of communication. It is the primary place where the truth of our humanness is disclosed. "It is the centre of language alone that, related to the totality of beings, mediates the finite, historical nature of man [sic] to himself and to the world." [12]

How and when does this disclosure happen? Gadamer gives the paradigm of text-interpretation. To understand a text, one does not need to overcome the spatio-temporal distance which separates the interpreter and the text. If we are serious with our being 'historical' and 'temporal,' the present situation, our contemporary issues, concerns and prejudices — instead of obstructing understanding — serve as the only condition of possibility for human experience.

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified or erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world. They are simply the conditions whereby we experience something — whereby what we encounter says something to us. [13]

This is what Gadamer refers to as 'historically effective consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*). [14] That is, our historical, social and cultural locations are no longer obstacles to understanding the text or the world (as in Schleiermacher and Dilthey). To interpret a text is always to approach it with a certain set of questions, pre-judgments, interests. We are always in a 'situation'; we do not stand outside it. It is this situation (i.e., the horizon of our expectations) itself which becomes the enabling condition for our understanding. Understanding thus happens in what he calls the 'fusion of horizons' [15] — the fusion of the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader, the horizon of the past or tradition where the text is situated and the contemporary cultural context where the interpreter is located. Gadamer uses the metaphor of the game to bring out the dialectical relationship of these horizons in the act of interpretation. What is important in a game is not so much the rules but the game itself. [16] The 'joy of the game' happens when the players

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[12] *Ibid.,* 415.

[13] H.-G. GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 9. See also *Truth and Method,* 269-277.

[14] H.-G. GADAMER, *Truth and Method,* 300-307.

[15] *Ibid.,* 306-307.

[16] H.-G. GADAMER, "Man and Language," in *op. cit., Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 66.

are so caught up in it to the point of 'being played' by the game itself. The same thing happens in a conversation or dialogue. People are caught up in the dialogue inasmuch as they let go of their initial positions without their knowing it. Their differing horizons have fused. Thus, in the act of understanding (as in real games or conversations), it is in that point of joyful encounter between two horizons that the disclosure of truth happens.

There are problems, however, which can be raised against Gadamer's project. First, interpreting a text is not really like conversations or games where the dialogue-partner or opponent is an active historical subject in flesh and blood. In hermeneutics, the interpreter engages a passive text, as it were, no matter how much Gadamer asserts that it also has an 'active share' in the process. In the end, the hermeneutical act is a work of the interpreter. Jürgen Habermas (1929-), for instance, asks: what guards the interpretative act from systematically distorted communications?[17] What criteria are there to check any fundamentalist reading imposing itself as legitimate? Is this not exposing the so-called 'disclosure of truth' to ideological manipulation? How sure are we of the truth of our reading? Who arbitrates between two conflicting interpretations, two opposite readings?

It is Paul Ricoeur (1913-) who attempts to strike a balance be-tween the methodological aspects of hermeneutics (Schleiermacher) as well as its ontological dimensions (Gadamer).[18] Against Dilthey who separated *explanation* (for natural sciences) from *understanding* (for human sciences), Ricoeur insists on the necessity of both in the act of interpretation. In other words, methodological tools to help us understand the text in its linguistic, historical and cultural contexts — a concern already present in Schleiermacher but denied in Gadamer — now become indispensable and salutary. In other words, what proves necessary is not only 'retrieval' or our immersing into the tradition of the text in order to disclose its truth to us but also 'suspicion,' i.e., a critical look into the context of its production in order to alert us to ideological distortions. Like Schleiermacher, Ricoeur recognizes the dialectical relationship between the two poles of interpretation present in the whole history of hermeneutic theory: the past world of the text and the contemporary world of the interpreter. But unlike Schleiermacher who underscores the 'behind

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[17] JÜRGEN HABERMAS, "On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality," (1970) in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts from the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present,* ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, 294-319.

[18] PAUL RICOEUR, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Lan-guage, Action and Interpretation,* ed. & trans. John Thompson ([n.p.]: 1981).

of the text' by undertaking to grasp the intention of the author, Ricoeur privileges the 'front of the text.'

> *The sense of the text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the non-ostensive reference of the text. Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world — propositions opened up by the reference of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movements from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.* [19]

The text as text renders its author 'dead,' as it were, releasing it for all possible readings and interpretations as it encounters new contexts. Being polysemous, the text engenders a 'surplus of meaning,' making any reading an exploration of signification and existential possibilities in new settings, new situations, new worlds.

1.4. Towards a Methodology for Vincentian Studies

The purpose of this cursory survey of hermeneutical theories is simple: to search for methodological guidelines towards inculturating Vincentian charism and ministry in our differing contexts, particularly in the Asia-Pacific Region. Vincentian studies, like Christianity itself, have been interpreted in the West and exported to the rest of the world for consumption. A cursory review of the articles published in *Vincentiana* bears out articles written mostly in French or Spanish, and more recently, in English. Most authors — the so-called 'Vincentian experts' — come from the West as well. This tells us a glaring fact: that despite the growing number of Vincentians in the so-called 'South' or 'Third World' and the fertile field of apostolic ministry in these regions, there is yet no significant literary production in the field of Vincentian studies emerging from their contexts. There might be several factors which might explain this: there is no time to do serious writing and reflection as many confreres are being caught up with the demands of the ministry; there is a lack of Vincentian literature (dearth of copies, lack of translations, etc.); there is no financial structure and access to publication, etc. But one obstacle which might be behind most minds of confreres wanting to write something on Saint Vincent is the availability of a viable methodology. "How will I do it? Am I sure that

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[19] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fortworth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87.

