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## Sloterdijk and Interreligious Dialogue against Extremist Reason: A Reflection on Christianity's Quincentennial Anniversary<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** I weave Sloterdijk's consideration of monotheistic religions with the necessity of dialogue to save faith, and by extension reason, from extremism as a reflection on Christianity's quincentennial anniversary in the Philippines. Sloterdijk depicts inherent pathological elements in the three monotheistic religions which left to their own ideological confinements suffer identical radicalization as history has presented. Religion plays an important role alongside language as an expression of culture in a people's sphere-formation as setting up the boundaries of their identity. This is what Sloterdijk recognizes as immunitary reason as the drive to immunize common spaces from what we identify as foreign as opposed to extremist reason as the ideological confinement to one sphere without the malleability to forge new spheres. Sloterdijk's response is a post-zeal manifestation dialogue, a co-immunism, which is rather timely considering that the Catholic Church in the Philippines celebrated 2020 as the year of interreligious dialogue, reflecting on how the faith arrived on the Philippine shores entwined with Hispanization; religion, a manifest of political expansionism. A post-zealotic attempt at sphere-formation allows co-immunization to secure common efforts for the same ideals. By bringing Sloterdijk and the Catholic Church's effort for interreligious dialogue, I seek to point out a common threat recognized by the two—extremist reason, referring primary to the rise of radicalism throughout the world, yet is expanded to a particular zealotry for the privatization of affairs, i.e., a social apathy as an extreme form of ideological reason. This polemic qua reflection provides an insight into hospitality as a potential resource for moving forward.

**Keywords:** Sloterdijk, Extremist Reason, Interreligious Dialogue, The Philippines

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the reviewer/s for the generous comments and questions that allowed me to see how the ideas herewith can easily be misunderstood and that provided me ways to clarify certain points.

Rather than beginning this paper by recounting how the Catholic faith arrived in the Western Pacific islands some 500 years ago, I find it more opportune to question the lasting significance of its lengthy presence. 2021 celebrates the quincentenary of the Catholic faith's arrival but also the start of Spanish colonization. It is naïve to celebrate the faith without remembering the thorn of colonialization it engendered. From 1521 to 1898, the islands were united under the Spanish flag, an identification to *Hispanidad* which was possible at the apex of extremist reason perhaps because of the lack of any previous dialogue of the faith outside itself. This is something not unnoticed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in declaring 2020 the year of dialogue. In this paper, I provide three points for reflection on Christianity's quincentenary by portraying Sloterdijk's consideration of sphere-formation and interreligious dialogue as a polemic against extremist reason. Again, this is a polemic that I leave open-ended. The three points I provide are not accelerative – they do not progress from each other – but rather are foundational – as a form of sideways mobility to expand the grammar of this reflection – for a holistic reflection. I first uncover extremist reason through a glimpse of a pathological metaphysical optimism based on immunitary reason which was the force for Christianity's evangelization-cum-colonization. This serves as my springboard for an assessment of the faith's presence in the Philippines. On a micronarrative, I engage Alfredo Co's account of the evangelization of the Philippines and point out a contradiction in his reading; I argue that the religion which arrived on the shores because of immunitary reason developed into a different experience than what is presently celebrated in the quincentennial anniversary. I then present the phenomenological approach to religion as a certain post-zealotic encounter of faith, something echoed by Pope Francis and even found in the CBCP's initiative to foster interreligious dialogue—a timely polemic against extremist reason for a country already plagued by its expressions in social and political pathologies.

## 1

Religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”<sup>2</sup> Durkheim's sociological definition highlights how religion is a collective experience bounded by regulations. This institution plays a dominant part in a people's identification. I would like to consider how this plays a part of Sloterdijk's spherology sanctioned by immunitary reason; “whatever ethnic, economic and political situation might govern their lives, exist not only in ‘material conditions’, but also in symbolic

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<sup>2</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 44.

immune systems and ritual shells.”<sup>3</sup> The history of humanity can be recounted as gradations in our sphere-formation. In a social sense, this may be identified first through the family, then a bigger community, until ultimately as contemporary society portrays the global community. This progression is guided by immunitary reason which impels a form of protectionism. Immunization stands as identifying, establishing, and defending spaces that are common to a particular people—something neatly represented by culture, with religion and language as two facets among others.

