

DAKATEO (CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE PHILIPPINES)

REGIONAL REPORT

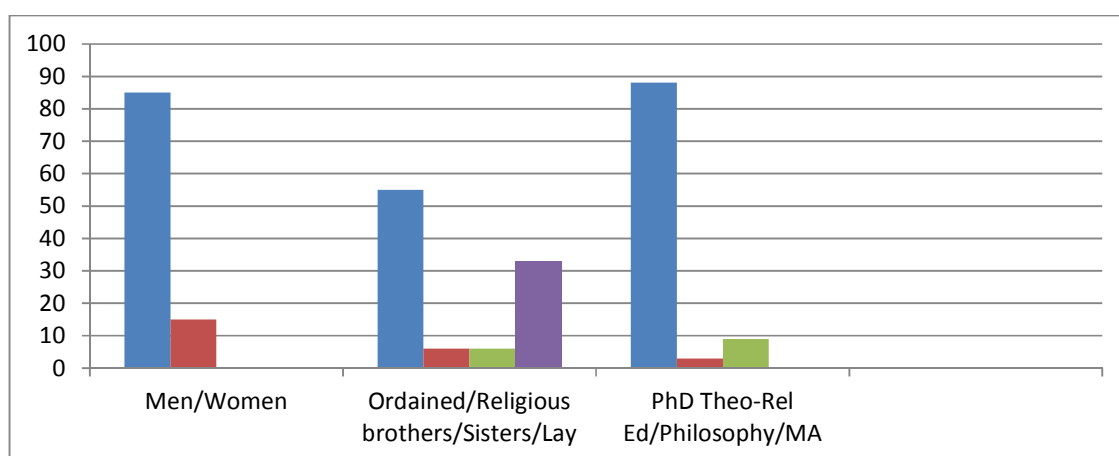
Realizing the need to have a forum for serious theological discussions on intra and extra-ecclesial issues that call for enlightenment and critical analysis, a number of Philippine-based alumni of the theology faculty of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, have taken steps toward organizing an association, which they hope will contribute to the development of theological consciousness in the Philippine Church.

The Damdaming Katoloko sa Teolohiya or DAKATEO is an association of Catholic Theologians in the Philippines which promotes theologies for a just and inclusive Church and society. To achieve the vision, DAKATEO (a) supports creative and scholarly theological research and its dissemination, (b) promotes theological reflection and discussion on current issues and questions in society, and (c) fosters fellowship among its members and solidarity with the oppressed and excluded. DaKaTeo is specifically oriented to theological research and practice that dialogue with varied contexts, disciplines, social movements, and faith traditions from a liberative perspective.

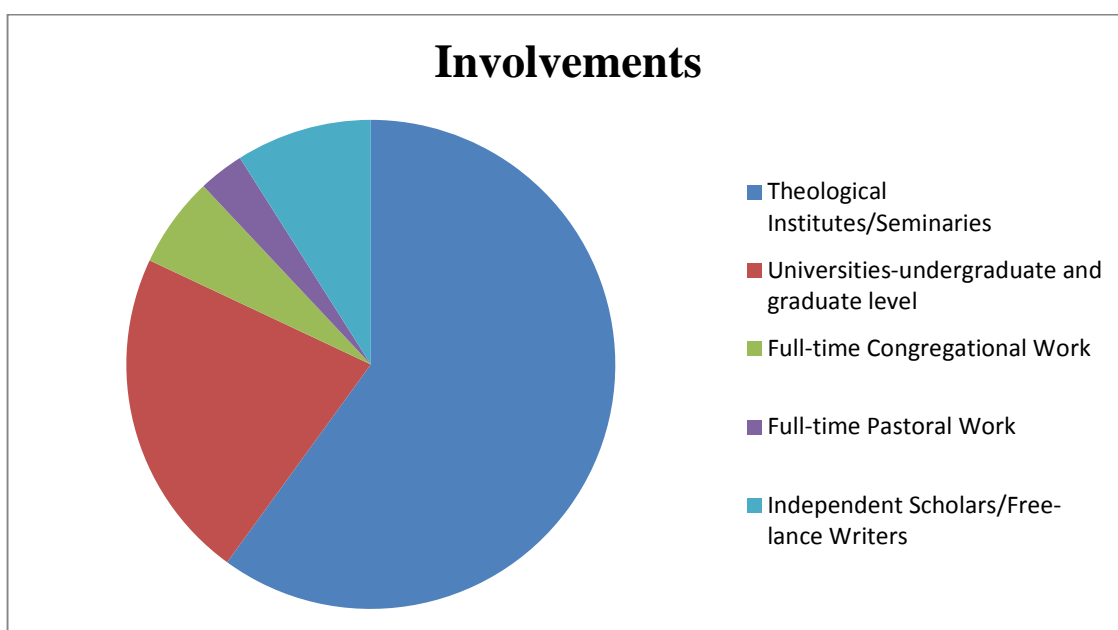
At around the time when DaKaTeo was being conceived, other theologians in the country also thought of organizing themselves along the lines of theological specialization. In 2000, the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines was established and in 2001, the Philippine Association of Catholic Missiologists. Two years ago, the Philippine Academy of Liturgical Research, composed of the country's liturgists was also formed; and last year, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has likewise encouraged the church historians to organize. DaKaTeo is the only Catholic theological association in the Philippines that is composed of theologians from the various theological disciplines, and formed on the basis of a shared liberative, interdisciplinary and intercultural orientation, and with a commitment to theological research and writing.

