

Liberal Arts in the Post-Colony: Will the Knot ever Untangle?

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### Abstract:

Negotiating the “double bind” of an “enabling” cultural imperialism, the post-colonial university continues to interrogate the idea of a “universal” liberal arts education. Aquinas University in the Philippines takes on this challenge as it strives to craft a liberal arts program that has at its core the local culture operating in dynamic interaction with the institution’s Dominican orientation and mission.

### Biographies:

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Fr. Ramonclaro G. Mendez, OP (PhD, Saint Louis University, Missouri, USA) is the rector and president of Aquinas University of Legazpi (1999-present). A friar of the Dominican Province of the Philippines, he has served as regent of the College of Commerce of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila and as rector and president of Letran College, Calamba (1992-1999). His professional training in educational administration and in community development has served him well through almost twenty years of service as president of higher education institutions run by the Filipino Dominicans.

### Liberal arts in the post-colony: will the knot ever untangle?

In the Philippines today, one of the most important concerns in education is how Philippine education can be made to comply with so-called ‘global’ standards such as those enshrined in the ‘Washington Accord’ or the ‘Bologna Accord.’ As reported by the Presidential Task Force for Education created in 2007, one of the pressing problems is that the entire Philippine education cycle is the shortest in the entire world—14 years, while the rest of the world has either 15 or 16 years. Filipino graduates fall short by one year at least and this is a disadvantage as long as getting jobs abroad is the issue. The Washington Accord requires, for instance, that a professional engineer should have at least 16 years of education for him or her to qualify to practise in another country. Two options have been presented: increase basic education from 10 to 12 years or add the ‘missing’ 2 years to post-secondary education. The two additional years could be a kind of ‘pre-university’ program of ‘general education’. The ‘university proper’ could then range from 2 years for undergraduate courses in arts and sciences to 4 years for engineering and other programs that need international accreditation. There are international deadlines for compliance, because in 2015 the 10 ASEAN countries will open their borders to the free movement of professionals and by 2020 the Philippines will enter into the Asia Pacific Trade Regime. Such deadlines are exerting great pressure on Philippine education authorities to implement the needed education reforms as soon as possible (Cruz, 2010).

The proposed reform of having two years of post-secondary ‘general education’ seems like a blessing for the liberal arts, but it is overwhelmingly obvious that the reform is geared toward fitting graduates for jobs abroad—education for national development goals, that is, in order to have tighter measures for a more efficient mass production of overseas contract workers whose dollar remittances have become the backbone of the national economy. As the report of

the task force puts it in no uncertain terms: ‘the President made a firm commitment to truly improve the educational system towards producing a globally-competitive workforce’ (PTFE, 2008, p. 1). There is hope that somewhere along the way the country will realize what is articulated in the reform objectives as ‘high quality education that will make [every Filipino child] a whole person... [and] a responsible citizen’ as much as, or more than, the envisioned ‘productive, well-paying job’ and becoming a successful entrepreneur. One suspects, however, that the first is just pure rhetoric and the second a pipe dream.

I begin with this current issue in Philippine education in order to stress one basic point: that more than ever now education in the postcolonial Philippines is in the tight grip of a global system that is oppressive and inimical to the interests and well-being of its people. I am haunted by Oswaldo de Rivero’s notion of the ‘myth of development’ according to which economies like ours have no hope of being fully integrated into the global economy that operates by the laws of Darwinian competition (Rivero, 2001). Therefore, whatever we do in education in the present set up cannot propel us towards genuine development. But the crux of the matter is that we are caught fast in the rampage and we have to learn to swim in it. The message of the task force is loud and clear: we do not have a choice, for what is at stake is survival itself.

The issue of education is closely tied to economics, to poverty and its attendant ills, which translate daily in the boardrooms of university administrators into the pressures of meeting accreditation standards, falling enrolment figures, decreasing completion rates, and the struggle to retain good teaching staff. Tertiary education is mostly in the hands of private entities, most of which are not-for-profit institutions that rely almost entirely on tuition fees to survive. For the students and their parents, college education is a means to a job and upward mobility, which means that their objective in getting an education is mostly utilitarian, practical—so that when the elder child shall have finished school and gotten a job he or she

could help out with the family finances and the younger sibling's school expenses, never mind that while in school many students have to juggle hours for study and for work or incur absences because they have no money to get to school. There is no luxury of choice in a situation like this, both for the school and for the population served by the school.

