

# COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY IN GROUNDED LOOB-SPIRITUALITY, AND LEADERSHIP IN THE UNIONIZED CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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*A hundred and thirty-years after Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum, unionism as a fundamental moral and legal right has not been fully accepted in many Christian universities. Unions that got legal mandates were accepted, if at all, by the school management as a matter of legal obligation not of moral choice. When negotiations and conversations are done with a pressured corporate attitude protective of its privileged position, then genuine dialogue of equal partners cannot be fully achieved to the shared satisfaction of both groups. This will require a re-calibrated leadership, one which engages the teachers' union on an equal footing. Guided by Habermas's critical theory, the university leadership has to move away from the alienating instrumental rationality and embrace the bridge-building communicative rationality that is geared towards consensus or rational agreement on issues affecting the institution. However, the latter should not be reduced to a mere sociological approach or method, albeit its democratic underpinning. Taking into consideration the essentially religious Christian identity of the university, the paper suggests that the communicative rationality be grounded on a spirituality that builds on the Filipino concept of loob – one that is closer to Jesus' envisaged companionship of empowerment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Unionism which presupposes the legal and moral right of workers to organize themselves into a union for the purpose of entering into a collective bargaining agreement with the management is a modern development. In the Catholic Church's social tradition, Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* published in 1891 was the first official papal response to the working condition of workers

being exploited by profit-driven capitalists. Those were the days when no labor laws existed to protect workers' rights in the workplace. Since then the Church's Social Doctrine has consistently affirmed and supported workers' rights.<sup>1</sup> The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines took the cue and grounded its position on the twin principles of the dignity of human work and the priority of labor over capital defending workers' "right of association, the right to participate in the fruits of work and in management (e.g. profit sharing, sharing in the ownership of the enterprise or the means of production, participatory decision-making), and the right to strike under certain conditions."<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, five-hundred years after the coming of Christianity to our native shores, unionism remains, to use a Visayan word, "*samok*" (troublesome) as far as company employers are concerned, a threat to their institutional and practical hegemony in the decision-making processes of the company.<sup>3</sup> Unionism is pushed to defend itself against the employers' resistance the "most glaring" of which ranges from "bribing leaders, promoting them, increasing their wages and other perks and benefits, to preventive suspension, dismissals, and even death threats."<sup>4</sup> There are companies who use union avoidance tactics "foremost of which is the hiring of an outside consultant who can provide advice to management on how to subtly avoid unionization in the workplace and in some cases, provide information of persons

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<sup>1</sup> See Catholic Charities, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.cctwincities.org/education-advocacy/catholic-social-teaching/notable-quotations/labor-unions/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 20 January-17 February 1991*, (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications), par. 320 (henceforth, PCP II). See *Labor Exercens* 20.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful presentation of the history of unionism's origins, struggles, losses, and achievements in the country for the past 100 years, see Jorge V. Sibal, "A Century of the Philippine Labor Movement," *Illawara Unity* 4, no.1 (June 2004): 29-41.

<sup>4</sup> Marie E. Aganon, Melisa R. Serrano, and Ramon A. Certeza, *Union Revitalization and Social Movement Unionism in the Philippines: A Handbook* (Philippines: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and U.P. School of Labor and Industrial Relations, 2009), 2, 9.

who are available to do the dirty job of busting the union.”<sup>5</sup> Organizing a union is going through the proverbial eye of the needle. At every step of the way, the management would throw obstacles including management intervention, subtle and cover, “making sure that the union will be crushed.”<sup>6</sup>

Connected to the employers’ dread of the union is the ubiquitous market-driven form of globalization which thrives on competition-for-profit. This has placed capitalist companies and business enterprises in a survival mode and is heightening boundary-setting corporatism. In fact, globalization has resulted in the weakening of unionism in the country.<sup>7</sup> Today, the labor movement is facing more threats than opportunities. This is so since globalization “brings in great changes in technologies which are characterized by ‘jobless growth’, labor flexibility, higher skill requirements, and more machine intensive production processes.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, jobs are increasing in the services sector where organized labor is weakest.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Antoni A. Credo, “Trade Unions in the Philippines: Struggle for Relevance amidst Globalization and Technology,” *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations* 36 (2019): 184-208. Unions too have contributed to their own decline like their slow response to the changing world of work brought about by globalization coupled with traditional approaches to union organizing and their failure “to organize aggressively and include other sectors of the economy in their organizing activities, particularly, women, professional, technical, and white collar workers” (Jorge V. Sibal, “A Century of the Philippine Labor Movement,” *Illawara Unity* 4 no.1 [June 2004]: 3).

<sup>8</sup> Sibal, “A Century of the Philippine Labor Movement,” 139.

<sup>9</sup> See Rene E. Ofreno, ‘Workers’ and Employers’ Organizations under ‘Globalization,’ *Philippine Industrial Relations for the 21st Century: Emerging Issues, Challenges and Strategies* (Quezon City: UP SOLAIR and Philippine Industrial Relations Society, 1999) and BER Bitonio, Jr., BER, Unions on the Brink, Challenges and Choices Facing the Philippine Labor Movement in the 21st Century, *Philippine Industrial Relations for the 21st Century: Emerging Issues, Challenges and Strategies* (Quezon City: UP SOLAIR and Philippine Industrial Relations Society, 1999).

