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Agnes Brazal

Eleanor Dioniso

Kathleen Nadeau

*California State University, San Bernardino.*, knadeau@csusb.edu

Emma Porio

Mary Racelis

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# Rapprochements Between Theology and the Social Sciences: A Round Table Discussion on Women and the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>

AGNES BRAZAL, ELEANOR DIONISIO  
KATHLEEN NADEAU, EMMA PORIO, MARY RACELIS  
PANELISTS

PATRICIA LAMBINO, RACHEL SANCHEZ  
DISCUSSANTS

LUIS DAVID, S.J., JOJO FUNG, S.J., FERNANDO ZIALCITA  
PARTICIPANTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

JEAN TAN  
MODERATOR

*This event was convened by Budhi in order to pursue more thoroughly and with greater depth some points of discussion that were raised in the Symposium on the Filipino Family: Catholic and Women's Perspectives,<sup>2</sup> which was organized by the Department of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University (AdMU), and held on September 13, 2014.*

*Prior to the round table discussion (RTD), the panelists were given an outline of questions, which were prepared by Dr. Patricia Lambino, Mr.*

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<sup>1</sup> Round table discussion held in Faber Hall, Ateneo de Manila University, in January 26, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Held in Leong Hall, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, September 13, 2014.

*Michael Liberatore, Ms. Rachel Sanchez, members of the Theology Faculty of the Loyola Schools, AdMU, and Dr. Jean Tan, editor of Budhi.*

*Four of the five panelists, Dr. Agnes Brazal, Ms. Eleanor Dionisio, Dr. Emma Porio, and Dr. Mary Racelis, were the speakers in the September Symposium. Dr. Kathleen Nadeau, who was visiting the Philippines at the time of the RTD, graciously accepted Dr. Porio's invitation to join the RTD. Ms. Sanchez, who was the key organizer of the Symposium, and Dr. Lambino joined the RTD as discussants and resource persons. Fr. Luis David, S.J., Fr. Jojo Fung, S.J., and Dr. Fernando Zialcita were members of the audience. Dr. Tan served as the moderator of the discussion.*

## **Editor's Introduction**

Academic writing and publishing, the whole apparatus of *knowledge production*, as we fashionably call it these days—public presentations in symposia and conferences and extensive mechanisms of peer review and monitoring of citations, notwithstanding—is still to a great extent, and possibly in proportion to the increase and intensification of specialization in all fields, a solitary affair. Individual academics—thinkers, researchers, policy analysts, teachers—wonder about the real reach of their thoughts beyond the borders of their highly specialized pursuits.

Meanwhile, it is widely recognized that complexity and multidimensionality are hallmarks of the growth of knowledge and of creative responses to problems facing us in the world. These entail conversations—collaborative as well as mutually contesting—across different fields of expertise and experience and the increasing participation of voices previously relegated to the silent margins.

Coming together, especially for women, is a potent political act. Speaking of their own experiences, frustrations, and desires,

elaborating analyses of situations and phenomena from their own critical perspectives, voicing out their questions, professing their commitments, women speak for themselves as well as on behalf of others—of other women not present and of other marginalized *others*.

The participants in this RTD came as scholars, teachers, intellectuals, policy analysts, or researchers; they came as sociologists, anthropologists, or theologians; they came as Filipinos immersed in their culture and local concerns and engaged with global concerns, and at the same time addressing a Catholic tradition that transcends and traverses their specific historical contexts, or as a visitor reflecting on Philippine realities from her own particular perspective. But they all came as women and as Catholics—*as Catholic believers with a feminist consciousness*. Which is to say that the critical dialogue was played out in a double field: the points of tension were simultaneously interpersonal and interior. For this reason, the discussion that transpired was genuine and vital.

The exchange, which was mainly focused on possible frameworks, parameters, and limitations of dialogues between theology and the social sciences on the questions of women and gender, gave rise to surprising insights and unexpected questions: (1) the potential of liberation theology to serve as a basis for a dialogue between theology and the social sciences, (2) the centrality of pastoral work—in which women are actively, though for the most part silently, engaged—as a locus not only for the renewal of the Church in general, but of theological renewal particularly on the question of gender inequality, and (3) the role of a Catholic university (and in particular, a Jesuit Catholic university) in mediating the dialogue between the Church and the world.

The transcript that you find here was edited primarily for ease of reading. Although the digressions, repetitions, stammerings, and

even inarticulate gestures, did not distract our attention or detract from their meanings at the moment of enunciation, these may trip us up in our reading. (This could very well be an occasion to reflect upon the politics of transcription and the possible political and theoretical relevance of the gap between the spoken and the written word—but that’s a philosophical task for another day.) In a few cases, some passages were condensed or streamlined to make for a more coherent thematic flow, and slight amendments to the original transcript were made by the participants in the order of clarification. But save for these minor alterations, in editing the transcript, I sought to maintain the tone of the live conversation in all its spontaneity and waywardness, manifesting the willingness of its participants to explore possibilities, raise questions, and offer suggestions for future interlocutors to take up. It is my hope that through the transcription and publication of this RTD, the encounter of mind with passionate mind that we have recorded here will find a second life in those who will carry on the praxis of transformative conversations.

### **On the Possibility and Limits of Dialogue**

**Jean Tan:** The general question is this: Do you think it is possible to have a dialogue between theology and sociology or anthropology? Or, alternatively, is a dialogue between the Church hierarchy—that is to say, the Philippine Church—and social scientists possible? These are in fact two distinct questions—theologians may well be willing to dialogue with the social sciences, but what about the Church hierarchy or the Magisterium? In any case, what would the terms of such a dialogue be?

How would such a dialogue between the Catholic Church or Catholic theologians and the social sciences be possible and what are its limits?

**Agnes Brazal:** When I was thinking about that question, I thought it is important to start with the Church teachings that underline the need for dialogue with the other sciences. We find those teachings starting from Vatican II. Of course, the Church has been in dialogue with other sciences even before the Second Vatican Council, but the more dynamic interaction between theology and the other sciences has become more prominent from Vatican II onwards.

*Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 44 and 62 are key texts. For instance, GS 62 says, “Sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles but also of the findings of the secular sciences especially of psychology and sociology.”

The Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA) by Paul VI also affirms, “These sciences are a condition at once indispensable and inadequate for a better discovery of what is human” (OA 40). However there was a shift in tone starting from the papacy of John Paul II to Benedict XVI. Although John Paul II recognizes the need to dialogue, he cautions, “The human science and philosophy are helpful for interpreting man’s central place within society and for enabling him to understand himself better and a social being. However, man’s true identity is only revealed to him through faith” (*Centesimus Annus* [CA] 54). And with a hint of triumphalism, he asserts, “From the Christian vision of the human person there necessarily follows a correct picture of society” (CA 13).

