

THE IMPETUS

The Challenge of Developing a “Hiyang” (Appropriate) Methodology in the Study of Spiritualities in the Philippines

Fr. Esmeraldo Reforeal, O.Carm.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Coming back home is always an opportunity for me to recharge my energies. It is also an occasion to catch up with my brothers and sisters in the Order, family, friends, and relatives. Coming home, I hear people telling me “*Tumaba ka ah, hiyang ka yata doon.*” (You are looking good; the place seems to agree well with you.) But then, the next day, others would say, “*Parang payat ka ngayon, di ka ba hiyang doon?*” (You look slimmer; didn’t you like the place?) Taking this example as an aide to help us understand the word *hiyang*, I think that we could get some initial insights regarding the word. First, *hiyang* means that there was an adaptation or “fitting-in” to a particular situation. An individual is always at home when he or she is *hiyang*. It implies adjustment to a new environment. Can we apply this to our efforts in discovering/rediscovers our rich spiritual heritage? Offhand, if we want to have an insight into the richness of our spiritualities in the Philippines, we need to have a *Hiyang* methodology. I use *Hiyang* to mean appropriate, relevant, and well-adjusted methodologies in the study of spiritualities in the Philippines.

I also wish to suggest from the outset that we are not talking about the study of *a* or *the* methodology but we will be presenting several methodologies, which could all be *Hiyang* in their own way. I believe that we need to identify various methods and approaches because of the assumption that there are several spiritualities in the Philippines. A study of a particular spirituality alone requires different methods and approaches, how much more if we have a number of spiritualities.

My task is to set the mood for our succeeding discussions. So mine is just to roll a red carpet before us to inspire us to actively contribute what we have, and share what we have experienced in doing research.

DO WE REALLY NEED TO DEVELOP HIYANG METHODOLOGIES?

Any scientific undertaking needs to develop and use methodologies that are well planned and appropriately executed. Failure to have them can adversely affect the output of the research – wrong interpretation of data, irrelevant conclusions, and the like. A classic example of this is the popular anecdote about the government project that failed because the agency people did not have an ocular inspection of the area nor did they conduct needs assessment. Their method was simply gathering information provided by the local area official. So immediately after that, they decided to deliver a toilet bowl to each resident in the area? You know what happened after that, right? We all knew that after the delivery, people filled the bowls with soil, put them in their porch, and planted tomatoes in it so that they can have an additional source of food. We can draw our own interpretation; perhaps they did not have enough food; perhaps they did not have the land to cultivate; or perhaps they did not have enough knowledge about that new “thing”. This is simply a glaring example of not using an appropriate or a relevant method.

This paper was delivered during the **Colloquium on Research Methodologies in the Study of Spirituality in the Philippines** on June 28-30,2004 at the Titus Brandsma Center, Quezon City, Philippines. This was also published under the book titled *HIYANG*, in 2004. Copies of the book are available at spirit@tri-isis.com.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This is a free material. We encourage students, scholars and researchers to use this for dissemination. However, please acknowledge author when quoting any part of this essay.

Do we really need to have *Hiyang* methodologies? I believe that our answer should be yes, because we want to avoid as much as we can, inadequate or wrong interpretations, baseless conclusions or irrelevant recommendations. In short, we do not want our study to be a “toilet bowl study”. This is very important in the light of our belief that spirituality is transformational and liberating.

This is not a totally new effort. In fact, in the early 80’s (1983), in the book edited by Leonardo Mercado, SVD (Research Methods in the Philippine context), Leslie Bauzon echoed Dean Feliciano’s assertion that “methods” or “techniques” should be planned, pursued and concluded in order to determine where innovations and adaptations can be made in Philippine social research and thus gear the social sciences more effectively for Philippine national development. He affirmed Bro. Andrew Gonzales’ suggestion that “What is needed for the progress of the social sciences in the Philippines is not a conscious search for a Philippine paradigm in sociology, psychology, economics, linguistics, political science (and if I may add, theology and spirituality) but an empirical orientation that looks at reality, in its context and as much as is humanly feasible, in its totality...”¹

HOW CAN WE DEVELOP HIYANG METHODOLOGIES?

1. To develop a Hyang methodology, we need to know what we are going to study. We also need to have a working definition of spirituality. We have to understand the basic concepts of spirituality. There is a bit of a hiccup here since we study spirituality because we want to know what spirituality is and yet I am saying that we need to know what it is before we can have a Hyang methodology or approach. At the very least, we have to have a basic understanding of spirituality and accept the fact that it is experiential and evolving because it is also culture-based.
2. To develop a Hyang Methodology, we may assume that Spirituality is undeniably connected to theology, and vice versa. We assume that attempts to speak about our understanding of God (theology) have something to do and say in our efforts to live in the light of that understanding (spirituality). A theology, to be alive, needs to be always grounded in spiritual experience. For a spirituality to be named and understood and lived, it needs to be theologically sound. Therefore, spirituality is liberating and free. And if it has to be liberating, it should be liberated. It should not be confined to a particular methodology or approach, it should, however, take into account all the instruments given and desired to have a Hyang methodology.