**COMMUNICATIVE ACTION:  
A PROPOSAL FOR THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP**

Christian universities including those run by religious orders are not immune from the dictates of the market in the globalized context. To be sure it is not proper and fair to place the schools in the same league with profit-oriented stocks-defined companies or corporations. Educational establishments are formally non-profit and non-stock entities and are informed by the Catholic faith. But, for all intents and purposes, the market of neo-liberal globalized order has either conditioned or determined their direction and operations in unprecedented ways. The market ideology has philosophical support in instrumental rationality, which has the following features: technical efficiency and prompt delivery of goods as the name of the game, achievements and awards as the measuring stick of successful Christian universities, and competition as the way. In the mad rush, obedience and submission in practice to the corporation's authority have never been more prized. Critical and organized labor fighting for political participation is hard if at all, a fit to the system.<sup>10</sup>

When the teachers and/or non-teaching personnel dare to form a union, the reaction of the management is generally one of opposition. In many cases, the management would resort to union busting openly or covertly.<sup>11</sup> While they do not use physical violence to the organizers, they employ other means to demoralize

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<sup>10</sup> This was intimated by an academic administrator of a Catholic university who, on one occasion, advised her faculty members to leave everything to the management while they focused on their school tasks.

<sup>11</sup> The author, co-founder of their university faculty union, is writing from actual experience. The UST (University of Santo Tomas) is another case in point. In the 1950s when the teachers attempted to form a union the administration opposed it. It should be noted, in addition, that the author's faculty union is an active member of the Council of Teachers, Employees, and Staff of the Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (CoTESCUP), a national alliance of school-based employees' unions and associations, whose objective is to advance the rights of the employees through different platforms. The association is a venue, among other things, for the sharing of union experiences. The common experiences point to the difficulty of not only forming a union but sustaining the life of the union owing to the management's biased attitude against the union.

the organizers and discourage the school employees from supporting the union. In schools where the faculty unions got the legal mandate to bargain collectively with the management by virtue of its win in the certification election, the management conceded, at least initially, as a legal obligation not necessarily as a free moral choice.

In the unionized university, when the management engages the organized labor in negotiations and conversations with a pressured corporate attitude protective of its privileged position, then genuine dialogue of partners cannot be fully achieved to the shared satisfaction of both groups. The Christian management, thus, is challenged to re-define its leadership to freely dialogue with the teachers' unions as dialogue partners who are not treated merely as subordinates in the corporate structure and culture.

It is in the above light that the paper is proffering Habermas' critical theory of communicative rationality as a bridge-building framework that challenges the leadership to re-calibrate itself. This can be done by transcending the alienating instrumental rationality and moving towards engaging the teachers' union on an equal footing. In the context of the essentially religious identity of the university, this calls for a spirituality of Christian leadership. For this purpose, the paper proposes that communicative rationality be grounded on a spirituality that builds on the Filipino concept of *loob*. As it will be shown later, Habermas' explication of communicative rationality resonates with *loob*'s affirmation of equality.

### INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Instrumental rationality is a product of capitalism and the emergence of the modern nation-state.<sup>12</sup> An identical term is *practical rationality* which "applies to actions."<sup>13</sup> It means "acting in

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Karl Spracklen, *The Meaning and Purpose of Leisure: Habermas and Leisure at the End of Modernity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1999), "rationality," 772.

a way that is maximally efficient in achieving one's goals.<sup>14</sup> However, if goals conflict with one another a rational action is one that conceives of them as forming a system or one that embraces all these goals in a favorable scenario.<sup>15</sup>

In continuously developing modern states that are propelled by globalization instrumental rationality expresses itself clearly in the one-sided fixation on the goals, achievements, and successes of their political, economic, and cultural institutions (like schools). This raises many serious questions when one looks at this through the lens of democratic ideals. The prominent Catholic theologian from India, Felix Wilfred, has this to say about modernity's globalization:

One serious consequence of globalization is that, contrary to appearances, it erodes democracy and democratic institutions. Globalization driven by financial capitalism seeks efficiency and prompt delivery of goods. Democracy and democratic processes seem to be an irritant to this purpose. Democracy, with the participation of those involved, is being replaced by "management." The world and every aspect of life become objects of management in an "administered world" (Theodor Adorno).<sup>16</sup>

The tentacles of globalization do not spare the educational field. Wilfred adds a word of caution: "The temptation is strong for Christian institutions to follow unwittingly this undemocratic trend ... tutored by globalization."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Felix Wilfred, "Rethinking Christian Identity in Global Process: Implications for Asian Christian Higher Education," *QUEST* 2, no. 1 (June 2003), 37. For the author's theological reflections, see Part 1 of his essay which focuses on approaches to Christian identity (24-30), Part 2 which is about development of Christian identity through prophecy and negotiation (31-37), and Part 3 which proposes a set of criteria to identify the *Christian* (sic) character of our Christian institutions (37-41).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 37-38. To appreciate the immediate context of the quoted line, see Wilfred's short explanation (37).

