# THE "EVERYDAY" IS SUFFICIENT UNTO ITSELF

## EVERYDAY LIFE IN SOCIO-PASTORAL PRAXIS

***Enrique P. Batangan***

*The author argues for the valorization of "everyday life" (lo cotidiano) which is quite often neglected in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice. Using theoretical resources from Jürgen Habermas ("lifeworld"), Henri Lefebvre ("everyday life") and Michel de Certeau ("tactics of the weak"), Batangan explores the repercussions of this key theme on theological reflection, socio-pastoral praxis, and the everyday practices of our ecclesial life.*

By way of introduction, it must be spelled out in no uncertain terms that I am approaching this article from an unabashedly socio-pastoral and unashamedly auto-biographical perspective. Actually, as far as my faith-life journey is concerned, the two are almost inextricably bound with each other. At the risk of sounding a bit too self-referential, I need to share that I spent the best years of my adult life engaged in various forms of what is often referred to as socio-pastoral praxis or pastoral work geared towards transformation of church and society. Specifically, my socio-pastoral praxis was informed to a very large extent by the political discourse of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) and Maoism (strange bedfellows, many have said). But in 1993, I became disillusioned with the CNL's subservience to the Maoists, the division within the far Left, and the ignominious purges which claimed the lives of former comrades. To stay as far away as possible from a political process that had devoured its own children, to steer clear of what I came to consider to be a futile debate within the far Left and to be able to shed all vestiges of Maoism, I rejoined two broad-based organizations whose common thrust was democratization and

**Hapag 10, No. 1 (2013) 69-81**

development from below via popular education, grassroots leadership formation, and people-empowerment. What was remarkable about their social praxis was the fact that it was unmediated by a totalizing ideology or a vanguard party. What was even more striking was the willingness and readiness of activists within the two organizations to listen to stories drawn from the everyday life of the people they were working with – for example, stories on how the people cope with poverty, powerlessness, and marginalization as they hoped to uncover the discourses of resistance and unmask the patterns of dependency imbedded in their stories, however vague or inchoate they appeared to be. There was also a great deal of emphasis on the two-fold imperative of enabling the people to learn from their local knowledge and to surface their "indigenous" ways of transforming their situation (e.g. local and vernacular perspectives on power, conflict, the environment, and religiosity as well as local histories of resistance to domination, etc.). Looking back, I consider that stage in my journey as my pre-conceptual and largely unconscious initiation into the politics of everyday life.

In 1998, I became blind in one eye. Somehow, I was prompted by the disability and the unusual atmosphere of the changing millennia to return to my original twin passion: theology and socio-pastoral praxis, but this time, minus their ideological moorings in Maoism, and without my having to sever ties with the NGOs I referred to. I began to realize that my formal studies in theology made for a passionate search for a new paradigm (to use a well-worn word) of socio-pastoral praxis. During the early stages of my theological studies, it did not occur to me that I could bring my initial exposure to the challenges of everyday life to bear on my search for a new paradigm of socio-pastoral praxis until I signed up for *Theology for Adult Christian Communities* – course on the "Theology of Everyday Life".[1]

The course which was designed for the adult theological education of Christian communities brought the significance of everyday life and its relevance to theology and pastoral praxis to the forefront of

[1] This course was directed by Dr. Emmanuel S. de Guzman, Ph.D., at the Maryhill School of Theology for the second semester of the school year 2003-2004.

my awareness. Everyday activities that were seemingly routine and prosaic as eating and cooking and taken-for-granted earthy phenomena as odor or smell were shown, upon deeper reflection, as possible embodiments of socially discriminatory prejudices or assumptions and values that foster life-enhancing practices, albeit inchoate, pre-conscious, and largely unarticulated. Everyday activities depicted in social realist murals like a family having a meal together or fishermen going about their daily routine and vendors plying their wares got to be viewed not simply as works of art but read as "texts" which bore witness to community, solidarity, mutuality, and reciprocity – values forged from within the very heart of their everyday life, not imposed from without.

