

Open Space for the Third Other in Levinas: Philosophy of Dialogue as Interlocution among Filipino Tripeople and Beyond

Fr. Jaime D. Del Rosario, O.M.I., D. Ministry, Ph.D.

Notre Dame University in Cotabato City

delrosario.jd@ndu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Philosophy of dialogue in Emmanuel Levinas' discourses of the I, you Other, and the broader Third Other calls for opening the usual ongoing dialogue between Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos into an interlocution among Tripeople, including the indigenous Filipinos. Particularly in the setting of the Bangsamoro region in Mindanao as continuing from the original Filipino people as the indigenous people who, through time, were termed as Filipino people, eventual Muslims, and Christians emerged from among those of the indigenous people who assented to such significant religions, while some remained in their indigenous beliefs. Hence, the dialogue between the I and you Other as the Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos are both summoned to transcend their conversation to move towards responding to the Call of the Infinite through the Third Other than the indigenous Filipinos deserve such open space for the broader interlocution among them as Filipino Tripeople. The Call of the Infinite Goodness, however, proceeds even beyond the three of these communities among Filipinos. The hybridities emerging among them extend into their international relations as the Infinite moves even further to the Good of the human race that each of them is summoned to fulfill. The Good of the other and the third other calls for transcending the self of the I. Inherent in the original I of the Filipino person has been expressed in belonging to open communities that extend to different others, such that the *kababayan* in a village or barangay is not confined to kinship but to the inherent Filipino view of shared humanity. Filipino proverbs, including those of diverse ethnic groups, open the identity of the humanity of the Filipino to religiously different others. Thus, conflicts of differences would be resolved peacefully by interreligious openness to the inherent friendship to the point of siblinghood in their human interactions. Inherent traits among Filipinos then are the elements that open space for transforming violence towards a shared community that they used to blend, valuing the life of the others and shared charitable care for the others to fulfill the I of the Filipino. Respect for the natural environment as the inherent habitat of the indigenous Filipinos can move the Tripeople towards a shared vision that responds to an even further infinite call for Goodness of international relations with the entire human race.

Keywords: *Philosophy of Dialogue as Interlocution, Filipino Tripeople as Muslims, Christians, and Indigenous People, Interreligious dialogue, Transcendence, Third Other in Levinas*

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of dialogue in the philosophical discourses stirred up by Emmanuel Levinas' encounter of the I with the Other, which we can appropriate between Muslim and Christian Filipinos who move beyond the two dialogue partners as the presence of the third Other can be contended as transcending their dialogue to involve also the indigenous Filipinos. Re-reading our ancestral roots as original Filipino people point back to the indigenous people. Hence philosophizing on the dialogue between Muslim and Christian Filipinos extends the dialogue into interlocution among these Tripeople within Filipinos.

Before the arrival of these two major religions of, Islam and Christianity, on the Philippine shores, indigenous people as local early inhabitants were originally Filipinos as eventually until now termed. Local early inhabitants had their level of technology in prehistoric times as early as 10,000 to 5,000 B.C. (Jocano, 1998, 192). We had stone tools and elaborate ornaments. From 500 B.C. through 50 B.C., early Filipinos developed skills and knowledge, such as industries for ceramic, cloth, metal, iron, and glass (Jocano, 1998, p. 192). We had our language systems as literate in syllabic writing (Jocano, 1998, p. 194). We had skill in boat-building by about AD 320 and engaged in maritime trade (Jocano, 1998, p. 192). Although our ancestors did not refer to themselves as Filipinos, the identification that would eventually emerge into our contemporary awareness of the Filipino people had what we could interrelate into shared elements of integrating one community of people with another. The eventual Muslims and Christians among early Filipinos originated as indigenous people who would later find interrelatedness in being Filipinos among these Tripeople. However, in contemporary times, we also cannot fossilize ourselves into being constricted within the absolutized category of Tripeople while shunning further directions towards the internationality of human communities. Through dialogue in Levinas, the I responds to an infinite Call from original Goodness to transcend oneself, seeking the Goodness of the Other that also moves beyond the Other towards that infinite Call of Goodness (Sealey, 2010, p. 370). We also need to respond to the Call in Levinas' philosophical enlightening of transcendence that goes beyond the I in dialogue with the immediate other towards infinite Goodness—recognizing the humanity in every human being as the Filipino person leads us to the direction of life towards fulfilling the transcendent Good of all of humanity that is immanent in every human person.

