

## From the Editor

Jesus exhorted and invited people to extend acts of solidarity and care beyond the dictates of imperial Rome, further than the boundaries of the traditions of the elders, against the limits of conventions, creed, and other habit-forming institutions. Many times, he emphasized the superiority of compassion (ἐσπλαγγίσθη; *esplanchnísthi*) and mercy (ἔλεος; *eleos*) over and above the pre-established and customary habits; thus, making possible the concrete expression of his vision of the good news of the Reign of God.

Habits are formed first through imitation of the habits of those who came before us—of those who even came thousands of years before us. While some of those habits are virtuous or, perhaps, innocuous, others are either equivocal or predominantly vicious. The habits and imperious ambitions of kings and emperors were fed by antiquity's citizens during the long period of colonization and imperial invasions; masculine domination's growth has been nurtured too by patriarchal milieus; racial superiority is still tended by the dominant's entitlements; the anthropocentric prerogative is incubated in the anthropocene; the overbearing rational efficiency standards are sustained by capitalism, and; the erosion of common sense and indigenous habits of solidarity and fellowship are threatened by the habitual reliance on systems. In other words, people are inside character-forming worlds where mimesis produce either wholesome or unwholesome habits. Even the churches and the academic disciplines are formed by those worlds.

The current issue features articles that conform, as usual, to academic traditions, but they are no less bearers of Jesus's vision of the Reign of God. In view of promoting the well-being of humans and non-human

persons, readers are invited to dive deep into the articles' complex arguments and be rewarded by fresh realizations about liberation from debilitating habits. The following critical works would hopefully trigger a radical reimagining of relationships and at the same time interrogate dispositions that breed habitual alienations.

Rex Fortes's article ("The Indiscriminate Use of *Ethno-Cognates* in Biblical Studies and Its Repercussions to the Filipino Migrants Abroad") brings to awareness the complexities and subtleties of meanings of ethnic labels found in the Scriptures. Scriptural studies that indiscriminately make use of such labels could end up on the lap of readers who could weaponize them. Fortes is referring to some studies that use *ethno-cognates* without adverting to their nuances. He is raising caution regarding label-appropriations as readers' use of such concepts could bring about unintended negative consequences. He offers "...pertinent lines of action that, hopefully, can profit all of us, particularly in our attempt to present suitably biblical collectivities in the Philippine context." His paper advocates for respect of ethnic differences and the recovery of the rightful ethnic identification of Filipinos living outside the Philippines.

Edward Foley ("Synodality through a Eucharistic Lens") argues that "the practice of Eucharist at the local level can either enhance or inhibit our growth as a synodal church." His review on the nature of synodality reminds us about the need to keep the distinction between the institutionalized but narrow episcopal synodality and the more broad and basic form of ecclesial synodality. The three key aspects of ecclesial synodality (communion, participation and mission) may either be enhanced or impeded in local eucharistic practices (impeded by those that do not promote community; those

that do not encourage full, conscious, and active participation; those that primarily focus on “personal piety or intra-ecclesial concerns rather than nourishing our participation in God’s love affair with the world...”). His concluding remarks should be seriously considered: “Because of the powerful coupling of eucharist and synodality, the performance of both impact each other. ... The fundamental contention here is that the way local faith communities perform eucharist and its radiating spirituality, so does the local faith community either advance or impede the synodal call to journey together.”

John F. Haught (“Evolution and the Cosmic Drama”) invites readers to consider the larger cosmic setting and to situate the long story of life within the much longer scientific story of a universe that is 13.8 billion years old. In his discussion, Haught appropriates Darwin’s three evolutionary ingredients (mindless combination of random variations, natural selection, and enormous spans of time) as part of Divine Providence. One of the most serious challenges to such a position is our perceived reality of cruelty and suffering. Haught writes: “For many thoughtful people the cruelty and indifference of evolution make life—and the universe that sponsors it—incompatible with the notion of divine care.” He insists, however, that the three troubling aspects of Darwinian evolution may be read against the framework of “Divine providence and promise.” He concludes with this statement that should be humbling for the restricted anthropocentric view of time: “...evolution now invites theology to extend the sweep of the divine promise beyond the narrow sphere of human history so as to embrace the story of the entire universe.” In this longer story of life, “the universe is invited, but never forced, to undergo a process of perpetual self-transformation.” Thus, humans are summoned to reconsider their too narrow understanding of self-transformation.

