
TOWARD A THEOLOGY FOR THE MACAU MANIFESTO

向《澳门宣言》迈进的神学

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ABSTRACT

As a missionary stationed in Taiwan since 1961, I would like to offer three suggestions regarding the Macau Manifesto and the Economy of Francesco statement, as a sign of my full support for their ideas and initiatives, locally and globally. These suggestions are meant to highlight and clarify the theological presuppositions that inform these statements. Each of them has emerged from my own experience working among Chinese people and learning from their cultures.

FIRST SUGGESTION

Over the years my philosophical and theological thinking has shifted from a more static paradigm of substance and accidents towards a more dynamic paradigm of relationship, structure, and process. Substance and accidents, you may recall from the Scholastic philosophy derived from Aristotle and Aquinas, which once was taught as the exclusive approach to truth in Catholic

institutions. The more dynamic paradigm of relationship, structure, and process, however, is not so much a rejection of the Scholastic *philosophia perennis*, as a development derived partly from Catholic engagement with modern post-Enlightenment philosophies, and partly from the renewal of Biblical studies that inspired the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In my own experience, this paradigm also emerged from my study of Chinese philosophy and reflections on the discoveries of modern science. Let me explain my understanding of the new philosophical paradigm of relationship, structure, and process.

First, Relationship: the ontological priority of relationship emerges from the realisation that the whole reality of all beings can be described in five dimensions: 1) the material dimension, which includes the full spectrum from the smallest sub-atomic entity to the universe as a whole; 2) the organic dimension, which encompasses our so-called “environment” with its incredibly rich amounts of plants and animals; 3) the spiritual dimension, culminating in the human person with its two inseparable and mutually enriching aspects of self-subsistence and self-giving, which unfold in the reciprocities of *communio*; 4) the global social dimension, in which we locate humanity, all peoples and races in *communio* as humankind, and 5) the transcendent dimension, revealing the divine mystery of an infinite loving *communio* with the Creator or sustaining force of all created beings.

Second, Structure: all relationships unfold within structures, that is, various systems that give definition to the five basic dimensions, and the limits and possibilities that may emerge in each of these. For example, we recognise value systems, and through experience come to respect their objective validity. In Confucian philosophy, Filial Piety (Chinese: 孝; pinyin: *Xiào*), expresses

the normative significance of family for becoming fully human; in Catholic social teaching, the principle of subsidiarity identifies the value system operative in all five dimensions of relationships.

There is a convergence of wisdom in these two value systems: both recognise the basis of human morality in what is first learned in families, and our consequent need to respect family life, especially in our efforts to sustain it. What the principle of subsidiarity teaches us about how states and “higher” institutions assist persons in families to become fully human, is reflected in the Confucian paradigm of “the rectification of names” (Chinese: 正名; pinyin: *Zhèngmíng*). These value systems are recognised as objective, that is, as cosmically significant and all-encompassing. Their violation in one of the five dimensions of Relationship inevitably has repercussions for all relationships, threatening to undermine their integrity.

Third, Process: here we struggle with the realities of history, human freedom, evolution, conversion, and growth. Both Confucian philosophy and Catholic social teaching as value systems are hopeful regarding the ultimate outcome of the processes unfolding in the five dimensions of relationships. Confucian teaching is optimistic about human nature and our capacities for overcoming all obstacles that block the path toward social harmony and human flourishing. Catholic social teaching, because it is theologically grounded, believes that our *communio* of faith, hope, and love, will be sustained by the promises of God, manifest in the Trinity of relationships, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This first suggestion, then, calls for a paradigm shift in our basic thinking about the ultimate questions of life, as expressed so memorably by Immanuel Kant: Who am I? What can I hope for? What shall I do? If human

persons emerge from a nest of relationships, that are structured in a certain intelligible way, reflected in the existential struggles of our histories, both individually and collectively, then we need to orient all our responses to these facts, as honoured in the wisdom traditions, for example, of Confucian philosophy and Catholic social teaching. The practical consequences that flow from this theoretical shift in philosophical perspective will become evident in my other two suggestions.

