

**CULTURE, RELIGION, AND MORAL VISION:
A THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON
THE FILIPINO PEOPLE POWER REVOLUTION OF 1986**

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The article systematically reflects on the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986 under the illumination of theology. It contends that there can be no liberation apart from the beliefs and values of a people, with religion as their deepest source. The struggle against injustice and oppression must be united with a people's consciousness of their cultural rootedness, at the heart of which is their religion. The dynamics of culture and religion and its bearing on moral vision made the Filipino People Power Revolution possible and was the source of its nonviolent spirit.

ON FEBRUARY 25, 2001, to commemorate the anniversary of the People Power Revolution of 1986, or "EDSA 1,"¹ that toppled the violent and rapacious Marcos dictatorship, the Alfred Nobel Foundation and the Center for Global Nonviolence conferred upon the Republic of the Philippines the Nobel Peace Prize and the Global Nonviolence Award. Significantly the award ceremony took place just a few weeks following "EDSA 2," in which for the second time in 15 years, Filipinos unleashed people power to force the resignation of their president, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, whose two and a half years of corrupt and incompetent rule had wrecked the nation's economic and political institutions. In a bloodless and legal transfer of power, Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took up the reins of government.

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¹ EDSA stands for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a main highway where the revolution took place.

Pierre Marchand, head of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Foundation, spoke the following words at the awards ceremony:

The world salutes the Filipinos for their courage in overthrowing two undesirable presidents. You have given the gift, in a world that only knows force and violence, of effecting radical change without firing a shot. The legacy of people power would be the Filipino people's gift to other peoples of the world. You were given a national gift. Do not keep it to yourselves. The world will never be the same again, if the spirit of EDSA prevails beyond the shores of this tiny archipelago. The 15th anniversary of People Power 1 was significant as it came 18 years after the death of Ninoy Aquino, 30 years after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., 50 years after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, 2000 years after the death of Christ.²

Although the second exercise of people power enhanced the revolutionary legacy of the previous demonstration, there are distinctions between the two phenomena, as they arose from different historical contexts and were shaped by a different confluence of events and forces. It is not possible, therefore, to study and analyze them as one single phenomenon of people power. However, though the two people power revolutions are not to be read in the same light, there is between them a historical continuum that tells the story of a people who took to the streets as the court of last resort to throw off the yoke of abusive and corrupt leadership.

The history of a people that seems to pass from one crisis to another could not come to a standstill. But it did for a moment, if only to honor the man who was the moral compass and a key figure in the people power revolts that ousted two presidents. That figure is Cardinal Jaime Sin, who died June 20, 2005. It was fitting to give tribute to a priest and prophet who saw his duty in putting Christ into politics, believing as he did that politics without Christ is the greatest scourge of the nation. Called the "divine commander-in-chief" for his ability to marshal huge protests, Cardinal Sin goes down in history as one who did it twice and with astonishing grace. "Go to EDSA," he twice said, and in both cases sitting presidents were toppled in a matter of days.³

In this article, I present a systematic reflection on the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986 under the illumination of theology. This event,

² The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Foundation is composed of peace advocates, including the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Carlos Ximenes Belo, and Jose Ramos-Horta of East Timor, Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, Henry Kissinger of the United States, and Adolfo Perez of Argentina. The quotation is taken from the *Philippine Star*, February 26, 2001, 2.

³ "Philippines' Cardinal Sin Is Dead," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4113474.stm> (accessed May 7, 2006). Jose Ma. Montelibano, "Jaime Cardinal Sin," http://www.iskandalo.com/cardinal_sin.html (accessed May 7, 2006).

while extraordinary, is also classic in its enduring relevance. The question I ask is what made this people's revolution possible, ending a regime without a single gun shot. In a world where power flows from the barrel of a gun, the revolution of 1986 poses a contradiction. How was it possible at all? The answer, I contend, lies in the deep connection between culture and religion, and religion's bearing on the moral vision of a people who acted gracefully in a life or death national crisis.

I argue that culture, religion, and moral vision constitute the *locus theologicus* for the Filipino People Power Revolution of 1986. This means that culture intersecting with religion in the shaping of moral vision offers rich material for theological reflection. I aim to show how the dynamics of culture and religion bear on the way our moral vision is shaped relative to how we see reality, what we regard as values or disvalues, and what we judge as right or wrong. How we are influenced by culture and religion enters into how we choose and act. Culture and religion, therefore, are the givens in the moral landscape of both individuals and communities.

The article consists of three parts. Part one discusses the basic meaning of culture and religion; part two develops the meaning of moral vision as worldview, particularly its religious dimension; and part three treats the dynamics of culture and religion and their bearing on moral vision as manifested in the Filipino nonviolent struggle for justice and freedom. Into the development of these main topics, I weave elements of the Revolution of 1986 to show how the connection between culture and religion and its bearing on moral vision provides the locus for theological interpretation of the revolution.

Using narrative to organize lived experiences into meaningful episodes, I attempt to put sinews and flesh on the dry bones of concepts.⁴ The stories belong to the Filipinos themselves. An indigenous and contextual Filipino theology grows out of a uniquely Filipino experience of the gospel—a theology that flows out of life and back to life, a theology that is at once “faithful to the text and relevant to the context.”⁵ The following short narrative of the historic event of the People Power Revolution of 1986 sets the background of my theological discourse.

⁴ See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Creating A Liberating Culture,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delvin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, Kathryn Tanner (New York: Oxford, 2001) 122–39, at 123, 128.

⁵ Quotation is cited in Douglas J. Elwood, “Prologue: Prospect for Indigenous Philippine Theology,” in *Toward a Theology of People Power: Reflections on the Philippine February Phenomenon*, ed. Douglas J. Elwood (Quezon City: New Day, 1980) 1–16, at 3.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

On November 3, 1985, President Ferdinand Marcos announced on U.S. television that he was calling for a snap presidential election to be held in three months or less. This announcement was the beginning of a political drama that unfolded through a confluence of events and forces, whether of chance or providence. The story begins in the late 1960s, when the country faced two crises: first, the crisis that developed from the student-led protests against the Vietnam War and the founding of a new Communist party in December 1968; second, the threat of a Marcos dictatorship that came with allegations of widespread corruption among his family members and cronies. In the face of this threat, members of Congress were rapidly polarized, and in the streets a series of violent demonstrations by students, laborers, and peasants began what came to be known as the "First Quarter Storm." On September 22, 1972, Marcos declared martial law.

The imposition of martial law effectively paralyzed all anti-Marcos elements and consolidated the pro-Marcos forces that controlled the government for the next decade. The threat of arrest, without due process and without warrant, forced the opposition to go underground, and student activists, radicalized by the futility of their efforts, joined the leftist groups. Above ground, only the church hierarchy and a few others continued the anti-dictatorship movement. The rest of the Filipinos went about their daily lives, unmindful of the national situation, out of indifference or fear, or because they were simply ground down by poverty.

In January 1981 Marcos lifted martial law, which had been in force for nine years. Five months later, he was elected to another six-year term, his third elected term of office. Two years later, Senator Benigno Aquino, Marcos's rival in the political arena, broke his self-imposed exile in the United States and returned to the Philippines. After his plane landed at the Manila International Airport, Aquino, escorted by military men, was shot to death as he descended the stairs of the plane. The last image of him on television and in newspapers was of his bloodied body sprawled on the tarmac. The following week, a nation infuriated by his murder spilled into the streets by the millions to form a mammoth funeral procession through the city. The dam of pent-up anger ruptured, and the people were awakened to the dark struggle ahead.

Over the next two years, the impact of Aquino's murder and the declining economic conditions fanned the fires of the protest movement, which crossed ideological lines. The extreme left was at the frontline of the organization of workers and the urban poor. In the center left were the urban middle organizers, some university academicians, and the social democratic movement. The center right included the Catholic hierarchy, organized business, and conservative social democrats. At the extreme right were

those from the old politburo families, dissatisfied military leaders, and the Reform Armed Forces Movement, a military faction that protested the politicization of the armed forces.

By late 1984, rumors of a possible presidential snap election were already flying. The opposition was not yet galvanized. A confluence of events and forces, however, brought together the divided opposition into an alliance that moved and supported the candidacy of Cory Aquino—widow of the slain hero, Benigno Aquino—against Marcos. This turn of events marginalized the left, which decided to boycott the elections. The elections, however, were marred by violence and blatant fraud, as Marcos's goons snatched ballot boxes, even as volunteers from the National Movement for Free Elections tried literally to guard the boxes with their bodies. When the Philippine National Assembly proclaimed Marcos the winner, computer technicians from the Commission on Elections staged a walkout to protest the fraud. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) declared the election unparalleled in its fraudulent conduct and concluded that a government based on such deceit had no moral basis for its power.

The CBCP declaration was unprecedented. It was the first time that the bishops of a nation had officially condemned its government as morally illegitimate and hence unworthy of allegiance. It was also the first time that the Church, through its leaders, had declared a revolution—even if that word was never used. Unprecedented, too, was the bishops' assertion of independence from the intervention of Rome, which tried to sway their collective decision to issue their statement even before Parliament (merely a rubber stamp) had declared Marcos the winner. Rome in effect was telling the CBCP to be silent until President Marcos was proclaimed the duly-elected head of state. The CBCP countered Rome by appealing to the principle of *Octogesima adveniens*, that the local church was fully competent to pronounce judgment on local issues. After the CBCP proclamation, the nation saw a clear direction amidst its collective fear and confusion. The voices of protest found an authoritative moral basis, and the people were empowered in their moral struggle.