Higher education institutions in the Philippines are 'dysfunctional', says Andrew Gonzales, former secretary of Education, 'because of the poor quality of instruction and inadequate training with regard to research, resulting in a mismatch between the country's needs and educational output' (Gonzales, 2004, p. 280). He attributes this dismal condition to the massive privatization of education due to the huge strain on resources after World War II, caused largely by an expanding population and the pressures of putting to school increasing numbers of students. While not bad by itself 'in the spirit of free enterprise and laissez faire', privatization 'has let loose a plethora of institutions in which quality control is a rare occurrence' (289). Quality is monitored, there is regulation by government and private accreditation and self-policing mechanisms, but the great emphasis has been on the performance of graduates in board examinations—

Little attention is paid to research (except among an emerging group of research-conscious academics), community service, or publications (which at the highest levels are better gauges of an institution's excellence than merely a good track record in board examinations) (Gonzales, 289).

The result has been vicious competition, 'with institutions offering basically the same areas of specialization and competing for scarce resources' (289). I will add that this grim picture includes strategies of survival that verge on the unethical, practices that show how well and truly the schools have become part of the market.

Writing about the postcolonial contexts of Asian universities, Philip Altbach identifies 'massification' of higher education as responsible for the 'overall deterioration of quality.'

‘[The] pressure [of continuing expansion] makes it difficult to focus on other things—improving quality, upgrading research, enhancing the salaries and working conditions of the professoriate, among others’ (Albach, 2004, p. 23). The problem of funding is ‘acute’ since there is never enough public funding and, influenced by the World Bank and other international agencies, more and more governments ‘argue that higher education is mainly a “private good” serving the needs of individuals and less a “public” or social good. Therefore, the thinking is that the “user”—students, and perhaps their families—deserve to pay a significant part of the cost’ (23). Meanwhile, these same governments are increasingly seeing the central role of higher education in knowledge-based economic development and tying its fortunes with national economic survival. In the Philippines, this is certainly very clearly articulated in the report of the Presidential Task Force for Education.

The struggle for liberal arts education runs smack in the middle of this situation and against the intents and movements of both ‘providers and clients’ in most cases. This is of course not unique to the Philippines or to Asia. According to W.R. Connor, writing in 1998, ‘liberal education at the undergraduate level is an endangered species and likely to face extinction in another generation or so, in all but the wealthiest and most protective institutions’ (Connor, 1998, p. 3). Now, twelve years later, as I understand it from Martha Nussbaum, who was recently interviewed on CBC radio, even in the U.S. the liberal arts are being ‘squeezed out’ of the curriculum and for similar ‘practical’ reasons as we have in the Philippines, education being seen as training and preparation for jobs and careers in an increasingly competitive market. The victims of global oppression are certainly not confined anymore only to the ‘third world’ or the peoples of the ‘south’ and the recent global financial crisis has brought this fact sharply into focus. That said, I argue that the issues are still vastly different in postcolonial contexts like that of my country.

I borrow W.R. Connor's definition of the liberal arts, drawn from the Athenian Greeks, as the learning of the 'skills of freedom' or 'the skills needed to preserve freedom' (Connor, 1998, p. 5), and realize how far removed this is from the study of the liberal arts by students in a post- or not really post but neo-colonial set up.

First of all, we are the suppliers of labour. We trade warm bodies for overseas contract work with our government as the major recruitment and placement agency (Tyner, 2009). The exodus is towards the West and the rest of the rich nations of the world. There must be a qualitative difference in why there is a crisis in our liberal arts education. What goes by the name of liberal education in our universities, excepting a few, cannot rightly be called such, to my mind, because it is construed as merely instrumental in the acquisition of basic skills for the professions and trades. The stronger emphasis on proficiency in English, for instance, is driven by the impetus to work in foreign environments outside the Philippines or for foreign corporations in the country. Even the study of the arts and world literature is intended to increase the students' awareness of the foreign, as can be gleaned from many a course syllabus. All these and more should weigh heavily on any assessment and decision to reform liberal education. The situation is bleak, but a romantic return to a classical past is out of the question—that is, if it existed at all in the first place.