The third Other in the philosophy of Levinas looks into the open space of society or an immediate community. "Whatever be the ways that lead to the superstructure of society, in justice, the dissymmetry that holds me at odds concerning the other will find law, autonomy, equality" (Levinas, 1989, p. 117) again. The I and the You in dialogue cannot remain confined to each other's care and concern, or else the third Other can be left out of the pursuit of the Goodness of humanity. Also, between the I and the Other, domination of either of the two dialogue partners can emerge from the I or you as an

imperfect possibility of their supposed harmonious relationship. When the I neglect the Goodness of the Other, the domination of the I over the Other can bring out problems in their dialogue and relationship. Whereas, when the Other thinks only of the Other's sake, I can suffer being conquered and dominated by a self-centered and even cruel Other. What can set the limits of conquest between the I and the Other is when the Goodness for the Other calls upon the I to be and do Good to the Other. Levinas sees this turning point as the philosophical principle that Ethics is the First Philosophy. "It obsesses the subject without staying in correlation with him (her), without equaling me in a consciousness, ordering me before appearing, in the glorious increase of obligation" (Levinas, 1994, p. 94). The I becomes truly oneself in pursuit of the Good of the Other as being summoned by Goodness for the Other. "These are the modalities of signification irreducible to the presents and presences, different from the present, modalities which articulate the very *inordinateness of infinity*" (Levinas, 1994, p. 94). That Goodness is infinitely beyond the Other but summons the I through the Other who is immediate to oneself. "With the term ancestral domain, I.P.s have been able to articulate their stakes and even convey their plight and marginalization as a unique group of people" (Erasga, 2008, p. 36). It is the third Other who reminds the I of the Call of you as Other for the Other's Goodness, as well as that of the third Other, in the broader human society, as fulfilling who the I can be.

The I who is selfishly concerned only of oneself does not fulfill the very being of the I. Unless the I moves out of one's center space, the I stagnates and cannot fulfill the fullness of being an I as oneself. The Other pulls out that core of the I to reach out to the Good of the Other and thereby recognized as a Good I by the Goodness making the Call through that Other to the I. The Open Space for the Third Other brings out the possibility of interlocution among Filipino Tripeople of Muslims, Christians, and indigenous people. The third Other asserts that space is to be opened by the I and the Other you. Indigenous Filipinos summon the Christians and Muslims as either the I or the Other you to move beyond their dialogue confined only between them to complete the humanity of the Filipino. "Religion among Indigenous Peoples is closely interwoven with culture. Indigenous religions are also known as traditional religions, ethnic religions or tribal religions" (Layugan, S.V.D., 2019, 11). We can include interlocution with them to be called as also interreligious, but also as intercultural, and inter-belief as well. "They differ from other revealed religions in that they are very much a part of the day-to-day life of the indigenous peoples" (Layugan, S.V.D., 2019, 11), and hence it is a way of life to the extent similar to the major religions as guiding people assenting to such beliefs for their meaning or purpose in living life.

The Third Other Through Filipino Experiences

Probing into the philosophical meaning of the Third Other in Levinas through our Filipino experiences, particularly in Mindanao as the Bangsamoro region, the original Filipino indigenous people's communities are the most immediate mediators between

the Muslim and Christian Filipinos. Since they have been the original ancestors of the Filipino people until today, the Muslim sector and the Christian sector among Filipinos have emerged from the original Filipino indigenous people. Even the considered major ethnic groups such as Tagalogs, Cebuanos, Ilonggos, Maranaws, Maguindanaons, Tausugs, Badjaos, Samas, Ilocanos, Bicolanos, Kapampangans, and Warays, among others, are regarded as indigenous people too when we look into the building up of communities and small societies that have undertaken the wider barangay civic society model through time for their relationship as *kababayan* or fellow village member. “Kinship, while recognized as important in interpersonal and interfamilial relations within the village, is not considered very significant in defining the *Banwa* identity” (Jocano, 2003, *Filipino Indigenous Ethnic Communities: Patterns, Variations, and Typologies*, 155). As indigenous people, local inhabitants had been living together, supporting one another, and freely belonging to villages with the barangay system as the most advanced. “The oldest known Balangay has been carbon-dated to 320 CE” (Pedrosa, 2019). It was initially Filipino. “It was the first wooden watercraft excavated in Southeast Asia and is evidence of early Filipino craftsmanship and their seamanship skills during pre-colonial times” (Pedrosa, 2019).