Cory Aquino, in a massive rally in Luneta Park, declared her victory and called for nationwide civil disobedience to topple Marcos by eroding his economic base. As the call for disobedience mounted, some officers of the Reform Armed Forces Movement finalized their plan for a coup d'état, but this was aborted following a security breach. Instead, the plotters, together with the Secretary of Defense Juan Ponce Enrile and General Fidel Ramos, retreated to Camp Aguinaldo along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) where they held a televised news conference in which they declared open rebellion against the Marcos regime. Cardinal Sin broadcast an appeal for people to rally at EDSA to support and protect Enrile and Ramos. In response, some 20,000 citizens massed outside the camp in the

early morning. Even as the first tanks began to move in to crush the rebellion, people continued to pour into EDSA, creating a mammoth human barricade around the camp. The crowd swelled to an estimated two million people dressed in yellow, Cory's color, and singing songs, praying the rosary, waving yellow flags, and carrying religious statues. Nearby houses in posh subdivisions opened their kitchens to prepare food for both the soldiers and the crowds; food multiplied, and so did the courage, faith, and hope of the people. People knelt in prayer, threw their bodies in the path of the tanks, offered flowers to the soldiers, and appealed for peace and solidarity. As the crowd continued to grow in size and spirit, government troops defected in droves to the side of the people.

As military support for Marcos dwindled, U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt, acting on behalf of his friend President Ronald Reagan, told Marcos that the time had come for him to cut and cut clean. Late in the afternoon of February 25, 1986, the Marcoses fled to Hawaii. As soon as the people heard of their departure, they exploded in euphoria into the streets. The four fateful days of February 22–25, 1986—the EDSA revolution—came to a close.⁶

CULTURE AND RELIGION

My theological reflection on the EDSA revolution begins by defining the nature of culture and religion. Culture is a deep and complex reality. From the modern anthropological view, it is a way of life, a way of being that is peculiar to a people, as expressed in their beliefs, values, attitudes, and worldviews. It refers to the way people construct the character of their own lives as groups and societies in particular historical circumstances and contexts.⁷

⁶ The historical review is based on the research done by Rowena B. Azada and Ranilo B. Hermida on the background of the EDSA revolution. See “‘People Power’ Revolution: Perspectives from Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas,” *Budhi* 5 (2001) 85–149, esp. 104–12.

⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 33. While culture is universal, each instance of it is particular. A culture can be integrated on a semantic or logical level with the beliefs and values that make it up, presupposing and implying one another, “every bit of belief fits in with every other bit in a general mosaic of mystical thought” (Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* [New York: Free Press, 1962] 99). The particulars within each culture constitute a cohesive whole, wherein each element is intelligible in its relation with other elements, in the particularity of their context. What makes a culture distinct is its context. See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954) 47–53.

Culture, however, is not linear and unchanging. It is a dynamic creation of dialogue, conflict, and negotiation within multileveled social processes and interactions. Constituted by beliefs, values, customs, stories, and traditions that form a particular way of being human, culture emerges from historical processes and continues to evolve as its participants make sense of their experience in changing times and circumstances.⁸

For Kathryn Tanner, who discusses the shift in the study of culture from a modern to a postmodern perspective, the modern view emphasizes culture's role in generating social consensus, as people come to a shared experience of values. From the postmodern perspective this emphasis on consensus appears as an optical illusion. Against the view that cultures are clearly circumscribed, consisting of internally unified beliefs and values that are transmitted as principles of social order, the postmodern view stresses historicity, indeterminacy, fragmentation, and conflict.⁹ It rejects the modern tendency of previous students of culture to turn a blind eye to the social conflict and divergence of opinions that mark the struggles of a people to make sense of reality, as they either preserve, alter, or revolt against the terms of their world. Tending to intellectualize culture, the modern view ignores the conflicts, the turns and twists of real life situations, and downplays the power dimension in the interpretation of beliefs and values. From a postmodern perspective, cultures may have common elements, but rather than being articulated in apodictic terms, they remain vague and unelaborated. This lack of clear and categorical definitions, however, makes dialogue and interactions possible among people who are differently situated. Rather than a consensus-driven notion of culture is one whose meanings are plural and shift according to multivalent circumstances.¹⁰

Postmodern critics of culture gainsay the cultural stability that anthropologists emphasize. They hold that when cultural forms function as rules directing action, they do not resemble the rules of a game or mathematical

⁸ The modern notion of culture has been criticized for its lack of attention to historical process. Culture viewed as a dehistoricized concept begins to be treated like the facts of nature and givens of life, about which human beings can do very little; they are simply to live by it and work with it. Treating culture as dehistoricized makes it easier to talk about, to describe its shape and how it hangs together. See George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fisher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986) 98. Culture as a totalizing vision is a hypothetical construct that most likely distorts the reality of its lived practice. See Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, abridged with intro. by Eva Gillies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 221.

⁹ See Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 38–56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 45–47.

formulae that are mechanically applied and executed.¹¹ Rather, cultural rules are applied with flexibility, creativity, and innovation, according to the complexity of social circumstances. The various ways of responding appropriately to cultural rules depend on the dictates and demands of human situations. People meet in a variety of centers where interactions are multileveled and exchanges are marked by imbalances and inequalities. The interconnections between and among cultures are not static and homogeneous, but shifting and pluralistic.¹²

While the postmodern critique is valid at many levels, it can (wrongly) present culture as so shifting, pluralistic, and fragmented as to leave nothing by which to distinguish one culture from another. There may be no clear, a priori homogeneity, but there must be a cultural matrix of historical experience, values, and beliefs that provides a relative center of engagement and negotiation. Or, to press the point further, there must be some core beliefs and values in a culture that offer reference points for understanding it precisely as a culture, even as it is open to ever new ways and horizons of meaning. A creative tension between centering and decentering, therefore, is present in the reality of culture.¹³

Religion, like culture, is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, if one views it only from the socio-anthropological perspective, one can miss its core. On the other hand, if one views it only from a philosophical-theological perspective, one can neglect its social-contextual constructions.¹⁴ There is, however, a common thread running through the socio-anthropological, philosophical, and theological perspectives: the ultimate

¹¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977) 1–9.

¹² Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 53–56.

¹³ Isasi-Diaz referred to the shared experience rather than the sameness of experience of the Latinas. Their shared experience, however, does not define their claim to common identity, or common attributes, or even common situations or experiences, but rather points to their cultural matrix, part of which is the marginality/oppression in which they live and the way they experience the world because of how others perceive them. This cultural matrix is the common background that directly influences their worldview, and against which their lives unfold, each of them in their own persons and acting in their own way (“Creating a Liberating Culture” 126–27). I see in Isasi-Diaz’s narrative a nuanced middle position between the modern and postmodern understandings of culture. Without denying a common reality that serves as a relative center of cultural engagement and negotiation, the specificity and concreteness of the historical configurations of individual experiences remain. There is a creative tension between centering and decentering of the cultural experience.

¹⁴ Social anthropology studies religion as a social phenomenon, particularly its impact on society; theology and philosophy inquire into the substance and ground of religion, and probe its transcendental origin and goal. It describes what is ob-

meaning about which all religions are concerned. This may be termed the quest for meaning in the face of pointless existence (Geertz);¹⁵ not just any meaning but ultimate meaning that demands total surrender (Tillich);¹⁶ a quest for meaning that reaches its peak fulfillment by being in love with God (Lonergan);¹⁷ and within that love, the human person as the event of God's self-communication (Rahner).¹⁸

Clifford Geertz, a foremost anthropologist of religion, suggests that in religion we seek our answers to the problem of meaning in the face of pointless existence. Chaos threatens to break in on us at the limits of our analytic capacities, moral insight, and powers of endurance. In the face of bafflement, suffering, and intractable ethical paradox, people turn to religion to find meaning.¹⁹ This quest or drive for meaning, Geertz writes, is an

servable about religion as a human and superhuman phenomenon. Social anthropology observes the effects of the divine experience, but it is an outsider to that experience. Geertz, whose works have laid the mediating link in the dialogue between social anthropology and theology, makes no claim of competency to speak about the basis of belief. He writes: "The existence of bafflement, pain, and moral paradox—of The Problem of Meaning—is one of the things that drive men [and women] toward belief in gods, devils, totemic principles, or the spiritual efficacy of cannibalism . . . but it is not the basis upon which those beliefs rest, but rather their most important field of application (*The Interpretation of Cultures* [New York: Basic Books, 1973] 109).

¹⁵ Ibid. 45–46.

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 1.

¹⁷ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 105–6. The gift of God's love is an experience of the holy. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford, 1923). This experience is what Tillich named as being grasped by Ultimate Concern (see *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965]). The experience corresponds to Ignatius Loyola's "consolation without a cause." On this see Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (Montreal: Palm, 1964), 131 ff., where he takes "consolation without a cause" to mean "consolation with a content but without an object."

¹⁸ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 127. Rahner defines mysticism as an "ultimate and absolutely radical experience of transcendence in the mystery of God." See also Michael Stoeber, "Mysticism and the Spiritual Life: Reflections on Karl Rahner's View of Mysticism," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 17 (2001) 263–75; and Andrew Tallon, "The Heart in Rahner's Philosophy of Mysticism," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 700–728.

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock, 1966) 14. Other relevant works of Geertz include *Myth, Symbol, and Culture* (New York: Norton, 1974); "Impact of the Concept of Culture in the Concept of Man," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973) 33–54; "The

imperative in human experience.²⁰ Geertz is not consciously engaging in theological discourse, but trying to understand and interpret human behavior. He sees the dynamic of human meaning as operative in both culture and religion. For him, culture is a complex interplay of symbols expressing meaning, and religion as a cultural system is the expression of the human search for meaning. His work provides a singularly provocative interface between anthropology and theology.²¹

In defining religion as the dimension of depth in all reality, Paul Tillich adopted the term *ultimate concern*. Religion or faith, he writes, is the "state of being ultimately concerned."²² His philosophy of religion as a philosophy of meaning in relation to the Unconditional finds resonance in other voices.²³ "The concept of the Unconditional is paradoxical"; it is related to all things, and yet is beyond all things; it is not bound to anything, as it stands over and against all things; it is the dynamic reality inherent in all, yet transcending all.²⁴ Religion as the ultimate and deepest meaning that "shakes the foundations of all things"²⁵ holds an ecstatic attraction and fascination, for in it the finite finds its rest and fulfillment.²⁶

Lonergan speaks of the religious experience of being loved by and being in love with God as the highest level of the human intentional conscious-

Growth of Culture and the Evolution of the Mind," in *Theories of the Mind*, ed. Jordan M. Scher (New York: Free Press, 1966).