Jürgen Habermas, who is not against modernization per se, warns that it “can become pathological, as when money and power ‘colonize the lifeworld’ and displace communicative forms of solidarity and inhibit the reproduction of the lifeworld (e.g., when universities become governed by market strategies).”<sup>18</sup> “Lifeworld,” in simple terms, covers “all of the immediate contacts, activities, and experiences that are within the world of a specific individual. In some instances, a lifeworld could also be applied to corporate life or vocational responsibilities. It is a universe of what is self-evident.”<sup>19</sup> In more technical language it “refers to domains of action in which consensual modes of action coordination predominate; the background resources, contexts, and dimensions of social action that enable actors to cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding: shared cultural systems of meaning, institutional orders that stabilize patterns of action, and personality structures acquired in family, church, neighborhood, and school.”<sup>20</sup>

Another pathological form according to Habermas is “juridification.” This occurs “when the law comes to invade more and more areas of social life or “lifeworld,” turning citizens into clients of bureaucracies with what Foucault might call ‘normalizing’ effects.”<sup>21</sup> Habermas understands the system like markets and bureaucracies as predefined systematically structured or coordinated situations. Actions are coordinated on the basis of money and institutional power.

Instrumental rationality serves the globalization process which is just the continuation of the project of modernity. Francis Bacon’s ‘knowledge is power’ “was a programmatic statement which energized individuals and communities to seek knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> The reason was that more knowledge meant a greater share of power. With the birth of science and technology as a means

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<sup>18</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Jürgen Habermas,” Aug. 4, 2014 rev. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/>

<sup>19</sup> Hrf, “Habermas Theory of Communicative Action Explained,” accessed October 9, 2022 <https://healthresearchfunding.org/habermas-theory-communicative-action-explained/>.

<sup>20</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Jürgen Habermas.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Wilfred, “Rethinking Christian Identity,” 31.

to be able to control nature “(t)o participate in the world of modernity and share in its benefits meant that people needed to equip themselves with knowledge.”<sup>23</sup>

The reality on the ground reveals knowledge being owned and controlled by those in power; in other words, to have access to knowledge is a matter of having power. If someone or a group has no political or economic power, the members are excluded from the network of knowledge. The present-day globalizing context is “marked . . . by crass bourgeois individualism that zealously guards the benefits of knowledge for the privileged few, to the exclusion of many.”<sup>24</sup> Wilfred cannot be more straightforward when he points out the nexus of power and knowledge in the educational landscape.

As in every sector, those who wield power define education and determine its content, method, etc. Naturally, the wielders of power will opt for a kind of education that will reproduce the present society and the benefits they can derive from the maintenance of the status quo. The powers that be will see to it that the knowledge produced and transmitted does not in any way challenges the present order of things.<sup>25</sup>

Against this ideological backdrop, higher education gives preferential attention to those areas and subjects which are likely to bring economic progress. “(E)ducation is being pulled down from its sacred niche to become one more player in the marketplace. (It) is on sale, for a price ~ to be sure.”<sup>26</sup>

How is the above imbalance to be corrected? The paper proposes that Habermas’ theory of communicative rationality/action will serve as a corrective to the one-sided emphasis on instrumental rationality. In positive terms, his theory can be a bridge-building framework that informs Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 31, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 34.



management in leading the way in fostering a dialogical relationship with its employees, particularly the unionized ones.

### **WANTED: COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY/ACTION**

Habermas has developed a diagnosis of society as suffering from “one-sided rationalization” privileging the instrumental reason. This resulted in the disruptions of the communicative life-world by “systems” such as markets and bureaucracies.<sup>27</sup> In the context of deliberative democracy, he does recognize and defend modern institutions while justifying the universal claims of public practical reason.<sup>28</sup> His criticism of instrumental rationality led him to construct a moral-political theory whose communicative ideal is the core normative standard: inclusive critical discussion free of social and economic pressures, in which interlocutors treat each other as equals in a cooperative attempt to reach an understanding on matters of common concern.<sup>29</sup>

In more systematic terms Habermas provided a theoretical framework for an interdisciplinary critical social theory. His model of social criticism is pragmatic, that is, human interests constitute knowledge. It is pluralistic as well because different forms of knowledge come from different core interests. The social inquiry is guided by three distinct interests: in control, in understanding, and in emancipation. The emancipatory interest of reason is of particular importance to him as he pushes for a critical self-reflection meant to overcome dogmatism, compulsion, and domination.

Habermas’ pluralistic mode of critical inquiry suggests a norm of correctness be verified by the participants of the practice. While each theory and method has “a relative legitimacy,” his Critical Theory does not just accept the independent correctness of

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<sup>27</sup> Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, “Habermas,” 359. On this point, see the second volume of Habermas’ *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1982).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 772.

<sup>29</sup> For the paper’s substantive treatment of Habermas’ communicative rationality, the paper is indebted to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Jürgen Habermas.”

each but attempts to critically unify them bearing in mind and accepting “the tension of divergent approaches under one roof.”<sup>30</sup> He clarifies that his theory “does not relate to established lines of research as a competitor; starting from its concept of the rise of modern societies, it attempts to explain the specific limitations and the relative rights of those approaches.”<sup>31</sup>

To achieve the unification goal, he frames his own distinctive definition of rationality as epistemic, practical, and intersubjective. Epistemic means that rationality consists not so much in the possession of particular knowledge, but rather in “how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge.”<sup>32</sup> It is pragmatic as it shares a number of distinctive features with other views that see interpreters as competent and knowledgeable agents. Most importantly, a pragmatic approach develops an account of practical knowledge in the “performative attitude,” that is, from the point of view of a competent speaker. A theory of rationality, thus, attempts to reconstruct the practical knowledge necessary for being a knowledgeable social actor among other knowledgeable social actors. The third attribute of his rationality theory is intersubjectivity, that is, reconstructing a “performative attitude” through language although the language is not the only medium.