WHERE DO WE START?

It is an established fact that there is a widespread decline in traditional religious practice in the West. Surprisingly there is, at the same time, an ever- increasing hunger for spirituality. The question at the forefront of most of the great spiritual classics used to be *What/Who is God?* Nowadays, the characteristic question of the contemporary spirituality enthusiast is more likely to be *Who am I?* Great Spiritual writers such as Julian of Norwich understood quite clearly that these two questions are inextricably linked. I have read somewhere that in Berkeley University, a very secularized center and bedrock of free and postmodern thinking, students feel increasingly

¹ Mercado, Leonardo. (ed) 1983. Research Methods in the Philippine Context. Tacloban City: Divine Word Publications. p10

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This is a free material. We encourage students, scholars and researchers to use this for dissemination. However, please acknowledge author when quoting any part of this essay.

free to claim and announce that they are searching for spirituality and spiritual meaning in life. Spirituality for the youth today is most likely an image of who they are and has become a voice of their conscience. Many of them talk about spirituality in “worldly and public terms” – as a basis for a new sense of community, as a cure for racism, as an essential element of the new ecological awareness, as an antidote to violence and unrest... Is this the same experience that our young people in the Philippines have? There are differences obviously, but there are also similarities.

Beyond the boundaries of the organized religions, the situation is even more uncertain. Many people are suspicious of public religious dogmas and instructions and some are offended at how they are transmitted. Or even inside the organized religions, people are not there to accept everything from their leaders with a grain of salt. Say for instance, just recently, even before the new instruction regarding the liturgy was released by the Vatican, individuals were already asking what kind of theology was behind it, what sort of spirituality were we trying to live when a priest was expected to follow procedures regardless of how important and significant fellowship is in our liturgical celebrations.

This reaction can be easily understood in the context of postmodernity. We all know that there are a variety of theories of post modernism but all of them reflect upon a common experience known as post modernity. Its roots appear to lie in our human experience, especially the experience of losing the spirit of optimism and certainty born out of what appeared to be a stable social, religious, intellectual and moral order in the beginning of the 20th century. There appeared to be a guaranteed and continuous social and economic progress. The human mind was perceived to be capable of addressing any question or of solving any problem. However, the decisive breaking point was marked by the two world wars of the 20th century period reaching an appalling climax in the Nazi extermination camps and the bombing of Hiroshima.

From then on, theorists came to suspect the myth of modernity and concentrated on demolishing previous assumptions about the nature of the world. People like Derrida and Foucault spearheaded this process. Another strain of postmodernist trend recognized the present social and cultural fragmentation but sought to find a strategy to enable people to reconstruct a kind of authoritative interpretation of events. Gadamer represents this strain. Universal norms were found wanting and there was a growing acceptance that human experience is PLURAL and DIVERSE.

Postmodernity rejected the intellectual optimism of what was known as “modernity”.² In other words, post modernism criticizes our confidence in the powers of human reason, in principle, to solve all problems, to discover essential truths or to establish definitive meanings. Postmodernism recognizes that all interpretation of “**Truth**” is **culturally-conditioned, contingent and morally flawed as well as intellectually partial**. Some theorists refer to an “incredulity towards metanarratives.”³ Such an approach is suspicious of any system of thought, whether philosophical, or theological, that seeks totally to escape from the limitations of context.

It is in the context of post modernism that we can base our discussion on Hiyang methodologies in the study of spiritualities in the Philippines. The term “spiritualities” is by itself a post modernist assertion. We need to be aware of the difficulties in post modernism. First, we have to accept that there are several theories and methods and approaches in post modernism which demands that we exercise critical discernment when examining them. We can fall into the very trap we criticize, i.e. being absolutely sure of what we see as the “right way”.

² This word refers to Western culture since the Enlightenment and Industrial revolution.

³ See Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, ET (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This is a free material. We encourage students, scholars and researchers to use this for dissemination. However, please acknowledge author when quoting any part of this essay.