²⁰ Clifford Geertz writes: "To make sense out of experience, to give it form and order is evidently as real and as pressing as the more familiar biological needs" (*Interpretation of Cultures* 140). Similarly, Peter Berger writes: "men [and women] are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality" (*The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* [New York: Anchor, 1969] 22). In another place, he writes, "One fundamental human trait which is of crucial importance in understanding man's religious enterprise is his propensity for order" (*A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Sacred* [New York: Anchor, 1970] 66).

²¹ See the collection of commentaries on Geertz's writings: John H. Morgan, ed., *Understanding Religion and Culture: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979).

²² Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 1.

²³ Abraham Heschel writes: "Human being is never sheer being; it is always involved in meaning. The dimension of meaning is as indigenous to his being human as the dimension of space is to stars and stones. . . . Human being is either coming into meaning or betraying it" (*Who Is Man* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1958] 50-51). Robley Edward Whitson also writes that meaning is not only the core of religion, it constitutes the essential experience of community of people out of which religion is generated (*The Coming Convergence of World Religions* [New York: New Press, 1971] 10).

²⁴ James Luther Adams, introduction to Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 15.

²⁵ Tillich, *What Is Religion?* 163.

²⁶ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 15.

ness, the peak of the soul, the *apex animae*.²⁷ “Being in love with God, as experienced, is being in love in an unrestricted fashion. All love is self-surrender, but being in love with God is being in love without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations. Just as restricted questioning is our capacity for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the proper fulfillment of that capacity.”²⁸ At the apex of religion is the response to the divine initiative of love, which is never ceasing, always giving and loving, deepening and broadening, boundless, unrestricted, unconditioned. In all our human questioning is the question of God, and being in love with God is the ultimate fulfillment of the human capacity for self-transcendence.

Rahner conceives religion similarly. For him, the origin of religion is the disclosure of Godself as a gracious God gracing the human person. Religion is the prior word God speaks. As hearers of the word, we have an “ear” within us for God’s revelation.²⁹ Our entire being is ordered toward God, with a radical openness (*potentia obedientialis*) to God’s self-disclosure.³⁰ To be human is to stand in free love before God, to listen to God’s word or to God’s silence.³¹ This a priori state has its origin in God and is sustained by God: “Everyone, really and radically *every* person, must be understood as the event of a supernatural self-communication of God.”³²

However deep and intimate the religious experience is, it is not solitary. Religion is communal. Lonergan describes the religious experience as radically personal at the outset, but it seeks community in the end. By its word, religion enters the world and endows it with its deepest meaning and highest value. It sets itself in a particular context, where it relates with other meanings and values, and there comes to understand itself, but always drawing forth from the power of ultimate concern in the midst of proximate concerns.³³

Rahner speaks of the historical and categorical objectifications of reli-

²⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 107.

²⁸ Ibid. 105–6.

²⁹ See Richard J. Beauchesne, “The Spiritual Existential as Desire: Karl Rahner and Emmanuel Levinas,” *Église et théologie* 23 (1992) 221–39, at 224. “Rahner’s supernatural existential—an alert toward Being considered as Desire—expresses in their nakedness both the absolute otherness of God as well as the absolute gratuity of our openness toward God, of that which enables us to hear the call from the gracious and gracing mystery, which is God” (ibid. 238).

³⁰ See Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 126–31.

³¹ Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Joseph Donceel, ed. Andrew Tallon (New York: Continuum, 1994) 92.

³² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 127.

³³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 118.

gion. In his theology, religions as social/communal institutions are the a posteriori historicizations of God's transcendent revelation within the framework of the "supernatural existential." They are the historical categorical objectifications of the transcendent supernatural revelation of God. The supernatural existential, therefore, is the root and origin of institutional religions, insofar as they arose from the originating faith response to the antecedent supernatural revelation of God.³⁴

Lonergan speaks of the historical conditionings of the outward word:

The word, then, is personal. *Cor ad cor loquitur*: love speaks to love, and its speech is powerful. The religious leader, the prophet, the Christ, the apostle, the priest, the preacher announces in signs and symbols what is congruent with the gift of love that God works within us. The word, too, is social: it brings into a single fold the scattered sheep that belong together because at the depth of their hearts they respond to the same mystery of love and awe. The word, finally, is historical. It is meaning outwardly expressed. It has to borrow and adapt a language that more easily speaks of this world than of transcendence. But such languages and contexts vary with time and place to give words changing meanings and statements changing implications.³⁵

Before it enters into the world mediated by meaning, religion is the prior word of God. This word belongs to the world of immediacy. The a posteriori word is historically conditioned by the human contexts in which it is uttered, and such contexts vary from place to place, from generation to generation, as religion seeks new words, new expressions, new language.³⁶

Theology and socio-anthropology have a common ground for dialogue in the social and contextual expressions of religion. Religion exists because those who believe in it claim to have encountered the divine, in their experience of transcendence and ultimacy. Religion is not the product of social construction, but is mediated through social and cultural constructs.³⁷ While it is a social phenomenon embedded in social relations and

³⁴ See Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 138–61.

³⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 113–14.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 112.

³⁷ French sociologist Émile Durkheim, from the framework of social anthropology, takes a contrary view. For the atheist Durkheim, the sacred is simply society's projection of itself in human consciousness. Religion is the symbol that provides a total world interpretation, the myth that relates people to the ultimate conditions of their existence. The very origin of religion as such is society; religion is the social construction of society. Durkheim used the concept of totemism to explain the sacred in terms of the holy objects that function as symbols in signifying the identity of a tribe. He saw embodied in these revered objects a power that was charged by the very identity of the group itself. He called this force or power the "totemic principle," which is derived from the collective identity and traditions of a tribe. Durkheim holds that sacredness, as a universal feature of all religious phenomena,

expressions, it is first of all the experience of the divine: the a priori word of God at the core of finite existence, encountered in different and varying human contexts.³⁸

Religion, therefore, is a complex, multivalent phenomenon. A basic definition that synthesizes its essential elements is this: Religion is a social and communal phenomenon, grounded in the a priori experience of the divine in varying intensities and depths, at different levels, and in different modes. In and through all these facets, religion is being grasped by ultimate concern.

MORAL VISION AS WORLDVIEW: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

The dynamics of culture and religion enter into our moral vision in the sense that they enter into our worldview. I develop the concept of worldview and relate it with what I understand about moral vision. I treat particularly the religious dimension of moral vision, because when religion is related with moral vision, the complex relationship between religion and morality is brought into question. I focus on this dimension of moral vision to ground my contention that religion as the substance of culture was the liberating force in the Filipino nonviolent struggle for justice and freedom at EDSA.

A worldview is a way of looking at the world, in view of the claims or demands reality makes for meaningful human existence. It is a source of presuppositions in thinking, judging, and acting. These presuppositions are the starting points for the ordering and patterning of reality. One's worldview provides the basic model of interpreting reality, that is, it systematizes one's conception of reality. The following story exemplifies worldviews in action:

A teacher who was a Westerner or trained along Western lines was almost in despair. After a carefully built-up scientific explanation of malaria, its processes, causes, etc., the boys in an Ugandan primary school did not seem to have under-

is a creation of society. See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965) 235 ff.

³⁸ Paul Knitter speaks of a "frightening and fascinating" journey that a religion, in a world of religious pluralism, has to take with other religions toward the fullness of truth. "A true religion will no longer be founded on the absolutely certain, final and unchangeable possession of Divine Truth but on an authentic experience of the Divine which gives one a secure place to stand and from which to carry on the frightening and fascinating journey, *with other religions*, into the inexhaustible fullness of Divine Truth" ("Christianity as a Religion: True and Absolute? A Roman Catholic Perspective," in *What Is Religion? An Enquiry for Christian Theology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and David Tracy, Concilium: Religion in the Eighties 136 [New York: Seabury, 1980] 19).

stood anything. “Why does a man catch malaria?” one boy asked timidly. “Because a mosquito, the carrier of the parasite, bites him,” replied the teacher, who went on to give the whole explanation again. At this, the class still unconvinced and solidly behind the daring boy who shouted, “But who sent the mosquito to bite the man?”³⁹

The boys are inquiring not from the level of scientific information but from the worldview of their cultural beliefs and stories. This brings to mind the Filipino folkloric belief that people must beg pardon of the spirit of a particular outdoor spot where they urinate lest they be harmed by the spirit. Such a belief reflects the worldview that determines one’s way of relating to the world.

Peter Henriot narrates the following to illustrate how a worldview peculiar to a culture—in this case, the Zambian culture—can explain why people behave as they do:

Women by and large work much harder than men—longer hours, double jobs (outside work place and work at home). And expectations that this should be accepted as normal are deep in the culture. I commented once to a Zambian man that I was surprised and disturbed to see a largely pregnant woman walking along the road with a small baby on her back and another child clutching her right hand, carrying on her head one piece of luggage and in her left hand another, while her husband walked leisurely behind her carrying only a walking stick. I was told—with almost a straight face!—that the man was protecting his wife from the lions they might encounter. The fact that there had been no lions in this particular region for decades did not distract from the cultural imperative that men do not carry their wife’s luggage in public, let alone look after children.⁴⁰

This story exemplifies a gender-bound division of labor that may have been justified in past circumstances, but that under completely new circumstances cannot be legitimated.⁴¹ Henriot continues with another narrative:

I was feeling puzzled why people remained sitting during the reading of the Gospel at Mass. Why did they fail to show respect by [not] standing, the kind of respectful gesture I had grown up with in my own country? I was told by a Zambian that in their culture, respect was shown by taking a lower place when an elder or important person was speaking. One did not show respect by standing but by sitting. I came to appreciate that the value of respect is expressed in different ways in different cultures. This is indeed a simple lesson, but one with profound consequences in efforts to inculcate the faith.⁴²

Charles Kraft develops the major functions of a worldview as a basic

³⁹ Raimundo Pannikar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 322.

⁴⁰ Peter Henriot, “Grassroots Analysis: The Emphasis on Culture,” in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, ed. G. de Schrijver (Leuven: Leuven University, 1998) 333–50, at 346.

⁴¹ De Schrijver, *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds* 420.

