

QUO VADIS CATHOLIC CHURCH?

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY OF A CHURCH WITH TIMORESE'S FACES

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Abstract:

This article presents a panorama of church life in the context of Timor-Leste. In 2015, the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste commemorated 500 years of the evangelization mission. It is within this context that this paper asks: After five centuries of evangelization in Timor-Leste, Quo Vadis Catholic Church? We pose this question to ourselves. This question and the theological reflection arising from it feels heavy to us. The question can also be: Quo Vadimus? As a Church, where are we going? This essay describes the three periods of evangelization in Timor-Leste each having its special and unique characteristics. These characteristics give each period a unique evangelization identity. This article ends by providing some proposals for the future of the Church with Timorese faces.

Keywords:

Timor-Leste, Catholic Church, Evangelization, memoria passionis, national identity

INTRODUCTION

A theological argument is enriched by experience and the historical background. My point of departure is based on Johann Baptist Metz's (1928–2019) method, when he became acutely aware that the new *locus* of theology is the context of modernity. From that perspective, I argue that Timor-Leste's history can also be a *locus* for doing theology. By doing this,

theology has its significance when it is explored within a history. I based this paradigm on the mystery of incarnation, the Logos of God incarnated in every context of cultures.¹ This way of doing contextual theology, my reflection is based on the historical background of Timor Leste. Following Metz, I want to explicate two propositions: first, the history here will not only be referred to as the history of the victories won but also the history of the victim, lesser, suffered, oppressed and imprisoned. Metz, through his political theology, inspired and invited us to reflect on the “memory of the history of the world suffering/*memoria passionis*”, of Timorese. This memory is bought to new life through “*mortis et resurrectionis*” of Jesus Christ.² As Pope Francis says: “Memory is a dimension of our faith”³. Metz placed new pressure on this element of *memoria* to be (critical) to the development of the modern world. Particularly, we see his criticism of the narrow modern view of history as the history of the victors, the winner, thus ignoring the history of the victims, including suffering and sin. In this case, Metz is making a criticism on the modern ideology of progress.⁴ Secondly, Metz’s criticism of the modern worldview and the ideas attached to it (emancipation) is related to the tendency of not

¹ The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) refers to the economy of the incarnation as the law of the Church’s life and mission. See Second Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) *Plenary Assembly*, 30, in Catalino Arévalo and Gaudencio Rosales (eds.), *For All the Peoples in Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Document from 1970-1991*, vol. 1, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, 34-35. These documents will be referred to as *FAPA I*, 34-35. Then, the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC) understands the Asian Church’s mission also in the light of the foundation: “Her mission is bound by the same law of incarnation as is implied in the mystery of Christ Himself, which she signifies. Universal in intent, the Church’s mission need to be actualized by becoming incarnate in particular human situation”. Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, 24, in *FAPA I*, 72. Cfr. also R. C. Mendoza, “Assuming All that is Asian: Becoming a Truly Local Church in Dialogue”, *Asia Pacific Mission Studies*, vol.1, no. 1 (2019), 72-73.

² Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. By J.M. Ashley (New York, 2007), 42.

³ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (=EG)*, (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 20130), n. 13.

⁴ Thus, as underlined by Adrianus Sunarko, Christian hope for the future must not turn a blind eye to or forget the historical burden of world suffering. Likewise, memories of past sufferings help us to see history and the future not only from the perspective of those who are called victors in history. Metz sees that the weakness of modern ideology is that people can solidify with future generations, but do not give place in solidarity with those who are victims in history. Cfr. Adrianus Sunarko, “Iman Kristen dan Dunia Menurut Johann Baptist Metz” (Christian Faith and the World according to Johann Baptist Metz), in *Teologi Kontekstual*, (Jakarta: Obor, 2016), 131-156.

acknowledging mistakes.⁵ Metz's criticism here is that there is a strong tendency of modern society to forgive themselves or at least, they do not care about the sufferings caused by their mistakes. Modern society does not take responsibility for the suffering that accompanies the progress made through technology and industrialization. The cause of suffering is shifted to other parties.⁶

Within this framework, I will reflect on Church life in Timor-Leste.⁷ To know holistically the life of the faithful and the Church in Timor-Leste; all the phenomena in it, including the history and the sociological factors. In my opinion, it is good to re-examine the historical, socio-political and cultural aspects which have taken part in shaping the character and pattern of faith and living contexts of church life in Timor-Leste. As Chris Lundry stated: "In order to understand the significance of the transformation of the East Timorese Catholic Church, it is necessary to review its background".⁸

The 500 years of mission in Timor Leste we had celebrated can be divided into three periods: The Church during a Portuguese era as Portuguese-Timor, the Church during the era of Indonesian occupation in Timor-Timur, and finally the Church within an Independent Timor-Leste. The Portuguese occupation lasted five hundred years, while the Indonesian occupation was for twenty-four years. Our independence will last forever.⁹

THE CHURCH AS A COLONIAL INSTRUMENT (?)

The idea for colonialists Portugal and Spain (and others that follow) to go and discover the new world was accompanied with the slogan: gold, gospel and glory. It is undeniable that the missionaries followed the same ideas. I present a brief overview of how the Portuguese mission began.

⁵ Johann Baptist Metz" (Christian Faith and the World according to ...), 151.

⁶ Johann Baptist Metz" (Christian Faith and the World according to ...), 152.

⁷ About the name that I will use in this article. I preferred to use Timor-Leste rather than East Timor or Timor Lorosa'e. Because Timor-Leste is an official name that is written in the Constitution of the Republic of Timor-Leste.