SECOND SUGGESTION

My second suggestion concerns conversion, to be understood not in a narrowly sectarian sense, but as a process of becoming aware of the objective dynamics of relationships, and learning to live harmoniously or with integrity in them. In practice there is no way around the basic need for conversion, especially in relationships among individuals, groups, communities, and nations. Conversion within Relationships generally means moving away from individualism (egoism) and moving towards *communio* and loving care. Conversion within Structures generally means moving away from wrong value systems (with profit, consumption, pleasure, and the power to dominate others embraced as ultimate goals), and towards value systems that seek to establish harmony, through sharing, enrichment of others, service, and basic protections for the weak and poor.

With Processes, conversion generally means overcoming distortions generated by a one-sided and partial advancement on one or two of the five dimensions, especially the material and organic dimensions, to the detriment of the spiritual, global, and especially the transcendent dimensions, and working towards an integrated approach that acknowledges all five dimensions

as an overall unity and *communio*. There is nothing especially mysterious or sectarian about conversion. It requires a change of heart, an all-too-familiar demand that we learn from our mistakes, and if we have fallen or strayed from the path that promises to lead us to fulfilment, we simply pick ourselves up and start walking once again in the right direction. The mystery lies, however, in how such a change of heart is accomplished. The path toward conversion may be understood differently in various wisdom traditions. To understand their various ways of mapping the dynamics of conversion, in our common quest for *communio*, we must consider a third suggestion, concerning the indispensable importance of interreligious dialogue.

THIRD SUGGESTION

My third suggestion concerns interreligious dialogue. Contrary to those intellectuals and pundits who would minimize the role of religious wisdom in seeking consensus about the world's problems, I contend that the worldwide consensus holds, that true religion, whatever historical and cultural form it has, is always for the common good of all people in the global humanity, since it is based on a genuine experience (in whatever concrete expression and formulation) of the transcendent mystery which Christians, Jews and Muslims call GOD. While other wisdom traditions also acknowledge the transcendent dimension, they may do so with different names, each of which conveys different insights into our common human experience of the transcendent mystery. It is also a deplorable, but realistic fact, that all true religions are overshadowed by human weakness and sin, as history shows very clearly, for example, all religious institutions struggle with the abuse of power, not to speak of sexual misbehaviour.

Nevertheless, as imperfect as all religions are, their role in orienting their followers to the nature of relationships, the value systems to be honoured in them, and the paths toward conversion opened in each of them, requires us to acknowledge the importance of interreligious dialogue for sustaining the possibilities of global cooperation in solving our problems, as clearly indicated in the Macau Manifesto and the Economy of Francesco document.

The objectives of interreligious dialogue are apparent in each of the three dimensions of the theoretical paradigm outlined as follows. a) With reference to relationships: interreligious dialogue should promote mutual understanding and acceptance, that is, a humble yet joyful recognition of the realities in which our human lives unfold. b) With reference to structure: interreligious dialogue should enhance conversion and genuine subsidiarity, as shown above. c) With reference to process: interreligious dialogue should foster hope that humanity is capable of establishing a global community of men and women, living in a *communio* of peace and joy, never being totally satisfied with “things as they are now,” or “business as usual.” Always trying to come closer to a more harmonious, creative and joyful global human community, protecting the environment, and properly facing together whatever natural catastrophes may occur.

The significance of interreligious dialogue and what we should expect from its proper conduct has been well laid out in Pope Francis’ recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), based on his own experience participating in such conversations with other leaders of global religious communities. Pope Francis’ vision of interreligious dialogue reflects his specifically Catholic commitment to living in and through the mystery of the Triune God.

It bears fruit in the range of practical exhortations he has made urging all of us to respond to the need for conversion to achieve *communio*, particularly to work together to address global problems, like catastrophic climate change and the social inequities that stand fully revealed in the sufferings of so many people because of the COVID pandemic. His vision animates every proposal put forward in the Macau Manifesto and the Economy of Francesco statement. While these proposals are practical, and thus need to be considered on their own merits, there’s no doubt that they are animated by a theological vision that deserves to be respected by all, if not actually shared by all.



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