⁴² Henriot, “Grassroots Analysis: The Emphasis on Culture” 348.

model of reality, which he calls the “central control box.” The first function of a worldview is to explain how and why things have come to be as they are and how and why they continue or change. If a worldview conditions a people to see the universe as being operated by invisible personal forces beyond their control, they would understand and relate to reality differently from those who view this same universe as ruled by the phenomenon of cause and effect of impersonal forces, which can be influenced and even determined by their human agency.⁴³

A worldview also has a valuing and judging function. People reject or accept realities according to their consonance or dissonance with it. The worldview also provides psychological reinforcement, especially in crisis or boundary situations (illness, calamities, death), in life passages (puberty, marriage), in the changing seasons of sowing and harvesting. Each event is celebrated with a ritual or ceremony providing a sense of security and support for the participants. The worldview also has an integrating function, in terms of the way it systematizes and orders people’s perception of reality—its premises and presuppositions, its bases and criteria, its limitations and boundaries—into one design, creating a whole way of understanding and interpreting multifarious events. The integrating function of a worldview gives a people a centered and centering vision of a world in the face of conflicts and dissonances.⁴⁴

I understand moral vision in terms of worldview, because we choose and judge according to our perceptions. Morality is deeper than choosing. What lies deeper than the choice is the vision or the worldview. How a person sees and responds springs from this depth. We see as we are. And according to our seeing, we act. Moral vision is rooted in our worldview. We see the world in a particular way because we are a particular sort of person. Thus we are inclined to decide in one way or another, because of who we are and what we have made of ourselves. Moral vision is far-reaching; it touches a depth where persons take hold of who they are, where they have set their hearts, how they have integrated and directed their energies, and how deeply they have been moved and influenced by their beliefs and convictions. A worldview provides a perspective that inspires action.

The dynamics of culture and religion constitute the context and ground of moral vision. Entering into the way people choose and act are the beliefs and values they hold, the stories and traditions that shaped their memories, the relationships and interrelationships they are a part of, and all these are woven and interwoven into the fabric of their fundamental relationship with God. Moral vision is deeply connected with a particular way of being human (culture) within the experience of the divine (religion), which de-

⁴³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999) 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 54–57.

defines one's deepest selfhood and identity. Being moral, therefore, is something of utmost importance and dignity.

To speak of religion and its bearing on moral vision, however, is to bring to question the complex relationship of morality and religion. The inescapable claim of fundamental values such as truth, freedom, justice, and equality lies at the core of moral existence. To ignore this claim is to deny humanity itself. There is a transcendent dimension to being moral in the sense that, while it springs from within oneself, it also demands something greater than oneself. Being moral is experienced as something of utmost importance and dignity, for it is intrinsically bound up with being human.

When the question "why be moral?" is asked, the answer most commonly given in the past was that one should be moral because God commands it, or that one should be moral out of love of God. But that there do exist atheists and nonbelievers who live by high moral standards seriously challenges the absolute validity of this position. To say that belief in God is not necessary to be moral or to become aware of moral obligation and demands has a basis in fact. Some may in fact deny God and abandon religion yet still strive to be moral. One could go even further and say that some deny God and religion precisely because of their moral strivings.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, morality is still frequently understood and interpreted in the context of religion. The sacred traditions and sacred books have contributed largely to the strong religious context of morality. Probably the single event that has inscribed the deepest moral images in the minds and hearts of most people is the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses. Most remember Moses coming down the mountain with the two stone tablets onto which were carved the commandments God had given to be the moral code of the people. This event certainly portrays God as the direct source of moral laws and commands imposed by the power of God's authority, with the accompanying threat of divine sanction. An intelligent reading and interpretation of this pericope, however, require one to distinguish between the religious message and the form and language in which it is communicated. Vincent MacNamara writes:

What the Jews came to realize was that as a people of God, they were to attend to this fundamental strand of human experience. If they were to be God's people, they were to take seriously the horizontal dimension of their lives. Nothing could contribute more powerfully to that insight, nothing could give it greater weight and significance in Jewish minds than to attach morality to Moses, the great prophet, and to regard it as given to him by God as the law for his people. The insight about the significance of morality was important. But we need to distinguish between the

⁴⁵ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World no. 12, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America, 1966) 216–17.

reality of the insight and the particularly colorful and impressive way in which it was communicated.⁴⁶

One may speak of God as the source of morality in the sense that God has created persons and has given them a nature with a capacity to reflect on and respond to the moral thrust in that nature. One should not, however, think of God as the direct and external source of moral commands and obligation imposed on persons, with the threat of divine punishment or the promise of divine blessings, because morality is grounded in freedom. Only free acts are moral. Thus, any imposition or coercion from an external authority violates the free nature of moral acts. God is not an external authority, but is the immediate source of every person's reflective capacity for free moral acts.

What I have so far established is that it is possible to speak of morality as a human phenomenon with a certain autonomy from religion.⁴⁷ The distinction between morality and religion, however, does not imply the absence of interrelationship. Both are concerned with a person's ultimate good and value. Thus, although morality makes its own demands, it is ultimately based on the nature of persons in terms of the "should/ought" that every person experiences as a being-in-community, which has an intrinsic relation with God as the very source of human nature and its moral thrust. We therefore speak of a *relative* autonomy of morality with respect to religious faith, not an *absolute* autonomy.

For believers, to grasp the total vision of life is not possible without contextualizing it in their relation to God. They perceive morality as situated decisively in their relation to God. Religious faith is not regarded as only one option among others in life. Of its nature, religious faith is a fundamental choice that engages, shapes, and evaluates the whole of life. As René Latourelle puts it: "The word of God brings into play our sense of personal existence and our sense of the whole of human existence. Here it is not a question of modifying our prevailing system of values; it is a question of reorienting our whole being. . . . Faith is a decision for God, and our whole life ought to pivot on this dramatic decision which involves us even to our innermost aspirations."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Vincent McNamara, *Love, Law, and Christian Life: Basic Attitudes of Christian Morality* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988) 26–27.

⁴⁷ Schubert Ogden and Hans Küng conclude that belief in God is presupposed by our moral choices. This position is criticized by analytic philosophers who claim that belief in God is not implied in living a moral life. See Gerald McCarthy, "Meaning, Morals, and Existence of God," *Horizons* 9 (1982) 288–301; James J. Walter, "The Relation between Faith and Morality: Sources for Christian Ethics," *Horizons* 9 (1982) 251–70.

⁴⁸ René Latourelle, "Revelation and Faith: Personal Encounter with God," *Theology Digest* 10 (1962) 233–38, at 237.

Thus religious faith is the all-embracing horizon against which believers look at the whole of life, modifying and qualifying their attitudes, dispositions, values, and aspirations that enter into the very fabric of their concrete choices and decisions. Religious faith brings to morality a depth, intensity, and urgency by situating it in relation to the person's fundamental response to God who calls.

What all this suggests is that, when we speak of morality, we are confronted with questions that concern human existence as a whole, which must be seen in the general and larger context of the nature and purpose of being human, that is, what the human person was made for.⁴⁹

For morality to develop its sense of responsibility to that which evokes the obligation to be good, it needs God to complete its inherent drive to become more aware and reflective of realities greater than the one experiencing the obligation. Whereas Kant's explanation of morality implies that the moral life can be self-sufficient because ideally it is based on the only truly good thing, i.e., the Good Will, Kierkegaard's understanding is closer to the truth of the obligatory nature of morality because he accounts for the deep urges of morality to expand the realization of obligations to the point that eventually one knows that to remain moral, one must be committed to something greater than even being good. This difference comes out in examining how they [Kant and Kierkegaard] relate morality to religious belief.⁵⁰

Religious belief does not cancel the value that reason is presenting in the realm of morality, but it appeals to human beings to see that there is a realm of values that they have not imagined in their parameter of values. That is the way religious faith opens up reason to something greater than what it has envisioned to be the good. It does not subvert it, but it appeals for openness, a widening of horizons, a going in a new direction, seeing a whole new world that one never expected to exist. It is natural, for instance, for one to consider the value of security and possessions. Religious faith widens the horizons of values to include the value of sharing, which is perhaps an even more important value than security and possessions. Religious faith, therefore, challenges a person to stretch his or her horizons of meaning, to seek more and become more.⁵¹ To ground morality in religion means to ground it in a vision of the human person as being grasped by ultimate concern, oriented to the supernatural, and "in love with God," in

⁴⁹ Osmond G. Rambaran, "Morality and Religion: An Analytic Approach with Implications for Religious Education," *Religious Education* 72 (1977) 514-27.

⁵⁰ Dennis Sansom, "Does Morality Need God? A Kierkegaardian Critique of Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26 (1999) 17-33, at 17-18.

⁵¹ This was an intervention by Antonio Lambino; it is cited in the discussion portion of the article by Francisco F. Claver, S.J., "Social Theory and Social Change in the Philippines," *Pulso* 1 (1984) 42-48, at 46.

whom, as Lonergan writes, one's "capacity for moral self-transcendence finds a fulfillment that brings deep peace and joy."⁵²

CULTURE, RELIGION, AND MORAL VISION

The main contention of this article is that the dynamics of culture and religion were at the base of the moral vision of the Filipino struggle for justice and freedom at EDSA. In this section, I will discuss the interaction of culture and religion and its bearing on moral vision, using narratives from the EDSA experience to root my theological discourse in the Filipino context.

What precisely are these dynamics of culture and religion that enter into the shaping of moral vision? I use Tillich's much quoted statement, "culture is a form of expression of religion and religion is the substance of culture,"⁵³ to provide an interpretative framework in discussing the dynamics of culture and religion. Tillich offers a heuristic framework, but its use and interpretation must be specified in a particular text and context. Using Tillich's framework, I will demonstrate the dynamics of culture and religion by drawing concrete elements from the Filipino people power phenomenon.

Culture Is a Form of Expression of Religion: The Filipino Core Cultural Values

Culture as a form of expression of religion implies that embedded in cultural forms and contexts is the experience of religion, though its cultural expressions may not be explicitly religious. The holy is a transcendent power made present through symbolic forms without ever becoming identical with any of them. In and through the world of the finite, persons encounter the holy. It is an experience that points beyond itself. Cultural forms and realities are potential symbols of the divine.⁵⁴

⁵² Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 122.