I am doing it right like they did? What then is the proper way to do this?" The following is my attempt to develop some pointers towards a methodology for inculturation of Vincentian charism in our differing contexts.[20]

(1) *Vincentian Historical Studies*

What we have are Vincentian 'texts' — those coming from Saint Vincent as read through the lens of his secretaries and biographers, most of which are still in their French or Spanish versions. Their contents are Vincent's interpretations of the events of his life, the communities and institutions he founded, his relations with others, the events of his times and his responses to them. This in itself requires a host of methodological linguistic tools to be able to understand Saint Vincent's texts in their contexts. It is here that the researches and studies of the so-called Vincentian 'experts' can help us. This is a necessary moment in any inculturation process. It is these historical studies (linguistic, structural, psychological, contextual, etc.) that make us see the larger picture, as it were, and enable us to understand Saint Vincent maybe (just maybe) "more than he understood himself," as Schleiermacher and Dilthey promised us.

(2) *Starting-Point for Inculturation*

Historical studies do not suffice; there is a need to make the charism relevant to our differing contexts. If we follow the directions set out for us by romanticist hermeneutic theory (Schleiermacher and Dilthey), what remains to be done is application. Laudable efforts are done along this line in recent times, the most prominent of which (in the Anglophone context) are the studies by Robert Maloney.[21] There is a consistent methodology in Maloney's articles. In his study of the five Vincentian virtues, for instance, he starts by (*a*) a look at the five virtues "as Saint Vincent himself understood them"; (*b*) an examination of the horizon shifts between the 17th and 20th centuries; (*c*) retrieval of the virtues in their contemporary forms.[22] This three-level framework is ever present in most of his

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[20] My position here is a reworking (also a revision) of my previous article, "In Search of Meaning: Vincentian Charism and Hermeneutics," in *Knowing the Tree by its Leaves: Re-reading St. Vincent de Paul in the Philippine Context* (Manila: Congregation of the Mission, 1993), 3-29.

[21] See, among others, ROBERT P. MALONEY, *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality for the Service of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1992); *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul* (New York: New City Press, 1995); *Seasons in Spirituality: Reflections on Vincentian Spirituality in Today's World* (New York: New City Press, 1998).

[22] ROBERT P. MALONEY, "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today," in *op. cit.*, *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul,* 37-69.

main studies, e.g., the vows, providence, mental prayer, simplicity, humility, aging process, gentleness, authority, friendship, etc.[23] Even as we acknowledge the value of these excellent studies towards making Saint Vincent relevant to contemporary times, I would like to pose some questions as to its method, particularly with regard to the starting-point of the inculturation process. To start reflection with Saint Vincent's words and actions (or how he understood himself) engenders quite a host of methodological problems for us. First, following Gadamer, we can ask if we can ever know the mind of Saint Vincent "as he understood himself." Are not our readings interpretations in themselves emerging from our prejudices and situations? Second, granting that we can reconstruct the times of Saint Vincent and proceed as Maloney does, all that is left for us is to apply what the 'experts' have produced. For no one of us would ever have the time to learn 17th century French, to read Coste's 14 volumes, to understand Vincent's socio-historical context, etc. In this perspective, we can only be passive 'consumers' of a Vincentian production done elsewhere.

If we are to understand Saint Vincent for our times, our option is to start reflection from our different contexts, cultures, interests. It is these present 'prejudices' and 'situations' that make us understand who Vincent is today. There is no way for us to recover the 'behind of the text.' In a Ricoeurian fashion, what is crucial is the 'front of the text' as it opens us to a 'meaning surplus' in new horizons, new worlds, new possibilities beyond what the original author ever imagined. This is good news for us who are 'non-experts,' i.e., formators, missionaries, pastors, workers in the grassroots communities. It opens a way for us to actively interpret (not just passively 'consume') Saint Vincent from our situations in life in a way that is as real and valid. Our concern here is beyond the methodological, but the existential. That is, we do not just want to understand Vincentian texts for the sake of merely understanding them, but mainly to also understand ourselves. It is only through these continuous acts of interpretation that we also shape our Vincentian identities and the truth of our existence and mission is disclosed to us, as Gadamer reminds us. What we refer to as

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[23] ROBERT P. MALONEY, "The Four Vincentian Vows: Yesterday and Today," in *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul,* 70-129; "Providence Revisited," in *He Hears the Cry of the Poor,* 52-72; "Mental Prayer Yesterday and Today: The Vincentian Tradition," in *ibid.,* 78-100; "Simplicity in the Life of the Daughter of Charity," in *ibid.,* 144-151; "Humility in the Life of the Daughter of Charity," in *ibid.,* 152-159; "On Selling Chalices," in *Seasons in Spirituality,* 27-44; "A Further Look at Gentleness," in *ibid.,* 81-102; "Some Reflections on Authority," in *ibid.,* 71-80; "Hoops of Steel: Some Reflections on Friendship," in *ibid.,* 113-142.

products of our interpretation are not just literary outputs but also our works and mission, our personal and communal witness — documented or not — all disclosures of the truth of Vincentian existence for our times. In this context, we can say that we are all 'Vincentian experts,' as it were, as we continually articulate the Vincentian meaning vis-à-vis the 'texts' handed down to us. There is no one proper way to do Vincentian hermeneutics as each culture, context or situation engenders its own method.

(3) *Dialectical Interaction*

In order to guard us from ideological use of the Vincentian tradition, there is also a need to posit within our methodology itself a dialectical and critical interaction between the past and the present, between the text and the interpreter, between one interpretation and another, in the manner of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion. It is here that rigorous Vincentian historical studies prove useful as they can also place into question our contemporary retrievals. But the dialectics also works in the opposite direction as contemporary horizons critique the structural prejudices of Saint Vincent's times. The problem with Maloney's methodology is its uni-directionality. Even as he adopts the Vincentian charism to our times and contexts through the analysis of the 'horizon shifts,' his method seemingly appears to be a 'top-down' reflection process (i.e., Saint Vincent's reflections merely applied to our times). There is no way in which contemporary perspectives can put into question the positions and options Saint Vincent made, he being the product of his own times. Examples of this dialectical interpretation will be given in our analysis of 'collaborative servant-leadership' in a later section.

2.   The Challenge of Culture(s)

What I have explored so far is how to deal with 'the past,' that is, with the world of historical texts and its relation to the interpreter. What is often left out in the discussions on hermeneutics is the fact that 'the present,' the world of the interpreter is also a matter of interpretation. When we aim to re-read the Vincentian charism into our culture(s), it is often forgotten that this same culture also needs to be 'read' or is already a product of plural and often conflicting readings. What then is culture?