I first focus on religion. A macro-narrative of this spherology is religion’s involvement in immunizations throughout history. For most of our species’ history, we were foragers, only eventually learning to settle and domesticate in the recent 10,000 years.<sup>4</sup> Despite this brevity (compared to two million years), settling profoundly influenced our development to what was ultimately domestication not of livestock or flora but our very selves. We found a home. In fact, domestication comes from the Latin *domus*, home, and playfully thinking, it is rather peculiar that one would use the word domesticate than habituate, the latter from *habitare*, to dwell, while the former from *domare*, to tame; in finding a home, in creating meaning, we have tamed the species.<sup>5</sup> Due to our domestication, we have survived according to the degree of our immunized spheres.

Localized domestication can be translated in history as the establishment of nation-states, “a simultaneously imaginary and real immune structure, that could be experienced as a convergence of place and self[.]”<sup>6</sup> These served as the link between interior and exterior, the physical representation of a metaphysical limit. With the demarcated spaces, one had to keep these safe from the foreign, immunized from the profane. Coincidental to our taming was the emergence of religion as a search for metaphysical optimism—assurance, safety within the bounds of one’s immediate surroundings.<sup>7</sup> This fitted perfectly well for religious immunization offers an embodiment of metaphysical optimism through rituals that save the congregation

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3

<sup>4</sup> See Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014), §§3 and 5.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Sloterdijk wrote a contentious essay on this yet elaborating this is beyond my present aim. (See Peter Sloterdijk, “Rules for The Human Park: A Response to Heidegger’s “Letter on ‘Humanism’”,” *Not Saved: Essays After Heidegger*, trans. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), §6).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 150.

<sup>7</sup> Harari points out how in history this was represented by “domesticated” gods such as the Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Norse gods and goddesses as part of humanity’s cognitive revolution. See Harari, *Sapiens*, §2.

from chaos.<sup>8</sup> Religious rites make the most sense to the believer who has ascribed to such the consolation of the Day of Resurrection, a common celebration among the three monotheisms that serve as a manifestation of the greatness of YHWH, Jesus, and Allah who will raise the faithful to everlasting life while cast the infidels, to eternal damnation.

The historical development of these religions is exemplary of immunization from symbolic to localized spheres. This was obvious with the scramble for Jerusalem as the localized metaphysical struggle of the three monotheistic faiths. For purpose of this essay, I focus on Christianity (Roman Catholicism) and Islam whose seats are in reality not Jerusalem but Rome and Mecca respectively. The conquest for the Holy Land was a symbolic fight for the cradle of their religions, and thus while it was under the control of Shia Moslems, Christian campaigns were plotted to regain Jerusalem under the motto “Deus vult.” God wills the conquest and wills salvation for those taking part. It is common knowledge that the metaphysical optimism that drove crusade after crusade was on the one hand for the hope of eternal life or spiritual favors or even forms of penance imposed for the remission of sins.

What I am trying to point out here is that this metaphysical optimism provides us a glimpse of extremist reason especially with “the spirituality of *imitation Christi*” as its foundation.<sup>9</sup> With such a foundation for mimesis of taking up one’s cross and following Christ, the armed warfare for Jerusalem took form as the world’s immunization, i.e., baptism into the Christian grammar. This though was not enough of an immunization since metaphysical optimism pointed to a bigger reality; the Church found herself dividing the world to her loyal subjects to further this immunological drive in terms of salvation. The papal bull *Inter Caetera* apportioned lands unknown, *terrae incognitae*, to the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns.<sup>10</sup> The circumnavigation of the globe, of which that Philippines was part with Fernando de Magallanes’ 1521 arrival, buttressed an extremizing reason and enthused a passion for religious zealotism, mimicking the same process in Europe and the Holy Land. The Latin *incognatus* while meaning unknown also denotes in legal parlance the state of being untried; the global evangelization took the forms of subjugating these lands under the law and trying them, making them *terrae cognitae*. This provided a new conquest of an even greater sphere: the world is an orb worthy of heated conquest resulting in a “theological-cosmological litany in which the spheric attributes are

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<sup>8</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), §1.

<sup>9</sup> See William J. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia c. 1095- c.1187* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 30.