DaKaTeo Profile and Location of Theology

Membership



DaKaTeo has 33 members— twenty eight men [1 deceased] (85%) and five women (15%). Eighteen members are ordained [diocesan and religious priests] (55%), two are religious brothers (6%), two are religious sisters (6%) and eleven are lay (11%). Twenty-nine members have PhD in Theology/Religious Education (88%; 27 in Theology; 2 in Religious Education); one holds a PhD in Philosophy (3%) and three have MA degrees (9%).



Eighteen of the members (60%) teach in theological institutes/seminaries, mostly in the Philippines, with one associate member teaching in the United States. The ordained among them are involved as well in pastoral work (either on a part-time or full-time basis). Seven members (22%) work in the theology/religious education department of Catholic universities where they teach undergraduate students required to take up theology courses as well as students pursuing a masteral degree in theology/religious education. Two members (6%) work full-time with their religious congregation; one member (3%) is involved full-time with a Pastoral Skills Training Center which provides training/retreats not only to lay people but priests as well; while three members (9%) are independent scholars/ free lance writers.

General Profile of Theological Schools

In the theological schools, majority of the students are seminarians (diocesan or religious); they compose 70-95 percent of the school population. In general, in the past ten years, the enrollment among Filipino seminarians has decreased. Theological institutes in Manila, however, have experienced an increase in the enrollment of foreign students

(seminarians, religious and other lay people) from countries in Asia like China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. In theological schools that specifically cater to Asian students and/or have offered scholarships for their studies as the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) and the Institute for Formation in Religious Studies (IFRS), foreign students constitute around 75% and 65% of the population respectively. Majority of the foreign students are women.

What are some reasons for the increase in foreign students of theology in the country? As the number of vocations to religious life has decreased worldwide, many religious congregations have formed international novitiates generally along linguistic preferences. A number of religious congregations probably chose to establish their international novitiate in the Philippines not only because of the presence of many theological schools in the country but also because we are more open both legally and culturally to the presence of foreigners. These novitiates “ride” on the programs of theological schools for their theological formation. Some international religious congregations of men (e.g. the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Xaverian Missionaries, Scalabrini Congregation, Claretian Missionaries, etc.) have also identified the Philippines as one of their international centers of theological formation for their seminarians. This has led to an increase—in certain theological schools—in foreign students not only from Asia but also from other continents like Africa and Latin America. For example, at the Maryhill School of Theology in 2010, the foreign students coming from 16 countries represent 30% of the students in the ordained ministry program.

In terms of gender representation, the males continue to dominate the theological schools’ population though an increasing number of women have enrolled in the past decades. This has been due to the opening up of theological institutes to women students (which was not the case 20 years ago) or the establishment of special programs for lay people, distinct from the program for ordained ministry. In these programs for lay people, majority of the students are women. Another factor in the increase in women enrollees is the requirement of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education for religion teachers to have a masteral degree in theology or religious education.