But with Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), it seems we are going back to the more dynamic interaction between theology and the social sciences. In EG 132, he emphasizes the need to dialogue with other sciences to render faith more intelligible to professionals, scientists, and academicians. “Proclaiming the Gospel message to different cultures also involves proclaiming it to professional, scientific and academic circles. This means an encounter between

faith, reason and the sciences with a view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility, a creative apologetics which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all.”

In EG 133, Francis cites the importance of this dialogue in bringing the Gospel message to different cultural context and groups. “A theology—and not simply a pastoral theology—which is in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups.” Furthermore, in EG 134, he emphasizes that “Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way.”

In terms of method, it is liberation theology that has developed the dialogue with sociology, whereas previously, theology’s main conversation partner was philosophy. And so the see-discern-act method, which was endorsed by John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*, but which was developed more fully in liberation theology, is very relevant to the question at hand, because the “see” part provides the framework for the analysis of the social situation in dialogue with the sciences, initially with sociology, but later expanding to anthropology, psychology, et cetera.

If you are doing theology, you don’t stop at this stage because that’s just doing sociology. After the analysis of the situation, you have to move to the “discern” part, in which you analyze the situation in the light of the Scripture and Tradition. This, however, is not a one-way interaction. It’s not just about what can we learn from the Tradition. The situation can also challenge the Tradition. So the current situation can help us re-read the Scriptures, re-read the Church doctrines and even revise them. The history of the

development of Church doctrines attests to such changes that have happened.

Finally, the “act” part of this three-fold method consists in determining what we do after this process of discernment.

**Jean:** Can you give an example of instances where Church doctrine has been altered by its engagement with the social sciences?

**Agnes:** The example that comes to mind is the attitude towards socialism in the Church. Before Vatican II, the Church was very critical of socialism. But because of greater sociological understanding of what is good about socialism, particularly collective ownership, we find, for instance, that in *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII recognized that the socialization of certain industries is important. Contrast that to *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA), where it is said that “No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist” (QA 120).

**Eleanor Dionisio:** You were asking about concrete examples. I wish to add to what Agnes said about theology of liberation. Ivan Vallier, a sociologist who died in the early 1970s, had a theory of change within the Church, which addressed precisely this—the interaction between the interest of the Catholic Church in sociology and the changing of Catholic perspectives. He did not deal with the changes in Catholic theology, but certainly, the theology of liberation comes out of that period that he talks about. He talks about the Church moving from a defensive period, a preoccupation with protecting itself from secular society, to a preoccupation with secular society itself, and then engaging secular society in a way that transforms the Church. He calls this the social servant stage.

Part of this social servant stage consists in the interest in the social sciences. The social sciences are used by the Church to understand what’s going on in the secular world, sometimes with an



antagonistic perspective, because basically, the social servant stage came out of the need to combat socialism and communism and their influence on the working class.

Despite this initial defensive orientation, however, out of this confrontation with secular society eventually emerged the theology of liberation, because people engaging with the poor, engaging with socialism and communism—the ideas—and with socialists and communists—the people—this humanizes socialism and communism, giving those -isms a human face, making us see the faces of the poor.

So I think that theology of liberation is an example of how the Church's engagement in social action transforms it and makes its impact on theology. Thus, although the theology of liberation has been marginalized, you can see its influence in the social encyclicals of John Paul II, even if he was one of those who tried to silence theologians of liberation. Despite efforts to suppress it, the theology of liberation inevitably made its way into mainstream theology.

**Emma Porio:** May I add to that? I think, the question about theology of liberation and the empirical dimension of social realities was raised when Dom Hélder Câmara, the archbishop of Recife said, “When I give food to the poor, when I support the poor, they call me a saint. But when I ask why they are poor, then they call me a communist.” For me that comment basically summarizes the whole issue, the seeming conflict between the sociological, empirical underpinnings of poverty and marginalization of poor women and that of the Church. When sociologists ask for the reasons behind their suffering, the reasons why the poor are oppressed, then they go into the historical and structural bases that lead to the conditions of their oppression. You ask, “Can there be a dialogue?” I say, of course! We bring to the table our concepts, methods, and analytical perspectives in examining the phenomenon of women's

impoverished and oppressive conditions. And for us sociologists, we're always conceptually or theoretically driven and empirically anchored in our analysis of the gendered conditions of poverty and inequality.

. . . For sociologists, social reality is understood by looking at our societies and cultures and knowing that knowledge is always historically and structurally constituted over time. And our understanding of gender roles, of relationships between men and women, of the relationship of families with the Church is basically constituted in their own socio-political and economic contexts.

**Jean:** “When I help the poor, you call me a saint. When I ask why are you poor, you call me a communist.” It seems to me that this point brought up by Emma is a good way of seeing our way through my question about not just the terms but also the limits of the dialogue between the Church or theology and the social sciences. It suggests that on the side of the Church, there arises a certain resistance to dialogue the moment we view the Church from a historical and sociological perspective, the moment we subject the Church as a human institution to critique. It seems to me that for the Church, it is acceptable to talk about helping the poor, but not to ask questions that undermine the very authority of the Church by appealing to the secular presuppositions of the social sciences, which do not treat religious beliefs and practices as sacrosanct.

So what are your thoughts on this?

**Emma:** I come here as a sociologist and a researcher interested in producing knowledge that might help the women, on the ground, who everyday must confront poverty, the devastating impacts of flooding and climate change, and at the same time try to be a good Catholic mother, daughter, et cetera. So, I ask these questions not

because I want to harmonize the teachings of the Church; but to make the teachings of the Church more relevant and inspiring to poor people.

In my research, I meet women struggling with floods, being evacuated and evicted; they ask me, “What can the Church do for us? Where is the Church here?”

As a sociologist, I’m doing research on gender and climate resilience, so that perhaps the knowledge that we bring to the decision-making spaces could help create structures and processes or policies and programs that may alleviate their impoverished conditions and make their communities more livable.

And the Church and its teachings, especially Pope Francis, will inspire us in doing that.

**Kathleen Nadeau:** I reflected on what liberation theology can offer for the study of gender issues and family concerns. For both anthropology and liberation theology, the primary methods of are praxis, right? We try to go in with an open mind and we do our theory by listening. We get it from the ground by listening to people.

Reading these questions, and coming from America, where, right now, the gay rights movement is considered the Last Civil Rights Movement, it occurs to me that if you think about—well this is my imagination but I feel that it is very, very true—the Filipinos are very inclusive, welcoming of difference, and accepting of others just the way they are.

I teach gender studies in the United States. We were once watching a documentary depicting how gay men in the Philippines date straight men, and discussing how in Samoa, gay men would say, “How could I date another gay man? That would be like dating my sister! You know, it seems so strange.” And one of my students, who told me he is gay, explained that the reason gay men date gay

men in the United States is because they will be, they might get beaten up. In the United States, they can't date straight men because they're in danger.