<sup>10</sup> See Alfredo P. Co, “Catholicism in Asia: Discoursing the Impacts and Lessons of the Evangelization in China and the Philippines,” *Across the Ancient Philosophical World: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2015), 117.

studied ‘*ad majorem gloriam globi*.’<sup>11</sup> We have to remember the earlier remark that religion provides metaphysical optimism, which sought to patch the cracks caused by the Reformation and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire with the evangelization-colonization of *terrae incognitae*. An additional arsenal was added to the Church’s anti-pagan metaphysical optimism: it is better to end life now than continue living a sinful life.<sup>12</sup>

Parenthetically, what later sought to be a counter-reformation religious order eventually experienced the harshness of this metaphysical optimism. With the monarchs’ zeal of *ad majorem gloriam globi*, it comes to no surprise that the Society of Jesus came under fire with their firm conviction of *ad majorem gloriam Dei*. Earning the irk of monarchs across the Old World and their expansion (and relative success) in the New World, their motto was the grain of salt, and the very order that has a fourth vow of obedience to the Pope was expelled from Christendom by the Supreme Pontiff who stood as a mere satisfier of the Crowns’ wishes.<sup>13</sup> With such a move, extremist reason took firm root within the Christian narrative

## 2

For a micronarrative of extremist reason, I engage Alfredo Co’s treatment of Christianity’s arrival in the Western Pacific. He highlights the different approaches of the Catholic Church to evangelize China and the Philippines, however, becomes ambiguous if not profoundly misled in claiming to things. On the one hand, “It was literally a triumphalist march of a dominant Western Catholic culture inward” signifying an evangelization-cum-Hispanization through cross and sword in the Philippines, yet he on the other claims that “the Catholicism [which the Filipinos] continue to practice now is the very kind of Catholicism brought to them by the colonizers some 500 years ago[.]”<sup>14</sup> He portrays the generally unproblematic (as

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Globes: Sphere II*, trans. Wieland Hoban (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2014), 31.

<sup>12</sup> See Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal*, §3.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase *ad majorem Dei gloriam* (trans. For the greater glory of God) is the motto of the Society of Jesus. The Society was suppressed and abolished officially with papal brief *Dominus ac Redemptor Noste* by Clement XIV. (See Giovanni B. Nicolini, *History of the Jesuits: Their Origin, Progress, Doctrines, and Designs* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 1111-1130 for the Brief while the following pages for some explanations) The expression of the Pope’s subservience to the Catholic monarchs is part of the reply of the then Cardinal Ganganelli, a papabile, to the conclave’s inquiry into his stance to the Jesuit question. (See Joseph Wilhelm, “Pope Clement XIV,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04034a.htm>) All professed men and women have three vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty, while the Jesuits have a special fourth one, which is a vow of obedience directly to the Holy Father.

<sup>14</sup> Co, “Catholicism in Asia,” 118 and 123.

coerced) evangelization in the Philippines which was unsuccessful in China. An initial efficacious bout of evangelization was made by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci – via inculturation – who won favors even from the imperial court, yet the Church through the ardent campaigns of the Dominicans banned the incorporation of the Confucian Rites within the Christian liturgy.<sup>15</sup> The difference is obvious: the Jesuits' attempt in China was through inculturation because as Co maintains the Chinese culture was already formed through millennia, while religious orders such as the Augustinians and the Dominicans came to the Philippines with a sense of evangelization as Hispanization. We may opine that the Western Pacific islands' immunization was not as strong as that of other cultures. Co juxtaposes the degree of the two culture's immunization:

There was no single sovereign that ruled the entire archipelago that is now collectively known to be the Philippines. There were *Agtas*, *Ifugaos*, *Ivatans*, *T'bolis*, *Lumads*, and countless communities ruled by tribal chiefs, each having its own animistic religion, tribal customs, religious rites, individual myths and legends, by those were all that was—for the islands were never unified nor existed as a state or a country like China, India, Japan, or Khmer. China was already a well established [sic] culture and civilization when the Western colonizers and evangelizers came to the East.<sup>16</sup>

