The Christian Message as Vision and Mission

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The Christian Message as Vision and Mission:

Philosophical Considerations of its Significance

By

Santiago Sia

Foreword by:
Dr Antonio M. Pernia, SVD
Former Superior-General of the Society of the Divine Word

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Philosophical Considerations of its Significance

By Santiago Sia

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To

The Divine Word Missionaries

A Tribute

SOME COMMENTS ON THE BOOK

"Informed by philosophy and theology, and committed to the complementarity of faith and reason, Santiago Sia articulates the power of the Christian message in a world beset by challenges and loss of meaning. Neither dogmatic nor doctrinal in emphasis, the essays in this volume highlight the rationality of the Christian message in terms of love, hope, and redemption. With insight and even-handedness, Professor Sia powerfully illustrates the enduring relevance of basic Christian themes for various aspects of modern life and culture, including education and technology."
—Brendan Sweetman, *Professor and Chair of Philosophy, Rockhurst University, USA*

"Santiago Sia has devoted much thought and time throughout his philosophical career to examining some of the fundamental issues in the Christian religion and their relevance to contemporary society. In times of progressive modernization, such as ours today, these issues have become more relevant than ever. And in this book Santiago Sia shows himself to be well-equipped to be an excellent guide."
—André Cloots, *Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium*

"In this new work Santiago Sia deals with a number of enduring philosophical themes with characteristic erudition. Sia conveys the richness and complexity of the Christian tradition as it engages with questions of meaning and ultimacy. He challenges the dichotomies that have marked much of the western philosophical and theological traditions, and makes the case for a faith that is multidimensional, creative and hope-filled."
—Linda Hogan *FTCD and Professor of Ecumenics, University of Dublin, Ireland*

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FOREWORD

I am honoured to write the Foreword to a book that is destined to have a major impact both on philosophy and on Christian theology. For the book, as its title indicates, is a serious and insightful philosophical reflection on the significance of the Christian message as vision and mission. The book is philosophically rigorous in its consideration of the Christian message as vision, and theologically creative in its treatment of the Christian message as mission. Combining references to works in philosophy, theology and literature, the book is written in a language that is easy to read and thus is accessible both to the specialist in philosophy and theology and to the educated lay person.

While the book is arranged in three parts, the discussion and reflection it undertakes actually come in two parts, namely, the discussion of the Christian message as vision and the reflection on it as mission (where Part III of the book is actually an application of this second part in a specific area of mission).

The first part is a rigorous examination of the philosophical underpinnings of the Christian message as vision. Here, Professor Sia exhibits a mastery of the main philosophical thinking connected with the topic, especially process philosophy and, in particular, the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. He convincingly shows that, even if one does not agree with its specific content, the Christian message nevertheless implies a vision of a response to a fundamental human need. However, the significance of the Christian message lies not just in recognizing this human longing but also in deepening people's awareness of the human quest. For this human quest is what makes us human and defines our fulfillment as human beings. Thus, the Christian message is shown not as an alien or esoteric message imposed from the outside, but as one that arises from and is rooted in human nature. And this becomes a point of encounter between those who subscribe to, and those who do not agree with, the Christian message.

The second part is an insightful proposal that vision must become mission. Here, Professor Sia manifests a wide-ranging familiarity with theology in general and with the basic doctrines of the Catholic Church in particular, resulting in a sympathetic view of the Christian message. The book makes three very helpful proposals in reflecting on the Christian

message as mission. First, viewing human existence as a journey, it proposes to treat the Christian message as **MAP** in life's journey (it makes life ***M***eaningful if it is ***A***ctualized in one's journey, enabling one to enter into a ***P***ersonal relationship with God). Secondly, comparing the Christian message to a mission statement, it interprets the Christian message as **PASS** in the journey (***P***ointing the way, ***A***ccompanying and ***S***upporting us on the journey, and leading to the ***S***alvation of all creation). Thirdly, emphasizing that mission be understood as giving witness to the Christian message, it underlines the implications of the task of mission as **SOCIUS** (***S***haring the message, ***O***pening oneself to the otherness of the other, offering ***C***ompanionship, ***I***nvoking and turning to God, participating in ***U***plifting humankind, and ***S***erving the community). Translating vision into mission through understanding human existence as a journey is another point of encounter between those who are already inspired by, and those who are critical of or even are opposed to, the Christian message.