2.1. Culture as Process

In many anthropological discourses, 'culture' is always used as an abstract 'noun' for something. It either refers to some 'elitist' social practices (e.g., music, paintings, theatre, etc.) or, in more contemporary sociological egalitarian views, to some determinate

communal forms of life, meanings and everyday practices. It is located either in the past (as traditional values and 'ways of life') or in the future (as socialist or religious ideals). Both the Vatican discourse of the so-called 'Christian culture' and the radical communist utopia called 'classless society' are the same rendering of culture as 'noun'; the former founded on the nostalgia of the past, the latter hinged on an ideal future. Despite their seeming ideological differences, what binds these two positions is the abstract determinate form in which culture has been conceptualized and captured. A contemporary cultural theorist, Raymond Williams (1921-1988) argues against this passive connotation of pre-determined values by emphasizing culture as 'verb.'[24] Before becoming an abstract 'noun' for something, culture was first a 'process.' The Latin term, *cultura* can be traced to its root, *colere,* which, among other things, means 'to cultivate.' 'Culture' thus originally is a word to denote an actual practice, that is, the cultivation or tending of something, generally of plants or animals, and by metaphorical extension, of human 'tending.' Only in later developments did it come to denote an abstraction, a thing-in-itself. What I intend to underline here is culture's original meaning; it is a verb, a process, a dynamic reality. Beyond abstract and determinate cultural 'forms' to which we often refer, culture is about collective human *praxis* necessary for a local community to survive in the social and physical environment in which it finds itself.

What repercussions does this have to the project of inculturation?

(1) What I call 'top-down' inculturation approaches fall into the danger of 'adapting' into the present some reified (most often imported) cultural forms — either from the West or from the past — into contemporary practice. One example is the early practices on liturgical 'adaptation': the adaptation of some foreign reality by retaining the so-called 'essentials' and adjusting the 'expressions' to local contexts. The 'essentials' (or the 'core') represent the 'more authentic' reality as compared to the 'expressions' (or the 'peripherals') which are just its cultural trappings. Thus, the essentials need to be kept while the expressions can be transformed according to context. This is often referred to as the 'kernel-and-husk' theory of culture. But we can ask, for instance, who determines the so-called 'essentials' from the 'peripherals'? Can we really separate the two? For instance, is Filipino Catholicism separable from the Spanish practices of processions, fiestas, *santos, panata,* etc.? Are these essentials or peripherals? Applied to a more distinctly

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[24] RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Culture and Society Coleridge to Orwell* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993 [1958]), xv-xvii. See also *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1988), 87-93.

Vincentian context, who delineates between the 'essentials' and the 'expressions' of the Vincentian lifestyle?[25] This issue has been debated all throughout the centuries in our communities — discussions to the point of violence and destruction of persons and relationships, with all the parties believing that their reading is the more 'essential' one.

(2) Even if we start inculturation from local cultural contexts, we still meet the same methodological dead-end, if we continue to view culture as 'noun,' not verb; as reified realities, not as process. One instance of which is the romanticist cultural analysis which equates Filipino culture (or any culture for that matter) with its frozen past as 'native' costumes and food, 'ethnic' dances and songs, 'traditional' practices — including even the so-called 'Filipino values.' For who can ever pinpoint what the 'Filipino values' are all about? The culture from which any inculturation process starts is never a static reality but is in the process of being formed and transformed by concrete social agents through time. Thus, any cultural analysis must take this dimension seriously. When we say Filipino culture (or Fijian, Indonesian, Indian, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Australian, or Chinese, for that matter), there is not a single set of values, art forms or practices which we can pin down to identify with it. These practices and values are in fact constantly created and recreated as these specific societies encounter different forces and influences all throughout history. This brings us to the next point.

2.2. Culture as Power

In any cultural analysis, what needs to be attended to and examined is the play of forces in the shaping of cultures. Our first realization is that cultures are not prefabricated realities; they are dynamic realities constantly transformed through time. Corollary to this assertion is that cultures do not just 'innocently' move or mix among themselves as coffee to water. Our second assertion is that culture also means 'power.' Some cultural realities (e.g., language, worldviews, religion, values, etc.) come to be accepted as the norm due to their dominance not only in the cultural but also in the economic and social spheres. Think about McDonald's, Coca-Cola or Hollywood celebrities becoming household names. It is not an

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[25] An example of this approach is found in Julma Neo, "Inculturating the Charism in the Asian Context," in *Of Roots and Wings: Reflections on Rediscovering and Reliving a Religious Charism Today* (Manila: Daughters of Charity, 2003), 285-310. Neo states one of her basic assumptions for inculturation: "We need to distinguish between charism and its expressions (e.g., works, lifestyle, forms of community living, ways of praying, structures). These expressions must be developed from within cultures of those who live the charism" (286).

innocent diffusion. Some analysts call it the 'McDonaldization,' 'Coca-Colonization' or 'Hollywoodification' of the world — all because the US is exerting hegemonic dominance in all fields — cultural, political and economic. For most people, 'hegemony' — a notion made popular by Antonio Gramsci — constitutes their sense of reality, their ordinary or common sense experience as they are also constantly bombarded by the media and propaganda for these things to be 'taken for granted' as *the* reality. It is another world for 'culture'; in our case, global capitalist culture. But a lived hegemony is never a totalizing, singular, abstract system. It is a complex of relationships, experience and activities. The dominant position must constantly renew, recreate, defend and modify itself as it is also continually resisted and subverted by forces in its margins. According to Williams, "there is no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality that includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention." [26] Thus, resistance can be located within what Williams calls the 'residual' and the 'emergent' which, together with the 'dominant' hegemonic force constitutes the whole cultural process. In other words, there is more to culture than the 'dominant,' since actual human practice in the rough grounds can never be totally exhausted by its control despite its universalizing intentions. "For there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness, in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize." [27] It is from these areas that 'emergent voices' — both alternative and oppositional — emerge in order to exert pressure on the hegemonic.