We have been part of the international maritime trade through the Silk Road since ancient history. “In addition to the uncovering of trade wares from archaeological sites at Butuan, the discovery of several plank-built and edge-pegged wooden open water boats (known as barangay) within the same sites further attests to the significance of the area to Philippine and Southeast Asian Maritime Silk Roads history” (Pedrosa, 2019). Early Filipinos from our villages engaged in international exchange for transporting people and communications. “Due to the archipelagic geography of the Philippines, boats played a vital role in transportation, commerce, and in facilitating contact and exchange between population centers throughout the region and beyond” (Pedrosa, 2019). We all began as indigenous people, so emerging from these as Muslim and Christian Filipinos in later assent to the two religions, we have been continuously forming our eventual Filipino identity by sharing our lives through generosity, cooperation, and meaningfully deep initiatives of dialogue and interlocution. Our renewing such interrelatedness as siblings brings out the authentic meaning of heroism that this philosophical paper-discussant finds in *Bayani-han* through *Bayanihan*’s original sense of community.

Moreover, the paper-discussant defines the real *Bayani* or hero as the I as self offered for others, you and the third other, in the community. The local inhabitants, as indigenous people, had the inherent flexible attitude of adapting to interspersing of the *ating pananaw* into a self-transcending broadening of viewing humanity staying *lahat tao* or *sangkatauhang pananaw* viewpoint of all as humanity, as seen by the paper-discussant. This inherent Filipino attitude of sharing viewpoints between Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos and extended to the third other indigenous Filipinos in interlocution

is a foundational element for opening to interreligious dialogue and interlocution that would build sustaining peace.

The Filipino initially opens space in between the dialogue of the I and you other as well as with the extended interlocution with the third other in the Filipino generic linguistic common expression in *pakikipagkapuwang-tao* before being contracted by grammar into *kapuwang-tao*. The space of *puwang* between human persons is kept open in the dialogue and interlocution. Such space is opened by the *pagpapahalaga* or valuing the Goodness of life of the human other and the third other as the Call of the infinite Good transcending the I as self. These could address violent tendencies in extremism and fundamentalism that would obstruct the positive directions of the dialogue and interlocution. The Islamic community had discredited the recent violent conflict of the Maute Brothers staging the Marawi siege, which espouses moderation and peaceful resolution of disputes (*A.B.C. News*, 2017-06-10). Moderate Muslims see that the rational approach, not violence, would enhance Muslim participation in secular civil states worldwide. "As both Christianity and Judaism have done, Islam can not only survive but thrive in a secular state. Once dissociated from coercive power; it will witness a renewal of spirituality" (Mernissi, 2002, p. 65). Promotion of peace, integral human development, and service of all of humanity are inherent aims of religions. It is not religion itself that calls for violence in the differences among religions, but the politics that dilutes the very purpose of religion to promote the value of life that reaches eternity. The major religions of Islam and Christianity hence would be seen as an eventual growth of the already inherent sense of spirituality among our indigenous ancestors with varied forms of belief systems with siblings relations beginning with friendship for the Good of the other as ingrained in their viewpoints of the meaning and direction of life.

When we look into our Filipino proverbs, we can find our inherent wisdom that can bring out the Goodness that every religion brings to the broader human society. "*Ang bigas man kahit na magaling, Ay isinasaing bago ipakain*" (Tica and Balaris-Tica, 66). We translate this proverb as Rice though remarkable has to be cooked before it can be served for eating. We ponder on the deep symbolism of the Filipino staple rice that we can share but also requires effort to prepare before we can partake of our shared meal in our reconciling interreligious society. A Tausug proverb expresses shared preparation before disaster comes. "*In half subaywajibmangad hang ha di' patumu' in ulan*" and with its English translation, "One must always be prepared to have a roof ready before the rain falls" (Ager, 2002). Resources are available in our religions, but preparation for rainy days of starvation on both sides must be done before any disaster. In our interspersing of life elements, though in different religions, we share the same soil where we live. This is expressed in the Maranao proverb: "*So bawing a ketesen Na mi song bosaketesen Na makapenagenesa*" and in English: "A bunch of bawing plants, May grow far apart, But they are one when being pulled" (Ahmad Fabrao, 2013, p. 7). The indigenous people,