⁸ Chris Lundry, "From Passivity to Political Resource: The Catholic Church and Nationalism in East Timor", *Asian Studies*, vol. 38, 1(2002), 2-33, here. 7.

⁹ Francisco Pinheiro e Silva, *Quatrocentos e Cinquenta Anos da Missionaçãõ da Igreja de Timor. Breve Resumo*, [Four Hundred and Fifty Years of the Mission of the Church of Timor. Brief summary], (Baucau: Grafica Diocesana, 2012), 2.

Almost 350 years under Portugal colonization, Frédéric Durand, a French geo-historian from the University of Toulouse noted that statistically in the 1970s, there were only 28% of Timorese who became Christians or Catholics.¹⁰ It meant that during the first epoch of the Portuguese colonial era, evangelization developed by the missionaries very slowly. What happened during this epoch? Why did Catholicism increase at such a slow rate? There are some fundamental reasons. First, the main purpose of the Portuguese presence on the island of Timor was for commercial relations, namely the interest in the sandalwood and spices trade.¹¹ Second, in relation to the first point, the contact that occurred with the island of Timor was meant to be temporary. As noted by Rui Araujo, Prime Minister, in his speech in 2015, he stated: “the arrival of the Portuguese on the island of Timor in 1515 did not represent the start of the island’s colonization. That would only happen a couple of centuries later”.¹² This is an accurate statement. The contact intensified only forty years later, when missionaries began to take part in the mission of the Portuguese colonial government. Then, there was conflict on the vision of the mission between the colonial government and the missionaries. This conflict brought a new problem for process of evangelization itself. Nevertheless, there are some points that need to be noted in this step:

1. *Faith converted Timor.* After more than forty years of a purely commercial relationship, the missionaries started to establish an ongoing relationship with the people. A bond of fellowship took root between the two, not merely by simple communication, but by the preaching of the Word of God. Therefore, it was not the warriors or Portuguese armies but the missionaries who won the hearts and minds of the people.¹³
2. *A New Culture of Writing.* The people of pre-colonial Timor had not developed a written language. Communications and knowledge were oral. One lasting contribution by the missionaries was in the

¹⁰ Frédéric Durand, *Catholicisme et protestantisme dans l’île de Timor: 1556-2003*, [Catholicism and Protestantism in the Islan of Timor, 1556-2003], (Toulouse, Bangkok: IRESC, 2004), 69.

¹¹ Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, *História da Igreja em Timor-Leste. 450 Anos de Evangelização (1562-2012)*, vol. 1. 1562-1940, (Porto: Fundação Eng. Antonio de Almeida, 2013), 121-8.

¹² Rui Araujo, “The Role of the Church in the Struggle for National Liberation: Memory and Reflection”, in *The Church and Its Timorese Face*, (Dili: Lahane Palace, April 9th, 2015), 3.

¹³ Pinherio e Silva, 6-7.

development and introduction of a written language for the people of Timor-Leste. This new form of communication was initially met with resistance. It should be noted that the education, as a new culture, was not readily accepted. The missionaries had to convince the local kings to send their children to school.

3. *Seminaries.* In the second half of the fourth decade of the seventeen hundreds, two seminaries began to operate, one in Oecusse and the other in Manatuto. However, these two seminaries functioned more as schools than a place for the formation for priesthood candidates.
4. *The shortage of missionaries.* A major problem faced by the Patronage¹⁴ was the scarcity of missionaries. The tensions between Portugal and the Holy See and between Portugal and Spain and the politics of liberalism were the reasons for this scarcity. Therefore, the mission of Timor found some difficulties caused the lack of missionaries since the fall of Malacca in 1641 and mainly after the expulsion of the Dominican missionaries in 1834.¹⁵
5. *Schools and colleges in the Macaense era.* Timors mission, after being abandoned for forty years, was being revitalized with Timors integration into the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Macau in 1874 until 1940, the year in which the Diocese of Dili was erected. During that time in Macaense, the increase in missionaries, schools and colleges, not only for the formation of letters and professionals, but also as effective means of evangelization, came to gain great attention from 1877. A school for the formation of catechists was created in 1924 and the re-creation of a minor seminary in 1936.¹⁶

¹⁴ The Holy See took advantage of the policy of reconquering these two Catholic countries (Spain and Portugal) and successively delegated a set of exclusive rights and privileges to the kings of these two countries in the continuation of political expansion to future lands discovered and conquered, in sending missionaries for evangelization and building churches, and introducing people suitable for the episcopal function. The exclusive rights conferred on the kings of Portugal became the cause of tensions between Portugal and the Holy See, when the latter, for many reasons, wanted to resume the responsibility of evangelization in the areas of the Patronage.

¹⁵ Pinherio e Silva, 8.

¹⁶ Pinherio e Silva, 8. The children who had this training in schools, colleges and seminaries, became priests or future political figures in the moments of decolonization, in the years of the occupation of Indonesia and also in this time of independent Timor. Cfr. C. Pinto & M. Jardine, *East Timor's unfinished struggle: Inside the Timorese resistance*, (Boston: End Press, 1997), 9-11

6. *The emergence of Tetum as a vehicle for language.* The people of pre-colonial Timor were people without a *lingua franca*. Existing languages and dialects imposed themselves orally in their spheres. The bellicose spirit of the people was, without a doubt, formed by this gap. The beginning of the formation of today's Tetum as a vehicular language dates back to the pre-colonial period. An indelible factor that contributed to the emergence, formation and dissemination of this *lingua franca* was by missionaries who felt the need to evangelize the people with their native language. In the last two decades of the 19th century, missionaries began to produce grammars, and dictionaries. They first introduced this language in prayer, liturgy and catechesis. We can argue that these efforts by the Portuguese missionaries played a significant role in shaping East Timor's national identity. Tetum is an important medium that played a role as a bridge in order to break the boundaries of tribes and kingdoms of local minor groups that are exclusive societies. Tetum played a role in uniting all Timorese from East to West, from Jaco, Lautem, to Lifau, Ambeno. Therefore, the development of the Tetum Language used in the meeting arena became a very important first step as a seed in the formation of Timorese's national unity.