Taken together, such assumptions and values, whether life-giving or death-dealing, come not as a super-imposition but as an outgrowth of a web-like network of relationships and interactions unfolding in the midst of what is often referred to as "daily grind". More often than not, they take shape *in spite of* and not *because of*, even at times *in opposition to* the dominant discourses, values, economic and political systems, and knowledge-power structures engineered by the state, the economy, the media, the church, and ideological interest groups. They evolve, organically as it were, into a relatively coherent perspective on life and emerge as reality that enables us, without being consciously aware of the process, to make sense of our own words and actions and what others say and do. Such tacit pre-understandings are brought to bear on how we interpret reality, arrive at a consensus, cope with the harsh realities of life, give meaning to events and relate with religious institutions and discourses even before they are overlaid by ideological, religious, political, and cultural meanings from external sources and agents. In other words, they get to constitute a common universe (or multi-verse, if you wish) of meanings. Such a world of meanings is fundamental to Jurgen Habermas's notion of life-world.[2] But what is often overlooked is the fact that this world is no longer free from the encroachment of political as well as religious bureaucracies and the global purveyors

[2] This notion is exhaustively discussed in the second volume of Jürgen Habermas's *magnum opus*. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

of consumerism (what Habermas would call "social system"). The life-world or everyday life, thus, poses a challenge to theology and pastoral praxis, whose urgency cannot be underestimated. Negatively, I would like to believe that theology and pastoral praxis are challenged to recognize their complicity with efforts of the institutional church, however sincere and well-intentioned, to undervalue the "rawness" of everyday practices and meanings in the way they are construed as inauthentic, uncouth, backward and irreligious. Positively, they are called upon to free the "subjugated knowledge" such that encountering the holy in the ordinary, the sacral in the secular, the eternal in the temporal and the divine in the quotidian is not entirely alien to the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this in mind and in heart, I believe that the realm of the "everyday" or "quotidian" is not so much a world of banality that is far removed from the edifying influence of faith as a rich source of theological reflection, a challenging terrain of pastoral praxis and an arena for discipleship.

However, I am aware that my enthusiasm does not square with the apparent neglect of everyday life in theology and socio-pastoral praxis. While the everyday or quotidian is beginning to occupy a prominent place and fast becoming a privileged object of abstract speculation and empirical investigation in secular disciplines, it has yet to be brought into the center of pastorally oriented theological conversation. Notable exceptions in the field of theology are the seminal works of Hispanic feminists who have introduced such labels as *la vida quotidiana* or lo *cotidiano*[3] and the pioneering reflections of some Filipino theologians.[4] But related fields of sociology and cultural studies have also been churning out some of the best researches on the everyday or the quotidian from which the various theological works on everyday life are taking their cue. One such research is the monumental three-volume *Critique of Everyday Life*[5] by the French

[3] D. F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 538-541.

[4] See the works of Emmanuel de Guzman, Victorino Cueto, and Daniel Franklin Pilario, among others.

[5] To date, the writer does not have access to vol. III. See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I: Introduction*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 1991); *Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2002).

sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. The beginnings of the contemporary interest in everyday life may be traced to Lefebvre's pioneering work. Commenting on Lefebvre's injunction to "undertake a vast survey of how we live... for example, a day in the life of an individual, any day, no matter how trivial," Stuart Elden[6] suggests that everyday life "may be familiar to us but this does not mean that it is understood. Analyzing the everyday may bring out the extraordinary in the ordinary.... An initial definition would be to suggest that everyday life is everything left once work is removed: everyday life is sustenance, clothing, furnishing, homes, lodging, neighborhoods, environment."[7] The operative line is "analyzing the everyday may bring out the extraordinary in the ordinary." Elden is a lecturer in Political Geography but his commentary provides a secular analogue to what is traditionally referred to as revelation. Pitching for everyday life is therefore not alien to theology and socio-pastoral praxis because daily concerns and practices may be pregnant with possibilities for faith and life.

Lefebvre's popular version of his three-volume work, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*[8] constitutes a formidable challenge to the elitist view that everyday life is banal, trivial, shallow, and inauthentic. The works of Lefebvre on everyday life are a bit similar to Jurgen Habermas's distinction between life-world and social system.

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*[9] may not be as voluminous and systematic as Lefebvre's *magna opera* but it plays a crucial role in fostering inquiries into the lowliest preoccupations of marginalized men and women who struggle to survive by simply drawing on resources "of their own making" and invention. Moreover, it takes to task literature, the arts, science and even urban planning for their dismissal of the daily life and the lived experience of their "users" or human beings who subvert their status as objects or consumers by relying on ruses or *diskarte* endemic to their everyday

[6] Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 120.

[7] Ibid., 111.

[8] Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (London: The Athlone Press, 2000).

[9] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

life. Of interest to activists is de Certeau's inquiry into the various forms of resistance mounted and derived by the "weak" from their everyday life. In Habermasian terms, de Certeau's work puts into sharp focus the so-called "tactics of the weak"[10] in resisting the colonization of the life-world by the social system.