A theological appreciation of the book cannot fail to note the challenge to theology that it entails; namely, the challenge for theological reflection to be attentive to the two dimensions of the Christian message underlined by the book; that is, the Christian message as VISION and MISSION. This implies undertaking the task of theological reflection both as *"fides quaerens intellectum"* (to clarify the significance of the Christian message as Vision) and as *"fides quaerens linguam"* (to explore the implications of the Christian message as Mission).

First, *fides quaerens intellectum*, or "faith seeking understanding." This is the classical task of theology as enunciated since the 11th century by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). This is the task of reflecting on the Christian faith in the light of human reason in the conviction that faith is not incompatible with reason, that believing is not a perversion of human nature, and that therefore the teachings of the Christian faith do not demean, but rather enhance, human life. As Professor Sia shows in the book, there is a synergy between faith and reason. And even if at times their relationship was expressed in terms of faith *versus* reason, there were also times when that relationship was seen in terms of faith *and* reason.

One approach to the reflection on the Christian faith in the light of reason is precisely the one exemplified by Professor Sia in the book; namely, investigating the philosophical underpinnings of the Christian faith and showing that the Christian message is rooted in human nature and provides a vision of a response to fundamental human needs. Some years ago, it was said in jest that, in response to an announcement saying "Christ is the Answer," someone scribbled underneath "But what is the Question?" The challenge to theological reflection as *fides quaerens intel-*

lectum is precisely to show the relevance of the Christian message as vision by reflecting on the profound questionings of the human heart. For, as one writer puts it:

> There is within us a fundamental disease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life, of ever coming to full peace. This desire lies at the center of our lives, in the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of the soul …. At the heart of all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology, and religion lies the naming and analyzing of this desire …. Whatever the expression, everyone is ultimately talking about the same thing—an unquenchable fire, a restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, a hunger, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia, a wildness that cannot be tamed, a congenital all-embracing ache that lies at the center of human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else.[1]

Secondly, *fides quaerens linguam* or "faith seeking expression." This is the task which, I personally believe, should complement *fides quaerens intellectum*. It is the task of reflecting on the Christian faith that stresses its missionary dimension. It underlines the fact that the Christian faith is not, in the first place, a body of truths that we need to understand, but an experience of the Good News that we need to share with and proclaim to others. This is faith seeking to be communicated or proclaimed—a *fides quaerens proclamationem*. Naturally, proclamation presupposes understanding. For we cannot properly proclaim what we do not understand. But it can also be said that we come to understand the faith better, and more fully, in our very act of sharing it with others.

Additionally, *fides quaerens linguam* underlines the need for theology to be inculturated in the language and culture of a people. Today, we no longer speak simply of the possibility but of the necessity of inculturation. As Pope John Paul II once put it, "A faith that does not become culture is a faith which is not fully accepted, not wholly believed, and not faithfully lived". So, this is faith seeking to be expressed in the culture of a people—a *fides quaerens inculturationem*. Here, too, true inculturation requires an authentic understanding of the faith, just as a profound understanding of the faith can only be the fruit of genuine inculturation.

And finally, *fides quaerens linguam* signals the plurality of contexts in which theology needs to be done today. For, by saying *fides quaerens linguam*, one immediately adverts to the fact that in times past it used to be *fides quaerens intellectum*, or that in other places today, it may be *fides*

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[1] Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality* (NY: Doubleday, 1999), pp. 3-4).

quaerens justitiam ("faith seeking justice," as in Latin America) or *fides quaerens pacem* ("faith seeking peace," as in Africa) or *fides quaerens vitam* ("faith seeking life," as in Asia). This, then, is faith seeking to dialogue with other local Churches, other Christian communities, and other religions—a *fides quaerens conversationem*. Also, here, a genuinely fruitful dialogue necessitates a true understanding of the faith, while an enriched understanding of the faith results from respectful dialogue with others.

