

As a fitting conclusion, Paul predicted the book he will now be writing:
Without Buddha, I Could Not Be a Christian.

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TEACHING AND LEARNING MORAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Teaching and Learning Moral Theology
in a Cross-Cultural Context—The Philippines and the USA
Convener: James T. Bretzke, Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley
Presenter: James T. Bretzke, Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley
Moderator: William C. Spohn, Santa Clara University
Respondent: James Keenan, Weston Jesuit School of Theology

Living out our individual and corporate vocations as moral theologians in the age of globalization and a world Church necessarily will call us to greater interaction, collaboration, and even at times navigating conflicts both in and across a variety of geographical, cultural, economic, and religious contexts. Catholic moral theology, especially in its reliance on a natural law tradition and a strong central authority exercised by the Magisterium, has traditionally accented the universal in Christian ethics over the particular, cultural, and local instantiations of Christian morality. While inculturation has gained notional acceptance, insufficient attention has been given to the conditions and possibilities of approaching the inculturation of moral theology. After studying and teaching abroad for a decade on two continents (Asia and Europe) I was convinced that an ethics course done from a cross-cultural perspective must pay special attention to developing a better dialogue process as part of its fundamental methodology. This cross-cultural dialogue is necessary so that each culture can have its own say, without being prejudiced or forced into a conceptual framework of another culture's ethical tradition, which in turn may obscure and/or distort the insights which the first culture has to offer in deepening our shared understanding of not just the Gospel and its ethical ramifications, but the broader ethical tradition as well.

Our convention session looked at how differing contexts both engage and challenge some of the fundamental presumptions about a "catholic" moral theology, whose universality and cross-cultural applicability are grounded in a natural-law tradition, by looking at some of the concrete challenges this problematic finds in our theological schools in America and the Philippines. Since the summer of 2000, James Keenan and I have been alternating as visiting professors of moral theology at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) in Metro Manila, teaching what the Filipino students refer to as a "crash course" in

fundamental moral theology and bioethics during the first quarter of their first semester, that is, from mid-June to mid-August. We each had taught the same courses for a number of years at our respective home schools, the Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley/Graduate Theological Union (JSTB/GTU) for Bretzke, and Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts for Keenan. Though the professors and basic course material were the same in both places, we found the student bodies and social locations to be quite diverse, and this required of each of us a certain amount of pedagogical adaption. Additionally, I thought it would be mutually enriching to all parties if I could somehow bring my Manila students and Berkeley students into contact with one other. The *Blackboard* course-ware program, and a grant-funded, two-week immersion trip undertaken by myself and five of the Berkeley students to the Philippines in January 2003, offered the beginnings of the sort of cross-cultural student interaction that I envisioned.

While the global experience of teaching in both locations and undertaking the two-week immersion visit was worthwhile to all concerned, the lasting effect may be negligible, as I have now moved to the University of San Francisco, and JSTB's administration has shifted its institutional focus by requiring all 2003 incoming Master of Divinity students to spend their January Intersession in Mexico. This perhaps shows one structural weakness of these sorts of teaching exchanges, namely if there is insufficient institutional commitment to an ongoing interchange, then the effective results of one or two exchanges will remain largely with the specific individuals involved and not transfer in any real significant depth to the respective institutions. Manila this year, Mexico City the next; such an approach seems to ensure a certain amount of superficiality. While the positive effects of the immersion visit are clear, I am still left with a certain nagging sense that the exchange may have helped create, or credential, a false level of expertise that my students may now feel they have regarding the other culture. I wondered if my respective students each came away with just a dreadfully simplistic and/or romantic assessment of the reality, would this really help the development of cross-cultural ethics in the long run? There is a risk that a string of such immersion trips devolve into a sort of glorified tourism. Yet, perhaps even a simplistic, skewed view is better than no view at all. While I am concerned at the superficial level we may have reached on our own immersion trip, on the other end one cannot plumb the depths without first traversing the surface.

Therefore, I would judge the results to be only a partial success, yet I believe that quite a bit of learning has taken place on a number of different levels, ranging from the rudimentary technological to the more sophisticated theological planes and I would hope that the sharing of this whole experience, with both its successes as well as its failures, might encourage others to investigate similar opportunities for teaching and learning across the digital divide.

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