When it comes to the faculty, only the theological school initially established for the formation of women religious (IFRS), has more women professors than men. In other theological schools, the majority of the faculty (80% or more) are men.

Concerns Regarding Working Conditions

Bishops-Theologians Relationship

The vocation of the theologian in the Church is not simply to transmit the faith but to also help in the development of sound doctrine through creative theological investigations and scholarship (*Gaudium et spes* 62). Toward a greater appreciation of this role of theologians in the Church, an open dialogue between theologians and bishops is important. While a Bishops-Businessmen’s Conference for Human Development—which provide a forum for both groups to discuss pressing social issues—exists in the Philippines, there is no such parallel group for bishops and theologians. In India, theologians and bishops dialogue annually, resulting to a healthier relationship and mutual enrichment between the two groups.

Catholic Fundamentalism

The growth of Catholic fundamentalism threatens to stifle dialogue not only between bishops and theologians, but likewise among theologians themselves as well as with the rest of the laity. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference 1990 plenary assembly workshop report describes Catholic fundamentalists as follows: “Catholic fundamentalists takes a literal ahistorical interpretation of papal pronouncements and sees in them a safe refuge from the claims of science, the values and symbols brought about by the modernization of society, and the constant threat of religious relativism.” It further notes that:

It [Catholic fundamentalism] does not recognize the hierarchy of truths, nor does it distinguish the theological note of various papal pronouncements, clothing all with the cloak of infallibility. Many of these fundamentalists recognize only the magisterium of Rome, that is the Pope and the Roman congregations, and in so doing so they ignore the existence of authority vested in the local bishop by divine right. These attitudes do more harm than good to the cause of proclaiming the true nature of the magisterium and make it appear like a system of doctrinal dictatorship.¹

A common characteristic of fundamentalists is their refusal to engage in dialogue. This has become apparent in the current discussions on the proposed Reproductive Health Bill where some Catholics have resorted to heckling, sending of hate mails and other pressure tactics against those whose views differ from theirs, including theologians who are trying to mediate between the Church and the pro-RH bill advocates.

Balancing Research and Pastoral/Administrative/Other Tasks

The ratio of priests (diocesan) to the Philippine Catholic population is 1: 13,824 Catholics. If we include the religious priests, the ratio would be at 1: 9,492 Catholics.² This would explain why, aside from their teaching load, ordained priests-theologians are also called on to fulfill part-time or even full-time pastoral work. As theological institutes are non-profit, non-earning entities, salaries of professors are also lower than those in the universities. Thus some theologian-priests prefer to become a parish priest where one earns more, instead of teaching in the seminary.

Religious, both women and men, are likewise assigned administrative tasks within their congregation. Lay theologians on the other hand, especially if they are working in theological institutes which pay lower salaries, take up more teaching loads in other schools to financially survive. Thus, to be able to do research, DaKaTeo theologians need to learn how to multitask. DaKaTeo functions as a support and “pressure group” for the members to continue doing

¹ “The Emerging Challenges to the Church in Asia in the 1990’s: A Call to Respond,” The 5th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Bandung, Indonesia, July 17-27, 1990,” *FABC Papers*, no. 59.

² The statistics are based on the figures posted at <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/sc1.html>

research. We have this joke that we join DaKaTeo to pay [dues], be forced to write and then be critiqued!

The Research Environment

Research is not a priority in most theological institutes/seminaries in the Philippines. There are no funds for research. Some have no Sabbatical provisions for their professors. There are no incentives or credits given for publications unlike in the universities where the professors get higher ranking and salary increases because of their publications. Research, is thus, for professors in theological institutes/seminaries, a vocation that one chooses to pursue, rather than a means to a career advancement.

Creative theological exploration is further hampered by the limited availability of research materials in the theological libraries. While the internet has supplemented what is lacking, still the knowledge divide between libraries in the North and South remains huge. As most references now are available in e-form, it is a challenge how libraries in the North can share resources with theological institutes in the South, especially if these institutions belong to the same international religious congregation.