Mark T. Miller (“The Inner Word and Outer Word: Eckhart, Jüngel, and Lonergan on Trinitarian Knowing and Naming of God”) offers the view that by keeping in mind God’s revelation through the inner and outer Words (the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ), “...Christians and the Church in general might come to a more comprehensive knowledge of God.” In his coverage of Eckhart and Jüngel, Miller discussed about how “God’s trinitarian missions, the outer Word of the Son and the inner word of the Spirit, give us an intimacy with God that enables us to know and to speak of God,... With the benefit of both divine Words, we may better meet present and future challenges.”

Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman’s piece (“Catholic Sexual Ethics: Transitioning from Rules and Acts to Virtue and Character”) deals with the story of the evolving Catholic Sexual Ethics. It presents this continuing story as it highlights the contrast between the two approaches (the traditional Catholic laws approach and the renewed approach of virtue ethics) in three parts: 1) the Second Vatican Council’s methodological shift from classicism to historical consciousness, which fundamentally transformed Catholic ethical method; 2) a biblical and historical overview of Catholic sexual ethics that develops into a rule-based approach to sexual ethics, and; 3) virtue ethics as the culmination of the ethical methodological shift in Catholic theological ethics and its implications for Catholic sexual ethics. For Lawler and Salzman, the shift from a focus on rules and acts to a focus on virtue in sexual ethics is most clearly reflected in official Catholic teaching in Pope Francis’ *Amoris Laetitia*.

Thia Cooper (“Method and Themes for a Philippine Theology of Development”) accomplishes what an insider has not yet done, that is comprehensively reviewing the past five years of articles from the Philippines discussing

areas of theology and its intersections with marginalized groups. This task of reviewing has resulted in Cooper's offer of "a method to understand perspectives on development and theology that focused on being with and listening to marginalized communities." Based on her survey, she concludes: "In terms of the theological concepts, the communities emphasized Jesus' life and actions, every human being as created in God's image, communion, and the sacredness of the earth. In terms of the issues related to development, they called for protection of the earth, including the forests and water, and a focus on using the land and water for the common good; they argued the economy should be arranged for the people, rather than people serving the economy, including removing the focus on economic growth, instead meeting people's basic needs, ensuring a fair wage, and reducing inequality; finally, they called for ensuring access to a holistic education and safety for each human being." Readers critical of developmentalism (cf. Latin American *dependencia* analysis) have to be informed that Cooper is offering a different, even a contrarian, type of development: "...we can continue the conversation about development as the wellbeing of humans and the planet, prioritizing the voices of the marginalized." It is an interesting prospect to think about a conference attended by the writers reviewed by Cooper.

Veniz Maja V. Guzman ("On Beauty and Interpretation: Getting Closer to Nature with David Abram's Poetic Language") creatively harnesses academic resources to understand how the progress of textuality reflects the unconscious distancing of humans from nature. One could even connect here human language as reflecting a Cartesian humanity that treats everything as tools and extensions. Guzman (using Paul Ricoeur's concept of *distanciation* and Edmund Burke's

notion of the sublime) arrives at the conclusion that Abram's usage of poetic language is an effective tool in getting closer to nature. She writes: "I believe that this is relevant to the pastoral ministry of caring for the environment as it provides us a viable way of building a relationship with nature as it is seen as alive—and we are seen not as separate from it, but a being that is both fully animal and fully human engaging with it."

On behalf of the members of the Editorial Board, I extend my gratitude to the authors and peer-reviewers (and especially to Al Mozol, our Managing Editor, for the linkages he built) who have made the publication of this issue possible. You are part of MST Review's dedication and service to those on the ground of praxis and to our readers who need critical reflections that inspire commitment to the vision of the Reign of God.

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