It is undeniable that the missionaries made a considerable contribution in changing the lives of Timorese; helping and fostering Timorese to build and to develop a better civilization and to recognize their existence as a part of humanity in a whole. This shows that there are a number of positive achievements made by the missionaries. However, there are several things that need to be further criticized, namely as follows:

1. *Relating to aspects of dialogue.* What is meant here is primarily a dialogue between faith and culture. Some research, among them as done by Judith Bovensiepen and F. Delgado Rosa, has shown that there has not been any "inculturation" process or incarnation of evangelical values in the lives of Timorese people. In fact, on the contrary, in some respects, missionaries still brought with them the old concept that the gospel is contrary to culture and must therefore be erased or discarded. In connection with the question above, Bovensiepen and Delgado Rosa provided a very fundamental argument, especially with regard to the missionaries'

view of local culture.¹⁷ Although their research does not represent the Timor Leste context, but it can provide insights in order to see the missionaries' role in spreading the gospel and how they began a face-to-face encounter with local culture.¹⁸ That's why, for example, there were the indigenous kings, and with them, their residents and people who accepted to embrace the new faith without completely leaving the primordial faith of animism. Chris Lundry underscores this and says: "In line with doctrine at the time, the church attempted to convert the animist Timorese, although the scope of the missionaries reach was limited in the early period".¹⁹

2. *Internalization of the value of Christianity.* Even though the missionaries had tried to translate the catechism in Tetum, the process of cultivating Catholic doctrine was still at the level of memorizing it. The Christianity's values had not touched the lives and emotions of Timorese. Christianity was still considered something that came from outside.²⁰ Let us consider that it was also caused by an education program that "was not widespread, and was confined mostly to *suco* chiefs and *liurai* (village leaders) who were baptized and educated; an important byproduct of this process was to consolidate the chiefs' and *liurai's* authority".²¹
3. *Being as Catholic Portuguese.* In that epoch, to be Catholic means to be Christian with a Portuguese life style. Some indigenous kings were baptized with the names of the kings of Portugal. The newborn people in the new covenant with the true God entrusted themselves to the protectorate of the kings of Portugal.

¹⁷ Judith Bovensiepen & Fidalgo Delgado Rosa, "Transformation of the Sacred in East Timor", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58, 3(2016), 664-93.

¹⁸ Their research took place in the area of Manatuto district, particularly as it has been done by Bovensiepen in the highland region (Laclubar subdistrict, Soibada and Manatuto Town). Cfr. *Ibid*, 666.

¹⁹ Lundry, *art. cit.*, 7.

²⁰ This argument from my interview with some interlocutors like Mgr. Virgilio Do Carmo Silva, SDB; Fr. Jovito Rego de Jesus Araujo, Fr. Francisco Pinheiro e Silva, took place at Archbishop Office, Paço Episcopal, Câmara Eclesiástica, Arquidiocese de Dili, Timor-Leste, April, 16th, 2020.

²¹ Lundry, *art. cit.*, 7.

THE RESISTANCE ERA: THE VOCATION TO BE A POLITICAL CHURCH AND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE VICTIMS

I turn to the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste from 1975-1999. As Portugal faced a political crisis in 1974, the Timorese enter into a new period. This period we call the moment of resistance.²² Daniel Pascoe underlined that this spirituality of resistance took many forms under the guidance of different Church leaders during the Indonesian occupation.²³ The three movements of resistance are as follows: 1) the Indonesian military invasion; 2) the Timorese congregate in a large number in the Catholic Church; and 3) the Timorese struggle for independence (self-determination).²⁴

During the Indonesian occupation, the struggle for independence rose like a dream that would never end. The people suffered, were threatened and lost their life. Silence fell upon the nation as the people hid themselves inside the Church. Then the Church took the initiative to do its prophetic mission, that is, to support the people in their struggle for liberation. The reason was, the Church was the only societal institution which had privilege to stand with the victims and to have contact with the outside world. It was during these periods of turmoil that many Timorese converted to Catholicism.

According to Chris Lundry the conversion to Roman Catholicism skyrocketed and was estimated at over 95% for several reasons. First, under Indonesian law, Pancasila, one must belong to one of five officially recognized religions - Islam, Christianity (Protestantism), Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism - and the vast majority of Timorese were animistic in their religious practice. Second, under the severe persecution of the occupying Indonesian army, the Catholic Church was a place of refuge. Third, there was a certain prestige attached to being a member of the Church. Fourth, the Timorese were able to speak in their native

²² The term of resistance may become a keyword to describe the reality that occurred in this period. Timorese suffered from civil war, political vengeance, war against Indonesian occupation from 1975 to Referendum in 1999. Cfr. Mouzinho Pereira Lopez, *Ksolok Missão Nian*, [The Joyful of Mission], (Dili: Missio TLS, 2017).

²³ Just to mention these great leaders name's: the Bishop Jaime Ribeiro, Msgr. Martinho da Costa Lopez and Msgr. Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, SDB. Cfr. Daniel Pascoe, "The Role of the Catholic Church in Support or Opposition to the Indonesian Occupation of East Timor (1975-1999)", *Cross-sections*, vol. 2, (2006), 121.