A second important thought closely related to the first is that liberal arts education in the Philippines is really a colonial legacy, as much as Western education is. Formal education was established first by the Spanish and then by the Americans. The Spanish colonizers set up parochial schools all over the islands as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century in order to teach the Catholic faith and redeem the natives from their pagan ways. The first known edict on education was issued in 1582 by Bishop Domingo de Salazar (Bazaco, 1959) and by 1611 what would later become the Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas was established in Manila.

However, it was only after three and half centuries of colonial presence that the Spanish set up a school system, with the Royal Decree of 1863 that ordered the setting up of elementary schools and the training of teachers; the parochial and *encomienda* schools before 1863 were only catechism classes (Estioko, 1994, p. 170). Did the Spanish then bring liberal arts to the colony?

Here is what a priest-scholar has to say:

Spanish education for Filipinos was never the liberal education propagated by Christian education in the West.... [T]he chief goal of Christianizing Filipinos was superficial. The cross came with the sword, so they say. The Christianity that the colonizers brought along was a stale religion [of formulaic prayers] dating back to the first five centuries of Christianity.... The Filipinos had simply to accept them passively and memorize them touching perhaps their emotions and sentiments but never their understanding (Estioko 1994, 176).

Vicente Rafael writes about Rizal's criticism of Spanish education in the latter's political essays:

'Schooling led not to a future but to the perpetuation of familiar forms of servility. It was meant to maintain students in their stupidity' (Rafael, 2006, p. 46). Another priest-scholar, Evergisto

Bazaco, OP, writing in the 1950s, had a different view:

...Spain laid the foundation of the Filipino nation when she brought to the Philippines the best education of Western Europe. It was this education that first implanted in the hearts of the Filipinos higher ideals—love of God, of country, of fellowmen. This education encouraged them to practice their ideals, and finally led them to the practical pursuit of the one great ambition of the Filipinos— independence (Bazaco, 1953, p. 64).

Bazaco has a point that I'd like to take up later. Indeed, the ideals of freedom blossomed in the hearts of Philippine heroes Jose Rizal and other figures of the Propaganda Movement while they were students at the Universidad de Santo Tomas. An earlier resistance by the Spanish educated was led by the priests Gomez, Burgos and Zamora, who were guillotined for their audacity.

When the Americans came in 1898, they were quick to see the effective use of education as a tool for subjugation and sent out soldiers to teach in the barrios, even as they fought a full-



blown war against the Filipinos who had seen through their posturing of benevolence. The war was still raging in many places in the Philippine countryside when they set up a public school system. With the Educational Act of 1901, the Philippine Commission set up a Department of Public Instruction in the Philippine Islands, decreed that English be used as the medium of instruction, and imported trained teachers to replace the soldiers. In August 1901, the Thomasites arrived: six hundred American teachers on board the army ship *Thomas*, who were deployed all over the newly acquired colony. ‘The teachers’ task was “to carry on the education that shall fit the Filipinos for their new citizenship” and make them understand and appreciate ‘the underlying principles of [American] civilization’. According to Paul Kramer, education was carried out along racial lines and for empire-building. The work of the Thomasites was meant ‘to restore the fabric of U.S. national exceptionalism’ (Kramer, 2006, p. 169) among the Filipinos who were still reeling from the death blows of the violent war of 1898-1901. This war destroyed the fragile First Philippine Republic, decimated whole towns and villages, displaced tens of thousands of inhabitants, and caused havoc on the economy (170). With the focus on education, physical violence inflicted by the war was replaced by another kind of violence in a way more insidious because it was masked. A normal school was set up that same year and in 1908 the University of the Philippines, whose mandate was ‘to provide advanced instruction in literature, philosophy, the sciences, the arts, and to give professional and technical training’ (Estioko, 1994, p. 190). In 1903 the *pensionado* program was initiated by then governor general William H. Taft. A fellowship program much like Fulbright or the Ford Foundation fellowships, the *pensionado* program selected and sent young Filipino men and women to study in the U.S. For Paul Kramer (2006), this was the best condensation of the projects of tutelage and assimilation. ‘The program arose out of a desire for higher level Filipino civil servants and the complete absence of secular higher education in the Philippines capable of meeting American standards of

expertise' (Kramer, 2006, p. 204). According to Mario Orosa, whose father was a *pensionado*, 'The recipients, drawn from all the provinces and numbering a little more than two hundred, went on to become the cream of Philippine civil service, academic, professional and entrepreneurial ranks.... All [of them] returned to the Philippines to serve their country and serve her well' (Orosa, 2007, p. 1).