But all that is changing, right? So I reflected on what liberation theology can offer the social scientists in terms of the study of the family and so forth. And I think that what makes liberation theology important is that it is open. It understands process—the changing process of life itself. It is not the case that some rigid, male-centric structure of the family is always fixed and will never change through time, right?

So I was trying to get a hook on this question of gender and being open to changing structures of human relatedness. How can I get through this indirectly? Do you remember Fanella Canell (who wrote about the Bicol region)? She talked about how, since ancient times in the Philippines, it's part of the culture that people always travel with a companion. I think she said that people who are about to set out are not asked where they are going but whom they are going with. She then talked about the spirit healers and the shamans—who were, of course, villainized by the Catholic Church—as some kind of travelers with the spirit. It is the spirit taking pity on the people they're with that allows the healing to occur.

I was thinking about Saint Francis. Liberation theology is coming back. The basic Christian Community Movement is very important right now with all these disaster relief programs (as well as the failed projects) because of this concept of faith: faith to do the impossible. And how can we have faith to do the impossible, if we don't feel deep down that we are brothers and sisters working together regardless of each one's gender role or sexual orientation.

That stuff doesn't matter. I think it is merely the legacy of colonialism. Perhaps the Church hierarchy isn't going to like to hear this, but it really is the legacy of colonialism to discriminate, rather than see the God-given talents of all of us, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. What is constant and what is changing? Just this morning, I was in conversation with someone about this and Professor Zialcita was sharing that love is constant. God is love. That is constant. But everything else, we're always changing.

And in order to build these communities and to be successful, we need to go into the community, to really listen and to care, and to want to be part of the poor, so that we may build together. So that we're not broken. I think that's what liberation theology has to offer the social sciences.

**Emma:** I think the point brought up by Kathleen is an important one. When you talk about sexuality, homosexuality, and gender roles in the Visayan Islands, where I come from, young men holding hands going somewhere or putting their arms over each other is a normal way of acting.

To illustrate: A gay friend of mine once came to the Philippines and when he went to the Visayas and saw men and women holding hands with the same sex, he told himself, "Wow, this is a gay and lesbian paradise! He did not realize that the practice is part of a tradition of traveling together. In fact, in the Visayas, you would say, "You have an *abian* or a guide," which can be a guardian angel or a spirit accompanying you so that you may journey safely. Holding hands or putting your arms over the shoulders of the other as you walk together is actually an expression of partnership or keeping company and "being protected" in the journey. I think what Kathleen is saying is that Christianity's colonial legacy has

intersected into our ways of relating to one another, and has somehow brought about some distorted notions of sexuality and gender relations.

## **Theology of Liberation and the Question of Gender**

**Jean:** Let me intervene where Kathleen and Emma have left off and try to crystallize two points that may engender further discussion.

One of them is about this interesting observation that we Filipinos have a cultural basis for tolerance but that this cultural basis is discordant with Church teachings. Where does this leave us? That is the first question.

The other point consists in this very interesting idea that liberation theology is an existing tradition or paradigm in theology that is open to radical changes in society.

Regarding the second point, what I would like to ask is, how useful or apt is the theology of liberation for addressing gender issues? Can liberation theology be simply applied to gender issues without losing its force or traction or are there limits to its applicability? It seems to me that when we talk about Catholic social teachings, the Church doesn't have any problems with addressing social—that is to say, economic—inequality. But that's not to say that the Church is comfortable with questions of gender inequality.

**Agnes:** I just want to affirm that in terms of social issues, the Church is more open to a plurality of perspectives. Regarding socio-political-economic questions, the Church is able to recognize a spectrum of cases which call for a variety of nuanced judgments. For instance, war can be justified under certain conditions, but abortion or artificial contraception cannot be justified by any circumstance.

This dichotomy can be traced back to Thomas Aquinas, who (in turn) inherited this whole tradition of a physicalist interpretation of natural law with regard sexual issues but an interpretation of natural law that is based on the order of reason when it comes to social issues.

**Mary Racelis:** On the question, “Is the theology of liberation where we can move from?” Yes and no. While the theology of liberation has relevance to the Philippines, remember that it came out of Latin America, whose gender issues are somewhat different from our own. I mean their experience of machismo compared to ours. So, to me, liberation theology, while important, has to be re-examined in terms of gender issues in the Philippines. I think, as Kathleen and Emma pointed out, we have our own understandings of gender.

After all, the shamans or religious functionaries of the old days were composed of women as well as men. Recall the *babaylan*. If we are incarnating our religion in the context of our culture, for heaven’s sake why don’t we focus on our heritage? If you consider indigenous peoples as representative of the way it was before Spain, why don’t we reflect our pre-colonial cultures in our present context? Look, for instance, at the fact that many indigenous groups allowed divorce for specific reasons like childlessness or adultery; grounds for divorce were limited and reinforced by community norms. Yet, none of that is recognized as part of our roots, that is, divorce having been traditionally accepted as a solution to problematic marital relations.

Moreover, in biblical times, people did not live beyond the age of 30 or 40. A similar demographic applied to the Philippines in 1900, when life expectancy at birth for Filipino women and men hovered around 25 years. It was, therefore, imperative that the couple stay together to raise their children to adulthood. Father, mother or both

would likely die not long after. Today, however, Filipino couples can anticipate a lifespan at least twice as long as their child-rearing period, given life expectancies at birth now reaching 76 for women and 70 for men.

With even the youngest child living separately by the time Filipino couples are 40 to 50 years old, the latter still have another 30 or so years ahead of them. If they can revitalize their marriage and stay together, well and good. If, however, they have been genuinely miserable most of their married life, they may well want desperately to enter the next phase of their lives separately. It makes sense to recognize the *de facto* end of a marriage, enabling the two individuals involved to look to the next 20 to 30 years with anticipation and joy. If they find another partner who can bring meaning and comfort into this second phase of their lives, good luck! These are among the sociocultural realities that did not exist in biblical times and that need to be factored into new formulations of old dictums.

Those of us working in urban poor communities especially, realize that probably more than half the population is not officially married in the first place, either at City Hall or in the Catholic Church. That is usually because of the expenses incurred for a formal wedding celebration. Yet in a *sama-sama*, or common law marriage, the notion of family solidarity remains strong even without a formal ceremony. Usually it is the woman who strives to keep the family together in the face of poverty and often despite a husband's beatings, drunken episodes, and joblessness. Similarly, male workers go to the city or overseas to sustain the family, tolerating demeaning jobs and suffering overwhelming homesickness to play their provider roles.

It is essential, therefore, that we look at the actual situations families are facing, whether it's the mother-father-child



configuration (only one of several family formations these days) or other arrangements like single-parent families, sequential families with either party remarrying and living with another partner and raising different sets of children, LGBT families, and extended family members pitching in to raise the children of absent OFW parents. If the Church is to formulate a theology of the 21st century, at least for Asia and the Philippines, the various family forms as they *actually exist* and respond to dynamic changes in the social fabric must be factored in. That is where social scientists and theologians can really converge in conceptualizing the issues and reflecting together.