²⁴ Pereira Lopez, 9.

language (mother tongue) when congregating in the Catholic Church, and its liturgical symbol substituted their animist beliefs. Finally, the Church was viewed by East Timorese in the mountains as a place of resistance'.²⁵

David Webster also underlined the important role of the Catholic Church. He notes, "the church provided a 'thread of continuity, a link with the past' and acted as 'the repository and protector of the cultural values of people, (their servant and advocate)". The Church became a voice for the silenced Timorese.²⁶ In other words, the Church represented the voice of the voiceless.²⁷ Timorese Church leaders, such as Msgr. Martinho Costa Lopes and Msgr. Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, SDB, played a very important role in the fight against the persistent violation of their people's rights. Msgr. Belo continues to fight for justice and peace, for no war and non-violence to his Timorese people. In his nomination speech, Belo quoted a phrase from Terentius to affirm his position: "*Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto*" (Terentius 1, 1,25).²⁸ With this, Belo reaffirmed his stance: "as a man, as a human being, I cannot stay indifferent in front of what concerns man". I can say in the words of Pope Francis that the Catholic Church played a fundamental role as 'a mother' who deeply understands her children's pains, sorrows and sufferings.²⁹

During the Indonesian occupation, injustice and a desire for peace became fundamental reasons for the Catholic Church to act. The Church responded to this problem and participated in the struggle for the self-determination of the Timorese people. In 1989 Pope John Paul II showed compassion with and concern for the people of Timor because of violations of human, civil and religious rights.³⁰ In his sermon at the holy mass that took place at Tasi-Tolu,³¹ the Holy Father quoted the gospel:

²⁵ Lundry, *art. cit.* 14-5.

²⁶ Webster, "Canadian Catholic and the East Timor Struggle, 1975-1999", 65.

²⁷ Frans Siagian & Peter Tukan (edts), *Voice of the voiceless*, (Jakarta: Obor, 1997).

²⁸ Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, "Acceptance Speech on Receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace in Oslo on December 10, 1996", *Seara*, Edição 50 Anos, (1999), 104-10.

²⁹ Pope Francis calls this Church is "a mother with an open heart". Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013), n. 46.

³⁰ Maria Ângela Carrascalão, *Timor Os Anos da Resistência, Mensagem*, (Portugal: Serviço do Recursos Editoriais, Lda., 2002), 152.

³¹ John Paul II, "You are the salt of the earth,..the light of the World". *Homily in the Holy Mass*

“You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world” (Mat. 5,13a, 14a). In the spirit of the gospel, the Catholic Church of Timor-Leste continues to serve and protect the people from various social problems. Undeniable that the significance of the issue to the Church and the political importance of the Vatican to the Indonesian government is clear from the fact that Pope John Paul II was the only world leader to visit the territory during the Indonesian occupation.³² As a breath of fresh air was the Church’s connection with the world outside; the Church as a bridge to the outside world, which included connecting Timor Leste to the International solidarity movement.³³

There is no denying that during this period the Church played a dual role. On the one hand, the Church’s role as a prophet called for appreciation of the value of human dignity, especially with regard to the right to freedom of life and to determine opinions and to live freely as creatures of God’s noble creation (*Imago Dei*). The Church provided reinforcement for those who suffered due to injustice and violence. Therefore, the Church stands on the side of the marginalized and suffering. In the sense that the Church is a friend to those who are lesser, suffered, who are in the existential peripheral.³⁴ On the other hand, the Catholic Church also plays a role as a motivator for the revolution in order to resist oppression. In this sense, the Church is in a position of not being able to see and allow the abuse of humanity to occur. In other words, the foundation is that all are called to live freely as children of God.³⁵

I argue that the Catholic Church in this period was the only one that was able to criticize Indonesian policies during their occupation

at Tasi Tolu in Dili, October 12, 1989, in http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1989/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19891012_dili.pdf. Accessed: 03.05.2020.

³² Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR), *Self-determination in Timor-Leste. Extract from Chega! The report of the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR)*, Dili: Gráfica Nacional, 2009, p. 82, n. 310.

³³ Cfr. A. J. Lyon, *The East Timor Church: From Oppression to Liberation: The Catholic Church and the Nation-State. Comparative Perspectives*, ed. P.C. Manuel, L.C. Reardon and C. Wilcox, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006) 143-4.

³⁴ *EG*, no. 23.

³⁵ Chris Lundry noted: “the Church was the only institution to escape severe persecution after the invasion and has also provided assistance to thousands of widowed and orphaned victims of the conflict. The Church was the main distributor of foreign aid that came in the wake of mass starvation in the early years of war”. Lundry, *art. cit.*, 15.

of Timor-Leste. The Church was recognized as a body symbolizing opposition to the occupation. Timor-Leste's Church has contributed significantly to this phenomenon.³⁶ Through her leaders Msgr. Lopez and Msgr. Belo, SDB, the Church has done much and shown the face of a political and solidarity Church as proposed by Metz. They brought faith to the public sphere and gave it a social consequence. The faith and Christian theology, according to Metz, cannot be privatized; they have to be a praxis in life.³⁷ Metz reminds us that they are "a practice of history and society, a practice that understands itself as a hope of solidarity in God understood as the God of the living and the dead, which everyone is called to be subject to his presence".³⁸ As Metz has reflected, for the bishops, the existence of the Christian God is a God of history; He is part of the history of the suffering. God offers Himself to us and accompanies human history, that is, takes part in our pain and then suffers from the pain of others, and in this we draw closer to the mystery of the passion of Jesus.³⁹ The Church played her calling, to be the prophet in the middle of the crisis, to bring hope and consolation, reconciliation's mission.