What repercussions do these assertions have to inculturation?

(1) If we start the inculturation process from our present culture, we need to be reminded that this culture is never a monolithic reality. For instance, the notion of 'nation' (thus, national culture) is not a natural entity but a constructed reality, [28] thus, the question of power in the process of its coming to be. When we say 'Filipino culture,' we can ask "which Filipino?," "whose culture?" The more difficult it is, therefore, to look for a regional identity for when we say 'Asian soul' or 'Asia-Pacific' culture, to what do we actually refer? To force us to come up with one gets us involved in a process

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[26] RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 125.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] BENEDICT ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

of construction, thus, also an imposition of some dominant readings which enthrone some cultures but also alienate others. This leads us to ask the question what is the ultimate locus of inculturation. I believe that inculturation (of the Christian message or of the Vincentian charism) basically happens in what Williams call 'placeable social identities' — those 'knowable bonds, locatable voices in face-to-face interactions.'[29] It is these grassroots communities — be it a DC or CM local house, an SSVP conference, Marian youth group, a Confraternity of Charity, or a Basic Ecclesial Community — which are confronted by the challenge of survival but also of living the Christian message (and Vincentian charism) in their own contexts. Inculturation, therefore, neither happens in conventions and conferences nor in articles that we write (like this one). What we can do at most is to reflect on the attempts at inculturation in the grassroots communities. As liberation theologians love to say: "Reflection is a second act, the first act of which is praxis," that is, the praxis of these 'placeable social identities.'

(2) In more pastoral terms, I would like to forward for serious consideration the basic processes of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, or, in inter-religious context, the Basic Human Communities, to be themselves models for inculturation. In the see-judge-act processes of BECs, there is no dominant voice from above that is being re-interpreted in individual contexts. Even the Scriptures take on new color when read from the perspective of the community's own situation. So do the Vincentian texts. Each community decides on what particular line of action it is to pursue based on what is necessary for it to survive and to have a meaningful existence in the here and now. If there is anything 'sacred' in BEC, it is its process. Here, cultural formation is not an imposition of some preconceived forms — from the past like frozen texts from tradition or from reified cultural practices. Being aware of the power dynamics in cultural process, our aim as agents of inculturation in these communities is to create "conditions in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent

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[29] Placeable social identities' is equivalent to Stuart Hall's insistence on 'ethnicity' in global times — that "face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are.... Ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak.... Modern theories of enunciation [like the emancipative discourse of the margins] always oblige us to recognize that enunciation comes from somewhere. It cannot be unplaced, it cannot be unpositioned, it is always positioned in a discourse. It is when a discourse forgets that it is placed that it tries to speak everybody else." STUART HALL, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (London: Macmillan, 1991), 35-36.

decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that"[30] as they continually reread and reinterpret their Christian identities. For traditional Christian theology has also acknowledged the presence of 'sensus fidelium' or the capacity of the 'faithful' (or the present grassroots communities) to communally discern what is best for their own well-being, their faith-life and their communities.

3. Collaborative Servant-Leadership: A Provisional Attempt at Inculturation in the Philippine Context

This specific position in inculturation methodology is what makes me hesitant to reflect on the notion of 'collaborative servant leadership' in the *Asia-Pacific contexts*. This reluctance is founded on two things in our previous discussion: (1) the recognition that it is impossible to identify a specifically Asia-Pacific culture (that which is the starting point of inculturation) without exercising some form of 'violence' through the act of generalization; and (2) the realization that ultimately it is not I (the theologian or the pastoral worker) but the specific local communities which is the ultimate agent of the inculturation process. To respond to the first obstacle, I have delineated the focus of my reflections into the Philippine context. I am aware that the so-called 'Philippine context' is also a 'generalized view,' thus, also poses some danger of imposing its own signification over others. With this attempt also comes the invitation for other cultures and voices in the Philippines or outside it to contribute in the conversation. Most important of all, it is done with the awareness that this reflection is tentative and provisional. It can only be made definitive by the actual communities' reflection and praxis on what constitutes Vincentian leadership in their own specific contexts. It is these communities who have the last word on this matter, if there should be any last word at all. In this attempt, I intend to do three things: (1) to 'see' the Philippine contemporary socio-cultural context in terms of its experience of leadership; (2) to reread our socio-cultural past in order to search for some insights to our contemporary cultures; (3) to reinterpret the Vincentian 'text' from the perspective of our cultural analysis and establish some critical interaction between these two poles. What is lacking here are the concrete implications these reflections have on the formation process. Being consistent with our methodology, however, it is only the 'formators-on-the-ground' who, with their formandi, are the ultimate agents of inculturating this Vincentian charism. I will divide my reflection into three areas of leadership: collaboration, inclusion and servanthood.

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[30] RAYMOND WILLIAMS, "The Idea of a Common Culture," in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1988), 36.

Formation Meeting in the Asia-Pacific Zone

3.1. 'Datu': Leadership as Collaboration

(1) *A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context*

The Philippines did not have very positive experiences of leadership in recent decades: 20 years of dictatorship, inefficient bureaucracy, corresponding hopelessness and political callousness among the citizenry. One only has to read the daily newspapers to prove this. Two months after the presidential election, a proclaimed president still has to fight for the legitimacy of her rule and political survival. We do not only suffer from graft-ridden leadership but also the concentration of governance in the elite minority. The conclusion of a recent survey on the Philippine legislature is sad but not new: that our legislators belong to the select few of our society: "They are richer, older, better educated, and better connected than the rest of us.... A congress of well-connected and well-born multimillionaires sets the rules for a poor nation."[31] But even as early as the first cries of Philippine independence, politics was already in the hands of the *ilustrados* (the 'enlightened' elite) who saw themselves as "the legitimate leaders and spokesmen of their

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[31] Sheila Coronel - Yvonne Chua - Luz Ribman - Booma Cruz (eds.), *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and the Well-born Dominate Congress* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004), viii.

people." [32] The proverbial 'man-on-the-street' in effect can only sigh in hopelessness; others could not care less. No one pins his or her hopes on the 'politicos'; not anymore. In local places, the Church leadership serves as a more benign alternative. In electoral contests, for instance, church leaders and the ecclesiastical institution as a whole still retain credibility as the lone impartial voice. But the Philippine Church is not the best model for shared and collaborative leadership with the feeling of restorationist tendencies in some quarters and the consolidation of powers in the hierarchy. Side by side with these bleak prospects, however, we also hear of aspirations and experiments in participative governance at local levels: decentralization of government through Local Government Code; the rise of civil society; the tasks of NGOs economic development; the role of cause-oriented groups and 'party-list' system in political advocacy; the attempts to politically empower the grassroots, etc. [33] In the Church, we also see the movements towards BECs, the mushrooming of lay groups and their search for their active role and place in Church governance.