⁵³ Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?* 73. The relationship between religion and culture is also the central theme of all of Christopher Dawson's writings. See Daniel H. O'Connor, C.S.V., *The Relation between Religion and Culture according to Christopher Dawson* (Montreal: Librairie Saint-Viateur, 1952).

⁵⁴ R. F. Aldwinckle, "Tillich's Theory of Religious Symbolism," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10 (1964) 110–17, at 111. Tillich explains that symbols point beyond themselves. What symbols point to cannot itself be grasped directly. As symbols participate in the reality symbolized, there is an intrinsic relationship between the symbols and what they symbolize. Symbols open up depths of reality that would otherwise remain hidden, while at the same time they make possible levels of experience from which persons would likewise be excluded. See H. D. McDonald, "The Symbolic Theology of Paul Tillich," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (December 1964) 414–30, at 421–22.

Because religion is incarnated in culture, we must be sensitive and alert to the cultural ethos that gives it shape and form. Religion as the dimension of depth to all reality, as Tillich observed, breaks out of its confines only in explicit religious acts and practices.⁵⁵ It is a broad understanding of religion, both novel and fruitful, that makes one see that reality is not sharply divided into sacred and profane, but rather that all reality is potentially sacred. If religion is the depth dimension of all things, then culture, which is all pervasive in life, is the realm of religion.

Cultural exegesis is an interpretative activity that makes explicit what is implicit in culture, unfolding its meaning. It is perspectival, done from a particular standpoint. It sees a connection with what is going on in the lives of a particular people, their issues, problems, and hopes. Cultural exegesis cannot be undertaken in isolation from what truly matters to a people, that is, at the locus of human experience where religion addresses them at their depths. In the past, cultural exegesis or analysis had been neglected relative to social analysis, which focuses on the structures of economics and politics that were seen at the base of social problems. A shift is now occurring, as it becomes clear that social analysis that ignores cultural dimensions cannot get at the underlying dynamics shaping social movements in various settings.⁵⁶ Only when the cultural symbols and values of a people are taken seriously can their creative potential in the process of social change unfold. For sociologist Robert Bellah, the most important social sources are symbolic and cultural, the great collective symbols of social life: "We are used to thinking of change in economic and

⁵⁵ Tillich's view of religion as the depth dimension of human life touched a chord in the hearts of many and provoked spirited responses. See D. Mackenzie Brown, ed. *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁵⁶ Henriot ("Grassroots Analysis" 338) writes that the necessity of cultural analysis does not replace or merely supplement social analysis, but actually deepens it. Culture is not simply the content of analysis but also the context and the method. That is, culture provides not only the matter for social analysis; it also influences its perspective and process. Henriot's stance represents the "pincer movement of socio-economic and cultural analysis," which validates neither the socio-cultural nor the socio-economic-political approach, but sees both as constitutive of one analytical paradigm, though at times with varying foci of attention, either the cultural, the economic, or the political focus, depending on the context under examination, but never losing sight of the fact that both dimensions are intimately connected. José de Mesa distinguishes cultural analysis from social analysis: the former "is a systematic process of bringing into explicit awareness and orderly categorization (thematization) the implicit cultural meaning of cultural aspects within the framework of culture as an integrated system. . . . Social analysis tackles the more historical and institutional/structural aspects of the same culture" ("A Hermeneutics of Appreciation: Approach and Methodology," *MST Review* 4.2 [2000] iv-113, at 23-24).

political terms but it is symbolic change that goes the deepest and lasts the longest.”⁵⁷

The hermeneutics of appreciation is a methodology of cultural exegesis that highlights the positive elements in a culture.⁵⁸ It is based on the faith conviction that divine presence graces the life of a people, and the theological task is to discern the spiritual qualities and gifts of every people and of every age. As stated in Vatican II’s *Ad gentes*:

Christ Himself searched the hearts of men and led them to divine light through truly human conversation. So also his disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should know the people among whom they live, and should establish contact with them. Thus they themselves can learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth. But at the same time, let them try to illumine these treasures with the light of the gospel, to set them free, and to bring them under the dominion of God their Savior.⁵⁹

If culture, as Tillich says, is a form of expression of religion, we must be alert and sensitive to the depth dimensions of culture. Embedded in culture are expressions of religion, although they may not be explicitly religious. God graces the culture and life of a people and thus, in whatever is honorable, just, pure, lovely—in whatever is gracious, religion is mediated and experienced. Any authentic cultural value or experience is an experience of the religious. Religion is understood here as the profound dimension of reality that provokes a sense of depth, transcendence, and ultimacy.

What values at the core of the Filipino culture open it up to the realm of depth, transcendence, and ultimacy, giving a cultural shape and form to the religious experience that the EDSA revolution of 1986 was to many? I propose three core cultural values: *lakas-ganda* (gracious power), *lakas-awa* (compassionate force), and *lakas-saya* (indomitable joy).

The Filipino word *lakas* means strength, might, power, vigor, energy, pull, capacity, while *ganda* refers to the beautiful, the good, or simply what

⁵⁷ Quoted in John Coleman, “The Renewed Covenant: Robert N. Bellah’s Vision of Religion and Society,” in *Sociology and Human Destiny*, ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Seabury, 1980) 89. In the same vein, Joe Holland writes: “It is this question of culture, and within it religion, which reveals, I believe, the most radical dimension of our social crisis” (Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, rev. and enl. ed. [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983] xii).

⁵⁸ De Mesa, “A Hermeneutics of Appreciation” 6–10. A cultural exegesis based on an “appreciative awareness” is not blind to the danger of romanticizing culture. Cultural ambivalence is a fact. No culture can be absolutized. At the other extreme is a critical stance that can diminish the beauty and strength of a culture, reducing it to second class in relation to the perceived dominant and superior cultures. Empowerment of a people is the ultimate goal—to enable them to chart their own destiny as a people. The first step is to renew pride and confidence in a people’s cultural selfhood. A hermeneutics of appreciation needs a hermeneutics of suspicion to help discern what is really wrong.

⁵⁹ *Ad gentes* no. 11, *Documents of Vatican II* 598.

is ethical or humane. José de Mesa, a lay Filipino theologian, reflects on the meaning of graciousness in the Filipino contexts:

Real “beauty” or “goodness” is found in the deepest core of one’s personhood, the *loob*. *Loob*, literally the inner self, is where the true worth of a person lies. Authentic graciousness can only be *kagandahang loob*, the graciousness which springs from this personal core. When real, it is said to come from the *loob*. *Bukal sa kalooban* (welling up from the inner self), Filipinos say. The expression suggests that graciousness being outwardly manifested is truly in harmony with the most authentic in the person. The graciousness which orients power, therefore, is that graciousness which comes from within.⁶⁰

Lakas without *ganda* can be arbitrary and manipulative, chaotic and destructive. But without *lakas*, *ganda* is graciousness in vain. The good needs power for it to be effectual. Without *ganda*, *lakas* can dehumanize, but without *lakas*, *ganda* cannot humanize.⁶¹ The EDSA revolution yielded extraordinary stories that manifested *lakas-ganda*, and perhaps some stories can happen only in the Philippines. A soldier manning a tank told the people to stay so he could hold his fire.⁶² Hundreds of thousands of unarmed men, women, and children holding crosses or rosaries formed human barricades around rebel military camps or threw themselves on the roads in front of the tanks. When children gave the Marcos loyalist troops flowers and yellow ribbons and women hugged and kissed them, the soldiers could not find it in their hearts to open fire. A captain of the Marines explained how it happened that the shock troops failed to attack the crowds that had gathered at EDSA: “We have been given all kinds of training on how to disperse crowds, using truncheons, shields, teargas, but we were never trained to face a crowd that was praying, carrying statues and rosaries, and offering smiles, food, and flowers. How could we attack them?”⁶³ This is gracious power or a power that was graced.

Another story is told by the chief information officer of the Philippine Air Force, who reported that he overheard the radio contact between the Reformist troops in a helicopter and the Marcos loyalists on the ground. He narrated: “Imagine, a would-be attacker warning his would-be victims. ‘We’re coming in! Clear the area!’ And those on the ground responding, ‘We can’t, we can’t. Make another turn!’ and the helicopters did.” With

⁶⁰ José M. De Mesa, “Providence as Power and Graciousness,” in *Toward a Theology of People Power* 37–61, at 42–43.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 43–44.

⁶² Cited in Patricio R. Mamot, *Profile of Filipino Heroism* (Quezon City: New Day, 1986) 135.

⁶³ Cited in Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J., “Presentation” in “The ‘Miracle’ of the Philippine Revolution: Interdisciplinary Reflections,” a symposium organized by the Loyola School of Theology, ed. Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J., *Loyola Papers 15* (1986) ix–xii, at x.

pride tinged with amusement, he commented: “It was a beautiful war”⁶⁴—in other words, a war waged with *lakas-ganda*.