On the side, it is interesting to note that everyday life has increasingly been recognized as a theme for social research in the Eastern Block after the Cold War. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, the editors of *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Block* write: "*Byt*, the Russian for everyday life or the daily grind, has become a central term in studies of Soviet history and culture. Svetlana Boym has incisively analyzed the 'strong, almost romantic fear of banality' in Russian and Soviet culture, which had hitherto left the everyday mythologies, rituals and spaces of ordinary life beneath discussion, deemed irrelevant for the apocalyptic self-definition of Russian culture and for Soviet teleology alike. As she demonstrates, these despised and neglected 'Common Places' are in fact fundamental to an understanding of Soviet Russian culture."[11]

Crowley and Reid may well be speaking about the current state of affairs in theological and pastoral studies. In the context of the Philippine church in the 21st century, "everyday mythologies, rituals and spaces of ordinary life" are tolerated but relegated to the margins of ecclesial life and pastoral praxis. Hence they are lumped together under such condescending rubrics as "folk Catholicism", "popular religiosity" or "primal religions". However, I am taking the revisionist view that they lie at the heart of, and therefore central, and not peripheral, to an appreciation of Filipino culture and religiosity.

What is usually swept under the rug of mainstream academic research in theology, on the one hand, and socially engaged pastoral praxis, on the other, acquires prominence in the works of

[10] The phrase is the title of Cueto's unpublished dissertation, a coinage inspired by Michel de Certeau. Cf. Victorino Cueto, "Tactics of the Weak: Exploring Everyday Practice with Michel de Certeau. Towards a Theology of Everyday Life," Unpublished Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (2010-2011). A variation on the same theme but located in an altogether different context may be found in James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

[11] Crowley and Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces*, 6.

Reynaldo Ileto and Vicente L. Rafael. Their books[12] may not be considered direct scholarly forays into everyday life but they are related to it, albeit obliquely. Ileto's claim that the *Pasyon* provided the "grammar of dissent" for the revolutionaries fighting against Spanish colonialism hints at something which had the smack of the quotidian. The transformation of the *Pasyon* from an instrument of thought control to an idiom of political struggle was achieved when the revolutionaries drew on it not only as an articulation of their suffering, ideals, values, and hope but as a language of their dissidence as well. The *Pasyon* was re-fashioned and forged into a coherent worldview at the crucible of the everyday practices and struggles of Filipino revolutionaries.

Vicente L. Rafael's work revolves around the linguistic aspect of conversion. Highlighting the differences in signification in Spanish and Tagalog, he demonstrates that the Tagalog acceptance of Spanish rule was not passive. The "translation" process from Spanish to Tagalog created a terrain for resistance because at the core of the process was a plurality of interpretations of what it meant to obey and submit to colonial rule and what it meant to circumvent or negotiate with it. Since language is integral to everyday life and bound up with culture, and taken together they constitute what Habermas would refer to as life-world, Rafael's work is an oblique commentary on the life-world's de-coupling from the social system. Conversely, it shows how everyday life, far from being the purely mundane and prosaic or the merely unorganized and spontaneous, is generative of dissidence which subverts the encroachments of repressive authority and power. To think that the so-called masses can do nothing without us, middle class change agents, is sheer illusion!

Personally, I find in Jurgen Habermas's distinction between life-world and social system a very useful interpretive framework. As "lived experience and everyday life"[13] which functions as "a culturally

[12] Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto, *Pasyon And Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989); Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988).

[13] The above is, by far, one of the most succinct definitions of Habermas's notion of lifeworld. See Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 120.

transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns,"[14] Habermas's notion of life-world helps us to make sense of and give meaning to everyday life. It functions as an interpretive foil which teases out the finer points of everyday life as a lived experience and as an object of inquiry. The life-world's colonization by the social system ("specialized culture controlled by experts"[15]) which, according to Habermas, has been brought about by the strain and stress of capitalist modernization and undergirded by the hegemony of cognitive-instrumental rationality, is another helpful interpretive tool which may help us account for the undervaluing of everyday concerns and practices in pastoral praxis.[16] We need not belabor the point that the actual conduct of the church's pastoral work in the Philippines is not exempt from this phenomenon. One only has to take a hard look at the encroachment of bureaucratic and monetary concerns on pastoral endeavors to see the point of this observation. To recite a litany of sorrows with which we must now be familiar: bishops, priests, religious, and even lay people whose commitment to the Church of the Poor has become largely irresolute because they are beholden to the vested interests of their affluent benefactors and benefactresses and because as pastoral agents they have given up on the task of building Basic Ecclesial Communities amid bishops and parish priests who are more interested in ascertaining dogmatic certitude, canonical exactitude, moralistic proscriptions, liturgical correctness, and in erecting edifices. These lay people are otherwise socially engaged pastoral agents but are considered "backward" and "feudal" by their secular counterparts in the social movements because they resist any attempt to instrumentalize the resources of faith or to simply use them for purely pragmatic and utilitarian purposes.