(2) *A Rereading of Pre-colonial Philippines*

This ambivalence with regard to leadership structures in Philippine society is traceable to as far as its pre-Hispanic political set-up. [34] The three-tiered social hierarchy (i.e., *datu, timawa* and *oripun* in the Visayas; *datu, maharlika* and *alipin* in Luzon) is well-entrenched in most local groups called the *barangay*. The role of leadership falls to the *datu* who is considered to be the 'captain of the boat' (also called

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[32] MICHAEL CULLINANE, *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 34. Even Rizal considered the educated and the wealthy as "the rightful leaders of the Filipino social and political life" — a conviction which he shares with many *ilustrados. Ibid.,* 364, n. 63.

[33] For this initiatives, see, among others, the articles on local governance in *Intersect* 18, No. 3 (March 2003): 1-23; FELIPE MIRANDA (ed.), *Democratization: Philippine Perspectives* (Diliman: UP Press, 1997); G. SIDNEY SILLIMAN - LELA GARNER NOBLE (eds.), *Organizing for Democracy: NGOs, Civil Society and the Philippine State* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998); MARIA SERENA I. DIONO (ed.), *Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture* (Diliman: UP Third World Studies Center, 1997); MARLON WUI - MA. GLENDA LOPEZ (eds.), *State-Civil Society: Relations in Policy Making* (Diliman: UP Third World Studies Center, 1997); MIRIAM CORONEL FERRER, *Civil Society Making Civil Society* (Diliman: UP Third World Studies Center, 1997).

[34] For this, see WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT, *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain and Other Essays in Philippine History* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985), especially the articles, "Filipino Class Structure in the 16th Century," 96-126; "Class Structure in Unhispanized Philippines," 127-147; *Barangay: Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).

barangay) — as the early Spanish chronicles believed that they came to migrate in the archipelago through these boats. Belonging himself to the rich and powerful classes, the *datu* wields enormous powers, e.g., governing the people, leading them in war, settling their disputes but also helping them "in their struggles and needs." In return, he also receives labor and tribute from his people. Despite this strong social hierarchy, the structure could not be equated to European monarchies. There is no king among the *datus*. What we have is a 'loose federation of chiefdoms'; the acting head is a mere *'primus inter pares.'* [35] The *datus* were not subject to one another "except by the way of friendship and kinship." [36] The above description, however, is the mainstream class and leadership structure. Maybe there is no single social structure in pre-Hispanic Philippines as other studies also bring out different results: there are also *classless societies* which are "bilaterally structured, loosely stratified, and predominantly egalitarian... [with] no formally recognized or titled leaders even of jural sort, no chiefs, no headmen, and no servants." [37] If there is a dominant class structure and a hegemonic form of leadership, there are also cracks and fissures on the dominant where alternative voices are heard as challenging and exerting pressure on the hegemonic (to use Williams's analysis). How does this differ with Saint Vincent's time?

(3) *Saint Vincent and Collaborative Leadership*

Let us bear in mind that Vincent lived in the monarchic France, just before the absolutist régime of Louis XIV, *Le Roi Soleil* (the abuses of which later led to the French Revolution), but whose structures were already entrenched much earlier within the French social fabric. Vincent was at the death bed of the king's predecessor (Louis XIII), was the adviser of his mother (Anne of Austria), was present when Louis XIV was growing up and was still at the height of his works and mission when the sovereign assumed the monarchy in 1651. Being part of that society, Vincent, so to speak, also 'breathed the air that they breathed.' This absolutely hierarchical set-up — a legacy of medieval feudal society and the Council of Trent — shows itself within the CM community as a structure favoring the 'clerical state.' The so-called 'coadjutor lay brothers' in fact appear like second-class citizens who were prohibited from studying Latin and were never eligible to become superiors until today. One only needs

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[35] WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT, *Barangay: Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society,* 128.

[36] WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT, "Class Structure in Unhispanized Philippines," 102.

[37] HAROLD CONKLIN, *Hanunóo Agriculture in the Philippines* (Rome: UNFAO, 1957), in W.H. SCOTT, "Class Structure in the Unhispanized Philippines," 129.

to see the centrality of the 'superior' both in the *Common Rules* and the community structures to the point of having to obey the rules 'almost blindly' and to accept that the will of the superior is identical with the will of God.[38] To the Daughters, he emphasized that obedience is due to any person in authority — the Pope, bishops, pastors, confessors, directors, superiors, the Kings and his magistrates and their sister superiors.[39] The sequence with which Vincent enumerates them is reminiscent of the medieval feudal framework. Thus, to trace the Vincentian ministry of shared and collaborative leadership, of decentralized governance, and of democratic communal processes to the times of Saint Vincent is anachronistic. But parallel to William Henry Scott's 'cracks in the parchment curtain,' there are also traces where Saint Vincent has, in fact, thought outside the mold, as it were. At a time when the lay people were merely passive consumers of religious production, Vincent collaborated with them and made them collaborate with each other in the Confraternities of Charity. Even as superiors are ultimately responsible like "pilots who must guide the ship on the seas" (SV X, 262), they must also be men who are ready to consult others. He himself makes it a point to consult the lay brothers.[40] To Marc Coglée, he advised: "For temporal affairs, we consult a lawyer or some laypersons who are knowledgeable about them; for internal affairs, we discuss matters with the consultors and other members of the Company" (SV IV, 36).