Bishop Francisco Claver speaks of the blending of *lakas* and *awa* (compassion) that played itself out at EDSA and led to the stunning and unprecedented, thoroughly Filipino people power revolution. In the blending of *lakas* and *awa* is the joining of two seemingly antagonistic concepts: struggle and peace, conflict and harmony, power and gentleness, each compensating for the faults or limitations of the other, and thoroughly infused with faith. *Lakas-awa*, “compassionate force,” if we can so translate it, finds resonance in the deeply person-oriented Filipino culture. *Lakas-awa* articulates well what is meant by nonviolent Filipino power. Linguistically, it is thoroughly Filipino; it captures the emotion and spirit of the Filipino soul. Infused by faith, *lakas-awa* is a power directed by compassion fundamentally for justice, but also for charity. It is not abusive and self-serving, but is used to protect and empower those for whom one has *awa*, the weak and the powerless. Precisely because one has power, one is expected to also have *awa* for those under one’s power, for the weakest and the most helpless. *Awa* is the antithesis of the ruthless and violent side of *lakas*. *Lakas-awa* is what made the Filipino soldiers hold their fire and exercise maximum tolerance at EDSA; it is a decisive reason why people power remained nonviolent.⁶⁵ Again, it was the graciousness in the culture that resonated to the call of nonviolence. In the words of Cardinal Sin, the spirit of *lakas-awa* at EDSA enabled a “victory without hatred, without the spilling of blood of brothers, without the tears over countless sons and daughters fallen in the battle at the crossfire—but a victory nonetheless.”⁶⁶

The strength that comes from the Filipino penchant for song and celebration and sense of joy (*saya*) even in the most trying times is the cultural basis of the festive and nonviolent people power. “This sense of joy and humor, characterized by an irreverence bordering on the sublime and possessing a sense of irony which captures the unseen dimension of the event”⁶⁷ contributes not only to the Filipino charm but also to the Filipino indomitable spirit. The EDSA revolution of 1986 is described as a “smiling revolution.” It violated all the rules. While militant, it was never sad, but rather celebratory.⁶⁸ “There was nothing grim or stern about it. Even in the tensest moments, dissident soldiers sauntered about the rebel stronghold in

⁶⁴ Cited in Mamot, *Profile of Filipino Heroism* 57.

⁶⁵ Francisco F. Claver, S.J., “People Power and Value Transformation: A Faith Perspective,” in *Toward a Theology of People Power* 49–61, at 54–61.

⁶⁶ Cited in Mamot, *Profile of Filipino Heroism* 41.

⁶⁷ Conrado de Quiros, “Again the ‘Dumb’ Masa,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 30, 2001, A8.

⁶⁸ Randy David, “What Makes People Power Possible?” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 25, 2001, A9.

Camp Crame with yellow ribbons tied around the barrels of their rifles.”⁶⁹ The air was festive, as if the people were going out for a big family picnic, with children carried on their fathers’ shoulders. At the same time, the people manifested great courage and determination to free themselves from the cruel and oppressive Marcos regime.

This gracious and festive spirit of the revolution that borders on irony is recounted in many stories. One tells of what happened when the tanks and the armored personnel carriers were unable to attack Camp Crame because they were blocked by the massed bodies of the people. After some negotiations it was agreed that the soldiers would retire to Camp Bonifacio for the night to avoid incidents. As they revved up their engines and began to maneuver out of the field, the people called out to them and bade them farewell, “Goodnight, see you tomorrow.”⁷⁰ There was also as much eating as there was praying and singing. Life was being created amidst death. Joyful celebration took place in the midst of extreme danger and darkness. This is a joy rooted in hope, a hope founded in God.

The Filipino core values of *lakas-ganda*, *lakas-awa*, and *lakas-saya* at the heart of the EDSA revolution are imaged in the words of *Time* correspondent Roger Rosenblatt:

Try not to forget what you saw last week. You say now that it would be impossible to forget: Filipinos armed to the teeth with rosaries and flowers, massing in front of tanks, and the tanks stopping, and some of the soldiers who were the enemy embracing the people and their flowers. Call that revolution? Where were the heads stuck on pikes? Where were the torches for the estates of the rich? The rich were in the streets with the poor, a whole country up in flowers.⁷¹

The Filipino core values manifest the quality and disposition of the Filipino heart and spirit, the Filipino approach to reality as a whole. These values have spiritual and religious roots that give personal and social relationships a sense of depth, transcendence, and ultimacy, insofar as they pull people out of themselves and shift their centers from themselves to others, in graciousness, compassion, and joy. These values give shape and form to religion, insofar as religion is what touches life deeply and profoundly, giving it a transcendent and ultimate meaning. These were the values at the base of the nonviolent revolution.

No one has exclusive claim to the experience of the divine. It seeks its form and expression within one’s cultural framework. Thus, the expres-

⁶⁹ Cited in Mamot, *Profile of Filipino Heroism* 115.

⁷⁰ Cited in John J. Carroll, S.J., “Looking beyond EDSA: Part II: Values, Power, and Social Transformation,” *Human Society* 43 (1990) 1–14, at 7.

⁷¹ Roger Rosenblatt, “People Power,” *Time*, March 10, 1986, <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,960881,00.html> (accessed May 7, 2006); quoted in Azada and Hermida, “‘People Power’ Revolution” 112.

sions of religion vary as its cultural and historical contexts vary. One encounters the divine through what is present in one's culture. The phenomenon of seeking images, symbols, and language to express and share the experience of the divine is called the socialization of the experience. Culture and society provide the hermeneutical tools to make this socialization credible and acceptable. There is religion only where the experience of God has become truly incarnate in the culture, history, and life of the people. This must be so, if religious experience is to be human and humanly comprehensible.⁷²

Popular religion is closely identified with the simple and the deprived and is conditioned by their poverty, insecurity, and oppression. They seek a simpler and more direct relationship with God, beyond the over-intellectualized, cerebral, over-conceptualized dogmatic form of religious practice. Magical, symbolical, and festive, popular religion brings people in contact with God, whom they image as a God of absolute closeness, within whose orbit of sovereignty everything of weal or woe happens without any distinctions of causality. Arising from their own condition of powerlessness, they image God as one in whom they have access to power against dominant forces.⁷³

This empowerment is also embodied in communal celebrations of the different passages of their lives; during these and other high moments, they often remember and thank Mary and the saints. Through popular devotions, people touch the mystery of the divine in ineffable ways. In their feasting, dancing, processions, their religion becomes an amalgam of prayer, worship, and social celebrations. Religion is eminently cultural in form, bound up with the totality of other social relationships. "To change an understanding of God and ways of relating to him, there must also be change in our understanding of social relations in the same world."⁷⁴

In summary, Tillich's understanding of religion as the depth-dimension of reality opens up the experience of the transcendent beyond what is explicitly religious and makes all reality potentially a religious experience. If religion is the depth dimension of all things, then culture, which is all-pervasive, is the realm of religion. A person experiences the divine within his or her culture, which mediates the divine through what is good, true, and honorable in the culture.

⁷² The term "socialization of the divine" is used by Orlando Espin, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 95.

⁷³ See Luis Maldonado, "Popular Religion: Its Dimensions, Levels, and Types," in *Concilium: Popular Religion*, ed. Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 3-11.

⁷⁴ Robert J. Schreier, C.P.P.S., *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985) 140.

**Religion Is the Substance of Culture:
Filipino Faith as the Substance of Filipino Culture**

Tillich speaks of religion as the substance of culture.⁷⁵ It is that which flows into the content and form of culture. It is from religion that culture derives its essence. This Tillichian maxim that religion is the substance of culture must, however, be understood with an eye to nuance and diversity of contexts. For example, in the secularized northern European cultures religion sometimes seems barely present. Does this mean that these cultures have lost their substance? How about cultures characterized by religious pluralism, as in India? What does religion as the substance of culture mean here? And in the Philippines, where there is a dominant religion of a specific tradition, how is religion as the substance of culture understood?

Religion creates a center around which a culture revolves, so that whatever is vital and essential for the life of society is brought into relation with religion. And this relation does not necessarily take an explicit religious form or language. Business, politics, and economics belong to the sphere of the secular, but they have a religious dimension. They are not ends in themselves, but they participate in an ultimate meaning within the fundamental relationship of the human person, society, and God and the ethical imperatives of this relationship. Cultures, therefore, have a center of gravity and a substance, and this substance has religious valence, even if it is not explicitly religious or represented by a particular religion as in a culture characterized by religious pluralism.

Despite the fact that one particular religion does not have to be identical with the substance of any culture, it can come close to such a substance, and the ultimacy that attaches to any culture can be represented by this religion. Such is the case of the Catholic religion in the Philippines. While technically the Philippines is religiously pluralistic, it is predominantly Christian and Catholic. The question, then, is how, at the EDSA revolution, did Christianity, as principally represented by Catholicism, mediate religion as the substance of the Filipino culture?

According to reports, prior to the revolution a group of sociologists and political strategists had prepared five possible postelection scenarios, given the crescendo of political tension and conflict. None of the scenarios became a reality. What happened in EDSA was beyond all calculation and projection. It came as a complete surprise. The speculators had missed an essential element: the Filipino soul and the vibrant religious faith intrinsic to the Filipino culture. The politburo of the Communist party of the Philippines had also prepared a series of postelection scenarios, none of which became a reality either. The authors left out of the equation of liberation

⁷⁵ Tillich, *What Is Religion?* 73.

the people's religion, which discounted it as nothing more than a force of alienation and oppression. They failed to see that there can be no liberation apart from the beliefs and values of a people, the deepest source of which is their religion.⁷⁶

From the Marxist framework, popular religion in particular, through its symbolic structure of evasion and resignation, makes the condition of oppression acceptable or tolerable. This framework has been used to denigrate the place of religion in the task of liberation. Today, however, that is a minority position. Segundo Galilea speaks of folk religion as pivotal, arguing that liberation is not possible apart from the beliefs and values of the people. The struggle against injustice and oppression must be united with the people's consciousness of their cultural rootedness, at the heart of which is their religion. Popular religion may have its failings and ambiguities, but a religious experience that is meaningful to the people is a positive source of empowerment. It holds the power to shape perspectives and inspire action—even as a continuing purification of its spurious elements and a strengthening of its liberating dynamism are necessary.⁷⁷

Through the prism of EDSA, we reflect on the religion that was at the base of the entire event, which was for many an experience of the divine, so astounding that they called it a miracle. At EDSA, the Filipinos were a eucharistic people at the barricades, a people in love with Mary—*pueblo amante de Maria*—and a people bearing a prophetic witness as a church. If there is one image that remains of the EDSA revolution, it is that of people sharing food. Though food was limited, no one went hungry. It was a lived experience of the multiplication of loaves and fishes. As one story has it, an old man pulled two pieces of bread from his bag. He took one and gave the other to a soldier. Two men on opposite sides of the revolution broke bread. That was eucharistic.⁷⁸

Although Filipinos are deeply divided by social class, ideology, and politics, at EDSA, they came together as one eucharistic people. The Eucharist at the barricades gathered the multitudes together in one solemn communal act of prayer at a time of great crisis and danger, pulling together all that was human, the fears, the sorrows, and the hopes. The people were one when they sang and prayed together, one in a way that they had never been and perhaps could never have been, to the point of dying with their arms locked together. Father C. G. Arévalo described a moving experience during those fateful days and nights:

⁷⁶ Achútegui, "Presentation" x.