Immunization bears semblance to political armament, and a unifying power that was common to the four states mentioned was indeed absent across the islands: the imperial dynasties of China and Japan, the empires of the Mogul and the Khmer. Such a unifying power though does not assure protection from factions and other colonial threats. Cambodia fell under French protection, eventually colonization, India under Portugal, the Netherlands, and eventually Great Britain, the *Bakufu* was forced to open Japan following the great Qing empire's defeat in the Opium Wars. Yet beyond the political power, immunization indicates a common cultural identity, something which Co indicates to be absent from the various tribal groups scattered across the islands. Parenthetically, his pseudo-historical survey earns a comment for he portrays the Philippine religious-cultural landscape without any reference to literature or history and obviously mistakes *lumads* to a specific ethnic group wherein it is a collective term that today is properly recognized as Indigenous People (IP).<sup>17</sup> By situating his narrative this way, it becomes obvious that the IP were no match culturally more so politically to the evangelization-Hispanization that started in 1521, thus ushering the “a triumphalist march of a dominant Western Catholic culture

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<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*, 113-115.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> See Marita Moaje, “Drop ‘lumad’, use ethnic group names instead: NCIP,” *Philippine News Agency* (March 4, 2021), <https://web.archive.org/web/20210305032539/https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1132620>.

inward[.]”<sup>18</sup> The zeal in this conquest for the islands and by extension Asia was engendered by a metaphysical optimism stemming from something deeper. Co opines it as “European confidence” from a belief “that the search for the way to truth had ended” in the Old World, paving “the age of exploration, conquest and colonization beyond its borders.”<sup>19</sup> He contends a self-assurance of European immunity reason qua the bankruptcy of truth-finding which propelled the colonizers to the East. Although I do not fully agree with his reading, we arrive at a similar idea that such a move was an attempt at immunizing the global sphere because of the perceived self-immunization in the Old World.

Yet, the contradiction I seek to point out is Co’s second claim that there is a Philippine joviality in celebrating one’s culture identified through religious fiestas such as those dedicated to a particular saint, patron/ness of one’s hometown, or even grander celebrations in honor of the Santo Niño (Tondo, Pandacan, Cebu), the Señor Nazareno, or the Blessed Virgin Mary (Inmaculada Concepcion, Guadalupe, de la Paz y Buen Viaje, de Peñafrancia, among others).<sup>20</sup> It seems Co outwardly equates the Philippine sense of identity indistinguishable from Christianity’s viewpoint which would obviously earn criticism from IP and Muslims in the country. However, I argue that this is a simplistic narrative. Naïvely, Co confuses two kinds of Christianity, we distinguish from the vantages of sociology and phenomenology, a religion that is organized and one that is experienced.<sup>21</sup> In the recent gathering of UMPIL (*Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas*), Jovito Cariño precisely accentuated how the Christianity which arrived in the islands was zealous not primarily due to Christ’s final command of making disciples of all nations but due to political and economic motivations.<sup>22</sup> This reminds us of Sloterdijk’s consideration that “the motives of Christian missionary successes should be interpreted more critically” than mere global moral improvement but as “going on the offensive by fleeing from the world – or, to put it more mildly: serving the world from a position of scepticism towards the world.”<sup>23</sup> The positions of the world and the Church can be respectively read as that between foreign and inoculated. The smaller sphere which the Church initially identified herself with desired to expand its salvific promise and baptize all nations; the world’s turning point however was the realization of its spherical structure and salvation became enthralled in political conquests. The Christianity that arrived in 1521 was zealous

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<sup>18</sup> Co, “Catholicism in Asia,” 118.

<sup>19</sup> Alfredo P. Co, Introduction to *ACTA: Thomism and Asian Cultures – Celebrating 400 Years of Dialogue Across Civilizations* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2012) 3.

<sup>20</sup> See Co, “Catholicism in Asia,” 119-121.

<sup>21</sup> See Niklas Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, trans. David A. Brenner with Adrian Hermann (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), §1:I.

<sup>22</sup> The biblical reference is from Mt. 28:19, *NABRE*. See Jovito Cariño, “Gunitâ ng Nakalipas na Limang Siglo,” presented at the national assembly of the *Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas*, 24 April 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal*, §4.

due to immunitary reason, a desire to inoculate the foreign. We, therefore, are left to wonder if this is the same zeal of the devotees of the Black Nazarene or the La Naval as Co would suggest. In celebrating the quincentenary of Christianity's arrival, we are left to ponder the source of today's joviality.