as Manobo's example of a proverb, express a similar principle of sharing. "Tatalanakana kana pailsuluha" with its English translation: "They belong to one family, but they do not give water to one another" (Ahmad Fabrao, 2013, p. 27). The Christian Filipino view is expressed in the proverb: "Ang ulirang puso sa pagkakawangawa'y, Bahay pagawaan ng mga biyaya" (Tica & Balaris-Tica, 41). The dimension of self-transcendence in Levinas is understanding and caring for religiously different others.

Our indigenous people's roots assented to either Islamic or Christian religion, so we can no longer assume that an ethnic group belongs entirely to only one religion. Thus, we can have Christian Tausug and Muslim Tausug signifying the generic people who live in the currents of the Sulu Sea. The ethnic group Tausug refers to both Muslims and Christians among them. Similarly so for Maranaos can have Muslim Maranaos as well as Christian Maranaos, with Maranaos as a generic ethnic group of people who live by the Lanao Lake. This can extend to our recognition of Muslim and Christian Maguindanaons for the generic Maguindanao residents or belonging to the ethnic group in the locality. The indigenous people as the Manobos in the Bangsamoro region hence can have some belonging to Islam, some to Christianity, and some remaining with their indigenous beliefs. The understanding of who the Cebuanos, Tagalogs, or Ilocanos are among our various Filipino ethnic groups likewise cannot be presumed to be exclusive Christian in religion as there would be Muslims among them to be Muslim Cebuanos, Muslim Tagalogs or Muslim Ilocanos when through time their residence among these generic ethnic groups would have interspersed diversity of their religious affiliation.

While we can find our Filipino identity as Tripeople, the phenomenon of hybridity asserts itself as breaking boundaries that the category as Tripeople tends to solidify to constrain who the Filipino is. Experiences of intermarriages among Muslim and Christian Filipinos and recognizing the blending of Muslim and indigenous Filipinos or Christian and indigenous Filipinos would break the absolutizing tendency of one significant community as differentiated from the other. Dimensions between each community transcend the Tripeople category, limiting the interlocutors to the purist three only. With further hybridities, we can identify around six significant communities, while there are also even more when we expand further hybridity phenomena. We have small numbers of members among what we may call social minorities. However, we could likewise not be turned aside in our Filipino interlocation, such as Filipino Hindus, Filipino Buddhists, Filipino Taoists, Filipino Zen practitioners, and Filipino mestizos of diverse international origins, among many other variations of hybridities. We can consider the hybridity of cultures as equally crucial as the interspersing of religions, not merely on the level of biological genes but also in the dimensions of cultural expressions that could find the blending of elements within these Filipino communities. "Given world history, global trade, and the exchanges among peoples, we humans are necessarily hybrids" (Lee, 2011, p. 253). Interspersing of good elements helps expand the horizons of meaning in living life. "The presumption is

that identity diversity will necessarily result in a diversity of experience, perspectives, and personal narratives” (Bruya, 2017, p. 997).

Hence, we adapt to one another while adopting good elements from each one, eventually interspersed in our daily lives. “We are each repositories of various narratives and discourses, we carry different cultural traditions within each one, and this hybridity as a process leads to better adaptations or higher evolution. Hence hybridity, and not purity, may be a more significant process” (Lee, 2011, p. 253). Openness to a reciprocal understanding with a religiously different other is a starting point through hybridity that thwarts the potential tendency to violence in reaction to the difference. “We pointed out that the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in religious systems generates violence because it reduces the reciprocity of perspectives and thus obstructs mutual understanding” (Srubar, 2017, p. 509). With future developments in artificial intelligence and neurosciences, these hybridities with the human race could later find our preceding categories as classical. Nevertheless, in this philosophical discussion, we focus on the previous exploration.