It is here, in the task of theological reflection as *fides quaerens linguam*, that the book's proposal of seeing mission in terms of giving witness to the Christian message as SOCIUS becomes immensely helpful, as well as the proposals of treating the Christian message as MAP of the journey and PASS to the journey's destination. These proposals can serve to provide the necessary philosophical grounding to *fides quaerens linguam*.

I am grateful to Professor Sia for writing this very important book. I recommend it wholeheartedly to all those who take seriously the Christian message as "an enlightening vision and a challenging mission". The book can truly be our "SOCIUS," our companion, on the journey of life.

—Antonio M. Pernia, SVD
Former Superior-General of the Society of the Divine Word
Dean of Studies
Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies
Tagaytay City, Philippines

PREFACE

The idea for this book started with the invitation to give lectures at Christ the King Seminary, Quezon City and at the Divine Word Seminary of Tagaytay City, both in the Philippines. The first of these is a philosophy college while the second is a theological seminary. The nature of these academic institutions and their respective fields of study served as the specific context and topic of my lectures: the first one was on philosophical thinking while the second was on a more theological theme. But in both of these lectures I was anxious to show the relevance of one field to the other, a concern that I have tried to maintain throughout this book.

My visits to both of these colleges, owned and administered by the Divine Word Missionaries, gave me the opportunity to learn more about the education, training and work of these missionaries. It also facilitated the growth of this book since the time I spent in their company led me to focus more closely on its theme: the Christian message. I was particularly interested in how it served as vision and mission not just for these religious communities but also for others. My own field of study and personal research interests dictated how the book would eventually develop.

The publication of this book gives me the opportunity to express once again my gratitude to those who organized and hosted my visits to these venues, particularly to Dr. Raymun Festin, SVD. That their initiative prompted the writing of more essays which eventually led to the development of this book is a process that I truly appreciate. The book is dedicated to this religious missionary order, but honours all those who dedicate themselves to a certain understanding of the vision and a specific implementation of the mission of the Christian message.

The initial reflections on the theme of this book were inspired by our experiences as we toured the devastated areas of Tacloban, Guiuan and other towns in Eastern Visayas, Philippines, following the onslaught of super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda on 8 November 2013, and as we listened to the narratives of the survivors. While our first visit a few months after it hit these places opened our eyes to a truly desolate situation, even then we heard from the people their determined voices that they would rise again (*Tindog Tacloban* and *Bangon Guiuan*). On our subsequent visits we witnessed the developments that came about because of their resilience. We admired their stout devotion to their Christian faith, especially since they believed that it gave them genuine reason to hope for a recovery. The ap-

pearance of this book is another occasion to pay tribute to the inspiring courage and determination of the Taclobanons and Guiuananons and to express our continued solidarity with them. This is also a gesture of immense gratitude to all those who, irrespective of backgrounds, came to their aid and continue to do so.

Working on this book was a welcome time for me to re-focus on its theme, which had occupied my scholarly interests in earlier times. It also enabled me to draw together and revise/update previously published writings on various aspects of the topic. I would like to thank the editors and publishers of journals and books for their permission to include those essays which originally appeared in their publications. Details of these are included in the relevant essays. I want once more to express my appreciation of the invitations extended to me over the years by academic institutions and scholars in various parts of the world to give lectures and to dialogue with them. These have resulted in some of the essays included in this book and in my other publications. My publishers, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, deserve my immense gratitude for their continued support of and confidence in my work. Working with such professional and efficient staff-members has been a pleasure for me.

I am grateful to Dr Antonio M. Pernia, former Superior-General of the Society of the Divine Word, for graciously accepting my invitation to write the Foreword. His election to that office, as the first Asian member of his missionary order, was a vote of confidence in his dedicated leadership and an appreciation of the important role of the Philippine SVDs. He now brings that administrative and global experience to bear on his academic work as Dean of Studies at the Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in Tagaytay, Philippines.