The Gender Concerns

The mainstreaming of feminist perspectives and principles in theological schools continues to be a concern of DaKaTeo feminist theologians. The study of Niceta Vargas on the impact of feminist theologizing on five Catholic schools of theology in Metro-Manila showed the gains which have been made in terms of the number of thesis defended and articles published on feminist theology by both women and men in the last two decades³ However, these advances seem to be largely dependent on the presence in these schools of a handful of feminist professors who teach feminist theology subjects or integrate the feminist perspectives in the core courses. Except for the IFRS which was initially established for the education of women religious, what is lacking in most of these theological schools is the institutionalization or the conscious fostering of feminist perspectives in the different courses (e.g. its explicitation in the vision-mission of the school), the requiring of the use of inclusive language in theses/papers, etc. It is noticeable as well that the same handful of feminist professors are teaching in 2-3 of the five theological schools. While there are approximately 25 women theologians, including three foreigners, who possess a doctorate in theology/ministry/religious education, not all of them are feminists. Furthermore, women religious with PhDs are given administrative tasks in their congregations such as being President of their colleges/universities; a number of lay women do not teach in the theological institutes but instead lectures on undergraduate/graduate levels in the universities; while others have opted to migrate to theological centers in the North or do congregational work there. A few feminist male theologians however help in mainstreaming feminism.

³ Niceta Vargas, osa, *The Impact of Feminist Theologizing on Five Catholic Schools of Theology in the Philippines*, a paper presented at the conference on "Feminism in the Philippine Catholic Church," May 27-29, 2011, Villa Coinsuelo Retreat House, Novaliches, Quezon City. From 1990-2011, a total of 79 MA/PhD theses on feminist issues were defended and 56 articles published in the theological schools' journals.

Gap between Theological Education and Religious Formation

The kind of theology learned in the school is not necessarily the theology that shapes the practices in religious formation. It can happen that the orientation given in theological education is negated by the practice in the formation houses. For example, while learning the importance of a democratic and participatory church, this is contradicted by the clericalism and authoritarianism fostered within the religious formation houses. To address this, some theological institutes hold formators-faculty meetings as well as provide sessions to formators.

Quality of Students

The “third world debt crisis” which erupted in the 1980’s has resulted into less fund allotment for education and other social services, thus leading to the decline in the standard of education in the Philippines. This has been aggravated by the migration of teachers either to teach abroad or to work as domestic helpers. The lowering of the standard of education, which was once one of the highest in Asia, has also affected the quality of students enrolled in theological institutes/seminaries. They have poor English language skills and basic education background. Thus, despite the fact that English is the medium of instruction for most subjects from the grade school to the tertiary level, some still need to take English renewal programs, together with foreign students who are starting to learn English only in their adult years. Some theological institutes have tried to address this need by offering not the ordinary English subject but an “English for Theology” course where the students will also be introduced to basic religious concepts. Other formation houses employ an in-house English tutor.

Recently, an informal consortium⁴ has also been established, which would offer a nine-month program to respond to the need for English for Theology instruction, psycho-spiritual formation and basic catechesis especially for foreigners intending to undergo theological education. Many of the foreign students from Asia are either new converts or formed in pre-Vatican II theology, thus their need for basic catechesis. Psycho-spiritual formation will also be provided.

In terms of social orientation, the quality of students has radically changed when compared to the students during the decades of the Marcos dictatorship (60’s-80’s). Seminarians today are less socio-politically conscious and involved, even if they continue to have courses in Social Analysis. An extra-ecclesial factor is the general feeling of failure and powerlessness among activists fighting for decades for structural change or more generally the post-modern disillusionment with grand narratives or this-worldly utopia, that has affected the culture in theological institutes/seminaries as well. An intra-ecclesial factor might be the conflicting ecclesiological interpretations of various groups (e.g. Opus Dei, charismatic groups, neo-catechumenate, etc.) on the church’s role vis-à-vis the world, despite the clear mandate of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines⁵ for Christians to evangelize politics. Another internal

⁴ The consortium includes the East Asian Pastoral Institute and the two theology schools with the most number of foreign students— ICLA and IFRS.

⁵ The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines held in 1991 sought to renew the Church in line with the Vatican II council.

factor is the increasing population of foreign students who are understandably more hesitant to participate in rallies and demonstrations.