⁷⁷ See Segundo Galilea, "The Theology of Liberation and the Place of Folk Religion," in *What Is Religion?* 40–45.

⁷⁸ Cited in C. G. Arévalo, S.J. "Lagi Nating Tatandaan: Story and Remembering . . . and the Story That Is Tradition," in "The 'Miracle' of the Philippine Revolution" 22–45, at 30.

That night after we prayed together, and slept on the street not far from one another, and then when the troops came up from down the valley, we stood beside each other—for long stretches of time, up to the last anxious hour—and I think we believed we might die together. And what bound us together in those hours was, I guess, our common love for our people and our country. But deeper yet, our common faith. Our belief in the presence of the Lord in our midst during those hours. And for some moments of peace and courage, the presence of our Lady. Someone said to me later. “I knew she was with us. Don’t ask me how I know. Simply, I know.” Our faith . . . made us one. . . . Later that night, when things quieted down, a lot of people began drifting away. A time of respite, for some sleep and rest. The seminarians and novices stretched out in their cassocks on the street. I thought God must be looking down on this scene . . . with tenderness. . . . It was the mercy and tenderness of God which alone could make all of us, at that hour one—one people in a single resolve, sharing a common hope.⁷⁹

Pueblo amante de Maria—a people in love with Mary—these words express a singular truth about the Filipino people; it is not just a pious turn of phrase.⁸⁰ Their love and devotion for Mary is a deep part of their heritage and identity. And it is in this devotion to Mary that one finds the practice of religion taking on the popular expressions that make it specifically Filipino, with its local color and pageantry. The various manifestations of popular piety toward Mary appear not only in innumerable churches, chapels, and shrines dedicated to her, but it was woven into the very ordinary lives of the people as seen from Filipino religious practices of the past:

Mary marked our communities (so many girls and women at baptism were given her name or her titles). The name and figure of *Mary marked our geography*: so many poblaciones, barrios, towns, were also named after her. *Mary marked our time*: the timetable of all our communities: the oracion, the Angelus and its attendant pieties

⁷⁹ Ibid. 40–41.

⁸⁰ C. G. Arévalo, S.J., “Bayang Sumisinta kay Maria”: Pueblo Amante de Maria,” in *Filipino Spiritual Culture, Social Transformation, and Globalization*, ed. Jose V. Abueva, Arnold Boehme, Ruben F. Balane (Quezon City: Discalced Carmelite Nuns, Monastery of St. Therese, 2003) 42. “Statistics are cold numbers which will never express accurately a spiritual reality nor the intensity of religious faith. At times, however, numbers may constitute a significant index of a more profound reality. Four hundred sixty-three or over one-fourth of all parishes have the Virgin Mary as their titular patron without counting the innumerable barrio chapels, religious oratories or private shrines dedicated to Mary” (CBCP, Ang Mahal na Birhen: Mary in the Philippine Life Today: A Pastoral Letter on the Virgin Mary, February 2, 1975, no. 6, http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/1970s/1975-mahal_na_birhen.html [accessed May 29, 2006]). The deep love for Mary may correct the “dreadfully masculinized conception of the Godhead.” Elizabeth Johnson writes that if “Mary reflects the female face of God, then Marian theology and devotion have a contribution to make toward the crucial task of imaging God in inclusive fashion” (“Mary and the Female Face of God,” *Theological Studies* 50 [1989] 500–526, at 501).

became the clock of the daily lives of Filipinos. The morning started with the entire town praying the rosary, the *Dios te salves* chanted before dawn in every home; the leaders gathering in the churches and chapels at break of day. Boys went to school, rosaries around their necks, chanting prayers to the Lady. The *Angelus* signaled noon, and beneath the mid-day sun, the town took its break for meal and rest. Work ceased with *oracion* of the evening. And when the day was ending, the *Salve Regina* in the candle-lit church, the leading townfolk dutifully present, gave back the day to God through the hands of her who was the *clemens*, the *pia*, the *dulcis* Virgo Maria.⁸¹

A familiar sight in Filipino homes, whether in the rich enclaves or in the slums of the cities, is the holy picture of Mary. Images of her are displayed in buses, jeepneys, and tricycles, in public places, and along the roads—all palpable signs of a people in love with Mary—*ang bayang sumisinta kay Maria*.⁸² History points out that Marian devotion has a special role in the rapid conversion of the Philippines to the Catholic faith, and devotion to her was a powerful means of helping the early Filipinos live an intense Christian life.⁸³ Today, the devotion to Mary has kept and nurtured the Catholic faith of the people.

Given the omnipresence of Mary in the life and tradition of Filipinos, she was undeniably the most visible symbol at EDSA. “At the various sites where tens of thousands of people converged to wage, for one hundred hours, the revolution of peace and prayer, images of Our Lady were set up in almost every street corner. Rosaries were recited all day long, one after the other, almost without any interruption, as people watched, or knelt in front of armored cars and tanks, or rushed toward descending helicopters and advancing troops.”⁸⁴

Many believe that the EDSA revolution was successful due to Mary’s

⁸¹ Arévalo, “Bayang Sumisinta kay Maria” 46–47.

⁸² CBCP, *Ang Mahal na Birhin* no.14. The Filipino Marian popular religiosity is intertwined with Christ and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. In this respect, what is true of Latin America is also true of the Philippines. “The fundamental paschal dimension came to us through the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially through the recitation of and meditation on the mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary” (quoted in *ibid.* no. 72). In the official liturgies of Christmas and the Holy Week, Mary plays an important part in the popular devotion of the people. Inculturated Marian devotional practices deepen the religious fervor of the people, as they not only touch their profound religiosity but also evoke deep Filipino familial values. The family is at the center of the traditional celebration of Christmas from the time of the *Misa de Aguinaldo* onward. In the Easter celebration, folk practices center on the reunion of Christ and his mother (*salubong*); this moving drama of family reunion resonates with the Filipinos’ empathy and joy. *Ibid.* nos. 17–19.

⁸³ Arévalo, “Bayang Sumisinta kay Maria” 47.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 49. The role that the devotion to Mary played in the EDSA revolution should underscore the commitment to justice that love for and devotion to her

intercession in response to the Filipinos' devotion to her. Since that devotion is at the heart of Filipino religiosity, no liberation of the people can be separated from it; it is in this and in the entire expression of their religion that they are what they are as a people. What was regarded as a deadening opiate by a contrary worldview became the motive force and power that galvanized the people to concerted action and kept that action nonviolent. The place of religion in the Filipino culture signifies a strong and clear evidence of religion as the substance of a culture.

The Catholic Church was at the center of the revolution, with Cardinal Sin at the frontline. Pastor, patriot, and prophet, he stood as the people's beacon of faith and courage. As the custodian of the moral values and of the religious symbols, the Catholic Church was the moral center to which Filipinos gravitated when the nation was in crisis. It was the only social force that could mobilize public opinion and protest against any regime. Claiming allegiance of some 84% of the Filipinos, and with a vast network of communication and service, the Church's responsibility in the social order is great. As such, the Church in the Philippines holds immense power in the pursuit of justice and freedom for the people.⁸⁵

The relationship between church and politics had been a burning question within the Philippine Church from the very first day of Marcos's usurpation of power in September 1972. It was not as if the Church, especially the bishops, suddenly came alive during the dramatic turn of events at EDSA. Their pastoral letters for some 15 years prior to EDSA showed a progression in the Church's teaching role vis-à-vis the worsening political situation. It was, however, in the Post-Election Statement of February 1986 that this role reached its zenith, when the bishops declared the Marcos government morally illegitimate and its power without moral basis, and they virtually urged the people to rise in protest and revolt against this government, until it was finally removed.⁸⁶ In the estimate of many, the bishops' statement was the pivotal turn in the rapid succession of events, as its prophetic witness gave the revolution a light for all to follow and empowered the people with an invincible moral courage and faith. Under the moral leadership of the Catholic Church, the revolution took a radical turn

should instill, and should help to purify Marian devotion from the individualistic piety into which it has been turned by many.

⁸⁵ John J. Carroll, S.J., "The Church, State, and People Power," *Intersect* 16 (February 2001) 7–15, at 9. Regarding the involvement of the Church in politics, Bishop Claver said that it is a good rule of thumb to make a distinction between political field and political arena. Clerics have no competence in the political arena where "real" politics, the partisan kind, is played ("The Church in the Political Arena," *Pulso Monograph* 5 [December 1990] 12–20, at 13).

⁸⁶ Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J., "Philippine Church and People Power," *Month* 19 (May 1986) 149–54.

and a clear direction. The lines of the revolution were drawn and the Church was with the people, for the Church was the people, there at every street, behind every barricade, in front of the tanks—the Church as the people of God praying and singing—a vision of communal joy in the face of impending doom.

The dominant role that the Catholic Church played at EDSA mediated the liberating power of religion for all. When religion's vision of the good is identified with the common good, it holds a power to unify all.⁸⁷ At the time of the revolution, the Church was so uniquely positioned that it became the decisive arbiter of the common good. When religion contributes to the pursuit of the common good and builds solidarity in freedom, it becomes an agent of liberation.⁸⁸ As David Hollenbach writes: "Religious beliefs and loyalties are among the factors that energize communities and institutions of civil society, for they give people communal resources, affective motivations, and cognitive reasons for active participation in active public life."⁸⁹

Filipino men and women of different persuasions and affiliations, both

⁸⁷ David Hollenbach, S.J., writes that "we are not faced with choosing the alternatives of divisive religion on the one hand and the privatization of religion on the other. There is a third option: religious traditions, interpreted properly, have the capacity to contribute to the common good of public life in a way that is compatible with pluralism and freedom" (*The Common Good and Christian Ethics* [New York: Cambridge University, 2002]) 99.