We also need to be cautious about the way the terms “postmodernity” and “postmodernism” are used. It is inappropriate to use them to refer to any and every backlash against rationalism or uncritical liberalism of modernity. Some groups use them to pursue their own agenda. For example, some conservative Christian groups have used it to support their vigorous proselytizing. This is far from many of the values postmodernism stands for. Post modernism frees the notion of God from the constraints of rational philosophy and the need to justify beliefs in rational terms. We hear people say, “We can not put GOD in a box”, “I cannot fully explain my faith in God, but still I fully believe.” Postmodernism implies a rejection of any kind of literalism. It also rejects authoritarianism and prefers dialogue with strangers and what the “other” thinks rather than colonize alien experiences or convert those who understand the world differently.

SPIRITUALITY AND POST MODERNITY

From our point of view, does postmodern culture offer an opportunity for spirituality? Postmodernists (even moderate, theologically-minded theologians and spirituality “seekers”), affirm that human contexts of history, culture and language are intrinsic to all knowledge and its continuing quest for enlightenment. When we turn to postmodern writers and researchers who are interested in spirituality, some are deeply suspicious of traditional spiritual language. They reject the usefulness or necessity of transcendent realities such as “God”. However, postmodern culture is not necessarily opposed to religion, to concepts of “truth”, or to ethics and spirituality. This is so because postmodernism, at best, is thoroughly contextual, it can cope more easily than modernity with the distinctive wisdom of particular traditions.

The roots of contemporary spirituality are to be found in an emphasis on **human experience**. In all its variety and pain and struggle, our ordinary human experience becomes the immediate context for God’s self-disclosure. This is exactly the reason why we need to develop Hiyang methodologies in our study with the hope that we can have Hiyang spirituality/spiritualities. For the same reason we decided to have a look at the different existing methodologies in studying spiritualities. The next two days will be very interesting as we are able to listen to our different speakers. My personal expectation for this Colloquium is to gain more insights regarding those different methodologies. I don’t even have to choose which is which, or decide what is the best for the Philippines.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let me end this presentation with a story from a Japanese movie I saw. It is a story about a Japanese daughter from a traditional Japanese family who migrated to an urban area where she was confronted with the new reality of city life. She was absorbed into the city culture. Life went on according to the pace of the city and then, she became depressed. She was tired. She lost her drive to move on. Then she decided to visit her parents. A part of the movie presented that during her visit, the elderly father was sitting quietly and looking pensively toward the horizon. She asked him; “Dad, are you watching the raindrops? Are you looking at the mountains? Are you looking at the trees?” There was SILENCE... Then she went on and asked; “Dad, what is a soul?” And her dad replied, “My beloved daughter, can you give me a SMILE?” Eventually she smiled and the father said, “Soul is the one that can make you smile, that can make me smile, that can make the trees, the raindrops and the mountains smile!”

In our search for the soul and in our continuing effort to seek and search for the spirit, we have each other to journey with. In our quest to have Hiyang methodologies, we certainly can

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This is a free material. We encourage students, scholars and researchers to use this for dissemination. However, please acknowledge author when quoting any part of this essay.

encounter the dilemma faced by every single human being in a postmodern culture. But we have each other and that's very essential for us.

We are gathered here at the Titus Brandsma Center, as strangers and as friends. We are strangers because we have never met before and I believe that we have our own minds (hopefully!) that we can have critical discernment. And so, we hope to be open to dialogue starting today. We are friends because we share a common vision of developing Hiyang methodologies in our study of Spiritualities in the Philippines. We are here to make each other SMILE!

FOR FURTHER READING

Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999

David Tacey, *ReEnchantment: A New Australian Spirituality*. Australia: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000.

Isabel Panopio and Realidad Santico-Roldan, *Sosyolohiya at Antropolohiya: Isang Panimula*, Quezon City, Philippines: Ken Corporation, 1992.

Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

John Garvey (ed), *Modern Spirituality: An Anthology*. Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1985.

Leonardo Mercado. (ed) *Research Methods in the Philippine Context*. Tacloban City: Divine Word Publications. 1983.

Teresita Obusan (ed), *Roots of Filipino Spirituality*. Philippines: Mamamathala, 1998.

_____ (ed) *PAMAMARAAN: Indigenous Knowledge and Evolving Research Paradigms*. Quezon City Philippines: Asian Center – University of the Philippines, 1994.

Timothy Church and Maria Katigbak, *Filipino Personality: Indigenous and Cross Cultural Studies*, Manila Philippines: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 2000.

About the Author

Fr. Esmeraldo Reforeal is a Carmelite priest, currently pursuing his Doctor of Theology degree at Melbourne College of Divinity, University of Melbourne, Australia. He is working on his dissertation entitled, *"Bukal-Loob (Bukaloob): A Filipino Spirituality of Space."* He finished his Masters in Systematic Theology from the same university and another Master's in Pastoral Ministry from ICTC- the Ecclesiastical Graduate Program of Our Lady of the Angels Seminary. Fr. Reforeal is the Director for Research and Publications of the Institute of Spirituality in Asia.