Key Themes or Priorities for Theological Study

The signs of the times which demand critical discernment in the light of our faith include globalization, migration, climate change, women, cyberculture, corruption, hunger and poverty. Common classical theological themes like christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, spirituality, sexual ethics, principles of Catholic social teachings need to be rethought or re-articulated in the light of these signs of the times.

The method of doing theology is as important as the object of theologizing. “Changes in what we know are normal; changes in how we know are revolutionary.”⁶ Doing theology from the margins (i.e. from the perspective of women, the poor, indigenous groups, migrants, etc.) is the way to go in the two-thirds world context, if theology is to make sense to the majority who are poor and excluded. A course in Social/Gender Analysis as well as immersion in various sectoral groups are important pre-theological requirements to realize this thrust.

In Asia where Christianity has been largely identified as a foreign religion, doing theology from the margins needs to adopt as well a postcolonial perspective. Postcolonial theologizing interrogates the Scriptures and theological texts for their colonial entanglements, examines various forms of resistance explicit or lost in the texts as well as engages in a reconstructive reading of the Scriptures or a re-articulation of theological themes from the perspective of the sub-altern.

A particular form of postcolonial theologizing which has been subjected to postmodern scrutiny and critique, but nevertheless remains relevant is that of vernacular hermeneutics, more popularly referred to as “inculturation”. Vernacular interpretation makes use of the reader’s cultural resources and social experiences to re-read the biblical narratives and other theological themes. It draws on the three dimensions of a culture, the ideational (worldview, values and rule), performantial (ritual and roles) and material (symbols, food, clothing, etc.). Whereas earlier engagements in vernacular hermeneutics presuppose an essentialist notion of culture, vernacular theologies today must reflect a keener awareness of the contested nature and construction of cultural discourses based on class/caste, gender, ethnicity, race, age, etc., which is helpful toward a more ideologically critical inculturation.

In the context of globalization and the intermingling of cultures, a postcolonial-intercultural approach which highlights as well the hybridity emanating from encounters between the colonizer and the colonized, the metropolis and the periphery, indigenous beliefs and Christianity⁷ is likewise necessary.

While the understanding of what interculturality means continues to develop, among its main elements, as identified by the International Network on Cultural Policy, are the creation of

⁶ Daniel Maguire, “The Feminist Turn in Ethics,” *Horizons* 10 (1983): 341.

⁷ This corresponds to the third stream of postcoloniality as mapped by Sugirtharajah. R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 248-50.

spaces for interactions among diverse cultures, the call for mutual listening and dialogue and a consequent positive transformation in the view of the other.⁸ More concretely, the increasing diversity of the school population which now includes students not only from countries in Asia but from other continents as well demands that professors familiarize themselves with various contextual theologies. Theologians need to expand their competence in order that they can engage in a South-South dialogue within the four walls of the classrooms. This has to be reflected eventually in publications coming from the South, where until recently, the usual interlocutors remain to be largely authors from the North. Libraries likewise must enrich their collection with publications of theologians from countries where their students hail, to meet their research needs. With the internet, thesis writers coming from other countries can have the possibility of having a panel member outside the Philippines who is more familiar with his context and who can go on skype for the defense.

Interculturality has also oftentimes been employed in theology or religious studies to describe the dialogue between different religions. As more students are coming from countries where Christians are a minority group, theological institutes in the Philippines, which formerly did not emphasize dialogue with other religions are also now adding subjects on inter-religious dialogue and comparative religions.

Robert Schreiter refers to interculturality as “the ability to negotiate or cross a cultural boundary”⁹ while Raimund Pannikar focuses on the resulting “mutual fecundation” which is a characteristic of an authentic encounter between cultures.¹⁰ Mutuality and reciprocity among various cultural contexts should increasingly characterize indeed our theological conversations in the future!

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⁸ Annual Ministerial Meetings, “Interculturality Moving Towards a Dialogue Among Nation,” International Network on Cultural Policy, http://incp-ripc.org/meetings/2003/theme3_inter_e.shtml, accessed May 2005.

⁹ Robert Schreiter, “Communication and Interpretation Across Cultures,” *International Review of Mission* 85 (1996): 229.

¹⁰ Raimon Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr.en.htm> (accessed May 2005).