The fundamental form of coordination through language, according to Habermas, requires speakers to adopt a practical stance oriented toward “reaching understanding,” which he regards as the “inherent telos” of speech. When actors address one another with this sort of practical attitude, they engage in what Habermas calls “communicative action.” This is distinct from strategic forms of social action where actors are not so much interested in mutual understanding as in achieving the individual goals they each bring to the situation.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, the interlocutors in communicative action orient themselves towards arriving at a consensus. This is

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<sup>30</sup> Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. S. W. Nichol森 and J. A. Stark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. II: *Lifeworld and System*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 375.

<sup>32</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Jürgen Habermas.”

possible when one party affirms the claim made by the other party because the former finds the claim rational.<sup>34</sup>

When no agreement is reached the interlocutors may shift from ordinary speech to “discourse.” Discourse refers to “the processes of argumentation and dialogue in which the claims implicit in the speech act are tested for their rational justifiability as true, correct or authentic. For claims that are open to criticism and justification: intersubjectivity must go beyond the positivist fixation on fact-stating modes of discourse (category of empirical truth) but instead recognizes a spectrum of “validity claims” that also includes, at the least, claims to moral rightness, ethical goodness or authenticity, personal sincerity, and aesthetic value.”<sup>35</sup> The focus of the analysis moves away from the truth-conditioned semantics of representation to the social intelligibility of interaction. “Social cooperation is both deeply consensual and reasonable: actors sincerely agree that their modes of cooperation can be justified as good, right, and free of empirical error.”<sup>36</sup>

Habermas' theory of communicative action rests on the idea that social order ultimately depends on the capacity of actors to recognize the intersubjective validity of the different claims on which social cooperation depends. Discourse theory calls for a pragmatic analysis of argumentation as a social practice. As a process, it has a set of unavoidable yet counterfactual “pragmatic presuppositions” that participants must make if they are to regard the actual execution of dialectical procedures as a sufficiently severe critical test. Habermas identifies four such presuppositions as the most important: no one capable of making a relevant contribution has been excluded, the participants have an equal voice, they are internally free to speak their honest opinion without deception or

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., see Habermas *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol. I, 8-23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. “Given the difficulties of maintaining such deep consensus, however, it makes sense, particularly in complex, pluralistic societies, to relax these communicative demands for specified types of situations, allowing for weaker forms of communicative action (in which not all three types of validity claims are at stake) or strategic action (in which actors understand that everyone is oriented toward individual success)” (Ibid.).

self-deception, and there are no sources of coercion built into the process and procedures of discourse.<sup>37</sup>

Habermas summarizes his idealized conception of practical discourse in the “discourse principle,” which we might state as follows: A rule of action or choice is justified, and thus valid, only if all those affected by the rule or choice could accept it in a reasonable discourse. The central task of Habermas' democratic theory is to provide a normative account of legitimate law. His deliberative democratic model rests on what is perhaps the most complex argument in his philosophical corpus, found in his *Between Facts and Norms*: Societies are stable over the long run only if their members generally perceive them as legitimate and as organized in accordance with what is true, right, and good. In the complex world of modernization which has engendered religious pluralism and functional differentiation (autonomous market economies, bureaucratic administrations, unconstrained scientific research), the potential for misunderstanding and conflict about the good and the right increase while the shared background resources for the consensual resolution of the conflicts decrease.<sup>38</sup>

The demands on the legitimation of law change with this functional realignment: to be legitimate, modern law must secure the *private autonomy* (that is, able to make worthwhile choices) of those subject to it. The legal guarantee of private autonomy, in turn, presupposes an established legal code and a legally defined status of equal citizenship in terms of actionable basic rights that secure a space for individual freedom. However, such rights are expressions of freedom only if citizens can also understand themselves as the authors of the laws that interpret their rights—that is, only if the laws that protect private autonomy also issue from citizens' exercise of *public autonomy* as lawmakers acting through elected representatives. Thus, the rights that define individual freedom must also include rights of political participation. As Habermas understands the relation between private and public autonomy,

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<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005; English, 2008), 89.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

each is “co-original” or “equiprimordial,” conceptually presupposing the other in the sense that each can be fully realized only if the other is fully realized. The exercise of public autonomy in its full sense presupposes participants who understand themselves as individually free (privately autonomous), which, in turn, presupposes that they can shape their individual freedoms through the exercise of public autonomy.<sup>39</sup>

### APPROPRIATING HABERMAS’ CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY AT THE UNIVERSITY

As clarified earlier, Christian universities are not the same as profit-oriented stocks-defined establishments. Educational establishments are formally non-profit, non-stock entities and, to wit, religiously informed by the Catholic faith. But, for all intents and purposes, they cannot operate in an ideal world free of what William Becker calls as ‘ecological sin.’<sup>40</sup> The spiritual assumption of today’s ecological sin is that “in a carefully constructed social and economic perspective, we find fundamental spiritual satisfaction in (ecological evil); it is our symbol of being ‘number one’ and blessed by God.”<sup>41</sup> The ecological sin can be identified with what Pope Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm.”<sup>42</sup> This suits well with the success-oriented ideology of economic globalization which impacts the educational system.