One particular reality of this phenomenon of hybridity has been expressed in a Christian community of religious sisters in the United States who have integrated Christian meaning into the contemplation practice of Zen. “Several Catholic women religious described such practices as ‘Christian Zen,’ a fusing of Christian teachings and symbols with the ‘form’ of Zen meditation” (Bender & Cadge, 2006). Localizing this phenomenon, there was an exploration made by a religious sister to simultaneously play the chant of the Islamic prayer of Al Fatiha with the song prayer of the Our Father, and the interreligious participants in a school setting reacted to an agreement to their interreligious equivalence of prayer expression. More simple practices of hybridity emerging can be observed in our local setting in the Cotabato City area, and immediate vicinities would put out Ramadhan lights around their houses and in the streets that could be parallel to the Christmas lights as cultural expressions of religious celebrations. Even more socially meaningful interactive hybrid practice would be Muslims and Christians joining meals to signify the break of the day’s fasting during the month of Ramadhan among interreligious classmates, workmates, neighbors, and friends, which is paralleled by sharing of Christmas Eve meal, Patronal Fiesta meal, and Misa de Gallo dawn snacks or early breakfast among Muslim and Christian neighbors, classmates, workmates, and friends. Opening prayer before academic institutional activities at Notre Dame University in Cotabato City has been practiced as in Islamic and Christian prayers, one after the other. Sometimes, a third prayer from an indigenous Filipino community representative is also included. Awareness of the importance of religious or belief systems for the other initiates interreligious interaction that builds friendship or could happen because friendship already emanates from the interaction that supports such interreligious mutual recognition of the other’s prayer.

Meaningful interreligious dialogue initiatives also involve the indigenous people in the Philippines through religious leaders. The Bishops-Ulama Conference was revived in 1996 after its lull during the Martial law years in the 1970s. The participants made a statement condemning acts of terrorism, such as the bombings of Jolo Cathedral and Zamboanga mosque. “We mourn the death of those killed; we suffer with those injured; we grieve with their families and friends. But we refuse to let this lethal violence kill the dream of the Bangsamoro for a homeland in Mindanao of peace and prosperity” (Bishops-Ulama Conference et al., 2019). With the religious leaders taking the continuing initiatives to promote peace in society through interreligious assembly, the members of the religions would follow suit. With observer representatives from indigenous people, listening has been the Christian leaders’ attitude toward openness to the differences in religions and belief traditions. “Christian partners who enter into dialogue must keep the integrity of their own faith and at the same time must be open to learning positive values of other religions and traditions” (Henkel, O.M.I., 2005). The Prophet Muhammad was open to welcoming Christians in Ethiopia in his time, cultivating friendships among Muslim and Christian communities. “We understand that this loyalty of the Prophet includes all the Ethiopians. This loyalty manifested itself in the leniency of the Prophet toward the Christians of Najran, for the Prophet allowed them to pray in their way even in the mosques of the Muslims” (Balci, 2005, p. 118). Islamic view of loving one’s neighbors is because God/Allah chooses who our neighbors are. “Who chooses your neighbors for you? It is God who does the choosing, and anything your Beloved (God) chooses for you should also be beloved to you” (Al-Jifri, 2010, p. 85). Christians engage in interreligious dialogue. “For Christians, dialogue is religiously motivated and an occasion for grace, for both theological and spiritual growth” (Michel, S.J., 2005, 40).

Among Manobo indigenous people, the name for God is Nemula, as the beginning of life and things. “The tribe believes that Nemula has the power to create heaven, earth, animals, human beings, and everything that can be seen. He also owns nature” (Ortega, 2016). Adaptability and understanding among these varied religions and beliefs can bridge us to one another as siblings in God’s Creator while remaining in one’s belief system. The Indigenous Filipinos continue to teach us about caring for the forests and the natural environment since their very way of life inhabiting the forests. At the same time, they would know the intricacies of the interrelatedness of living beings in their daily living, pointing out to us not to dislodge them from such habitats for urbanizing purposes. “The Filipino believes that upsetting the natural order of things results in a disaster” (Carls-Diamante, 2010, p. 59). The Manobos, for instance, have attained a level of leadership for their village but have yet to sustain it towards the broader consolidation of powers in alliances and hence remained a weak social protection to preserve and sustain their indigenous communities. “The Bahai was, besides an avenger, a leader of little wars, and the data may combine in one person all sorts of leadership. But all these were limited in scope, local in character” (Manuel, 2000, p. 357). They need to forge alliances with

neighboring communities or interspersed migrants into their villages that could come from other indigenous persons of another ethnic community, the Muslim or the Christian, to be helpful for their basic needs such as education, electrical, and various technological supplements. "Their alliances, though more or less permanent, were put into test only occasionally; as a consequence, this institution failed to consolidate power in a person or set of persons in authority" (Manuel, 2000, p. 357). Interreligious interactions that lead to their integral development with fellow Filipinos are necessary.