I have to say that, having myself been a Ford Foundation International Fellow, I can trace back my lineage to the *pensionados* of 1903, for like them my education in the West was funded by American money. It is with this thought therefore that I talk about the 'enabling' aspect of cultural imperialism, which figures prominently in the writings of Gayatri Spivak and other postcolonial writers. The postcolonial critique of colonial, even post-colonial, education is thus rendered problematic by the very circumstances of the one speaking, for the critic is herself the product of what is being critiqued. She finds herself stuck in the postcolonial predicament of thinking outside of while thinking in and with Western frames, unable to escape its epistemological net, hopelessly entangled in it. Spivak explains this best as *a response to a command*. The intellectuals from the non-West did not or do not have a choice. '[O]ur turn towards the West—the so-called non-West's turn towards the West is a *command*'. This is 'the violence' wrought on the non-West, who could now be accused as being 'too Western' or whose 'desire to turn toward what is not the West...could very easily be transformed into just wanting to be the "true native"' (Spivak, 1990, p. 8, emphasis in original). But then this same response, this entanglement is 'enabling'—'Without that turn we would not in fact have been able to make out a life for ourselves as intellectuals' (8).

As suggested by Bazaco, mentioned earlier, it was education by the Spanish which 'laid the foundation' for the acquisition of the 'skills of freedom' by the colonized; the 'enabling' of Filipino intellectuals was at work as far back in history as the time of Rizal and the

propagandists and the revolutionary Katipuneros whom they influenced. The Americans' *pensionado* program and the work of the Thomasites were more direct, more overt in the construction of the good colonial through education, but also certainly more couched in the sweet rhetoric of the colonial state. While there has been much caustic anti-colonial criticism, therefore, the early American teachers are now mostly remembered only with fondness as the 'bearers of benevolence' (Racelis and Ick, 2001) and the *pensionados* hailed as heroes in the early efforts of nation-building. One of the *pensionados*, Bienvenido N. Santos, became a national artist for literature and taught and served as president of Legazpi College which later became the Aquinas University of Legazpi, the institution I represent in this conference.

The 'master stroke' in the use of education for the colonizing process was, according to Renato Constantino, 'the decision to use English as the medium of instruction'. The use of the foreign language introduced Filipinos to another world virtually experienced through the books they read, the subjects taken up in the schools that were all taught in the foreign tongue. 'English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen (sic)... This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their miseducation, for they learned no longer as Filipinos but as colonials' (R. Constantino, p. 6).

Indeed, what the Americans accomplished, according to Kramer, was a 'colonization of the future' (Kramer, p. 199), for the situation hardly changed even after the 1946 'granting' of independence. 'The national consciousness was shaped to accept economic dependency on the United States' (L. Constantino, p. 22) even as 'national development goals' mouthed by the government gave the illusion of sovereignty. The education system fed and nurtured both the dependency and the illusion of independence made possible by a thorough-going operation to accomplish such, from curriculum design to the writing of textbooks and the training of teachers,

to the policies and structures governing all aspects. In 1982 a new Education Act was passed into law, by virtue of which, according to Pedro V. Salgado, OP ( former rector of Aquinas University and fervent nationalist), Philippine education was redirected to the vocational and technical. The goal was '[to provide] ready skilled manpower for the factories of the foreign multinational corporations' in the country. For Fr. Salgado, what was worse was that the new curriculum implemented 'downgraded the teaching of history and social sciences which, as educators know, are very important vehicles in instilling the nationalist ideals in our youth' (Salgado, 2002).

Estioko writes what is now commonly accepted as true: that education either liberates or subjugates (Estioko, p. 175). Unfortunately in the case of my country, it is more the latter than the former. Liberal arts education especially as we have known it in the Philippines was designed after the American model, with reading lists and textbooks dominated by the American canon, activities mimicking American ones, values extolling the American way of life and ethics, etc. Small wonder then that many 'educated' Filipinos have grown used to decrying their own culture, their own sense of time and space and relationships. It is only our deep wells of humor and faith and optimism that perhaps have saved us from self-annihilation. Today, Philippine society has become so normalized to the idea of a "universal" /American/globally dictated liberal education that even the critically-minded hardly ever see anything problematic about it and the greater mass of *consumers* and *clients* of education even see it as good and desirable, what they need to get ahead in the rat race for jobs, career, the good life in the neo-liberal capitalist world. And perhaps indeed it is a moot point in this late post-colonial day. The world is now a global place more than ever before and even the critics of globalization in the post-colonies have learned to comfortably negotiate the "double bind" of an "enabling" cultural imperialism.