Several years ago Ambrosio Nitural had generously sketched for me the illustration that now appears in this book. I am very pleased—and thankful to him—to be able to use it once again this time for a much wider readership. The sketch graphically depicts the theme of the book.

As usual, I am enormously indebted to my wife, Marian, for her companionship and assistance in every aspect of my intellectual and personal journeys, for which I am most thankful. My extended family in the Philippines also deserves my continued gratitude for their support and hospitality throughout the years.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Message

To claim that our world today is inundated with messages in different forms and from various sources is no hyperbole. The increasingly complicated development and sophisticated advance of information technology and the hard-to-resist and addictive lure of social media have brought about this situation. We welcome the tremendous benefits derived from faster and more efficient communications which have improved our lives and society in so many respects. Not only are we more informed but we are also better positioned by them to be able to respond favourably. Unfortunately, we also have had to cope with the many negative consequences of this new development, such as the clogging of our days with unnecessary and constant information, the spread of fake news or misinformation, and the incitement of unrestrained passions and hatred. There is need somehow to filter out these messages, to show some restraint and to maintain constant vigilance.

But what is of even greater concern are the types and forms of messages which are being fed—uploaded, if one were to adopt the new terminology—into our senses. Again, many of these messages, especially if these are accompanied by graphic images, have admittedly enabled us to have a clearer and more direct view of distant events. They have even strengthened human relationships insofar as it has become easier to stay in touch with one another. At the same time, however, there are messages which, without the new developments in transmission, would not have reached the vulnerable or caused them so much grief and distress, and in some cases even driven them to suicide. Thus, regarding the messages themselves which have proliferated, we also do have to exercise some caution. It is a daunting challenge that will need our constant monitoring and vigilant attention.[1]

In the midst of all these messages and technological developments, one wonders about the status of the Christian message of love, hope and

[1] See my "Images, Reality and Truth: Some Philosophical Considerations," *New Blackfriars*, 96, 1063 (May 2015), pp. 295-310.

redemption. Will it become just another message among so many others? Will it be left unheard and unheeded? Does it still have an importance that ought to be recognized in today's society? What does it have to offer to enable us to meet the various challenges which beset present-day living? Such questions indicate that there is now an even greater and more urgent need to re-focus on the Christian message and how to share it around. Fortunately, those who have committed themselves to taking that concern seriously have harnessed the power of these recent technological developments and have updated their communication skills to meet the news of new generations. At the same time, efforts have also been made to reflect on the meaning and significance of the Christian message and how it can address the fresh challenges in the multi-faceted and fast-changing world that we live in today. Needless to say, it is an enormous responsibility, one that is bound to continue to increase as further developments in this area take place.

Christianity is, of course, much more than what is stated here in terms of the message of love, hope and redemption. In presenting the Christian message in this way, I am focusing on what I regard as the essential tenets in Christian teaching. Since the Christian message, as I have already stated, is not a simple message we are confronted with a multi-dimensional challenge. The task is not merely to relay information because the message is also intended to be lived—a way of life. Neither is it only an exhortation since it also holds out a definite goal. Consequently, any attempt to answer the concerns expressed above must take into account the complex nature of this message. Moreover, in addition to the proliferation of messages with which it seems to have to compete, it must also take on board criticisms and even opposition. How to manage those adds to the complexity of understanding and the application of its teachings. Nonetheless, if one believes in that message, particularly as regards its vision and its mission, and wants to share it with others, one would have to face up to those challenges.

The present book complements a recent fictional work, titled *This Deep Pierian Spring: an Account of the Human Quest for Meaning*[2] where we have tried to capture both the benefit and the challenge of text messag-

[2] M. F. Sia and S. Sia, *This Deep Pierian Spring: an Account of the Human Quest for Meaning* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 2017). This book is the last in a trilogy of philosophical novels, the first two being *Those Distant Shores: a Narrative of Human Restlessness* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) and *That Elusive Fountain of Wisdom: a Tale of the Human Thirst for Knowledge* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

es, the use of mobile phones, and news broadcasts on TV and the internet. The context, based on a real situation created by the onslaught of super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines, is an urgent request received by the main character, Prof Enrique de los Reyes, from Fr Rodrigo, another fictional character, to "pray". The text message is abruptly interrupted and thus makes Enrique wonder how to interpret and respond to it. In the ensuing narrative, as he attempts to decipher that message, he draws on his research and experiences about the quest for meaning exemplified by other fictional characters. In addition, he reflects on what the Christian message of love, hope and redemption can teach him about the situation.