But a more sober reflection will show that there is nothing extraordinarily novel about a pastorally oriented theological engagement with everyday life. I consider this concern to be continuous with theology's "turn to experience" which gave birth to a variant of pastoral praxis that is at once respectful of contemporary

[14] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 124, 132.
[15] Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre,* 120.
[16] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action II*, 304, 355.

human experience and sensitive to the "signs of the times". On a more concrete level, I maintain that a theologico-pastoral engagement with everyday life is continuous with what is often referred to as "contextual theology". But the imperative of uncovering the evangelizing, conscientizing, and liberating potential of everyday life entails de-colonizing the life-world or the world of everyday life from the stranglehold of the system. Such a tall order calls for a concrete proposal which is at once theologically tenable and pastorally viable. It is with this challenge in mind that we should embark on a process of evolving pastoral theology and praxis from below. Corollary to this, we should at least attempt to revisit and recast the *See-Judge-Act*[17] framework which has been the privileged methodology of liberation theology and pastoral praxis in the Philippines. However, a necessary shift in emphasis in the thrust of each of the three moments has to be explored. By "shift in emphasis in the thrust of each moment" is meant that the shift in emphasis does not render the former accent superfluous. Neither does it exclude the older emphasis. It simply transcends but includes it. Hence, the shift from socio-analytical and historical analysis to cultural analysis in the *Seeing* moment; the shift from the "product" (theological reflection) and "producer" (theologian) to the "user" (people and community)[18] in the *Judging* moment; and finally, the shift from carefully planned, thoroughly executed, and impeccably organized interventions to spontaneous, life-inspired actions in the *Acting* moment.

By way of conclusion, I attempt to discern the impact of everyday life on three dynamically inter-related dimensions of our individual and collective existence as socio-pastoral agents: namely, theological reflection, socio-pastoral praxis, and the church.

[17] Widely used among progressive theologians and pastoral agents in the Philippines, the See-Judge-Act framework has been a potent tool for social discernment and theological reflection. See D. F. Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis,* 529-599.

[18] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), xi-xxiv.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I submit that the process of engaging everyday concerns and practices in theological reflection provides an approach to a possible re-visioning of theology's working definition as dynamic inter-action between contemporary human experience and the Judeo-Christian tradition. As a case in point, contemporary human experience has always been considered post-analytically, i.e., after it has been subjected to various modes of analysis which draw very heavily from the human sciences. While this approach may still have its place, I make a case for a pre-analytical perspective on contemporary human experience. This is where the everyday or quotidian figures prominently. What is presupposed in this claim is the inherent meaningfulness of everyday life unmediated by logical, rational and scientific analysis and therefore a well-spring of theological reflection even before it becomes an object of rigorous analysis.

The other pole of the inter-action, the Judeo-Christian Tradition, does not lose its integrity in engaging everyday life in a process of conversation. On the contrary, as I would like to assert, it retrieves the originating matrix of much of the ideational processes of what we refer to as tradition because the fundamental themes of faith did not evolve in a vacuum but were an outgrowth of everyday concerns and practices. Nothing can be more quotidian or "everydayish" than "lilies of the field", "birds of the air", table fellowship, eating with outcasts, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, love of neighbor and trust in God's loving-kindness, especially in times of destitution, deprivation, rejection, and persecution.

This challenge is also an invitation for theology to critique its complicity with systems and structures, societal as well as ideational, which denigrate everyday life and reduce it to the inauthentic and peripheral and thus made them easy targets of problematization, scientific analysis, conversion, and purification. As a process of reflexivity and self-criticism, this initial undertaking can also provide the necessary nudging which might lead to a broadening of our appreciation of "contextualization" and "inculturation". Contextualization is often restricted to larger economic, political, societal and cultural contexts without casting even a passing glance at the daily struggles of people and communities who inhabit the