Randy Odchigue, who is a school administrator himself, has observed that “universities tend to formulate educational outcomes to meet institutional requirements of benchmarking and performance indicators to align to the corporate-industrial demands.

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<sup>39</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Jürgen Habermas.” See chapter 6 of Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, eds. C. Cronin and P. DeGreiff (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998a; German, 1996a).

<sup>40</sup> William H. Becker, “Ecological Sin,” *Theology Today* (1992): 152 in 152-164. The term, “ecological sin,” refers to the “web of spiritual assumptions about success and consumption, progress and waste, that effectively undermine and trivialize our efforts to escape.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>42</sup> See Donald Dorr, *The Pope Francis Agenda: His Teaching on Family, Protection of Life, Ecology, Women & The Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications, 2018), 176-180.

In the end technocratic rationality seemed to be overly obsessive concerned of valuing productivity and outcomes which are measurable, regulated and quality controlled. In other words, the compelling justification for the production and transmission of knowledge is hinged on the economic value and its role in international market competitiveness.”<sup>43</sup>

Wilfred enumerates the characteristics of higher education brought about by globalization which he finds unchristian: education turned into a profitable industry; erosion of democracy and democratic institutions as globalization is driven by financial capitalism that seeks efficiency and prompt delivery of goods (democracy replaced by “management”); violations of human dignity due to the dominant mantras of success, efficiency, and profit; cementing of the sense of individualism which marks modernity; the anesthetizing of social consciousness and circumventing of the political process; elitist education causing a deep rift between the rich and the poor with the well-to-do as the producers and controllers of knowledge and citizens in an information society.<sup>44</sup>

In the same vein, Christopher Ryan Maboloc has scathing criticism about the Philippine educational system in its elitist form. He points out the system’s emphasis on an outcome where learners will be manipulated by global industries. This is instrumental knowledge that reduces them to mere functioning workers who have to be ushered in through education to the monetized world and, thus, attain social status. The path is competition, not cooperation, which reinforces elitism in society. Human values are sacrificed on the altar of success.<sup>45</sup>

At stake in the criticism leveled against the instrumentalization of education is the students’ holistic education, which ironically, is a valued philosophical foundation of education. Yet, the march towards globalization, the re-tailoring of educational

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<sup>43</sup> Randy Odchigue, “Doing Filipino Theology amidst Globalize Technocracy,” *Hapag* 12, no. 1 (2015): 28.

<sup>44</sup> Wilfred, “Rethinking Christian Identity,” 37-42.

<sup>45</sup> See Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Deep Thinking or Resistance? On Finding a Middle Ground between Paolo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy and John Dewey’s Pragmatism.” *Philosophical Quarterly of Israel* 49 (3): 1097-1108.

aims and approaches meant to catch up with the demands of the competitive market impacts not only the students' integral human formation but the teachers themselves in their working conditions, in their relationships with the management in the corporate setting. When instrumental reason determines the manner with which the school administration treats its teachers, then free discussions involving subjects from both sides and mutual agreements have hardly, if at all, any place. Critical thinking, a hallmark of liberal education, becomes subservient to corporate interests. The unchecked exercise of management prerogative brings about a culture of timidity and fear on the part of the teachers who paradoxically are expected to teach their students critical thinking.

Teachers have to fight for political space in the decision-making structure and processes of the university, not in order to usurp the principle of management prerogative but to serve as corporate dialogue partners to represent and promote the interests and concerns of the faculty from below. In schools where the faculty unions get the legal mandate to bargain collectively with the management by virtue of its win in the certification election, the management concedes, at least initially, as a legal obligation not necessarily as a free moral choice. When the management engages the organized labor in negotiations and conversations with a pressured corporate attitude protective of its privileged position, then genuine dialogue of equal partners cannot be fully achieved to the shared satisfaction of both groups.

Habermas' communicative reason or action challenges the Christian academic leadership to go beyond the one-sided, goal-oriented, and achievement-fixated instrumental rationality and engage the faculty union as equal interlocutors in a cooperative attempt to reach an understanding on matters that have a bearing on the welfare of the teachers.<sup>46</sup> The Christian leadership must lead

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<sup>46</sup> Article XIII, section 3 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and Art. 255 of the Labor Code of the Philippines safeguards "the right (of teachers) to participate in policy and decision-making processes of the school insofar as these processes will directly affect their rights, benefits, and welfare." In addition, Art. 3 of the same Code declares that "The State shall assure the rights of workers to self-organization, collective bargaining, security of tenure, and just and humane conditions of work." The above provisions require the participation of the rank-

the way in fostering an atmosphere of inclusive critical discussion in which the organized labor feels that they are dialoguing and discussing *on an equal footing*.

The administration must be oriented towards the emancipatory, not the controlling interest of reason, guided by a critical self-reflection meant to overcome dogmatism, compulsion, and domination. The formal-corporate nature of the university remains as a predefined system but the latter cannot be allowed to 'colonize' the lifeworld of its employees. The unionists put it this way: management prerogative is not an absolute principle. Without the union providing checks and balances, the exercise of the corporate prerogative is bound to be abused. Checks and balances are an integral feature of the democratic polity. Unorganized and each-on-their-own employees who are generally ignorant of labor laws and relevant provisions in the Manual of Regulations for Higher Educational Institutions and are sucked into the culture of timidity and fear are easy prey to management machinations beyond accountability as in their lack of access to the real financial situation of the university.