NEW ERA AND NEW CHALLENGES FOR CHURCH

Timor-Leste is recognized for its sovereignty as an independent country on May 20th, 2002, through a Popular Consultation that was held by UNAMET in August 30th, 1999. During the consultation, approximately 21% of votes were in favor of autonomy within Indonesia, and the majority of Timorese, with 79%, voted against this which was the decision to be independent.⁴⁰ What is the impact of this independence in itself? First, the Timorese people were free from the shackles of colonial colonialism and Indonesian occupation in which the Church had played a very decisive role. But we are faced with the second thing, namely, this independence gives a different space for the Church mission. This independence era is very open to the future and we need some categories or some phases which can be seen as challenges and opportunities for the Church.

³⁶ Pascoe, *art. cit.*, 130.

³⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, *Sulla Teologia del mondo*, (Brescia: Queriniana, 1973).

³⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, *La fede nella storia e nella società*, (Brescia: Queriniana, 1978²), 81.

³⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, "La nostra speranza: la forza del Vangelo per la formazione del future", *Concilium*, 10 (1975), 124-148, here is p. 130.

⁴⁰ M. V. de Almeida, "Epilogue of Empire: East Timor and the Portuguese Postcolonial Catharsis", *Identities*, vol. 48, 4(2001), 538-605, here 584.

Post-Conflict Phase

In the first phase, we are in the *post-conflict* phase. This phase is characterized by some of the following moments: 1) Timorese people have gained their independence, East Timor has become a sovereign state. The government system adopted is democracy. There are many new things that make the Timorese' new generation fumble to be able to harmonize with this new system in their lives. 2) The people and their nation stand on destruction. The consequences of conflict and war that made Timor-Leste poor and the nation lacking in various aspects of life. People are sad, hurt, revengeful, angry, divided, violent, irregular or disordered. The fresh air of freedom without responsibility that is received and felt by the younger generation is ruining their lives. They are building a new family, a new generation that is lacking in education. 3) This situation is ongoing, the people and homeland of Timor-Leste, at the same time, must accept a new invasion in the form of the presence of strangers from various ethnic groups, races or religions with new cultures or fashions. The young Timorese embrace all things of a western style such as fashion, culture and behavior, including negative aspects which will damage or destroy the life of the nation and state. There is a danger of manipulation of the young Timorese generation. Timorese identity is in grave danger.

Globalization, Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Identity

Z. Bauman stresses that: "globalization divides as much as it unites. It divides as it unites, the causes of division are the same things, on the other hand they promote the uniformity of the globe"⁴¹. Therefore, on the one hand, it tends to unite, uniform, on the other hand it tends to divide, to create new distinctions and these effects are visible on different scales, both globally and locally. This globalization has caused also the crisis of identity. Because there is a *sans frontier* world. Globalization makes the world one and obscures each other's identity. Identity is defined as a set of significant traits with which people identify themselves. The traits can be religious, ethnic, national, regional, or a combination of two or more characteristics⁴².

⁴¹ Zigmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The human consequences*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

⁴² Cfr. Hari Juliwan, "Question of Identity in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach", *Diskursus*, vol.

There arises a fundamental question: How then, was Timor-Leste born? Nuno Mendes in his “*Multidimensional Identity Construction: Challenge for State-building in East Timor*”⁴³, presents a very fundamental analysis on how Timor-Leste is a fragile state and fragile identity. The question as Nuno asks is very easy and simple. I agree with him and on the contrary, the answer is complex and underlines the multidimensional nature of Timor-Leste’s nationalism⁴⁴. But far before, on the way to independence, in 1992, Ben Anderson has already talked about this topic in his *Imagining East Timor*⁴⁵. Actually, he was concerned that the situation is going to get worse. Timor Leste’s nationalism is very fragile.

In this context, unescapable that we are in a globalized world and certainly it has some consequences to Timorese life. First, it cannot be denied that globalization has penetrated all corners of the earth and this includes Timor-Leste, a newly independent country at the beginning of the third millennium. Globalization makes this small country grow very fast (even if it is forced) to get up from the rubble, catch up, fix themselves and try to enter into competition with other countries. However, it must be admitted that, in fact, Timor-Leste is not ready. Apparently, Timor-Leste is a country that is fast developing and making progress, but with an instant mentality, there are many things that are passed by without any resolutions to solve them. Indeed, this mentality forced Timor-Leste to modernize itself, but on the other hand, it was forced to change its initial vision and mission or ideals and be forced into the big dream of globalization. On the other hand, it also appears that we (Timor-Leste) are not ready to respond to the rapid flow of globalization itself. The second challenge is multiculturalism or multidimensional identity. Globalization has a big impact on us, in addition to making the world a global village, it is destroying the identity of each country, including Timor-Leste. Therefore, people are confused and unable to find where their real identity is. Moreover, we see from these historical

11, no.1 (april 2012), 1-19, 6.

⁴³ Nuno. C. Mendes, “Multidimensional Identity Construction: Challenge for State-building in East Timor”, in *East Timor. How to build a New Nation in Southeast Asia in the 21st Century*, ed. by Chr. Cabasses-Semedo & Frédéric Dúrand, Carnet de l’IRASEC/Occasional Paper, nr. 9, (2009), 19-30.

⁴⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, “Imagining East Timor”, *Lusotopie*, (2001), 233-239.

developments, Timor-Leste itself has been formed by three different periods namely Portuguese, Indonesia and Timor-Leste. So, why do we find it difficult to define our identity as Timorese?