The immunization that the faith secured before, contributes to the sociological understanding of religion as I have already devoted much of the section on, whereas what we celebrate this year signifies a phenomenology of the faith, which I plan to devote the remaining section on. Earlier, I have hinted at how religion quells the drive for meaning-formation. Religious experiences as events of such meaning-formation resound this, however, Luhmann notes that "Even if meaning can be actualized at the point where an operation is using meaning, the medium as such remains invisible."<sup>24</sup> Even if we are able to verbalize events (verbalizing as a medium between ourselves and the world, while events as the source of meaning), the medium of meaning-formation as an impetus for existence remains evanescent. We are not able to precisely articulate all experiences, more so those that provide social ontology or even meaning for oneself.

This brings us to the second facet of culture that represents the degree of one's immunization—language. I first focus on its significance. Giorgio Agamben links being to language: to be human is to be able to use language as our connection to the world.<sup>25</sup> Such is the esteem from an ontological perspective that may be attributed to letters while at the same time assert its domesticating capacity: "The latent theme of humanism is thus the de-bestialization of the human being, and its latent thesis runs: right reading tames."<sup>26</sup> Right reading domesticates the individual, educates, localizes the person to an immediate sphere. Playfully, we may even consider one's baptism of language that initiates the child into a single perspective, dramatically domesticating the child by providing the means with which life may be articulated. Such a baptism within a single worldview is more aligned to the Jewish celebration of *Shavuot* than the Christian Pentecost despite both falling on the fiftieth day after Passover. Actually, Jewish educational custom aligns the entrance of children into schools with *Shavuot* to make parallel the first encounter with the alphabet in Moses' bestowment of the Torah to the Israelites.<sup>27</sup> We witness here not a celebration of the multiplicity of tongues but a singularity of perspectives. The child's language-debut provides the *grammar* to her experience. This had a medieval implication exposed through the etymology of the word grammar since "whoever could read and write could easily

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<sup>24</sup> Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, §1:II.

<sup>25</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Sloterdijk, "Rules for The Human Park."

<sup>27</sup> See Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 85.



manage other kinds of impossible things, too.”<sup>28</sup> The ability to use language had a synonymous magical capacity for impossibility. This grammar was tied to domestication and as presented above, the formation of immunological zones. Here we see how this is linked to the second aspect of culture as part of developing immunitary reason.

The phenomenological aspect of religion which I present here is through the treatment of language. Among the three monotheist religions, it is only Christianity which does not associate its religio-cultural identity to language. Although the language used by Jews and Moslems has developed through time, the religious identity is closely linked in the language they claim that is spoken by God: Hebrew and Arabic.<sup>29</sup> Among the languages of the three monotheisms, it is easily identifiable which is based on development; Classical Hebrew and Classical Arabic are respectively the languages of the Torah and the Quran, while Classical Latin refers to the writings of Cicero, Caesar, Virgil, and Horace. We are able to scratch the surface by discovering this distinction. The association of classical Latin to the Roman language showcases not simply a source of religious convictions but of humanist ideas. The humanist ideas were cherished prior to the faith’s linguistification. Without classical Latin, Greek philosophy would not have developed further, and humanism and Latin philosophical discourses, failing to reach contemporary society.<sup>30</sup> The Renaissance was a rebirth of Latin humanism. Already by this tone, we sense the difference between Christianity and Islam in their primal grammar.

This difference is further emphasized in history as to how Islamic expansionism reached its peak with the Ottoman Empire before Christianity’s reassertion of dominance through cross and sword.<sup>31</sup> What propounded Christianity’s aggressive front was the language of expansion via the Enlightenment which “amounted to a continuation of Christianity by rationalist and historico-philosophical means by virtue of its ideological or propagandistic design.”<sup>32</sup> The actual experience of the Philippines in its evangelization testifies to the embrace of modernity. Indeed, this is where I agree with Co. What was absent in the country was a homogenizing factor prior to foreign intervention. However, where we differ is where we draw the boundary between foreign and familiar—are we all not foreign to other groups? While the Europeans faced a united China, Japan, India, and Khmer, these nations were once composed of groups foreign to each other only having been immunized (colonized) by an even greater immunized clan. What stood as that immunizing factor in the Philippines was cross and sword. This catapulted the formation of a collective

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<sup>28</sup> Sloterdijk, “Rules for The Human Park.”

<sup>29</sup> See Wout van Bekkum, “The Hebrew Tradition” and Kees Versteegh, “The Arabic Tradition,” *The Emergence of Semantics in Four Linguistic Traditions: Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1997), 6 and 234.