I usually bet on moral theologians as prospective collaborators because that's where we overlap most in our subject interests—family, women, gender relations, sexuality, and more. We *can* come to common understandings—at least sometimes—if we interact professionally with one another around problem-sets based on the lived experience of families.

Let me add one more thought here. Coming to this kind of meeting, I identify as a social anthropologist; that is what I teach. Definitely I come as a Catholic. I'm very much a believing Catholic who is, however, often immensely frustrated with certain pronouncements of the official hierarchy—not with the Church, not with what Jesus said, but with what the Church hierarchy proclaims as true for women and family issues. All too often our leaders are simply out of touch with sociocultural reality. I think it's very important to point out that for those of us who are sociologists or anthropologists or psychologists as well as professing Catholics, discrepancies between CBCP pronouncements on women and family, and what we see and report from empirical evidence are so great that sometimes we exclaim in exasperation, “Why do we stay in a Church like that?” Then friends like Maryknoll Sister Helen

come to the fore saying, “No, no Mary you have to stay in the Church because you have a better chance of reforming it from inside.” And I see the logic of that—although I don’t think I have made much of a dent in the reform category.

But many of my colleagues, my women friends who are committed to women’s rights, especially poor women’s rights, have given up on the Church. They are Catholic but so disenchanting that they dub the Church “hopeless” as regards women and family life. So they reject the entire institution. This, I think, is why being a Catholic and also a social scientist forces you—at least me and some of us—to say, “Hey, we have a stake in this institution. We believe in what Jesus taught. Given our dual orientation, we’re going to fight for our empirically-based understandings and insights as women into what it means to be a Catholic today.” We want a theology that recognizes and gives genuine spiritual meaning to women’s real lives—their problems, their joys, and their aspirations. I think that’s why we keep struggling to help define what those meanings, drawing heavily on the women’s own voices.

Is there an intermediate way to handle our interlocking roles as Catholics and social scientists? For me, in the Church, it’s theologians who offer some hope—theologians like the ones present here—open and progressive theologians, not the conservative, hierarchical authorities!

**Emma:** I want to add to what Mary said. Coming here, I am very conscious that I am a researcher and sociologist in a Jesuit Catholic university. So these three terms (i.e., Jesuit, Catholic, university) *frame* my research, teaching, and public engagements (i.e., public sociology). We do our teaching and research in a way that differs from other academics in non-Jesuit, non-Catholic institutions, because of the very nature of our positionality—our social locations

shape our engagements, affecting the way we produce knowledge and the way we mobilize knowledge for the betterment of the poor.

**Eleanor:** Going back to the question regarding theology of liberation, I think the theology of liberation cannot provide us with the framework necessarily for looking at gender equality. But the experience of formulating the theology of liberation actually does provide a blueprint of sorts. Theology of liberation began with the engagement of the clergy and the religious and lay-people at the ground level with the poor.

And I think that Francis's emphasis on pastoral care for the family can also serve to create some transformation—probably very slowly—in terms of the Church's teaching on the family, because it's only when you engage at the ground level that the need to change theology comes to the fore.

But I also wanted to say something that addresses the rules for the dialogue and the limits of the dialogue. Mary mentioned that she has hope in the moral theologians; I believe this comes partly out of a dialogue which my institute organized between moral theologians and social scientists on the question of a sexuality education program for Catholic schools. Of course, you would immediately think, "Conflict," right?

It surprised me how open the theologians actually were to dialoguing with the social scientists. And I'm not the only person who got this sense—other people within the institute also got the same impression, and we identify ourselves as social scientists. We got the sense that actually, the social scientists were less willing to listen to the theologians than the theologians were willing to listen to the social scientists.

I think that we, as social scientists, also have our own doctrines and our own prejudices. One of our doctrines is secularism. And

one commandment that springs from that is “Thou shalt not use religious language.”

And so, in this dialogue I am referring to, when the theologians said, “A Catholic sexuality education program for Catholic schools has to be grounded in Catholic teaching,” some of the social scientists immediately reacted and said, “No.” But you know, these are Catholic schools, what do you expect?

As social scientists, we bring into indigenous communities a respect for their values and their traditions even though we may not necessarily agree with their traditions about gender, for instance. I think that if, for instance, someone were to design a sexuality education program for indigenous communities, social scientists would say, “Well, you have to begin with the values of that community.” Well, why can’t we begin with the values of Catholicism as a starting point for sexuality education in Catholic schools?

I think that the important thing is to be willing to interrogate that tradition, their teachings, those values, and the theologians that we were in that meeting with were actually willing to do that.

They said that “Sexuality should be discussed in a scientific way,” which meant that it should be grounded in empirical data. Sociologists completely agree with that. They also said that “Even though it’s grounded in Catholic teaching, Catholic sexuality education should take an interfaith and an intercultural approach.” So it should be illuminated by the perspectives of other people on sexuality and not just by the Catholic perspective.

Now, another contentious issue was that the theologians said, “Well, sexuality and education have to take on board the effects of original sin.” So, of course, this triggered another vigorous reaction. The word “sin” definitely raises the hackles of social scientists. But the theologians were able to explain original sin as a concept that the

social scientists could agree with, even if not all of us might agree with theologians about the origins of original sin.

What original sin means, they explained, is the tendency of human beings to do things that harm themselves or other human beings in society. Now, social scientists are the first to believe that people are capable of such behavior. We're trained to spot such behaviors and expose them. We're trained to be cynics, to question altruism, and to ferret out self-interest, unsavory motivations, and the functions and dysfunction behind all individual and collective human action. So why should sexuality in a Catholic sexuality education program be exempt from such scrutiny? So the point is that theological language is translatable. It's translatable up to a point into secular language and even into the language of social scientists. And here I come to the question, what are the rules for engaging in dialogue?

One of the conditions of dialogue is translation. So Catholic theologians must be able to translate what they're saying into language that social scientists can understand. But alternatively, social scientists must also be able to translate their language into language that Catholics and people of other religions can understand. So the effort to translate must be mutual.

Our dialogue with the theologians revealed some of the prejudices that we have as social scientists. For instance, we think that theologians of any religion will stick immovably to doctrine. But the best theologians are actually masters at interpreting Church teaching in the light of empirical reality, in the light of present reality, which sometimes gets them into big trouble with the Church hierarchy. So the Church hierarchy is a different matter. But speaking of theologians, the best theological training allows theologians to look at the social and historical context in which a teaching was formulated, and thus to interrogate it more thoroughly

than any social scientist can. In other words, the best theologians are the ones who are able to look at theology with something of a sociological eye, and those theologians are our allies, not our enemies.

I also wanted say something about the limits constraining dialogue. I already spoke of how the theology of liberation, or even Catholic social teaching, evolved out of engagement with the poor. I think that something can happen if priests and the hierarchy engaged more completely with the pastoral care of the families. So I think that Francis's emphasis on this is dead on.