The norm of correctness is not an exclusive privilege of the Christian management but using Habermas' pluralistic mode of critical inquiry is verified by the participants in practice. There is no such thing as independent correctness of each party who represents a set of interests but the performative orientation is to critically unify them bearing in mind and accepting the tension of differences. To attain the unification goal, the management does not, in principle, have the sole possession of particular knowledge because what is crucial in the theory is the conversation of acting subjects, unionists and managers, and how knowledge is acquired and used in the spirit of good faith.<sup>47</sup>

A rule of action or choice is justified, and thus valid, only if all those affected by the rule or choice could accept it in a

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and-file on matters "that will directly affect their rights, benefits, and welfare" to partner with the management in advancing "just and humane conditions of work."

<sup>47</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Jürgen Habermas." affect their rights, benefits, and welfare." In addition, Art. 3 of the same Code declares that "The State shall assure <sup>47</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia



reasonable discourse.<sup>48</sup> For the management-crafted policies, rules and regulations governing the academic life of the teachers to be legitimate, they must secure the private autonomy of the teachers who are subject to the laws. The guarantee of private autonomy, in turn, presupposes an established legal code and a legally defined status of equal citizenship in terms of actionable basic rights that secure a space for individual freedom in the university setting.

Such rights are expressions of freedom only if the teachers can also understand themselves as the authors of the laws that interpret their rights—that is, only if the laws that protect private autonomy also issue from citizens' exercise of public autonomy as lawmakers acting through their faculty union representatives. Thus, the rights that define individual freedom must also include rights of *political participation* (italics, author's). As Habermas understands the relation between private (faculty) and public autonomy (university) each is “co-original” or “equiprimordial,” conceptually presupposing the other in the sense that each can be fully realized only if the other is fully realized. The exercise of public autonomy, in its full sense, presupposes that the participants understand themselves as individually free (privately autonomous), which, in turn, assumes that they can shape their individual freedoms through their political participation in the decision-making processes of the university.

The following sub-section ushers in the readers to preliminary remarks on the proposed spirituality of *loob* to undergird Habermas' critical social theory of communicative rationality with Jesus' envisioned companionship of empowerment serving as the foreground.

#### FROM COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY TO LOOB-GROUNDED SPIRITUALITY

Christian universities are ultimately defined by their adherence and witnessing to the truth of Jesus' envisioned kingdom of God in the here and now. This is what fundamentally distinguishes them from other religious or secular academic

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

institutions. As such, the legally established corporate identity and everything that goes with it is subject to the ultimate norm, not of instrumentalism but of discipleship of equals about which the kingdom of God is all about. This assumes that the university must be fired up by the kingdom's spirituality.

The corpus of theological writings on the kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven; the reign of God) has been extensive and aplenty after Vatican II. For the paper, it is greatly relevant and interesting that the post-colonial Bible scholar, John Dominic Crossan, has introduced a novel English translation of the Greek *basileia tou theou* ("kingdom of God"). His preferred rendition is "The Companionship of Empowerment."<sup>49</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu explains on behalf of John Dominic Crossan why "The Companionship for Empowerment" is closer than the generally known "Kingdom of God" to what Jesus stands for and envisions as expressed in his teachings and deeds. For one thing, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, not Greek but the language of the gospels is Greek.<sup>50</sup>

The English word 'Kingdom of God' is a direct translation from the Greek *basileia tou theou*. The Aramaic language renders a somewhat different nuanced meaning.<sup>51</sup> O'Murchu continues: "The Aramaic word for the kingdom is *malkuta*, formed around the root *kut*, which carries strong connotations of empowerment *power with* rather than *power over*." Here, "(e)mpowerment can be facilitated by a benign patriarchal ruler: empowerment from the top down." O'Murchu asserts that "it seems that even this mediation of empowerment was not acceptable to Jesus. It had to be empowerment *through the process of mutuality*. The pyramid had to become a circle. Gospel empowerment was to be circular, mutual, interactive, mobilizing diverse gifts, interpersonal, and lateral. It was not to be linear in any sense."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John Dominic Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom," in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. Marcus Borg (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 42 and idem, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 337 cited in Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2011), 30.

<sup>50</sup> O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*, 29-32.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

The project of empowerment through the process of mutuality suggested by Crossan presumes that the participants view and treat each other as equal partners. This resonates with Habermas' theory of communicative action. Moving farther, it seems that the philosopher's communicative ideal has intimations of spirituality, at least in the secular sense of the word.<sup>53</sup> Christianity's discipleship of equals must be the dominant, operative faith-informed principle undergirding the Christian leadership's relations with the organized teachers. In a corporate-hierarchical setting the leadership is precisely challenged in partnership with the organized teachers "to invent *spaces* within the constraints."<sup>54</sup>

The paper suggested earlier that Habermas' communicative rationality/action that seemingly resonates with the idea of gospel empowerment and discipleship of equals is not just a theoretical framework being proposed to the Christian management. Since the university under study is ultimately defined by its Christian character, it should be spiritually rooted and inflamed. In addition, since the university under consideration is part and parcel of the Filipino culture and society, the paper proposes Habermas' theory be grounded in a culturally contextual spirituality: the native concept of *Loob*.