What I intended to bring out in this dialogue of perspectives is the fact that 'collaborative leadership' is a phenomenon that emerges out of the horizons of people in contemporary times. Thus, it would be illegitimate to extrapolate this contemporary experience directly

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[38] Józef Kapuściak made a listing and overview of documents treating the role of 'superiors' from the *Common Rules* onwards. "Reading these documents, even quickly" he writes, "evokes the image of the Local Superior as 'an almighty father.' According to the established rules, he intervened directly in all aspects of the daily life of the community, of work and of problems which touched on the personal life of each confrere, including the problems of conscience. And everyone had to believe that 'the will of God is expressed by the will of the Superior.'" JÓZEF KAPUŚCIAK, "The Vincentian Local Superior," *Vincentiana* 46, No. 3 (2002): 210.

[39] VINCENT DE PAUL, *The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity*, trans. Joseph Leonard (London: Collins Liturgical Publication, 1979), 61.

[40] "As for myself, I call my men together whenever some difficult point of governance, either in spiritual or ecclesiastical questions or in temporal matters, has to be decided. When there is a question of the latter, I also consult those responsible for them; I even ask the advice of the Brothers in whatever concerns their duties because of the knowledge they have regarding them. The result is that God blesses resolutions taken this way through consultation" (SV VI, 66).

from the mind of Saint Vincent. In fact, it is this present reality that should be made to critique Saint Vincent and his times (as well as the experiences of pre-Hispanic Filipinos) — a hermeneutical act which is not possible in top-down inculturation discourses. But I have also shown that despite the dominant cultures where Saint Vincent found himself (or that of our early Filipino ancestors), oppositional and alternative approaches still show themselves — fields of resistance acting like fissures of the dominant hegemonic power.

3.2. *Babaylan* (Katalonan): Leadership as Inclusion

(1) *A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context*

Philippines is a typically macho-society with its corresponding double-standards and double-talks — all to the woman's disadvantage. In recent times, researches lead us to what is now called the 'feminization of poverty' in the Philippines.[41] That is, if the Filipino is poor, the Filipina is poorer (or experiences the impact of this poverty much more intensely because of entrenched structural inequality biased against women). It is also the Filipino woman who dominates the 'informal economy' in order to help make both ends meet. But it is also this part of the social economic endeavor that is not accounted for either in GNP or in the consciousness of the husband and the whole family. In the labor migration phenomenon, it is the women who dominate since they are much more in demand with regard to domestic work abroad. Thus, they have in effect become the actual 'breadwinners' of their own families. Yet decision-making in the typical Filipino family still rests on men. The Catholic Church is not very different — with an entrenched all-male leadership.[42] With the rise of feminism movements, however, Filipino women begin to reclaim their role in the Church, in society and its governance.[43]

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[41] NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE ROLE OF FILIPINO WOMEN (NCRFW), *Framework Plan for Women* (Manila: Office of the President, 2001); *Filipino Women: Issues and Trends* (Mandaluyong: Asian Development Bank, 1995); MARY JOHN MANANZAN, *Women and Religion* (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, 1998).

[42] A recent document issued by the Congregation on the Doctrine of Faith warns against certain tendencies in 'feminism.' See "Letters to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," in http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html (access 08.27.2004).

[43] NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE ROLE OF FILIPINO WOMEN (NCRFW), *Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025)* (Manila: Office of the President, 1995); *Making Government Work for Gender Equality* (Manila: Office of the President, 2001); MARILYN BARUA-YAP, "Engendering Development: An Overview of the Philippine Experience," *Review of Women's Studies* 13, No. 2 (2003): 10-60.

Though these movements are starting to make their voice heard and to gain influence, there is so much more to do in terms of instituting structures as well as forming consciousness of both men and women with regard to these issues.

(2) *A Rereading of Pre-Hispanic Philippines*

Philippine historians attest that in pre-colonial customary laws, Filipino women were equal to men in social, economic and political spheres. They could possess goods and properties, engage in commerce and even succeed the *datu* in the absence of a male heir.[44] But it is in the religious sphere that the woman exercises distinct authority in the person of the *babaylan* or *katalonan* (i.e., priestesses). According to Zeus Salazar,[45] there were three central figures in the pre-Hispanic society: the *datu* (the chief) who governs; the *panday* (blacksmith) who supervises society's technical needs and the *babaylan* (priestess) who takes care of its arts, medicine, religion and the humanities. Though there were males among them, most of them were women or hermaphrodites. She is the guardian of society's myths and keeps its harmony with nature through the performance of rituals. The role of *babaylan*, however, goes beyond ritualism. She is also the community healer and psychologist. Her knowledge of medicine is beyond the 'technical' since she is in touch with the depository of the community's traditional healing knowledge. She is acknowledged to know the depths of the person's and community's history that can lead to holistic healing. The *babaylan's* role is as crucial as the *datu's* as she watches over the theoretical and practical resources of the cultural and spiritual sides of her society's existence. Even the *datu* needs to consult her as she also determines the best time for plowing and preparing the fields, for sowing and harvesting. With the coming of the male Catholic clergy during the Spanish times, the *babaylan* was marginalized by the colonial structure as they were relegated to be procession coordinators, flower arrangers, prayer leaders, etc. Some who resisted this strategy of co-optation formed small 'messianic groups' which waged the first resistance against the colonial regime, particularly against the male clerical class (called the 'frailes') long before the political revolutions, which were later launched by the enlightened male élites. Others, however, continued with their usual function and practices in religious groupings which can now be found in indigenous communities in Philippine hinterlands.

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[44] T. AGONCILLO - M. GUERRERO, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing, 1987).

[45] For this, see ZEUS SALAZAR, *Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas* (Diliman: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999). Also published in *Women's Role in Philippine History: Selected Essays* (Diliman: University Center for Women's Studies, 1996), 52-72.