Philosophical Considerations

While the focus of this work is on the Christian message, it is with a specific view: examining certain philosophical considerations which underpin its teaching. Aware of its richness and complexity, the different chapters discuss that message only insofar as it provides a vision for humanity and articulates a mission to implement it. Despite this intended limitation, it hopes nevertheless that the discussion here of some of the philosophical issues will contribute to the ongoing reflection by those who believe in that message as well as to the debates with those who oppose it. The aim of this work is to establish points of encounter, rather than points of departure. The assumption is that despite the seeming gulf due to differing perspectives, there is a common ground on which all of us stand; namely, our nature and concerns as human beings. There has always been a connection between religious belief and philosophical thinking. Even if at times it has been faith *versus* reason, there is also a history of reflecting on faith *and* reason.

The book is a collection of essays written at different times and on varied occasions.[3] Consequently, there is some inevitable repetition. But this has been kept to a minimum and retained only when essential to the integrity of each essay. Despite the seeming variety of the topics and styles, there is a common theme and approach in the whole discussion, which hopefully is evident when one reads each chapter and pursues the argumentation. In addition, there is constant referencing in the footnotes to

[3] See among others, James Richmond, *Faith and Philosophy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966); M.J. Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion: the Historic Approaches* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Jerry H. Gill (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion: Some Contemporary Perspectives* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970); Monica Meruţiu (ed.), *Reason and Faith at the Beginning of the Third Millennium* (Cluj Napoca: Editura Fundatiei Pentru Studii Europene, 2011).

relevant essays in the collection in order to show the continuity of the discussions.

In putting together these essays, I am taking up once again the question that has concerned me throughout my academic career: namely, the contribution that philosophical thinking can and does make to clarifying, understanding, and interpreting issues which arise from concrete living.[4] Despite contrary views which are aired in various quarters and in diverse ways, I have become convinced that, even if philosophers themselves are not necessarily the best strategists, *pace* Plato, their intellectual tool can be of tremendous use in prying open many of the problems which beset society today as it has done so in the past.[5] An argument can be made that an important consideration in addressing the problems is focusing on what underpins them. In many cases, these problems and the attempts to confront them may benefit from uncovering the assumptions—or "mindset", a more contemporary term—that inform them. This was the stated intention and the consequent development of the themes in my recent book, *Society in its Challenges: Philosophical Considerations of Living in Society.*[6] I have tried to do that, too, with this book.

The book is divided into three sections. Part I: Philosophical Thinking and Religious Faith (Chapters One to Three) tackles the relationship, perceived or imagined, between philosophy and religion, and between reason and faith. Part II: The Christian Message and its Significance (Chapters Four to Nine) discusses various aspects of the Christian message with particular reference to its message of love, hope and redemption. The emphasis of Part III: Christian Mission and Education (Chapters Ten and Eleven) is on a particular field with which the Christian message is closely identified.

Chapter One: "Philosophizing, Philosophy and the Religious Context" is primarily a reflection on the relationship between the art of philos-

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[4] Cf. Appendix: "Process Thought as Conceptual Framework: a Philosophical Odyssey".

[5] In ancient China, rulers and emperors turned to the wise men or philosophers for political and social advice.

[6] Santiago Sia, *Society in its Challenges: Philosophical Considerations of Living in Society* with a Foreword by the former President of Ireland Mary McAleese (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, 2015). This book is the last in the trilogy which includes: *Ethical Contexts and Theoretical Issues: Essays in Ethical Thinking* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); and with Marian F. Sia, *From Question to Quest: Literary-Philosophical Enquiries into the Challenges of Life* with a Foreword by Prof David Jasper (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

ophizing and the pursuit of philosophy. I start with the claim that philosophizing, i.e. asking questions, is a human activity. It arises because of who we are as human beings. In our pursuit of answers to our questions, particularly the fundamental ones, the study of philosophy is an important resource, given that philosophers have preoccupied themselves with a more protracted and intense pursuit of these important questions. I then turn to the religious context, arguing that it is a significant setting both for understanding, appropriating and responding to the human act of philosophizing and for the resultant questions and answers. This essay provides the background and the direction of the development of the various essays in this book.