We have been collecting the responses of the bishops to the Vatican questionnaire on the family that was sent to them in preparation for the Third Extraordinary Synod on the Family. Many of the bishops actually admit that . . . they don't have pastoral programs for people who are separated. They especially don't have pastoral programs for homosexuals. These are possible entry points for Church engagement with pastoral care for families. I think that working on these issues would actually help to give homosexuality and separated people a human face and help the Church to deal and engage with them in a way that is compassionate and more consistent with the teaching of Christ than it is right now.

**Mary:** Since many of us will be focusing on pastoral engagement, that is where we can find common ground. That is where we can discover, for example, how many and who among Church authorities actually spend time in urban slums, listening and ministering to poor people. In reality, it is women who by their presence become the face of the Church of the poor—the nuns, the mostly female parish pastoral workers, and even the *manangs*, elderly women who steadfastly teach catechism to children and fix the altar for the priest's once a month mass. These are Jesus's 21st-century

disciples nurturing the spiritual lives of the community and bringing comfort to other women struggling to be better mothers, wives, family members, and community leaders. How many of our male bishops and priests spend real time immersed in those communities? And to explain this shortcoming by referring to the shortage of priests simply highlights the Church's short-sighted insistence on an all-male, celibate priesthood whose numbers are dwindling. Obvious solutions to increasing the number of priests by ordaining women and bringing in married priests.

So, if our official Church expects to become more pastoral, then Pope Francis's injunction that women have to be present at higher levels of decision making in the Church must be taken seriously. That is not only because they bring in new perspectives through their own insights, as he has said, but because in reality, it's the women who are most committed to and manage with great efficiency and honesty the deep social concerns of this country. That is a reality our Church still refuses to acknowledge as essential to its own reform and future mission. Let's face it: when it comes to pastoral concerns and confronting broader social issues, unless women play leadership roles, it's not going to happen! Men—and so few of them—cannot do it alone!

Recently I had a conversation with a good friend of mine, American anthropologist and Anglican priest Stuart Schlegel long based in Mindanao. (Some of you may know his book, *Tiruray Justice*, and the more recent, *Wisdom from a Rainforest: The Spiritual Journey of an Anthropologist*.) Reacting to an article I had written last year on women and the Church, he commented, "How I wish your Church would listen to some of us in the Anglican Church. We fought the women's ordination battle for years!" Here are his reflections from having been a parish priest in California after his return anthropological work in the Philippines and Indonesia.

When the arguments about the ordination of women in the Anglican Church surfaced, he was already predisposed to the idea. Thus, when the position of assistant pastor in his parish became vacant, he considered women candidates. Since it was a controversial issue, there was much consultation and discussion with his parishioners. With the support of his lay leaders, he ultimately chose a highly qualified woman priest to fill that position. He worried about the resulting split in his congregation, not least because those who left in anger were among his larger donors. Nonetheless, he persisted not only on the principle of equality but because selected priest Ruth was in his view the best choice.

He then said to me, “I wish your Church could see what a transformation took place in our parish after she joined. I was better at some things and she at others. She was much more open to others and people came to her because she was more used to listening and relating to their concerns than I was. Although I considered myself open to others, too, and fairly good at listening to them, I learned so much from Ruth and doubtless improved in openness and patience from her example. It was a wonderful combination. If only your Church knew how much it is losing in promoting Christ’s message by leaving out half the world’s population!”

**Agnes:** Actually that’s the paradox in the Church’s theological anthropology because, particularly for John Paul II, he sees women as having those feminine values, meaning the capacity for particular attention to persons. There are researches on infants which show that females indeed are more sensitive and attentive to the emotion of others. But the Church uses this possession of “feminine values” (such as empathy) to keep women to their role as mothers but not to promote them as potentially compassionate official Church



leaders. So what do we end up with? A male-led Church that is at times not sensitive to what people feel!

**Emma:** In terms of gender relations in the Philippines, actually if you go to the communities, women are doing so many things—not just tasks to maintain the home or family (i.e., social reproduction), but also perform productive and community roles. In my research on climate change in the river lines of Metro Manila, the women were telling us that while we academics speak of the “double burden” of women, the burdens of women in urban poor communities are in fact multiple: They take care of the family, the children, their husbands; then, they also volunteer as health workers, participate in the local government’s solid waste management, participate in the livelihood programs of the church, et cetera.

So in addition to the household and family roles, they also take on economic and community roles. When we ask them, why the added burden when they’re already burdened? Where are the men? They will tell you that men are only good at fixing their houses right after the floods, whereas women’s work continues long after the floods—washing, cleaning the mud from their houses, taking care of sick children, looking for food or money, etcetera. So in supporting women, to amplify what Mary said, not only must there be a recognition of women’s economic and community roles, but that recognition should also lead to women assuming decision-making and leadership roles, leadership roles in the family, community, and public institutions (e.g., political, economic, religious). This might lead to changes in policies and programs in society (especially in government and the Church) that may support women’s claim to resources and improve their political position.

Women do so many things, but in terms of decision-making, they are less present.

## Complementarity Between the Sexes?

**Rachel Sanchez:** I can see two concerns within the Church. I don't know if these are the proper labels, but perhaps one is *structural* and then the other one is more *anthropological*. By “structural” I am referring to the idea, which we seem to agree about, that women can benefit from more fairness in terms of roles and responsibilities within the structure of the Church. But at the same time, another theme emerging from our discussion is that of complementarity. It seems that we have certain beliefs about the qualities of women and I'd like to know if we view women the same way. Many Church teachings really emphasize complementarity, and we can make changes in the structures of women's participation in the Church based on that belief, but we can also try to question that anthropological perspective.

I'd like to know what the social scientists would say about it and how theologians see it.

**Jean:** To focus our discussion on this anthropological presupposition about the complementarity of the sexes that Rachel has raised, allow me to read a specific section of *Mulieris Dignitatem* (MD 29) that specifically talks about this notion of complementarity:

Unless we refer to this order and primacy we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women's dignity and vocation. When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all

persons—men and women. In this broad and diversified context, a *woman represents a particular value by the fact that she is a human person*, and, at the same time, this particular person, *by the fact of her femininity*. This concerns each and every woman, independently of the cultural context in which she lives, and independently of her spiritual, psychological and physical characteristics, as for example, age, education, health, work, and whether she is married or single.<sup>3</sup>

As I understand this, the claims being made here are that there is some ontological meaning to being a woman and to being a man, that this ontologically grounded difference comes down to this rather vague notion of her femininity, and that femininity is defined in terms of a capacity to receive. Notwithstanding the view that all persons, whether male or female, have both masculine and feminine aspects—a view which, I believe, is also propounded by the Church—a woman *as female* is still identified with receptivity and a man *as male* with activity.

So that's one passage where we can see this concept of complementarity at work. Are there other passages from church teachings that are relevant to this question of complementarity?