<sup>30</sup> See Sloterdijk, “Rules for The Human Park.”

<sup>31</sup> See Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal*, §4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

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consciousness among the people we would rightly identify as *Filipino*—bearing testament to unifying inoculation caused by our baptism into Hispanidad. This identity of Hispanidad was then, as the *Ilustrados* would seek to assert, the entry of the nation into the global sphere: a common language to interact with others, a language to articulate our experiences. Christianity’s language in its expansion was not of strict traditionalism as one might immediately associate to it, but rather an embrace of modernity—a desire for knowledge (the establishment of universities), a desire for medical advancement (hospitals), prevailing governance (town halls), and of course, all done for God’s zeal (churches). If the Church had not embraced this modern language, then friars should not have been engaged in the founding of these institutions to support a culturally vulnerable people. Their immunization was done in the sole language they knew, and thus the Hispanicization of the people of *las Islas Filipinas*.

The obvious difference between Christianity and Islam is their relation to language, the former polylingual, while the latter, monolingual.<sup>33</sup> While the Catholic Church took the language of modernity (notwithstanding obvious contradictions such as inquisitions and prohibition of certain books), we notice that Islam did not take a similar path. We may be more pronounced with the Church’s translation to vernacular languages. Thus, the linguistic identity of the *Latin* Church, although officially is language, is the language of the times. Though not perfect, the phenomenological aspect is localized.

### 3

In anticipation of the quincentennial anniversary, the CBCP marked 2020 as the Year of Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and the Indigenous People with the theme “Dialogue Towards Harmony”<sup>34</sup> which I here present alongside the Holy Father’s *Fratelli Tutti* and Sloterdijk’s post-zealotic narrative. With religion’s narrative above presented, we are left to ponder how extremist reason is manifest in the Philippines beyond already perceived political squabbles. Extremist reason’s emergence in the global sphere, Sloterdijk portrays, is due to the inability to dialogue outside one’s immunized sphere, resorting instead to the bursting of one’s bubbles and to “consistent applications of high cultural grammar, which was based on the rigid combination of a monovalent ontology and a bivalent logic.”<sup>35</sup> This zeal to impose on everything foreign a brand of vulnerability – vulnerable to the homogenizing effects of one’s prophetic mission – fails to recognize the potency of such exposure to the other. Cariño dwells on this phenomenological experience of Christianity: through

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<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.*, §5.

<sup>34</sup> CBCP Pastoral Statement, “Dialogue Towards Harmony” (2019), <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/dialogue-towards-harmony/>

<sup>35</sup> Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal*, §5.

the islands' baptism in 1521 we have been secured not the Gospel of Christ but the embrace of forgetfulness ("pagtalikod sa gunitâ"): "Similar to modernity, the missionaries thought they could launch a new epoch without looking back. And again like modernity, they thought that the future, under the guise of a promised redemption, will be fulfilled as history's destiny."<sup>36</sup> For Cariño, Christianity and the Enlightenment merged in its arrival 500 years ago; the lesser immunized sphere of the island natives was exposed and was simply too vulnerable to the Spanish expansionists' cross and sword, baptizing them into the grammar of a reason already extreming—harmony secured not through dialogue but homogeneity.

500 years of Christianity in the country and yet a consistent narrative of true encounter cannot be posited without resort to zealotism or blind faith. The Holy Father even affirms this through his observation of the global regress into extremist reason expressed in populist support or resentful nationalism but above all the regress of reason to forgetfulness, the weakening of historical consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Emphatic of the Holy Father to be in underscoring something Heidegger qualifies as characteristic of Western metaphysics which Dasein regresses in its everydayness.<sup>38</sup> Heidegger explains that the arbitrary division ramified by the Cartesian separation of ego and everything not-ego causes a forgetfulness of something even prior to the ego. In our case of dialogue, it is the forgetfulness of the arbitrariness of our standards in considering something as indeed immunized which in turn propels us to immunize what is foreign. The harmony that one gets from this forgetfulness is ephemeral for true harmony comes from an event (*Ereignis*).