(3) *Saint Vincent and Inclusive Leadership*

Vincent de Paul lived in a totally male-dominated society. To read feminist discourse into his conferences is absurd. Despite this location, Vincent did not consider women's status and role as secondary. His early collaborators were women: Madame de Gondi (co-foundress of the CMs) and Louise de Marillac (co-foundress of the DCs). Most members of the first Confraternities of Charity were women, even ladies of the court.[46] He also deconstructed the cloistered existence of women religious then by instituting a group of women *"having for monastery only the houses of the sick...; for cell, a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city"* (SV X, 661). But for Saint Vincent, the ultimate role of leadership in the ministry still goes to men. For one, he and Saint Louise agreed and instituted in the DC Constitutions that the real head of the Daughters of Charity will be the CM Superior General (Constitution 3.27). Vincent for sure is a man of vision, a creative genius for organization, a determined soul to get things done. For this, he is more of a *datu* than a *babaylan*.

It is in this aspect that the Filipino experience of pre-Hispanic *babaylan's* inclusive leadership becomes relevant to critique, but also to supplement, Vincent's medieval paradigm. However, this so-called *'babaylan* dimension' of reality is not also totally foreign to Vincent's experience. There is a crucial part of his life when he was still searching for his personal and ministerial identity which provides a key to this dimension but which he also wanted to forget and suppress for reasons only he knew — i.e., his captivity in Tunis and his experience with his alchemist master. A lot of debates have already gone into the authenticity of Vincent's account (i.e., his two letters narrating this experience) but I follow José María Román's position[47] that Vincent was in Tunis (1605-1607) even if the events really did not happen exactly the way Vincent wrote about them. His relationship with the alchemist is interestingly ambivalent. Vincent so dislikes him for his magic and trickeries as later to call him a

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[46] To the Ladies of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu, he states: "For eight hundred years or so, women have had no public role in the Church; in the past there were some called Deaconesses, who were responsible for seating the women in the churches and teaching them the rubrics then in use. About the time of Charlemagne, however, by a discreet working of Divine Providence, this practice came to an end; persons of your sex were deprived of any role and haven't had any since then. And now that same Providence is turning today to some of you to supply what was lacking to the sick poor of the Hôtel-Dieu" (SV XIII, 810).

[47] For a good account of this debate and a reasonable position therein, see JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography,* trans. Joyce Howard (London: Melisende, 1999), 61-83.

'wretch.' But he also acknowledges a more than master-slave relation between them. "He loved me deeply," he recounts, "and took great delight in discoursing with me about alchemy and even greater about his Law to which he did everything in his power to win me, promising to give me enormous wealth and to impart all his knowledge" (SV I, 6). Vincent in fact was very interested in acquiring his medical knowledge which he later on applied to the M. de Comet (the son of his benefactor).[48] My interest in retrieving this suppressed 'alchemist' episode in Saint Vincent's life is not so much to see his metallurgical or medical skills as to reinforce a weak dimension in Vincent's ministry for our times — that of 'inclusive leadership' as modeled by the Filipino *babaylan*. In medieval Europe and Christianity, alchemy was put in a bad light as it was related with magic and Islam. It was thoroughly banished with the coming of chemistry as modern Western science could not also accept the ambiguity (but also the inclusiveness) of its discourse. The alchemist was not only a chemist but also a doctor, not only a physicist but also a priest. He was one who could connect with both nature and the human psyche, both external and internal, both human and divine. In the pre-Hispanic Filipino context, this role, which is the nerve center of connectivity, was most effectively performed by the 'feminine' which also came to be suppressed by the coming of an all-male Spanish Catholic clergy. In the Asian Churches' call for triple dialogue (i.e., dialogue with cultures, with ancient religions, with the poor),[49] the art of 'inclusion,' connection and openness proves to be crucial attribute for its leaders and ministers. For all the anti-Islamic feeling of medieval France (Vincent was a 'Christian slave'), Vincent

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[48] A manuscript preserved in the Hospital at Marans states: "St. Vincent de Paul's remedy for gravel. Take two ounces of Venetian turpentine, two ounces of white turpeth, a half an ounce each of mastic, galangale, gillyflower, and cubed cinnamon bark. Mix all together along with half a pound of white honey and a pint of the strongest spirits. Let the whole mixture stand for sometime and then distill. The fourth part of a spoonful should be taken fasting every morning, along with three parts of borage or bugloss water; it may be taken as often as one likes, because it will do no harm; on the contrary, it is very good for health and especially so in case of urinary troubles. Hence no special régime is required except that one should not eat for an hour after drinking; and one can go about one's ordinary business. This will be seen from experience. This servant of God learned the remedy in Barbary when he was captive there." PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul,* Vol. I, trans. Joseph Leonard (New York: New City Press, 1987), 31.

[49] FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCES (FABC), "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia" (Taipei, Taiwan, 27 April 1974) in *For All the Peoples of Asia,* Vol. I, eds. Gaudencio Rosales and Catalino Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 11-26.

leads us to a sense of openness as to be able to learn from an Islamic alchemist (dialogue of religions) in a land and culture quite far from his own (dialogue of cultures). We now turn to the third dialogue: dialogue with the poor.

3.3. *Oripun* (Alipin): Leadership as Servanthood

(1) *A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context*

Philippine political leadership is not only composed of an exclusive elite minority (as we have asserted above), but also of a majority of corrupt and self-serving politicians. How to cover-up this pursuance of self-interest in the name of 'public service' is a skill which any politician has to learn. The seasoned 'politico' is one who can skillfully transform one's own interests to the language of the concerns of those they represent, thus, also concealing real self-interest.[50] In other words, while politicians purport to advance the agenda of their constituents, they are in fact also pursuing the fulfillment of their own interests, most often without admitting it. One case: The rationale of 'pork barrel' fund (PDAF - Priority Assistance Development Program) is to direct resources to districts too remote to get the attention of the national power centers. A fund is readily available to the district's representative (i.e., the Congressman or Senator), who is most intimately in touch with the local situation and thus the best person to act. But the truth is that "the benefits officials get out of it far outweigh those gained by the public."[51] Thus, for all their promises of 'service' to the citizenry especially during electoral campaigns, every single 'taxi-driver' (the Filipino counterpart for the proverbial 'man-on-the-street') knows that running for public office is nothing but for self-aggrandizement. Instead of helping improve economic performance, political leaders