**Agnes:** Also from *Mulieris Dignitatem*. John Paul II asserts that “the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words ‘He shall rule over you’ (*Gen 3:16*) must not under any condition lead to the ‘masculinization’ of women” lest they “*lose what constitutes their essential richness*” (MD 10).

<sup>3</sup> Available online, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html).

In *Love and Responsibility*, a book that was written by Karol Wojtyła, before he became pope, it's more of the experience of puberty, menstruation, menopause that predisposes the woman to be open to new life and that leads to the attention to persons.

**Jean:** So the woman is defined by maternity.

**Agnes:** Yes, but motherhood can be physical or spiritual; the bodily aspect is essential to her identity.

**Jean:** So what do you think of that?

**Kathleen:** By the Church teaching, it is the man who gives love and the woman who receives love, right? So this puts a woman beneath the man, rather than each, equally, giving and receiving love. This archaic, old way of thinking creates gender inequality. It also closes the gates on women by not allowing them to take a leadership role.

Equity, gender equity. At the deepest root, don't we all, male and female, really want gender equity? I'm not saying we're all the same. Each of us is different and we know that. But I'm saying, at deep root, when we respect and care about each other's dignity and love each other as equals, isn't that equity?

And so it's not just gay equity, it's also women's equity, it's also empowering men. I think men can be feminists too, right? So it's equity that we are really going after. I mean this concept of the man giving love and the woman receiving . . . I'm not even married but, I'm thinking, "Oh my god, this is so cut-offish of women's voices." Do you know what I mean?

**Mary:** Complementarity? The way I would interpret that is, yes, there is something about being a woman and about being a man that makes them different. But complementarity is not "he's like *this* and she is like *that*." In reality, they share and overlap along this whole

range of what is male, what is female—femininity, masculinity. Anthropological studies have shown that various cultures identify different constellations of characteristics and tasks as marking femininity and masculinity, or that men and women share many elements although with differing emphases. Gender is after all socially constructed.

As things stand, certain behaviors have been prescribed for women because they are the ones who have the babies. Society has evolved around that. But social change—in culture, in the environment, in economic circumstances, in technological development, in migration patterns and more—all of these are triggering transformations in the standard conceptions of femininity and masculinity. You're seeing more of a mix and overlapping among categories. Men are learning to take care of babies, while their wife is carrying out her job as a civil engineer or police officer or bank executive or market vendor or restaurant manager.

Whether those changes are a bad thing or a good thing can't be determined from the outside until you begin to explore the issues on the ground and understand how the affected persons view the situation. If you're a social scientist studying the actual patterns of behavior of men and women, you will see that there is a lot of overlap. And that's only at one point in time; over extended periods, the overlaps and separations are going to shift constantly as men and women in particular societies adjust to life's changing realities. So to imply that complementarity means separate, distinct categories of male and female that cannot overlap—it's just not true.

**Emma:** In sociology, when you talk about complementarity, it's always associated with the structural or functionalist perspective that seems to assume that the division of labor between husband and wife (or between males and females) share relatively equal power in their respective domains. But those from the social constructivist

perspective and/or post-modernist school will tell you that power relations and social hierarchies are always implicated in these divisions of labor and structures of gender relations in that particular society or culture.

So complementarity can actually be challenged because there are hierarchies within families and across families. Therefore, complementarity can only proceed if there is equity between men and women, but it is quite limited because it does not recognize the hierarchy and power relations involved between the two genders.

### **On the Role of the University in Mediating Religion and Social Realities**

**Luis David, S.J.:** I'd like to say something about the discipline of theology within the university.

The Ateneo is a Catholic institution. It has, understandably, as one of its mandates the presentation of assessments by the Catholic Church of culture and social issues in a way that may be highly nuanced but ultimately policed. As a Catholic school it has to at least inform its students about positions of the Catholic Church.

But then, the Ateneo is also a university. Most universities, whether Catholic-affiliated or not, have religious studies departments. They don't call them theology departments but departments of religious studies—in other words, academic departments that make assessments from the standpoint of a more diffuse understanding and experience of spirituality in relation to culture and social realities.

Now that's where I think some thought could perhaps be given. Could we not have a more polymorphous theology department, where you can have Catholic theologians working in the mode of a very highly nuanced but ultimately policed discipline, due to the nature of their foci—for instance, the interpretation of Sacred

Scripture—but then working alongside them are practitioners of the scientific study of religions? Such scholars need not even be Catholic; they could be Buddhist or Muslim. I don't know if the department of theology considers it to be its mandate to become that diverse, but I would really like to see the day when the Ateneo really understands itself, while being truly a *Catholic* university, also to be truly a *university*. So that the president does not have to go constantly apologizing to the bishops, reassuring them that we are a Catholic university, when a number of the faculty, for instance, write public letters in support of the Reproductive Health Bill. He would not have to do that, because all he would have to say is, "I'm sorry, but while the Ateneo is a Catholic university, it's also a university." We have to live those kinds of tensions I think.

**Agnes:** I think it's a limitation if you are teaching mostly undergraduate students, because many of them may still need basic catechesis first. I teach in a theological school and I tell my graduate students, "We are not teaching catechesis here. Theology is critical reflection of the faith, so don't expect that we will just discuss and I would just disseminate what the Church teaches."

**Patricia Lambino:** We actually do have a master's program and the people we address there are religion teachers. So our audience is not primarily composed of scholars pushing academic frontiers but communicators of the faith and formators of the young, mostly. Perhaps the idea of the different publics of theology will help address the issue raised by Fr. David. I think there is academic theology that addresses scholars, fellow scholars, and there is theology that is done on the pastoral level and the popular level.

My feeling is that college theology is a hybrid of sort, so we do need to traverse those lines distinguishing academic, pastoral, and "popular" theology in order to do what we do at the college level.

And this might also speak to the earlier conversation on the limits of dialogue. I was very much intrigued by Eleanor's reference to the "translatable ideas in theology to sociology and vice versa." That might be the sticking point or the snag. Maybe what is untranslatable is the role and place of scripture in theology that no other discipline has to contend with. I don't think you have a *Norma Normans Non Normata* or a Magisterium whose particular role is to set parameters for acceptable dialogue.

Now, that is not the stay that I will just sit happily limited by those parameters set by the Magisterium. I believe that these boundaries are somewhat fluid and that the interpretation of our norms develops as well.

**Jojo Fung, S.J.:** I want to speak as an outsider coming from Malaysia. I find this so refreshing and stimulating because, although I read about discourses on gender, this is very actual. This is where I hear you, you're speaking together—I find that tremendously stimulating and energizing. I don't find that space in Malaysia, for instance. If I do find a space, I think it's the interdisciplinary discussions among more open Muslim and Buddhist and Hindu intellectuals.

I like what Luis David said. Is it possible for theology to become a bit more interreligious as well? Because we want to bring on board the pluralism in Asia in terms of theological thinking in dialogue with the other religions. I think our conversation would be greatly enriched.