Perhaps this is what John Caputo refers to when he heralds a theology of event, recounting the illustrations at times paradoxical of the Kingdom of God: inviting those not worthy to the banquet (Lk. 14:15-24), yet casting out the one underdressed (Matt. 22:1-14) or even praise for the foreign Samaritan neighbor (Lk. 10:25-37) and the admonition that there is nothing external that defiles the person (Mt. 15:1-20; Mk.7:1-23) yet immediately followed by disdain for the unclean and foreign "dog" (Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30).<sup>39</sup> The advent of extremist reason in religion was precisely for homogenous harmony, yet the Church is mindful that this should not be the way. This has been echoed by the Second Vatican Council's thrust among Christians in *Redintegratio Unitatis*, across faiths in *Nostra Aetate*, along with Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam* as landmark documents to save the Christian faith from extremism in isolation and to encounter the Lord in a rejuvenated encounter with others. Hospitality has become

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<sup>36</sup> Cariño, "Gunitâ ng Nakalipas na Limang Siglo," 5. Trans. is mine.

<sup>37</sup> Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (2020), §§11-14, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html)

<sup>38</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 422.

<sup>39</sup> See John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), §12.

the more apt approach in our sphere-formation. This is even pushed forward with Pope Francis' encyclical inspired by his name-sake saint who "did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines [but instead] simply spread the love of God" and through such "inspired the vision of a fraternal society."<sup>40</sup> Visions of fraternal society are not new for Christianity, evident in the name *katholikos* (universal), and represented above all by the very papacy, marked with interculturality: neither Christ nor the first pope was Roman yet the Eternal City is *foreign* to both as it is in Rome, or that the title *Pontifex Maximus* was formerly designated to the chief priest in Ancient Roman culture—giving flesh to the dichotomy of the *pontifex* and God, repaying to Caesar (who at that time was the *Pontifex Maximus*) what is due and likewise to God.<sup>41</sup>

Dialogue with transculturality plays a fundamental role at the heart of Christianity, and so it is an extremely elaborate account of how this primarily intercultural sphere entailed a religion that dominated with cross and sword. We ought to be mindful once more of what lies at the heart of our sphere-formation. Perhaps rather surprising the current *Pontifex Maximus* declared how God is not the center of the orb we have fetishized much; "God did not want an idol to be at the centre of the world but man, men and women who would keep the world going with their work."<sup>42</sup> One needs to cite the exact words of the Holy Father lest the zealots be left in disbelief. Pope Francis wishes to put humanity on the stage and not merely empty idols that dominated extremist reasons of both past and present.

With humanity on stage, we are reminded of its expression-capacity through language. The treatment of language here refers not simply to the ability to talk or to engage in dialogue but hints at a deeper intimacy of Being, the allowance for an *event* to fully happen.<sup>43</sup> It is tied to a singular grammar of expression and forms an identity. In such a way, our recourse to individual grammars reflect the singularity of our standards to immunization; we have to be wary that the very prophetic role of each religion's language – be it an ardent continuation of tradition or an embrace of progress – remains to be part and parcel of the child's alphabetization with equally potentially capacities for extremism. However, the CBCP reminds us of our use of Christianity's language today: the quincentennial anniversary provides the "need to look back and seek forgiveness, reconciliation and healing for the wounds that

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<sup>40</sup> Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §4.

<sup>41</sup> See Mk. 12:17 and Numa Denis Fustel De Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 28 and 339.

<sup>42</sup> Francis, "Address to the World of Culture, Cagliari, Italy" (22 September 2013), *L'Osservatore Romano* 23-24 (September 2013), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130922\\_lavoratori-cagliari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_lavoratori-cagliari.html)

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings: from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 236.

resulted due to the absence of tolerance and dialogue.”<sup>44</sup> A post-zeal narrative is not simply a question of the ability for ecumenism or interreligious dialogue but a move beyond the nihilism masked by religious zealotry, blind faith, characteristic of extremist reason. It is likewise not a regress to any pre-global sphere. On the contrary, it should precisely go beyond the bifurcating logic of primitive sphere-formation; “What seems to be a new religious question is in fact the return of the social question on a global biopolitical level[.]”<sup>45</sup> We are once more brought back to the global sphere, yet with a different attitude—hospitality. This etymologically denotes a friendliness towards others (Lt: *hospitalitas*), however, it ironically resounds *hostis* (enemy) and *potens* (power) which connote “having the power of the master of the house over the guest[.]”<sup>46</sup> The obvious contradiction is contained in an even deeper root. The Latin *hospes* causes a tug in our translation as it means guest, host, friend, but at the same time stranger, or foreigner. One immunizes oneself from the stranger yet puts down these walls to let the friend end. The host is the guest; the stranger, the friend.