Secularism

Another problem that arises from globalization is secularism, that is concretely, the separation of the Church and State⁴⁶. Hodge noticed that there have been conflicts between the Catholic Church and the nation-state in Timor-Leste since independence. He says: “The formative role of the Church (and ‘religion’) was at the center of the most serious civil dispute following independence, resulting in mass protests over more than two weeks. This dispute occurred in 2005 between the Catholic Church and the Government of Timor-Leste, at that time led by the Fretilin party, and centered on the role of the Church and religion in education”.⁴⁷ So, he continues - “the imposition of a secular-religious divide through a public-private division by the Timorese government in education [...] was seeking to form the Timorese cultural space in a particular way”.⁴⁸ As we know, the separation between private-public is a part of the Western secular vision. This conflict can be seen to have affinities with the clash of the Church and state in early modern Europe, especially as many of the concepts used by the Timorese such as ‘secular’ and ‘religious’, come out of this period in European history.⁴⁹ What happened was the government’s intention which sought to establish its sole control over education and marginalize religion and the Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Anti-Christian thinking (which began to exist in Timor from the time of Portugal through Europeans and was shared by Timorese university students from 1975 on, continued to exist during the period of Indonesian occupation in Timor even though some politicians made the move to embrace the strength of Church) fixed anti-clerical pamphlets shortly after the black September and a few weeks after the intervention of UN forces. This attack on the Church was felt again after the restoration of independence and in the penultimate year of the first constitutional government. Those who wanted to perpetuate their positions in power to transform this nation, into a merely secular nation, took shelter on the grounds that faith is an obstacle to development to attack the Church in the bud no longer by pamphlets but by the law of education that tried to exclude the academic disciplines of religion and morals from the national curriculum.

⁴⁷ J. Hodge, “Church, State and Secularism in Asia: The Public Nature of the Church in Timor-Leste”, *De Gruyter*, *IJPT*, 16, 2(2012), 323-348, here p. 328-329.

⁴⁸ J. Hodge, “Church, State and Secularism in Asia:..”, 332.

⁴⁹ J. Hodge, “Church, State and Secularism in Asia:..”, 333.

⁵⁰ J. Hodge, “Church, State and Secularism in Asia:..”, 335.

I think secularism is a challenge but also an opportunity for the integrity of the Catholic faith in the lay state. The Church knows its history in this land very well. The history in the conquest of this land, in the education and civilization of these people, in the defense of its basic rights, in the commitment to the independence process. All are with the faith already embraced by the majority of the people and being recognized in these people with identity, they did not bow to these attacks, but reacted with a courageous demonstration of twenty days, criticized and applauded inside and out that ended with the agreement of some points and the formation of a team to deal with the matter.

The State recognizes the social responsibility of the Catholic Church, as stated in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste: “In terms of culture and humanity, the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste has always been able to bear, with dignity, the suffering of all the people, to defend them in order to defend their basic rights”.⁵¹ The state has recognized the struggle of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste in its efforts to bear the suffering of the people and defend the rights of the people, starting from the previous periods up to the post-independence era. Starting from this recognition, it is possible for the Catholic Church to continue to serve its people and bear their burdens in the light of the gospel. Because, Jesus Christ “wants all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2: 4).

A secular state in a nation where the majority of the people are Catholic is a major challenge. On the one hand, Catholic Christians at any time and in any place, but on the other hand, the lay spirit draws Catholic Christians to make decisions contrary to their conscience or to limit their identities as Catholics within the Church or within the home. Some experiences from these ten years of independence indicate this trend. It is a great challenge for the Church to maintain the integrity of the faith of its children.

Pope Francis also fosters all local Church to be in a social dialogue, that is, dialogue with the state in order to provide “responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society with principle of subsidiarity and solidarity, political dialogue and consensus building, [...] for the good of the human person and common good”.⁵² Because, the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue, but the state does.

⁵¹ Constituição da República Democrática de Timor-Leste, *Assembleia Constituinte, “Preâmbulo”*, (Dili: Avança Grafic Design, 2002), 9.

⁵² EG, n. 239-241

SOME IDEA CRITIQUES FOR OUR REFLECTION FOR THE FUTURE

I think that what we need better is to have a critiques and ideas for developing the Church in her way of life and in the future within the context of Timor-Leste.⁵³ Even though, I think, there is an argument on the situation of the Timor-Leste's contemporary Catholic Church. Father Martinho Gusmão, a diocesan priest,⁵⁴ noted a paradoxical reality between the Church and the Timorese people. It is unique that the Church is involved already in the life of the Timorese society. But there is a paradoxical development in the quality of faith that we can see from three fundamental characteristics:⁵⁵

The Popular Church

In the populist level, the Church face can be illustrated with a very global interest. The Timorese see the Church institution as very brave to encourage and defend their interest. Especially when they feel oppressed and imprisoned in their own land. The colonial Portuguese government used the Church as an 'instrument' to reach their goal. We see that the colonialism projects (economy, military and politic) became the main objective of their mission. So, the life of the people was not important to them. That's the reason why the Catholic Church converted only 28 percent of Timorese to be Christian or Catholic. The Catholic Church allied itself with the Timorese. The missionaries built a new mission center for educating and promoting the right of Timorese people. Protecting humanity became the main goal followed by the conversion of Timorese to Catholicism as the second objective. The consequence is the spread of the Catholic faith and development of traditional rites went together, live together in peace. Gusmão underlined that the Church discovered a popular-spirituality that is to live, experience, feel and understand faith in the unity of concrete life. They feel close to the Church because of receiving rice, corn, clothes, medicines, etc. They

⁵³ For this reason, it is the best way to look it from Timorese perspective. My reference will go to the contribution of some Timorese views or argument critique on the Church and her mission in Timor-Leste: Mgr. Virgilio Do Carmo Silva, SDB; Fr. Martinho Germano Gusmão, Fr. Francisco Pinheiro e Silva, Fr. Jovito Rêgo Araujo, some laypersons, etc. This information comes from my direct interview with these interlocutors.