I also like the idea that we—from different disciplines—can continue to challenge each other's presuppositions. All presumptions have to be unpacked and exposed. For instance, what do you mean by complementarity? I like the way you expose that. What are we presupposing here? Is it ethnocentrically



grounded? Western? Or is it really grounded in terms of our people's philosophical, etymological, and cultural presuppositions? I think that is where the social sciences can tremendously assist us.

And Eleanor, you're very humble to admit to our own blind spots. Speaking for myself, I find the findings in social sciences tremendously helpful for continuing the intercultural dialogue and the internal dialogue within myself. If not for anthropology, I think I would be stepping on a lot of landmines. I would have blown myself up not knowing that social phenomena have different nuances and meanings that are differentiated and yet similar.

So I myself appreciate the contributions of the social sciences. So if, I were to do theological reflection, I find the interdisciplinary discussions important. As a Jesuit, my own guideline is that we need the Magisterial teachings. We need to consult them as a source. Yes, we need Tradition and Scripture, but I also think we need discernment. I think it is precisely the different sciences that can really help us to discern a bit more deeply and say, "As a group of women in dialogue, where is God's spirit leading us in this part of the world?" I think the Spirit might lead us to express the faith—to use Eleanor's term—to translate it to our modern situation. How do we understand that in the modern context, with our people, with our families? I think this is important. But more than that, as a group of women, as a group of students, as part of a university, what is God saying to us academics in this university?

What is the spirit saying to us through the throes, the pains, and struggles of our people? That's a difficult question, I think, which you and I need to get down to and discern. So for me as a Jesuit, I think that discernment is very important. Our theological reflection has to be rooted in the Catholic sources, but we have to be context-specific and historical.

I think that's precisely our calling in the university. I think we can do it as a Catholic institution, trusting that God's spirit is with us. Thank you.

### **“The One Constant is Love” or the Challenge of Historical and Cultural Translation**

**Fernando Zialcita:** Like Fr. Fung, I'm an anthropologist, so my concern is culture. As an anthropologist, one of my favorite passages in the New Testament is Peter's vision of unclean animals as revealed to him by God. At that moment he realizes that one can be a follower of Christ without becoming a Jew. One can eat animals deemed unclean by the Jewish priests, and still be faithful to Christ.

I think the Church has in fact engaged in dialogue with other cultures. Otherwise, it would not have survived to this day. When it entered the Philippines, it did engage in dialogue with local cultures despite the at times violent confrontation between indigenous religion and the new one. However, the problem is—and this is unavoidable because we're all human—that sometimes, the Church gets stuck in a particular cultural practice and tries to universalize it.

For instance, this whole question about divorce. I can fully understand why Christ would have discouraged divorce. Within the Jewish context of the first century A.D., which was highly patriarchal, a woman who was either divorced or widowed, was condemned to poverty. A woman who was single was regarded as strange. Her life was always in relation to a man. If she was widowed, the norm was that it would be better for her to marry the brother of her deceased husband. That's why the custom of the levirate existed. This is weird from our perspective today, though it makes sense in that context. In the case of the divorced woman,

who would marry her? How would she earn a living? Divorce sentenced her to poverty. I can understand why Christ, out of compassion, insisted that there should be no divorce. He was concerned as to how the divorcee would fare given the practices and prejudices of His time and place. Hence the need to see things in context.

Sometimes we liberal Catholics are accused of being “cafeteria” Catholics. We supposedly choose certain teachings of Catholicism that we like and reject others. But I don’t think many priests today will claim that someone who has epileptic seizures is being possessed by the devil or that someone was born blind because of the sins of his parents. And yet that was the standard explanation during New Testament times. It doesn’t make sense anymore because the science of biology has introduced us to genetics and to the study of germs, while psychology has unveiled the power of the unconscious over our conscious behavior.

So I believe that what culture is and what challenges it offers to our understanding of the Gospel are themes that need to be addressed. Personally for me, as I was telling Kathleen at lunchtime, the one constant is love. By that I mean a commitment to the welfare of another person, even to the point of giving up one’s own interests. But how is love to be expressed in every particular generation, in every particular cultural context? That is the challenge.

### **Internal Rapprochements**

**Jean:** We have more questions than we had time. Let’s just end by giving each of you the chance to give your parting words. If you wish, you could answer the following question: How do you reconcile in yourself being a theologian or a sociologist and a Catholic and a feminist?

**Emma:** For me, it's very clear that my research on women (and with women) in urban poor communities is quite different because it's informed by my being a sociologist in a Catholic university. With inspiration from Freire, Fanon, and liberation theology, I do research with a sociological framing (theories and methodologies) and link that to knowledge-mobilization in policy-program spaces.

So, I don't see any conflict between my work as a sociologist and as a Catholic. I find the teachings of the Church inspiring, especially the concepts of stewardship and caring for the environment, which have been articulated eloquently by Pope Francis. His teachings have greatly enlightened me on how to frame my studies of women's poverty, gender relations, and community management in times of disasters.

For me, there is no need to confront contradictions between a sociological analysis of women's conditions and that of the Church. As far as I'm concerned, my work is to produce knowledge that is conceptually driven and empirical anchored in historical-structural contexts. You learn from social realities and you make decisions, you make interpretations on the basis of the context that drives the decisions and actions of men and women of various social, political, economic, and cultural locations.

I like the idea that we anchor our discussion on the pastoral care that we are called upon to give. For me as a sociologist and as a researcher, my pastoral care is exercised when I work with the women in urban poor communities. In studying the behavioral patterns and perspectives towards their family, community, and Church-related issues before, during, and after disasters, I hope to contribute to the constructing of a community that is informed by Church teachings as well as by empirical knowledge.

And for me as a teacher and researcher, we share the knowledge that we produce with our students and interested decision-makers.

We can support marginalized men and women by producing conceptually driven and empirically anchored knowledge and by mobilizing such knowledge in policy-program spaces, in the hope that this will narrow the gender gap, the inequity between men and women.

**Eleanor:** As a Catholic and someone with a background in sociology, I actually have a pretty good life because on the one hand, coming from sociology, I have the capacity, I guess, to look at Scripture, for instance, and realize that this is not the word of God *literally*; it is the word of God channeled through a particular context of the author. And so that helps me to deal with scriptural readings to which I have a particularly visceral reaction.

For instance, I'm a lector at my parish church, and I resorted to all sorts of stratagems to get out of reading that passage from Paul that says, "Women should be subordinated to their husbands." I got someone to substitute for me so I wouldn't have to read that passage. But then I could also look at this passage and say, "Well, you know, this comes out of a particular context. This is not Jesus. This is a context."

And as a Catholic, I have a set of values that anchors me to a sense of meaning in my life.

And then when I get really frustrated with the Church, I can look at it from a sociological perspective and say, well, you know, Pius XI said that we shouldn't have men and women in the same schools. But now the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas admits both women and men. So things change. So in that way, sociology gives me hope.

