

PREFACE

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF MARGINALIZATION

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, there is a mysterious figure that we oftentimes call the suffering servant. One passage goes,

*He was spurned and avoided by men,
A man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity
One of those from whom men hide their faces
Spurned, and we held him in no esteem. (Isaiah 52:3)*

Christian soteriology, by associating this unknown figure almost exclusively as a pre-figuration of the passion of Jesus, in effect de-historicizes the suffering servant. A suffering servant which is divorced of its historical context can hardly speak to men and women of today. Can the suffering servant be a contemporary figure? When DAKATEO chose the theme “New Forms of Marginalization” for its annual conference and subsequently called for papers related to it, in effect it answered the question in the affirmative.

Independent of the issue of suffering’s salvific value, oppression, marginalization or poverty can take different historical forms. In the Old Testament, the widows and the orphans are almost synonymous with the oppressed. Going to the modern times, we see that in the nineteenth century Europe, Karl Marx referred primarily to the industrial laborer when he discoursed on the proletariat. On the other hand, in an agricultural economy like China, Maoism addressed the issues of the peasant farmers.

What form does marginalization take today? Are there other forms of victimization in today’s globalized and neoliberal economy? The first article, written by Dominador Bombongan, sets the tone of the entire volume by explaining the inadequacy of the old model of poverty as a “lack of resources relative to needs.” Following several social analysis, he suggests the category of social exclusion. This category gives more justice to the multi-dimensionality of poverty. In this context, the challenge is to empower the excluded.

The article of Aloysius Cartagenas serves as the description of the evolving Roman Catholic response to the issue of social justice. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, Cartagenas reflects on the continuing challenges of the present. For instance, we no longer are confident today of what was presumed in the past as the limitless capacity of the planet earth to provide for our needs. This changing context continues to call for innovative solutions.

After having established the premise that marginalization takes different faces in every historical epoch, we then take concrete examples from the past and the present. An example from the past can be seen in the article of Reginald Cruz. Studying the phenomenon of women religious before the nineteenth century, Cruz rejects the study of history as the narration of "what really happened." Instead, he argues that history involves plausible reconstruction. With this new historiographical strategy, Cruz now sees that to be women religious of that period was not a passive acceptance of subjugated condition but an assertion of women autonomy.

The next two articles provide ethical reflections on the issue of marginalization. Appropriating the thought of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Ton Danenberg challenges the readers to see the face of the poor as the face of the other as other. This face cannot be manipulated. It demands a response from us.

Ferdinand Dagmang discourses on the inevitability of suffering, arising from the limitations of creation itself. Even solutions to certain problems bring about other kinds of suffering. To illustrate: while the value of education is undeniable, a society that instills education marginalizes those who are not intelligent enough to finish their education. Citing the parable of the good Samaritan, Dagmang calls for neighborly behavior to the current victims of marginalization.

What is the future face of marginalization? Today, science enables us to predict with greater confidence who would be potential victims in the future. In a thought provoking article, Jimmy Belita asks what the present generation should do in view of the picture we can have of future suffering. Belita observes that current approaches in ethics like the deontological, teleological or utilitarian, cannot give answers to questions dealing with the future. Is it imperative on the present to play God to prevent suffering that most likely will happen in the future?

Lastly, we go to the question of God's intervention in view of human suffering. Ramon Echica presents the answers given by process theology, kenotic theology and liberation theology. Process theology believes that God's power is ontologically limited to persuasion. Kenotic theology theorizes that the non-intervention of God is part of God's kenosis when God created the world. Liberation theology teaches that suffering is part of the imperfection of creation which we are tasked to perfect.

To end this introduction, we cite the concluding paragraph of the revised edition of Gustavo Gutierrez' book *A Theology of Liberation*. We recall that the first edition was written at a period when liberation theology flourished. The second edition, on the hand, was published when the Soviet empire was already showing some cracks. Gutierrez then recalls in the second edition that a journalist asked him whether, if given the chance, he would write *A Theology of Liberation* as he had written it two decades earlier. The Peruvian theologian answered by asking another question: Would you write a love letter to your wife using the same language that you used twenty years ago? The journalist answered he would not although his love would perdure. In the same manner, Gutierrez seems to suggest, love for the poor remains even if the present context inevitably differs.

Dominador Bombongan, Jr..
Theology and Religious Education Department
De La Salle University
Manila, Philippines
Email: belgesprout@yahoo.com

Ramon D. Echica
Seminario Mayor de San Carlos/School of Theology
Juan Luna Avenue, Mabolo, Cebu City
Email: monnanatu@yahoo.com.ph