Chapter Two: "Religion in Human Thought and Life" is a philosophical exploration of Alfred North Whitehead's conception of religion. Unfolding Whitehead's understanding of religion which can be traced throughout his many writings, the essay also provides a systematic discussion of its significance. It argues that Whitehead's conception of religion results in a clearer understanding of the role of religion in human life, including how it arises. Finally, it shows that his notion of religion also indicates the need to transcend our experiential starting point through rational thinking and to integrate the doctrinal expression with concrete human life.

Chapter Three: "Catholic Tradition and Philosophical Research" documents how the Catholic Church continues to support and even provide impetus to philosophy while reflecting on the nature of that support. Basing myself on relevant papal and other documents, I explore the Catholic Church's influence on philosophy over the years and its contributions, as articulated in these official publications, to the shaping and advancing of the present state of philosophy. In the latter part of this essay I offer philosophical observations of some of the criticisms leveled against that support and make suggestions as to how the Catholic tradition could contribute even more to philosophical research.

Chapter Four: "Love, Relatedness and the Christian Message". In his influential book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm regrets the disintegration of love in contemporary Western society. He maintains that its culture is counterproductive to the development of love. It is an alarming comment on a society that has been very much influenced by Christianity whose fundamental message is one of love. This essay sets out a philosophical interpretation of an interconnected reality, including humankind, which underlies all forms of love and points out that it needs, however, to be actualized and nurtured. Next, it suggests that the Christian message is an acknowledgement and a distinctive development of that understanding of

reality's relatedness insofar as it provides a "charge": empowering love but also setting out a mission of love.

Chapter Five: "Creativity, Hope and the Christian Message" is a philosophical interpretation of hope with specific reference to the concept of creativity (creative synthesis) as developed by Charles Hartshorne. In this essay I discuss its challenge for all humankind. The issues are explored insofar as they impinge on a number of concerns arising from the atheistic and Christian perspectives regarding our understanding and appreciation of hope. It does so with the intention of establishing a point of encounter between the two camps while respecting their differences. Claiming that the Christian message does not replace what one can know about the reality of hope from a more philosophical perspective, the essay also outlines what gives the Christian message of hope a certain distinctiveness; namely, that it reminds, reinforces and responds to, in a significant manner—because of its particular vision and its special mission—the hope that is imbedded in the whole of reality. It then suggests that the specific call to the Christian mission is a challenge to focus on that vision.

Chapter Six: "The Christian Message as MAP in Life's Journey". This essay puts forward and examines the suggestion that the Christian message can be a map of life. Likening life to a journey for which maps are particularly useful, it considers from a philosophical perspective how the Christian message provides a sense of direction in our lives. It uses the acronym MAP, claiming that it can make life ***m****eaningful* but that we need to ***a****ctualize* it for it to be of value in our life journey and to fulfill its distinctive aim of enabling us to enter into a ***p****ersonal* relationship with God. In making the case for the Christian message as a map of life, this essay turns to the philosophical insights of a number of philosophers to elaborate on these notions.

Chapter Seven: "From Vision to Mission with PASS for Life". Comparing the Christian message in some respects to a mission statement, this essay discusses some philosophical considerations not only as regards what is involved in the concepts of vision and mission but also what is entailed when the vision, that is to say, the original insight or teaching, is translated into a mission and lived. I follow up the discussion with a suggestion of a possible interpretation of the Christian message in our journey through life: I claim that, given that Christianity teaches that life is a journey towards a particular destination, the Christian message can be interpreted as PASS; namely, that it ***p****oints* the way, ***a****ccompanies* us on the journey while ***s****upporting* us. It is also intended to lead to the ***s****alvation* of all creation.