In a book written by the Filipino philosopher-anthropologist Albert Alejo, who had done extensive research on the concept of *Loob*, the author came up with varied descriptions of *Loob* using the different lenses of history, metalinguistics, psychology, and theological hermeneutics.<sup>55</sup> *Loob* is described as

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Van Ness, a specialist in the study of nonreligious or secular spirituality, defines spirituality in the secular sense as "the quest for attaining an optimal relationship between what one truly is and everything that is" (Peter Van Ness, "Introduction: Spirituality and the Secular Quest," in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, vol. 22, ed. Peter Van Ness [New York: Crossroad, 1996], 5) cited in Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religions and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *The Santa Clara Lectures* 6, no. 2 (February 6, 2000), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Wilfred, "Rethinking Christian Identity," 43-44.

<sup>55</sup> Albert E. Alejo, *Tao po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Office of Research and Publications, 1990).

the cave of Filipino thought, the holistic self of the Filipino, the state of feeling and core of the character, the genuine self of the person, and the person in his/her deepest interiority. There was also the post-modern critique of the 'embalmed' *loob* as an instrument of conquest.<sup>56</sup>

On the theological front, the late Filipino lay theologian, Jose de Mesa, employed the native concept to construct an enculturated theology for lowland Filipinos. He pioneered the use of the native expression *kagandahang-loob* as a culturally appropriate category to refer to God's *pagmamahal* (love).<sup>57</sup> He has proposed to translate *kagandahang-loob ng Diyos* into English as the winsome benevolence of God, a synthesis of beauty and goodness. De Mesa captures the depth-meaning of *loob* as "the inner self. . . the core of one's personhood and where the true worth of a person lies. It is what makes the lowland Filipino what he is and who he is as a person."<sup>58</sup> Beyond that, *loob* describes a person in a relationship to others because it provides an insight as to what kind of person one is."<sup>59</sup>

So, *Loob* is an essentially relational concept. People are able to appreciate *loob* only in terms of how the individual relates him-/herself to his/her fellow human beings. On the one hand, someone who consistently shows *kabutihan* (goodness) to them will be identified with *maganda* or *mabuting kalooban*. The qualifier *maganda* literally is beautiful which emphasizes the aesthetic dimension of *loob*, while *mabuti* is good which brings out its moral side. On the other hand, if another person is oftentimes unkind or mean or selfish towards others, people will eventually describe him/her as possessing *masamang-loob* (bad *loob*). From another angle, the person with a bad *loob* has his/her attitude and behavior

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See also Levy Lara Lanaria, "Kapwa in the Family Rooted in *Loob* of the Divine Image: Thoughts from a Filipino Lay Theologian." *Religions* 6 (2014): 35-43.

<sup>56</sup> Alejo, *Tao po!*, 11-38.

<sup>57</sup> Alejo equates *kagandahang-loob* or its variant *magandang kalooban*, with *kabaitan* [benevolence] or *kabutihan walang daya* [goodness without deceit]. See its other meanings in *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture: Studies in Theological Re-rooting*. Maryhill Studies 4 (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1991), 45.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

means that he has disconnected him-/herself from his/her *loob*. There are popular labels to describe the individual: *plastik* (plastic), *doble-kara* (double-faced), *balatkayo* (deception), *may maskara* (with mask) - all referring to thypocritical behavior. *Loob* manifests itself “through external behavior, and behavior in an authentic person stems from the *loob* and is not used to camouflage the inner self.”<sup>60</sup>

In the *loob*-scheme the *labas* (external) or *katawan* (body) is not a mere accessory but it is an essential part of our interiority. That is why Alejo dares to exclaim: *Walang loob kung walang katawan!* (There is no *loob* if there is no body).<sup>61</sup> Our relationship with one another can only manifest itself through the corporeal self, and the *magandang-/mabuting-loob* or *masamang-loob* will be sensed through time.

The state of a person's *loob* affects as well his/her outside world.<sup>62</sup> If there is a disjunction between the external and the internal “(t)he world will forever be in turmoil as long as people either fail to distinguish between reality and appearance or continue to behave outwardly in a mode that runs counter to what their *loob* is.”<sup>63</sup> The construct of *loob*, then, directs us to the kind of core which informs a relationship. *Loob* is emphatic relating, the measure of the person as *kapwa* of the other.<sup>64</sup>

To elevate the *Loob* discourse to the theological plane, we can go back to the story of creation in the book of Genesis.<sup>65</sup> According to the Scriptures, when God created human beings He was first projected as a relational God-within. “We shall make God in *our* image, to *our* likeness” (Gen. 1:26).<sup>66</sup> One is God but He is not alone in the innermost depths (*kaloob-looban*) of his divine being. God's *loob* is essentially an intra-relational self - which is why

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Alejo, *Tao po!*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> De Mesa, *In Solidarity*, 45-46.

<sup>63</sup> Reynaldo Clemena Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979), 240.

<sup>64</sup> See Alejo, *Tao po!*, 30.

<sup>65</sup> See Lanaria, *Kapwa* in the Family,

<sup>66</sup> Biblical citations in this article are taken from the *Christian Community Bible Catholic Pastoral Edition* version.