⁵⁴ Martinho Germano Gusmão, "Dilema Gereja dalam konflik politik di Timor Loro Sa'e. Antara konflik dan consensus" [The Church's Dilemma in the Political Conflict in Timor Loro Sa'e]'. Between Conflict and Consensus], *Seara*, Edição 50 Anos, 1999, pp. 46-53.

⁵⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, 46.

measured God's grace and love from the characteristic of help (charity help) from the Church.⁵⁶ So this affirmed that on the popular level, the Timorese live the faith with a manner and measure by a mundane one.

At the Political Level Timorese Treat the Church as Counter to Local Political Opposition

Many political figures have tried to use the "authority" (ex cathedra) of the Church to seek political support. This reality developed very dramatically when East Timor was under the pressure of 'civil war' and 'political integration' which claimed many lives but also destroyed various aspects of life. Since 1975 until now, the land of Timor-Leste has become a field of slaughter, destruction and conquest. Within this framework, politically the Church can become a social force, but it cannot yet become a cultural frame. Thus, the values of justice, love and peace are so difficult for the Church to fight for. It is precisely among the leaders who claim to be Catholic that syndicates emerge that instigate all kinds of terrible tragedies in Timor-Leste.⁵⁷

The Difference Between Doctrinal Catholicism and Popular Catholicism

Fr. Martinho Gusmão underlined this part by saying that theologically there arises a sharp difference between *doctrinal Catholicism* and *popular Catholicism*. This phenomenon is actually very hidden and has not been reflected on much. According to him, the dilemma is based on the fact that many Catholics after 1975 do not provide guarantees that the values of the Catholic faith can be used as a benchmark for resolving East Timor's social, political and cultural problems. In a perhaps harsh formulation, the Church may speak of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and peace, but Timorese still pounce on each other as prey. This means that Catholicism has not become a living praxis for Timorese. In another formulation, the Church is actually more a surface unit that gives a little space for all political interests to take shelter for a moment if the conflict has sharpened. When all groups are no longer able to resolve the problem, they will address their "political choices" to the Church, hoping for a little comment from the hierarchies. Thus, the theological problem is that the Church is still seen at an institutional level (social,

⁵⁶ Cfr. Gusmão, *art. cit.*, 47.

⁵⁷ Cfr. Gusmão, *art. cit.*, 47.

political and cultural) and has not yet entered into a culture in which the Church's objectification has not been 'dignified' in human identity and self-image (East Timorese).⁵⁸ So, this phenomenon becomes important to note. That the quantity of Catholicism in Timor-Leste is the majority, but spiritually, in fact the Timorese faith is still on the surface.

These are the three categories of church life that set a very paradoxical category of life in Timor-Leste. Institutionally the Church has shown itself to be strong but spiritually the Church is suffering from a spiritual loneliness and has not been able to testify to the freeing glad tidings.

PROPOSALS TOWARD A CHURCH WITH A TIMORESE FACE

We have started with a fundamental question: '*Quo Vadis* Timor-Leste's Catholic Church after 500 years of Evangelization?'. And this question has been the principal guide in this essay. Therefore, we arrive at the point to make some proposals. We did not intend to give a response to the question, on the contrary, it leads us to search for some important items that need to be developed in the future mission of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste. Here again the Church is called to play a role and to be with and accompany the Timorese, help them to find their identity as Timorese, not as Portuguese, Indonesian or any other country. Mgr. Virgilio do Carmo Silva, the Archbishop of Dili, said: "I think, the purpose of the Church now is to hear from our faithful, to accompany our Timorese to find and make sure that our identity is being Timorese; to hear from all, young and adult, what they want their Church to be? Within this, the Church should also find that the identity she faces is Timorese, not a Church that is an outsider to her people".⁵⁹

As Dr. José Ramos-Horta, as the President of Republic Democratic of Timor-Leste, remarked: "The Church is a part of our history, the only one that can claim a hundred years of experience but beyond that, it is the Church that provides the growth of Timorese identity, the Church has contributed enormously to education, health and culture over the

⁵⁸ Cfr. Gusmão, *art. cit.*, 47.

⁵⁹ The Archbishop Msgr. Virgilio gave an example that occurred three years ago, in 2018. For example, the Catholic hierarchy and the congregation or the faithful from three dioceses: Dili, Baucau and Maliana, have had a national week for Liturgy. They have try to hear each other, critized and tried to make some solution the liturgical life in Timor-Leste. He reminded: "that was not our decisions, the decision come out from the audiences". My interview with Msgr. Virgilio do Carmo Silva in the Câmara Eclesiástica, Lecidere, Dili, Timor-Leste, April, 16th, 2010.

years". As in 2015, Dr. Rui Araujo, the Prime Minister, on the occasion of the conference on "*The Church and Its Timor Face*" underlined and reaffirmed the statement by saying: "the Church's contribution to independence predates the Indonesian occupation. Indeed, its main contribution was to forge the very Timorese identity, which throughout the centuries was shaped according to the diversity of our ancestors, our culture and our traditions, always in contact with the Church. This national identity was strengthened after 24 years of great violence, since our people were absolutely convinced of the justice of their cause of independence, freedom and sovereignty"⁶⁰.