I can then go to prayer and look at the way that Jesus dealt with women and say, this is what it really means to be Catholic. Prayer helps me as a woman to develop a real relationship with Jesus—to see how He related to women.

**Kathleen:** I happen to be a Catholic as well. I went to Catholic primary and secondary schools. I did my M.A. at the University of St. Carlos in Cebu and got my Ph.D. from Arizona State University. I'm an anthropologist and consider myself to be very spiritual. In my classes, at a public, state university, I do talk about things like the importance of morality and that there is an Asian concept of human rights that argues that you can't have freedom without responsibility. Those types of things, which I think are very important, we talk about in the classroom.

I'm staying at EAPI (East Asian Pastoral Institute) right now, and I love it when some of the priests will say, "Well, even gender is in nature" and we all have different natures. I love this current movement that holds that we are part of nature and the very, very deep importance of the idea that gender is part of nature and the natural changing world. And you have this kind of balance and this fluidity.

It's kind of nice and I wanted to share that this past December, I met a couple that I wanted to befriend because the husband actually talked like a Jesuit priest. He had that kind of deep spiritual intellect, that kind of engaging conversational style. I just wanted to be their friend. They were really good people and they were Episcopalian, so I went with them to their church. I've never done that before and the mass is exactly the same as the Catholic mass, their prayers are exactly the same as the Roman Catholic prayers. And they have women bishops and there were lesbian women in the choir and lesbian servants at the altar and there were all kinds of people and families in attendance, and everybody was there as an equal.

It was a very loving environment and people were happy. They're accountable to the community, so there's no mystery—Who's this person? Who's that? Maybe, it is true that all churches have good and bad. The Episcopalians, as well, are not immune to scandal but

the gender equity is there . . . . So I'm also happy to be here with you and to share that I've grown up in our faith, and like the way that we're ecumenical. I always love that about us.

May I share one more thing? Then, I'll be quiet. I was talking with some priests and said, "I can't believe it. You mean Pope Francis is telling people not to have a lot of children? To have small families? And he doesn't allow the use of condoms?" And some of them were saying, "That's right." But some others were saying, "That's why we have free will."

The Catholic Church also acknowledges having a theology of the free will for individual decision-making in good conscience. And so, there are a lot of interesting things in the world.

**Agnes:** I was formed by the Jesuits here at the Ateneo, and my dissertation adviser at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven is also a Jesuit. What I love about being Catholic is our strong tradition of natural law, which for me means the use of reason (with the help of philosophy and other sciences) to understand our experience and our faith.

I love the opportunity to teach seminarians as a theologian and to teach them feminist theology. (Maybe it's the only time they will listen to me, because once they get ordained, they will just set me aside.) But I prefer teaching women, because I can see that many of them take the critique of a patriarchal society and Church seriously. They really have this conversion, whereas some seminarians (not all) just pass through the course or go back to their old views when they get ordained.

**Rachel:** One thing I really appreciate about what happened this evening is that I heard social scientists interpret the scripture. I found that very refreshing—and Fr. Jojo Fung's words as well.

Dr. Zialcita's interpretation about divorce really caught my attention. It's great to see the same things that I, as a theologian, look at all the time, but this time, to hear about it from the perspective of another person and to recognize that it also make sense. That interpretation also makes sense.

The challenge to me now is not just to leave it at that but also to recognize the tension. So, for example, from our course on "Theology of Marriage, Family Life, and Human Sexuality," I learned that love isn't just a feeling but that it also entails a decision. It's a commitment. There is a temptation for me to stick to an either-or attitude. Either stick to what I've learned from theology, from tradition, from catechism, or cast all that aside in favor of the new interpretation. But I can also face the challenge or the need to reimagine what love means. Reimagine what love means, reimagine what commitment means, without denying values we recognize in our faith.

So thank you for that. Thank you for helping me to broaden my perspective.

**Mary:** Let me respond with a couple of points to something you asked before which is, does the official Church have a problem with authority? I'm not sure you put it that way but the way I see it, Church people have no problem exerting authority; they do, however, retreat from challenging authority within their structures.

Happily, liberation theology changed a lot of that when it challenged the Church to champion social justice through agrarian reform, labor unions, and indigenous people's rights. The Philippine Church has generally done well in those domains. But the question of women seems to bring out the last bastion of rigidity. Old-school priests and bishops are used to preaching and *telling* people what is right; but they are correspondingly less accustomed to *listening* to their more marginalized parishioners or their reform-oriented laity.



How sad that societies globally and in the Philippines have evolved tremendously in this awareness of gender issues and the implications for women, men, families and communities, yet all too many of our male bishops and priests, trapped by centuries-old dysfunctional structures, remain reluctant to risk the changes that many of the laity believe are essential to Christ's message today. There are progressive bishops and priests—we know and have spoken to them—who are very sympathetic to our views, but the mandate of unity among the brotherhood and the unwillingness to challenge their own hierarchies of authority appear to stymie their speaking out to invest in real change.

That's why I am hopeful about theologians (the progressive ones willing to take empirical data seriously) as having the greatest potential or actual capacity among Church authorities for building the theology of the 21st century. After all, the theologian is supposed to give bishops the underlying rationale for why they are doing what they do. In this country, I think that we should combine forces, so that those theologians who are engaging in more creative or new thinking can take seriously in their discernment the empirical data provided by social scientists, and vice versa. If we don't agree, then let's at least search for common ground. So, theologians, if you're progressive, if you want to affect the bishops' thinking in new ways, we social scientists are your best allies.

Okay, that's the first thing. I guess the second is that I don't think the men who dominate the Church today appreciate how offended many of us women are at how marginalized we feel by the glass wall between the congregation and the altar—when we know that we're appreciated everywhere else in our society and have gained equal rights, but not in our own Church. And that is why, as a social scientist, when I cannot reconcile the two—women marginalized by the Church and my social science perspectives, I

speak up. Fortunately I've been around long enough that I can do that and why I can say to theologians, "Hey guys! We are your best allies; let's be partners and link up also with the more progressive bishops to strengthen their incentive to speak out in new ways. Whatever evangelizing in Asia that we help promote—the kind of evangelizing which recognizes the values of other religions and other cultures—let us together forge the kind of Church Jesus wanted!"

**Patricia:** How wonderful to have Mary as an ally. So now I'm wondering how do I get the others as allies as well, people who might think differently. I will leave this forum, this round table discussion, wondering what forms of authority we in each of our disciplines prefer to subscribe to and perhaps what mediating roles, if any, philosophy plays in questions of interpretation, in questions of where we get truth or meaning and so on.

That's where I am. The other question—and this is my parting shot—is, as a teacher, scholar and so on, as someone who does something in the university, what is my role, exactly? So those are my parting thoughts.

**Jean:** That sound like the beginning of another round table discussion. But let me just end by thanking each and every one of you for your very generous presence.