Christians love to refer to Him as 'Trinity' (three-in-one). Many Christian believers look up to the Trinitarian image as the model-par-excellence of human relationships. In a profound manner, the one Triune God wishes to *ipagkaloob* (give; share) to His creatures the beautiful intra-relationships happening within His *loob*.<sup>67</sup> It is not just His 'being-God' that He wants to be shared, but His 'being-God-in-relationship-with.'

"Then Yahweh God formed Man, dust is drawn from the clay, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and Man became alive with breath" (Gen. 2:7) - and man became an intimate and inseparable part of God's *loob* and the divine image dwelt in man's *loob*. Filipinos are wont to say "nothing happens to us which is not God's *kalooban*" (will). If God's will be profoundly rooted in His *loob* and man partakes of the divine *loob*, then God's *kalooban* from the innermost core of His being finds an echo in man's *kaloob-looban* (depths).

The Christian theological tradition has Father, Son, and Spirit constituting the relational God. Within the innermost Triune *loob* is a dynamic interaction of co-equal persons in perfect unity. Christians normally commune with the Triune God through Jesus Christ the one mediator between God and humankind (1 Tim. 2:5 "As there is one God, there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus..."). Believers worship him as the incarnation of God's love (Jn. 3:16 "Yes God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"). If God is *kagandahang-loob*, then Jesus Christ, as de Mesa stresses, is God's *kagandahang-loob* in the full sense of the word. To be united with the Triune God is to be united with and through Jesus Christ-God who had 'gone down' from the Spirit world and became our *kapwa-in-corporeality*. The union with Jesus who returned to the spiritual world in His resurrected body but is now present in Spirit "is an intrinsic one, based on an ontological reality" wherein he "communicates his life, his being to (them) from an innermost

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<sup>67</sup> See Karl Rahner, "Grace" sa Rahner, pat. *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 596. Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 4-5.

dwelling place within (their) being” thus enabling them to be animated by his Spirit and to live in him.<sup>68</sup>

### KA-LOOB IN THE UNIONIZED UNIVERSITY SETTING

Communicative rationality or action which advocates dialogue between subjects, between equals with divergent interests but moving towards agreements on vital issues in a democratic space for the well-being of teachers, in particular, and of the university, in general, cannot remain just a theory or method or approach in the university. Since the institution, as pointed out earlier, is subject to the ultimate norm of Jesus’ envisaged kingdom or companionship of empowerment, this requires spirituality. The paper has proposed a spirituality that is grounded in the native concept of *loob*. When the Christian management views, treats, and engages the organized teachers in discussion and negotiations as *ka-loob* with Trinitarian grounding, it is eloquently assuring the latter that instrumentalism is not the dominant driving principle of the university.

The formal institutional structure established by law and the concomitant management interests cannot be done away with but the creation of democratic spaces from within, a cooperative project of both sectors as well as the others, falls clearly in line with the gospel norm of the companionship of empowerment. The exercise of the legally pre-established management prerogative is relativized in the service of discipleship of equals. Unions do not have to fight for political participation in a conflictive atmosphere because the Relational-God-from-within (*loob*) reigns in the here and now of the Christian university, the discipleship of equals fired up by the companionship of empowerment is “already.” Circles can be created in tension with the hierarchical order (until perhaps someday the pyramid will look more and more circular).

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<sup>68</sup> William P. Roberts, “The Family as Domestic Church,” in *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, eds. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts, 70-90 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 83.

The companionship of empowerment has a prophetic character and orientation since it will continuously put into question the hegemonic doctrine of instrumental rationality fleshed out in market-driven globalization: competition, technical efficiency, achievements and awards, profit, and submission. The Christian identity in the globalized context challenges the school leadership to lead the way in transforming education from being a global commodity to being a force of emancipation. This is transformative leadership that allows space for the transformation of the members into an empowered community of discipleship of equals actively participating in the decision-making structure and processes through the teachers' union.<sup>69</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Today's 500-year-old Philippine Catholic Church is becoming more and more appreciative of dialogue in varied forms within and outside her ecclesial boundaries. The lay faithful who comprise the great majority has the capacity to speak, ask questions, collaborate, and listen as well. The present movement towards synodality which Pope Francis keeps pushing across the whole Catholic world will only fructify in the spirit of dialogue among co-equal and empowered companions.

In the context of the larger Philippines society, the Church fully supports democratic participation in the political sphere,<sup>70</sup> or what PCP II calls "people empowerment."<sup>71</sup> There is a tacit invitation here addressed to the management of every Catholic university to foster in its decision-making structure and processes the politics of dialogue and empowerment - the politics that is anchored on a prophetic and culturally appropriate spirituality. To belabor the point, the principle of management prerogative is

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<sup>69</sup> Wilfred, "Rethinking Christian Identity," 33.

<sup>70</sup> See Michael J. and Kenneth Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Significance of Public Theology* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1993), 33-42.

<sup>71</sup> "No social transformation is genuine and lasting where people themselves do not actively participate in the process. This is not only a sociological axiom but it also stems from the nature of human dignity and solidarity" (PCP II Acts, par. 325).



relativized in the light of Jesus' envisioned discipleship of equals. The latter stands as a prophetic corrective of instrumental rationality in favor of communicative action.

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