margins of such contexts especially if they are not aware and struggling and considered non-strategic in the process of social and ecclesial transformation. The same observation holds true for inculturation as it tends to limit its appreciation of culture to expressed attitudes, values, mores, symbols, and conventional language. We are reminded that culture encompasses the prosaic, the unexpressed, and the unarticulated. Culture embraces the odor that one wakes up to in the morning if one lives in a congested and blighted community or a squalid and overcrowded house. It includes the constricted space of our dwelling, the ants, cockroaches, and termites gnawing not only at the various parts of the house but at our skin as well. Culture includes the acrid smell of children in the streets and sweaty passengers in overcrowded jeepneys; encompasses our vernacular ways of negotiating with the rich and the powerful including such "tactics of the weak" as pilferage, slow-down, *pitik sa ani* (skimming from the harvest) and mimicking. Culture has a lot to do with the way one cooks and prepares the family's daily meals and the *tele-novelas* one watches as well as the rap and hip hop music one dances to. It embraces the conversations in which we pour out our sentiments to a sympathetic friend over beer and cigarettes because our daily struggles are invisible to the political or church organization we are working for.

## Socio-Pastoral Praxis

The process of engaging everyday concerns and practices in socio-pastoral praxis might start a conversation with a view to re-thinking some of the inherited predilections of socially-engaged pastoral praxis. Dialogue of life or immersion has to be rethought with the end in view of overcoming its bias for aware, struggling and organized communities. While they play a pivotal role in the process of social change, the social reality of organized communities does not indicate that we can no longer learn from communities who are merely trying to survive even as they do not inhabit our socially transformative discourse.

I remember one story about a European 'exposurist' who was taken to a parish in the Visayas because it has acquired a reputation for being something of a showcase for liberational BECs and the

parish priest was known for having evolved what we would call at the time "liberating signs and symbols" of the faith. The 'exposurist' was free in the morning so she decided to while away the hours by taking a stroll on the parish grounds. Then she witnessed what she confessed to be a heart-breaking scene. A funeral procession was winding its way towards the parish church. She knew immediately that the funeral was for a dead small child because a tiny makeshift coffin was slung on a bamboo pole carried on the shoulders of two sugar workers. When the mourners reached the church she sneaked up on them and saw the parish priest blessing the remains of the child almost mechanically. That evening she had an appointment with the priest. He was to share his experiences in evolving liberating and contextualized liturgy. But even before the priest could open his mouth she spoke up, "Here you are, speaking about liberating signs and symbols of the faith! But this morning I saw you blessing the dead child mechanically!" The priest answered, "It's OK! Anyway, they are not organized and struggling!"

Organizing people into Basic Ecclesial Communities and autonomous people's organizations, I maintain, should not marginalize those who shy away from our organizing efforts. My prayer to God and my challenge to socio-pastoral agents are to put the spontaneous and unorganized struggles of people and communities they minister to on an equal footing with carefully planned and executed pastoral strategies. They can even critique, if I may say so, well-worn approaches including structural analysis. This modest undertaking can provide the initial resource that we can draw on in introducing a framework for cultural analysis which takes everyday life in its own terms but remains cognizant of its situatedness in the whole of society and in the unfolding historical process.

## The Church

While I honor the doctrinal, legal, and liturgical teachings and practices of the Church, engaging everyday concerns and practices in our ecclesial life might contribute towards the realization of two dynamically interrelated goals. First, there is the need to discern how the Church's catechesis, codified laws, and liturgical celebrations are

impacting the everyday concerns and practices of believing communities. Are they privatized, compartmentalized, and viewed as totally out of sync with their daily life? Are they simply ignored because they do not address their daily grind, be it in the streets, families, churches, and neighborhoods? Second, we seek to examine how everyday concerns and practices, no matter how prosaic and banal they appear to be, are providing occasions for the church to take stock of its doctrines, laws, celebrations, and ministry in order to discern whether they are expressive of and responsive to everyday life.

I may be lamenting the inevitable exclusion, suppression, and silencing of everyday life by the system, be it social, ideological, or ecclesial, but I have enough reason to celebrate because the system, no matter how pervasive and omnivorous, leaves leftovers in its wake. Such leftovers take on the form of "subjugated knowledges", suppressed discourses and practices, silenced human beings and phenomena on the fringes of the church, society, and established social movements. It is to "them" that I would like to commit myself. May God grant us the grace to recover, retrieve, and celebrate the marginal! For when all is said and done, I hope and pray that this challenge will enable us, who make up the People of God – pastors and their lay partners, theologians, religious and seminarians, and faith-based organizations and activists – to bear witness to the irruption of the holy in the ordinary, and the divine in the quotidian.

***Enrique P. Batangan***
***St. Vincent School of Theology***
***Adamson University***
***221 Tandang Sora Ave., Quezon City***
***Email: enriqpilbat@gmail.com***