**But, wait, things are not so simple.** Judy Ick confesses that she was forced to rethink the ‘dogma of our “mis-education” by American colonialism’ on her encounter of the writings of the Thomasites while doing research for the book *Bearer of Benevolence*. She saw that the writings were fraught with contradictions and ‘it was futile to take sides’ (Ick, 2001, p. 265). She talks about the dynamics of colonial cultural production as fraught by this same contradictoriness, by the ‘tension between strangeness and sameness’ (267). From the journal entry of Anna Donaldson, she takes the account about one of Anna’s pupils as what ‘may very well be a metaphor for colonial education’.

...Anna Donaldson still could not forget a little girl from Nueva Caceres:

...she was only a yard high, but she used to declaim the following in a singsong manner with explosions at the ends of the lines:

“I lub the name of Washington;  
I lub my country too;  
I lub the flag, de dear old flag,  
Ob red and white and blue”

I guess this student stood out because she managed to, as they say in the theater, make the lines her own. While Donaldson must have been teaching this rhyme as part of the prescribed school curriculum—it appears in Baldwin’s *Primer*—the girl’s “original” rendition of the rhyme turns it into something else. Strangely it is the same yet not the same as the words on the page (Ick, pp. 266-267).

Ick goes on to say that while the objective of colonial education was to produce sameness, what the Thomasites encountered in the barrios, as in the performance of this student, was ‘an almost overwhelming strangeness’ (267). Indeed, as she further remarks, ‘the colonial process is far from a one-way street’. Ick’s musings takes two directions: on the one hand, the Thomasite is revealed as being, after all, just human; on the other hand, it points up the complexity and opaqueness of the Filipino girl’s performance, which cannot be explained away as mere submission.

Writing about the ‘strangeness of Jose Rizal’, Rafael comments that the classroom is ‘one place to see the emergence of the foreign and its domestication’ (Rafael, 2006, p.45). Compelled to use the foreign language of the foreign teacher, the student might say things without understanding them and by doing so ‘fend off’ the teacher’s oppressive attention, and ‘return the foreign to where it came from’. The language seems to ‘merely [pass] through one’s body’ but ‘in speaking it [the student becomes a medium] for the reproduction of its foreignness’ (46) and its circulation and availability ‘for all kinds of use and misuse’ (65).

Ick’s view finds support in many postcolonial texts. In the words of Gilbert and Tompkins in *Postcolonial Drama*, rephrasing Bhabha (1984), ‘the colonised is never always impotent; the coloniser is never always powerful’ (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996, p. 6). Mimicry is ‘camouflage’, says Bhabha (1994, pp. 85-92)—‘exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare.’ It can become ‘mockery’ of whatever is imitated; it is ‘at once resemblance and menace’ and is, at best, ‘ambiguous’, suggesting that the domination of the colonial authority can be total, but ‘not quite’. Filipino scholars Ileteo (1979), Rafael (1993, 2006), and Mojares (2008) have written about this process as subversive translation. ‘For what can be seen as assimilation may actually have been an active containment through translation of the foreign into native terms, thus an act of taming or domestication’ (Llana, 2009, p. 28).

Of course, this also explains why there is, at all, a postcolonial critic and how precisely complex what others have called the development of postcolonial subjectivity. It is never straightforward or solid. There are always cracks and crevices where new or other experiences, ideas, hopes and passions might germinate and thrive and eventually burst it apart. But, also, what further complicates postcolonial encounters—including that of Judy Ick meeting the Thomasites up close through their journals and the testimonies of their students—is precisely the

close encounter, the local and specific act of meeting, of human lives touching. And in seeing this, we realize there is hope.

Martha Nussbaum talks about the necessity of ‘cultivating humanity’—of nurturing the ‘compassionate’ and ‘narrative’ imagination by means of which students of the liberal arts are able to imagine the suffering other because the focus is on this other, the movement is outwards, away from the local.