⁸⁸ "Churches and other religions are uniquely positioned to make contributions to sustaining a vision of the common good and to empower their members to participate in the pursuit of the common good" (*ibid.* 108). Vatican II has stressed the impact of the properly religious mission of the Church in public life: "This religious mission can be a source of commitment, direction, and vigor" in building up the human community and in initiating action "for the benefit of everyone, especially those in need" (*Gaudium et spes* no. 42, in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Documents . . .*, ed. Austin Flannery, rev. in inclusive language [Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996] 209–10). John Courtney Murray, two generations ago, wrote: "Whether we like it or not, we are living in a religiously pluralistic society at a time of spiritual crisis, and the alternatives are the discovery of social unity or destruction" ("Intercreedal Co-operation: Its Theory and Its Organization," *Theological Studies* 4 [1943] 257–86, at 274).

⁸⁹ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 111. Martha Nussbaum holds that we need a vision of the good life which arises from myths and stories that must engage our collective imagination beyond our private enclaves. To the degree that this engagement is present in civil society, it will have political impact ("Aristotelian Social Democracy," in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson [New York: Routledge, 1990] 203–52, at 217). Hollenbach concurs with Nussbaum, arguing that religious and metaphysical beliefs can make important contributions to a social understanding of the genuine human good. See his "Religion and Political Life," *Theological Studies* 57 [1991] 87–106, at 106.

believers and nonbelievers, were involved in the struggle, and appropriated Catholic/Christian symbols without necessarily internalizing their content in a formal and explicit way. At the risk of their lives, they heeded Cardinal Sin's call to take to the streets and face the guns and tanks. Religion, in the pursuit of the common good, was a force of unity at EDSA. People power is church power when church is truly people, trying to be and to act in living fidelity to the gospel. In the prophetic witness of the Church at EDSA, religion was experienced as a force that was not alienated or separated from the Filipinos in their struggle for justice and freedom. This is the church at the barricades, as it should also be at the marketplace, at the railway stations, in the ghettos, wherever people live and die, as they struggle for meaning and purpose as individuals and as a people.

Tillich's maxim, religion is the substance of culture, must therefore be understood in context, and its meaning nuanced accordingly. Where there are truths and values that are regarded with ultimate concern, religion as the substance of culture is present, even if it does not take an explicitly religious form or language, as in secularized cultures, and even if it is not represented by a particular religious tradition, as in pluralistic religious societies. In the Philippines, which is predominantly Christian and Catholic, religion represents the substance of culture, and this substance elicits explicit expressions that are distinctively Filipino, as seen in the EDSA revolution. Catholic faith is a force of liberation that gives the Filipino a sense of rootedness, identity, and peoplehood. At EDSA, this dominant religion of a specific tradition drew diverse people to a center of shared humanity and destiny, through its vision of the common good.

Dynamics of Culture, Religion, and Moral Vision: The Filipino Nonviolent Struggle for Freedom and Justice

I return to my main contention that the dynamics of culture and religion have a bearing on moral vision, and this vision that is our worldview determines what we are and what we make of our lives, how we choose and act. Moral vision is deeply connected, therefore, with our particular way of being human (culture) within the horizons of our experience of the divine, in our quest for transcendent and ultimate meaning (religion). At EDSA, the moral vision of the people—rooted in their core values as Filipinos and in their experience of religion as a force of unity and liberation—was powerfully manifested in their commitment to nonviolence as they placed their lives on the line for freedom and justice. This was a vision of moral courage, self-transcendence, and solidarity.

Schillebeeckx writes that "God reveals himself as the deepest mystery,

the heart and the soul of any truly human liberation.”⁹⁰ He speaks of the mysticism of politics, defining mysticism as an “intense form of experience of God or love of God” and politics as an “intensive form of social commitment.”⁹¹ Love of God, which is at the heart of mysticism, enters into the concrete social and political commitment. This is holiness in the political arena (political holiness) that demands the same repentance, self-emptying, suffering, dark night, and utter losing of oneself as does contemplative mysticism.⁹²

Moral vision is the moral consciousness of a people needed to sustain their common life together—the vision required if they are to be a people at all. In their common life, people are bound together by strong connections.⁹³ Hollenbach observes: “They have come together in a *coetus*—the Latin word is cognate to *coitus*, sexual union. Their good is shared in a *communio* or communion. The links among them are formed by their common consent, their consensus, about what is just, right, and good.”⁹⁴

This common consent is born of struggle. The struggle for freedom and justice at the heart of the Filipino people power inspired extraordinary moral courage. This moral courage was evident in the election volunteers who guarded the ballot boxes with their bodies; it was evident in the computer technicians who staged a walkout at the risk of losing their jobs and even their lives, if they did not manipulate the election results. For these and many others who faced death, there was often a Gethsemane experience of not wanting to die, yet of being willing to let go and take extraordinary risks. Witness these accounts:

As five trucks filled with soldiers were moving toward the barricades, a group of religious sisters and students ran in the direction of the trucks and prostrated themselves on the ground, and with their hands raised with their rosaries, they waited for their end to come. But the trucks stopped.⁹⁵ Another story tells of a group of university students who were given 20 minutes to disperse; the Marines loyal to Marcos were ordered to shoot if they were prevented from attacking the camps. One of the students testified: “We formed a long line and prayed the rosary. . . . When the tanks came, the soldiers did not molest us. But we were all willing to risk our lives, to die.”⁹⁶

The struggle for freedom and justice can only be empowered by a moral vision of self-transcendence. This vision that can pull people out of themselves for a greater reality can embolden them to face tanks and put them-

⁹⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Cultures* (London: SCM, 1987) 73.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 71–72.

⁹² *Ibid.* 74.

⁹³ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Life* 65.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 65–66.

⁹⁵ Cited in Mamot, *Profile of Filipino Heroism* 115.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 130–31.

selves in the line of fire. At the root of morality is self-transcendence. One cannot be moral unless one is forgetful of self for others. Being moral takes this paschal meaning: a dying to self, that others may live.

Again, only stories can bring us to the reality of the moral vision that impelled people to do what they did for a cause greater than themselves. One striking story is about a man who drove his Mercedes Benz to the barricades to block the tanks from crossing over to where people had gathered.⁹⁷ It was foolish, one might say, but only a self-transcendence for a cause greater than oneself can impel one to be a “fool” for the gospel that confounds the wise and powerful. In a similar story, a man who, when he heard that a tank assault was coming from Malacañang and that all might be crushed to death, told his wife to go home so that if he died, someone would be left to care for their children. “Come to think of it,” he said, “at that time I realized I was willing to die.”⁹⁸

This commitment to nonviolence in the struggle for freedom and justice is possible only in solidarity, for it is from solidarity that the commitment draws its very life. The vivid images of people power at EDSA are those of men and women who locked arms with each other (*kapit-bisig*), faced the tanks, and dared to die together. Suddenly, a multitude of Filipinos realized their strength of solidarity. They discovered a power stronger than bullets—their morale and unity in locked arms. Joe Holland calls this the root metaphor of “social and spiritual creativity of rooted communities networked in solidarity.”⁹⁹ In his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), Pope John Paul II spoke of solidarity as a “firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good. . . . It is a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other.”¹⁰⁰

Solidarity at EDSA meant cutting across all class stratifications and class barriers, as it was incredible to see Filipinos from all socio-economic levels forming human barricades and protecting the strategic points with their bodies, together resolute in their commitment to a singular cause. The sea of humanity was ordered, directed by the common cause of nonviolence in the struggle for freedom and justice. As the people chanted and sang their

⁹⁷ Cited in John J. Carroll, S.J., “Looking beyond EDSA: Part II” 13. Carroll asks hard questions: Will members of the middle and upper classes, who risked their lives for political freedom, be willing to sacrifice their comforts for social justice? Will the person who put his or her Mercedes Benz on the barricade before the tanks at EDSA be willing to do without a Mercedes Benz so that the poor may have a better chance of surviving into a healthy and productive adulthood?

⁹⁸ Cited in Mamot, *People Power* 39.

⁹⁹ Holland and Henriot, *Social Analysis* xvii.

¹⁰⁰ *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 38, quoted in *Catholic Social Thought*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004) 421–22.

songs in the battlefield of EDSA, not a single shot was fired to silence their voices.

The vision of moral courage, self-transcendence, and solidarity at the base of the Filipino struggle for freedom and justice was made imperative by the core Filipino values and by the liberating force of religion in the Filipino culture. The EDSA people power of 1986 was “a peaceful, non-violent revolution with parallels but with no equals. A revolution to which some previous ones were similar but to which no previous one is identical. A revolution that could only have come from the heart and soul of a nation.”¹⁰¹

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Using the perspective of Tillich, one stance is taken regarding the dynamics of culture and religion: culture is a form of expression of religion, and religion is the substance of culture. That culture is a form of expression of religion means that the experience of religion is given expression through cultural forms and elements. Tillich’s understanding of religion as the depth dimension of reality opens up the parameters of a transcendent experience beyond what is explicitly religious and makes all reality available for the encounter with the divine. As culture is a form of expression of religion, religion is the substance of culture. This means that cultures have a center of gravity and substance which has religious valence, insofar as it points to realities of ultimate concern that find depths of expressions in different contexts. In the Filipino context, religion as the substance of culture is mediated in expressions that are distinctively Filipino. This was attested in the Filipino people power revolution that was steeped in symbols of faith.

The dynamics of culture and religion have a bearing on moral vision. The way people image themselves, and what they do with their lives, and how they choose and act is within the influence of their culture (the core values of which give expression to what is religious) and also within the influence of religion (in which culture draws its depth and substance). This main contention is validated by the EDSA revolution of 1986, through the expression of people power, with its deep roots in Filipino cultural values and religiosity. The revolution gave a vision of what is in the Filipinos and in their culture, empowered by their innate religiosity, that enabled them to respond to the cause of justice and freedom in the spirit of nonviolence, founded on moral courage, self-transcendence, and solidarity.

¹⁰¹ Antonio B. Lambino, “Theological Reflection in the Filipino Exodus: August 21, 1983 to February 25, 1986,” in “The ‘Miracle’ of the Philippine Revolution: Interdisciplinary Reflections” 11–21, at 20.