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[50] Such duplicity is also seen in the discrepancy between two images congressmen project in the Congress hall and among their constituents. Some legislators in fact fare poorly in bill-sponsorship (e.g., law-making becomes a sideline), yet they are also elected back to Congress by their constituents as they have projected themselves as the 'human face' of the law through immediate assistance, resource allocation and service provision, etc. (e.g., job referrals, community projects, "sponsorships in weddings, baptisms, guesting in fiestas, coronations, graduations, anniversaries, foundation ceremonies, conventions, seminars, beauty contests, funerals and other services"). RENATO VELASCO, "Does the Philippine Congress Promote Democracy?" *Democratization: Philippine Perspectives* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1997), 281-302.

[51] S. CORONEL et al, *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and the Well-Born Dominate Congress* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004), 175.

in fact drain the national coffers. On whom does the government rely for its economic survival at this point in history? It is those who are in the lowest strata of the pyramid of power — the 'least of all' in the Philippine society — who provide for the country's very subsistence: the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). They are the numerous Filipinos who do jobs refused by many others; they clean other people's homes, wash their dishes, do their laundry, cook their food or take care of their children [52] — all scattered all over Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Most of them do not even have permits to work nor to stay. Thus, they are also living clandestinely. This has become so widespread that one edition of the Webster dictionary equated the word 'Filipina' with 'housemaid.' Ironically, it is their dollar remittances that serve as "the main pillar of the Philippine economy." [53] The servants have become our leaders; the slaves our breadwinners!

(2) *A Rereading of Pre-Hispanic Philippines*

What comes to mind in pre-Hispanic Philippines is the lowest group in the social strata: the *oripun* (present Visayan *ulipon*; Tagalog *alipin*). *Oripun* comes from the archaic root *udip* which means "to let live," for example, "to spare life on the field of battle, to ransom a captive, or to redeem a debt equivalent to a man's price." [54] In other words, the existence of these classes depends on the generosity of their masters to whom they owe their lives as they were rescued from differing situations of death: captives in wars, victims of human sacrifice, household slaves, agricultural tenancy, etc. Due to their insurmountable debt situation, these slaves can be bought and sold. But the slave owner is not so much a perpetual *lord* as one's creditor. Thus, the slaves can also ransom themselves from such situations of dependence. It has to be mentioned, however, that the upper two classes (the *datu* especially) are non-working members of society, i.e., the unproductive leisured class. Thus, it is the *oripun*, in fact, who sustain society through their productive activities much like the Greek slaves who, despite being excluded from the polis, make possible the Hellenic philosophical and political (also read

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[52] Eric Hobsbawm writes: "[T]o me it seems inevitable that, one way or another, the countries that don't reproduce their populations... will import cheap labor or people who will do these jobs that the indigenous population no longer wants to do.... We have already seen migratory exchanges of this kind: the most common of which is the use of Filipinos as domestic servants." ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The New Century* (London: Abacus, 2000), 144.

[53] ROSARIO BELLA GUZMAN, "The Philippine Crisis: Will a New Presidency Still Make a Difference?," in *Birdtalk: Economic and Political Briefing* (July 15, 2004), 5.

[54] W.H. SCOTT, *op. cit., Barangay,* 133.

as 'leisurely') practice. What pre-Hispanic Filipino society considers as its parasites (i.e., the captured, ransomed, indebted, etc.) act as its source of life. Those who are 'left to live' by society (from battle or debt), in fact, let this same society live out of their own sweat and labor.

(3) *Saint Vincent and Servant Leadership*

It is here that Vincent de Paul's understanding of the Christian narrative can help critique contemporary and ancient Filipino experience. It is Christian love which taught him that to be able to lead is to make oneself the least of all; to be a master is to be a servant. Vincent says: "Yes, my brothers, the place of our Lord is the lowest place. Someone who desires to rule cannot have the spirit of our Lord" (SV XI, 138). Or, as he writes to Antoine Durand, a confrere who became superior at 27 years of age: "I do not share the opinion of a person who said to me some time ago that it is essential for a man to show that he is superior if he is to rule properly and maintain his authority. O my God, Our Lord Jesus Christ never spoke like that. He taught us the contrary by word and example, telling us that he had not come to be served but to serve others, and that he who wishes to be master should be the servant of all" (SV XI, 346). Vincent's journey was a following of the Jesus who was the 'evangelizer of the poor.' What impresses him in the Scriptural narrative is the 'poor Jesus' who incarnates himself in the 'poor person.' Thus, Vincent can say that 'the poor are our masters and lords.' If he were alive in the Philippines today as he works for the poor, he, in fact, would know too that this so-called 'refuse of society' is also the source of its survival, the wellspring of its own salvation. It is in their seemingly 'wasted lives'[55] where Jesus reveals himself. Vincent was the first who 'turned the medal.'

Conclusion

I would like to end this reflection on the method of inculturating Vincent's charism and ministry into different contexts with a story from Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*.[56] In this mythical journey of a company of men (called the League) to the East where the 'Home of the Light' is found, there was Leo who is the joy of the whole group. It was he who did all the lowly tasks, while, at the same time, offering them his songs and lively disposition. It was all a

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[55] ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (London: Polity, 2003).

[56] HERMANN HESSE, *The Journey to the East* (New York: Picador, 2003 [1956]).

pleasant journey until the day Leo left. The group soon disbanded and went on their separate ways for they could no longer tolerate one another. They realized it was impossible to go on without Leo. One day, quite long after, the narrator joined an Order. To his great surprise, there he found out that Leo the *servant* was in fact its *leader*. The real leader does not need to flaunt his authority. For as Saint Vincent also once advised: "Live with confreres so cordially and simply that no one, on seeing you together, may guess, who is the Superior" (SV VI, 66). There is thus a need to continually search for who the real leader is or what real leadership should be in our different and constantly evolving contexts.