As a reflection on Christianity’s quinentenary in the country, we are offered some consolation with the celebrated status hospitality has within Philippine culture, yet sadly it is almost immediately associate with industry and service. This type of hospitality I argue remains superficial if it is unable to combat extremist reason or social apathy. Jeremiah Reyes goes at length to discuss Filipino virtues, elevating *kagandahang-/kabutihang-loob* as a root paradigm of culture, the sheer beauty of the will, and as an actualization of the other, whereas *hiya* as a passion leads one to an uncomfortable state which, for brevity, is closer to being shamed (*napahiya*) than the virtue, propriety (*kahihayan*).<sup>47</sup> If hospitality indeed springs from the kindness of one’s will and sensitivity towards others (*hiya* as a virtue), then that is cause for celebration, yet if done from embarrassment and fear of being left behind (*hiya* as a passion), then, a matter of alarm. We are only left to wonder how the Christian missionaries were successful in explaining to the natives what baptism and salvation are that on April 14, 1521, just about two weeks since their arrival, the first baptisms were held. Rajah Humabon became Carlos and his wife Hara, Juana. We will never know what really made them aspire for baptism, out of hospitality or fear, but this marked the start of a

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<sup>44</sup> Armado L. Picardal, CSsR, “2020: The Year of Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue,” *CBCP News* (2019), <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/2020-the-year-of-ecumenical-and-interreligious-dialogue/>

<sup>45</sup> Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal*, §8.

<sup>46</sup> Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, §12. For the etymology, see *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “hospitality,” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/hospitality>.

<sup>47</sup> See Jeremiah Reyes, Loób and Kapwa: *Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics* (Ph.D. dissertation, KU Leuven, 2015), 125-129, 163-169.

new high grammar in the islands that eventually became the Philippines, the grammar that we today celebrate.

If indeed the exact Christianity that came to our shores 500 years ago is the identity of Filipinos today as in Co's presentation, then perhaps religion's sociological function has run its course and extremism is fundamentally part of our very reason as the nihilistic undertone to social and political pathologies. However, at the crossroads of our celebration, we ought to remember the vulnerability of historical consciousness; "a nation deprived of memory is orphaned from its beginning. It is a captive inside a turret enclosed by a question mark. Its existence is a space-less search. Its soul is an emptiness of restless yearning."<sup>48</sup> We ought neither to understand this polemic as a mere defeatist position of Christianity's arrival to the country and the forgetfulness of any indigenous practice nor as a valorization of returning to any microsphere. Resistance movements in the country to both cross and sword are simply a testament to the movement of immunological reason. We cannot simply reject what is at hand. The fact that the majority of the country today profess to be Christian presents the dominance of the grammar of this single language. What I wished to point out above with the discussion on language was how in its primal characterization, the Latin language, the language of the Catholic Church, has a civilized tone at heart with reference to the Latin classics. Such prizing of civility ought to strike a chord for any reflection on 500 years of Christianity's arrival, civility entailing not extremism but in fact hospitality. Likewise, with my discussion of Sloterdijk, we should not misunderstand his position as an impetus to return to smaller spheres but to be conscious of various spheres that interact with one another. I have tried to underscore the need to go beyond distinctions for the obvious fact that any return is a futile venture. There is no singular past that we may return to lest we be captivated by our fantasies in conjuring social imaginaries of a fictional past that is immune in itself from, even worse, a juxtaposed foreign social imaginary.

As we are only left with scraps of what can simply be gleaned as pre-Hispanidad consciousness, we should be propelled to cherish even more the hospitality that we pride as a Filipino trait as something that brings us forward. Perhaps how all these themes coalesce to form a polemic worthy of reflection is a matter for the celebration of the 500 years of the Christian faith. Pondering on our hospitality is a new language we were never fully able to master which now allows a breeze of fresh air to dust out the consciousness that has simply been forgotten. Moving forward requires us to enact this language that can conceivably take the form of dialogue. I leave this reflection open-ended; perhaps we need to go no further, the Moslem faith arrived even earlier than Christianity—perhaps we must start with them.

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<sup>48</sup> Cariño, "Gunitâ ng Nakalipas na Limang Siglo," 4. Trans. is mine.

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