Surely, as Joel Hodge in his essay noticed that the Catholic Church has formed and influenced East Timorese culture and politics, especially after the Indonesian occupation⁶¹. Timor-Leste's Catholic Church has become a community and national identity; it plays an instrumental role which influences it's development. Evangelization of the Catholic Church on Timor-Leste, the land of the rising sun, does not distinguish people from the Church. Both are like one coin with two sides. The most radical utterance in Tetum is: "*Povo mak Sarani, Sarani mak Povo*"⁶². The people are the Christians, and Christians are the people. To this spirit, Hodge affirmed this saying: "The strength and fervor of East Timorese affiliation to and belief in the Catholic Church belies a deeper cultural movement which was connected to Timorese identity and resistance to Indonesian rule"⁶³. According to him, in the way of Smythe, Timor's shift to Catholicism is in terms of an experience of oppression and the contribution of Christianity to Timorese resistance, identity and survival.

As a proposal for now and the future, it is our homework to search for and analyze the concept of 'Being Timorese'? and 'Timoresness'? The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) invites all churches in Asia, with a goal for the church in Asia, to become truly Asian in all things. FABC says: "If the Asian Churches do not discover their identity,

⁶⁰ R. Araujo, "The Role of the Church in the Struggle for National Liberation: Memory and Reflection", in *The Church and Its Timorese Face*, Lahane Palace, April 9th, 2015.

⁶¹ Hodge, *art. cit.* 324.

⁶² Domingos Sequeira, "*Se Mak Povo, Se Mak Sarani? Igreja Katolika Timor-Leste*" in *Catatan Lepas Untuk Pemimpin Bangsa Beradab*, (Baucau: Kleru Diocese Dili, 2005) 27

⁶³ Hodge, *art. cit.* 325.

they will have no future".⁶⁴ This also should be in Timor-Leste's context - "to become a church with Timorese faces". Timor-Leste's context must be accepted as theological sources (*locus theologicus*), in addition to the traditional sources of Scripture and Tradition. In other words, the Church is to immerse itself in and expose itself to the realities of its people. By doing so, the Church will be brought closer to the realities of the times and experience those realities from the perspective of the people themselves.⁶⁵

Within this framework, I suggest the following proposals that we need for the future of the Church in Timor-Leste.

Foster the dialogue between the Catholic faith and Timorese culture

In this period of independent Timor, when the people hope to improve their material life by resorting to state institutions, the Church is challenged to focus more on pastoral healing. At this moment, when the revival of animist movements is being felt, the Church is increasingly challenged to re-evangelize, purify and take root the Catholic faith in the lives of the baptized. Pope Francis says: "The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative in the context. It is incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but local features"⁶⁶.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

This is the existential aspect of Christian faith. Timor-Leste has just exited from the conflict and/or is still in a post-conflict situation. This aspect should be given more attention. What followed was the development of a policy of hatred and revenge among the East Timorese themselves. We have lost the home of peace, prosperity and especially 'purity of heart' to accept others as brothers and sisters (*maun-alin bin-feton*). Timor-Leste politicians are also losing heart to truly defend the poor and oppressed and tend to defend their political interests. Thus, division, hatred and revenge become *factum-historicum* for us.

⁶⁴ Colloquium on Ministries in the Church 14, FAPA 1, 70.

⁶⁵ Mendoza, "Assuming all that is Asian: Becoming a truly local Church in dialogue", 75.

⁶⁶ EG, n. 30; see also the vision for the mission of the Church to be in dialogue with cultures proposed by Pope Francis. Cfr. EG, nr. 68-69, 115, 117 & 132.

Catholicism is challenged to live with sects

The non-Christian religions that began to exist since pre-colonial Timor did not make themselves felt among the animist people. The non-Catholic Christian religions that have existed since the Portuguese-Timor period have made their presence felt, but have not caused tensions and conflicts. Religious tensions and conflicts were most felt in the period of Indonesia-Timor. Now, there are some new denominations of Christian churches in Timor-Leste. These non-Catholic Christian denominations and the other sects took advantage of the independence of this lay state and took shelter in the constitution of this Nation that protects the freedom of people to believe and not believe and to embrace a religious confession according to free choice. This is also a challenge for the Catholic Church.

Keeping the Catholic schools' identity and teaching quality alive

Another challenge for the Church is how to maintain Catholic schools and the quality of their teaching. The Church still continues to raise its head with schools from the past, but it is already past. With independence, the situation changed dramatically. The State has the most financial capacity to do everything. The state has the most teachers and in fact the majority of teachers in Catholic schools are state teachers. The education provided by the State aims to eliminate illiteracy and get all the children of this land to attend at least nine years of schooling, adopted the policy of universality. This is education which is mandatory and free of charge and allows everyone to access this view. In view of this situation, parents, in their freedom, are called to choose the best schools: in the State or in the Church. The Church is challenged to keep alive its own identity with the quality desired by its charism. Within this framework, the Church is expected to play the role of a compassionate father, reclaiming those who are lost, helping to become instruments that can reconcile all parties concerned until in the end all accept and forgive each other. Reconciliation will not last if it is based on forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

The article above has presented before us a bit of a panorama about the way of life of the church and the faithful in the context of Timor-Leste. From this description, we are not only presented with the nostalgia for the role of the Catholic Church which is very fundamental at a certain

time, but also at the same time this is a reflection of auto-criticism for the Church itself. In the sense that from the Portuguese era, Indonesia era to the era of independence, we realized and concede that the Church is holy but also is full of sin. Because those in the Church are sinners who are on a pilgrimage to the Father's house in heaven.

We have seen the history of the suffering of God's children in Timor-Leste but at the same time we realize that we are sinful human beings, because it is our negligence that makes others suffer, as Metz puts it. Within this framework, the Church also realizes positive history and negative history, light and darkness, which are inscribed in this land of the rising sun. In the end, after the learning process came a number of proposals to serve as a foundation for the future.

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