Through stories and dramas, history, film, and the study of the global economic system, they should get the habit of decoding the suffering of another, and this decoding should deliberately lead them into lives both near and far.... We need to understand the suffering of distant people, if we are to produce a world that is at least a little better than the one we currently know.... But we always risk error when we imagine the predicament of a distant person.

Americans especially often link up to the rest of the world through a very thin set of connections: in particular, as consumers and people involved in business, we connect to the rest of the world above all through the global market, that sees human lives as instruments for gain. If institutions of higher education do not build a richer network of human connections it is likely that our dealings with one another will be mediated by the impoverished norms of market exchange and profit-making (Nussbaum, 2002).

I’d like to reinterpret ‘local’ in Nussbaum’s text by saying that it is precisely the need for ‘local’ encounters that students need, whether in North America or in the world or worlds of the suffering others. It is in the local encounters that we see faces, we know names, we connect with actual, living, individual humans, not just ‘the human’ in its generality. It is complicated, and the risk of error does not disappear at close encounters, and the act of imagining takes on wholly different modes. I do not know how this can translate in the curriculum of American universities, but in ours at Aquinas University in the Philippines, we have a fairly good idea. In the Philippines what we need is the opposite movement, not away from but towards the *local*. The objective is not to essentialize or totalize it, or to make a myth of it. It is, rather, to draw the local into the always processual and messy act of what Nussbaum and other liberal arts scholars call

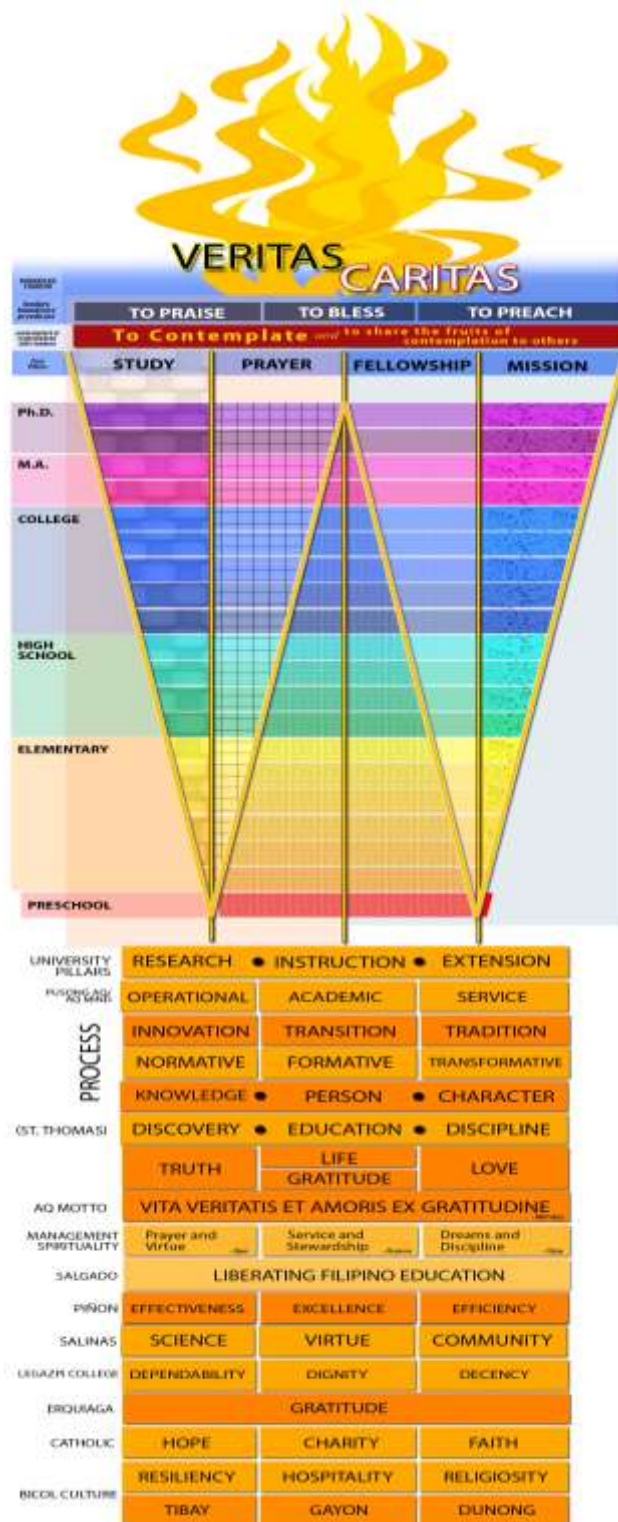
(from Socrates) self-examination, to think of it as act, as process, as performance—as co-performance of self and other, and therefore always fluid, changing, can be changed. The local is the site of agency. It is also always the only possible site of actual human community—where selves encounter others, where selves are simultaneously others, says Petra Koppers, in a reading of Jean-Luc Nancy’s politics of community (Koppers, 2007).