Chapter Eight: "Giving Witness to the Christian Message as SOCIUS." This essay presents and discusses a philosophical understanding of what is entailed in giving witness to the Christian message of love, hope and redemption. In line with the description of life as a journey, it suggests, as a way of unpacking the implications of the task, the acronym SOCIUS (***s****haring* the message, ***o****pening up* oneself to the otherness of the other, offering ***c****ompanionship*, ***i****nvoking* and turning to God, participating in ***u****plifting* humankind and ***s****erving* the community. This suggestion is more of an attempt to provide philosophical underpinnings, rather than an extended development, of the concept and practice of giving witness to the Christian message.

Chapter Nine: "The Christian Message at Journey's End" reflects on the Christian message insofar as it assures redemption, a specifically Christian belief, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In dealing with the topic, this essay makes use of Christian theological insights to bring out the significance of Christ's death which is believed to be a salvific event for all of humankind. In addition, it turns to two poems, Donne's "Good Friday" and Herbert's "Easter", which capture the meaning and sentiments of these two events for them. In this sense they act as guides in disclosing the Christian meaning and significance of the journey's end. Finally, I turn to Aristotle's discussion of *ethos* (together with *pathos* and *logos* in his *Rhetoric*) as a way of articulating the challenge of credibility for those who subscribe to the Christian message and who wish to share it with others.

Chapter Ten: "Seeing the Wood for the Trees": a View on Education". Arguing against the prevailing educational policies to prepare the learners primarily for the marketplace, I defend—while also acknowledging the validity of the concerns regarding the marketplace—the view that education is fundamentally about developing the total person. In this sense the philosophical perspective and the religious vision have an important role to play.

Chapter Eleven: "Developments in Contemporary Society and Faith-based Higher Education: Challenges and Issues." This essay sketches some developments in contemporary society which present specific challenges and raise particular issues, such as secularization, mechanization and globalization, for a faith-based higher education. It offers a suggestion as to why and how, precisely because of the distinctiveness of the Christian vision and mission, it can respond to these.

The Concluding Remarks consist of a reflection on the book's overall theme and its development in the various essays. In examining the philosophical underpinnings of the Christian message, the methodology

adopted in this work hopes to contribute to the discussion of its significance by setting out points of encounter. It also elaborates and defends further the claim made throughout the book that the Christian message can be appreciated even more as a vision and a mission that remind, support and fuel the human aspiration to reach fulfillment.

The Appendix titled "Process Thought as Conceptual Framework: a Philosophical Odyssey" charts the development of my philosophical thinking as I searched throughout my academic journeys in a number of countries for a more adequate way of understanding, articulating and communicating my experience as a Christian Filipino philosopher. It unpacks, in a more historical manner, many of the themes and issues which are discussed systematically in the essays in this collection.

There is a Selected Bibliography at the end of the book.

PART ONE:

PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING AND RELIGIOUS FAITH

CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHIZING, PHILOSOPHY AND THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT[1]

Questions and Question

Humans continually ask questions.[2] Some of these are routine or even trivial. Others are more pressing or significant. But now and then, as we conduct our daily business, interact with one another or are caught up in specific situations, thought-provoking questions, in various guises and contexts, do arise and challenge us. This observation in turn leads us to the rather fundamental consideration: Why do we ask questions in the first place? What enables us to raise questions? Why does it matter that we seek answers? What kind of answer can we expect? And then curiously, people sometimes answer a question with yet another one: Who wants to know? they ask before they undertake to provide an answer.