The infinite Call of Goodness I receive from the Other in the philosophy of Levinas can be regarded as these emerging practices of hybridity interreligiously and culturally expressed. The Filipino social experiences in places in Mindanao, such as in the Cotabato City area and vicinities, can manifest that friendship through hybridity is an important and meaningful way of building interreligious understanding for promoting peace and harmony among Filipinos. Although there are insensitive hybridity expressions that are not profoundly thought of for their substantial meaning of expression, when well-pondered upon more deeply, these could be addressed for better expressions. A few still would not be promoting reciprocal understanding. In an interreligious prayer and recollection among interreligious participants in a formal setting, placing both the cross and the crescent side by side could be reciprocally understood. However, placing the cross and the crescent side by side in a car or jeepney is not interreligiously friendly. Likewise, indigenous belief symbols in an intercultural prayer service could be reciprocally understood in a formal and mixed setting, such as between Christian and indigenous members or Islamic and indigenous members.

Nevertheless, in a more daily public utility such as in a car or a jeepney, combining these might not be reciprocally understood in a friendly way by the public. It would be an insensitive hybridity expression when for instance, a woman wearing a hijab or Islamic veil also wears a crucifix necklace, whether the woman is a Muslim or a Christian. As interreligious marriages can integrate the Goodness of different religions of the parents among their children who become bridges of understanding between different religions, further hybridity of various forms and expressions can continue sustaining dialogue and interlocution between two and among more than two religions and belief systems. When participants in public gatherings include indigenous Filipinos, their prayers and symbols would promote further understanding and involvement of the third Other in public activities, such as beginning with the diverse prayers of the Tripeople. There are particularities that some contexts would present the hybridity as meaningful and purposeful, such as in socially building up friendly relations through interreligious prayer, cultural practices of social gatherings, and interreligious blending in families of interreligious marriages.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that the open space for the Third Other in the philosophy of dialogue of religions in Levinas calls for both the I and you as the Other in our Filipino situation as currently identified with the Christian Filipinos and Muslim Filipinos being in the majority religions, to be responsive to the Call of the Third Other as the indigenous Filipinos that as well expand their dialogue into interlocution of Tripeople among Filipinos. The tri people further do not end within themselves as the move in responding to Infinity of such a Call to reach out to You Other and the Third Other in the broader human society still pursues even more comprehensive directions of internationality of calling the three communities towards the entire human race. While pursuing recognition and fulfilling the more excellent Good of the Tripeople in their different religions or beliefs, they cannot settle within their circle as the Call of Infinite Goodness, as pointed out by Levinas, moves the three of these communities together to pursue the even transcendent Good of the entire human race.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FR. JAIME D. DEL ROSARIO, O.M.I., DMinistry, Ph.D. in Philosophy earned his B.A. degree in Philosophy from the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City, in 1987 and was a college Instructor at the Department of Philosophy at UP Diliman from Academic Years 1987-88 to 1988-89. He joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate congregation, professing his first vows in 1991. He studied for the degrees of Bachelor in Theology earned in 1994 and a Master of Arts in Theology from the Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo De Manila University, respectively. He proceeded with a Master of Arts in Philosophy, earning the degree in 1995 from the U.P. Diliman. As an ordained priest in 1995, he was assigned to a foreign mission in Japan for three years, then followed various ministries back in the Philippines as a college professor, chaplain, and director at various Oblate colleges and schools in Mindanao, also as parish priest for some time alongside as farmers' cooperative manager and indigenous students' scholarship director. He took summer studies while doing missions to earn the degree of Master of Arts in Educational Management from Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City in 2006. He was then assigned to Notre Dame University as a college professor in 2006 and also a formator at the De Mazenod Community (Seminary) in 2008. He went for a Doctorate of Ministry degree, which he earned in 2015 from the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A.. Later, in 2020, he obtained a Doctorate in Philosophy from the U.P. Diliman. He teaches and forms ministries with A.B. and M.A. Philosophy degree programs at Notre Dame University in Cotabato City.