And so at Aquinas University we are striving to craft a liberal arts program that has at its core the local culture operating in dynamic interaction with the institution’s Dominican orientation and mission—still Western, but not quite anymore, because it has been made new by our claiming of it and transforming it as Filipinos, as Dominican Catholics living in the Philippines, our local site. It is this local site, specifically the Bicol Region and Albay Province, that inspired the founder, Don Buenaventura de Erquiaga, a Spanish businessman, to establish the school in 1948 as a gesture of gratitude to the people and place that built him up. When ownership passed to the Dominicans, the first rector, Fr. Ramon Salinas, OP, declared Aquinas in 1969 as a ‘community university’ committed to serve the immediate locality of Albay Province and Legazpi City: ‘We have an immediate and direct stake in our own community and we shall not neglect this responsibility’ (Salinas, 2002, p. 5). Now, forty years later, under the present rector Ramonclaro Mendez, OP, Aquinas professes to pursue a program of ‘education beyond margins’, poignantly aware of the institution’s commitment and responsibility to be a ‘community university’ in the context of graver social and economic conditions that block the poor majority from accessing its very own programs.

Figure 1. Aquinas University’s philosophy of education has the local notions of *tibay* (strength), *gayon* (beauty), and *dunong* (wisdom) at the core of our articulations of vision and mission from Erquiaga the founder of the school,



through the various rectors and presidents, from Salinas to Mendez; these resonate in or mesh with the university's Dominican commitment to truth, *veritas*, and to love, *caritas*.



Eight years ago we incorporated the study of the local, Bikol, language, and Bikol history and culture in the liberal arts curriculum. We also initiated and have sustained co-curricular programs such as a street theatre festival in the local language. The plays are really performances of local stories in drama form. The issues and stories on, of, or related to globalization have become part of these performed local stories. The global thus becomes local and the local, global. Fr. Ramonclaro Mendez, OP, who is supposed to be my co-presenter today, would tell you about how we are Bikolanos/Filipinos and yet Catholic and Dominican, how we are revisiting our philosophy of education and seeing that the local notions of *tibay* (strength), *gayon* (beauty), and *dunong* (wisdom) are at the core of our articulations of vision and mission from Erquiaga the founder of the school, through the various rectors and presidents, to the present, and how they resonate in or mesh with the university's Dominican commitment to truth, *veritas*, and to love, *caritas*. We have been working at infusing local content into the general education courses and even into the professional programs by integrating extension and research with instruction, so that theology is taught with real, field-sourced examples of local faith expressions and practices, engineering and business students become involved in actual community projects, education students teach in extension classes for out-of-school youths, and social science classes and philosophy majors learn why disaster preparedness programs in Albay Province cannot work unless they are grounded in the social practices and beliefs of the communities living at the foot of Mayon Volcano. A vibrant community development program forms a big part of this effort, such that the university is able to run programs in partnership with communities in key areas of engagement such as coconut coir production, abaca rehabilitation, coastal resource management, disaster risk reduction and management, access to/provision of potable water, participative governance, culture and the arts, literacy, and a few others.

The Bicol Region where the university is located remains one of the poorest regions in the Philippines and all hands are needed to help out in every way possible. Again, this is not a simple thing. The odds are great, almost insurmountable. But what is most important is that the heart should be in the right place, right where it is—desiring, hoping, praying, acting with a militant persistence. Inspired by the philosopher Alain Badiou, I call this the fidelity of hope, the transformation of victims into subjects, the seizing of truths. Surely this is what the liberal arts in the post-colony should be about, in order to make possible, at last, the untangling of the post-colonial Gordian knot.

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