There is something curious about the process of such fundamental questioning. While the intended goal is normally to move ahead from the original situation—with an answer that one expects to a question in most cases—it is also a challenge to move back, as it were! The symbol of the question mark, in the English language, is particularly appropriate in this instance. It curls back—**?**— as if to invite one to look at its foundation. And the Latin word for this movement (*reflectere*) feeds into the whole

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[2] Chapter One: "The Art of Questioning" in Raymun Festin, SVD, *Beliefs and Certitudes* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2008), pp. 5-14. See also his Response to this essay in *DIWA: Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, XLI, 1 & 2 (May & November 2016), pp. 22-26. On the importance of asking questions in various contexts, cf. Frank Sesno, *Ask More: the Power of Questions to Open Doors, Uncover Solutions and Spark Change* (N.Y.: AMACOM, 2017).

idea of "re-flecting"—thinking again, re-examining, or taking a second look. The word itself, "reflection", indicates some "mulling over". There is an expectation of a return to the basics in the hope of throwing some light on the present situation. Additionally, although not immediately apparent, if one were to analyze another meaning of the English word, "reflection", i.e. "an image on a surface", one realizes that the mere glimpse of the original source could be a motivation to seek it out again—and search deeper. The same claim could probably be made if by "reflection"—as in "it is a reflection on one's education"—one passes a comment, positive or negative. There is more than a hint that to understand the present situation one needs to trace it back to the past.

An equally curious feature of a question—and this has implications for the fundamental process of questioning—is that somehow it already contains implicit knowledge. It is not a betrayal of pure ignorance. Rather, it arises because one already knows something, however vague, confused or distorted that initial knowledge is.[3] While receiving an answer is a step further in the process, the raising of the question itself is possible only because there is some background information already possessed.[4] In other words, it is does not arise from a *tabula rasa.*

Another observation that can be made in this regard is that it shows that the questioning process indicates something about the nature of the questioner.[5] The process of fundamental questioning does reveal something about the nature of the source of the question if one were to uncover its root. Questions, and the kind of questions raised, do provide some information about the questioner.

While the process of questioning may take place in the present—and as has already been mentioned, it does return us to the past, so to speak—it also urges us onwards. It is not surprising that the word "question" is allied to "quest" as if the nature of this activity is to lure us, to prod us on, or to put us on track. This is particularly true of the more fundamental questions we ask about life.[6] Somehow, for instance, the question "Does life have any meaning?" is meant to unsettle us and to set us off on a search for adequate answers. And the answers are not necessarily straightforward,

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[3] This reference to what is implicit in human beings will be explained and developed further in the various essays in this book.

[4] In this regard, I disagree to some extent with the axiom: *Si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses.*

[5] This claim is particularly relevant in the context of the Christian message.

[6] This approach to fundamental questions is illustrated in Marian F. Sia and Santiago Sia, *From Question to Quest: Literary-Philosophical Enquiries into the Challenges of Life* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

not because there are not any, but because such answers are not solutions to a problem but rather mere responses that demand even more probing on the part of the questioner.

Question in Context

Fundamental questions, such as the ones cited above, do not just arise. They are not merely posed to keep the conversation going even if at times, admittedly, these questions and suggested answers are mentioned only in passing. They emerge because one finds oneself in a particular situation, now and then even in dramatic form. Sometimes, they come to one's serious attention in the silences of life or with the beauty of nature.[7] In other words, this kind of questioning takes place in a context. A very good example of this is the questioning that occurs because one finds oneself faced with suffering or evil. Tragedies and misfortunes leave us bewildered not just as to how they happened but, even more importantly, why they occur in the first place. It is a question that continues to haunt thinking beings. Furthermore, could they have been prevented? Other examples are the unjust situations as well as the admirable acts of many—which cause deep-rooted questioning of the behaviour of individuals, of groups and of society in general. It makes one wonder, for instance, about the nature of ethics and of an ethical judgment. Inasmuch as religion in contemporary society continues to spark off debate and controversy, it remains both an enigma and a problem. In this context, religious belief too (and other aspects of religion) is likewise an issue that demands quite a thorough probing.

The word "context" and its use here need some explanation. The word itself can be equated with "background" or "setting".[8] When one maintains that to understand a comment it has to be put in its context, for example, one is expecting a more accurate understanding of the comment as a result of doing so. Or if one insists that it is crucial to contextualize the debate or the discussion, one is indicating that there is a wider setting within which it is occurring and that it must be taken into consideration. Moreover, the historical context of an idea, just as much as that of an

[7] In an article (with Marian F. Sia) titled "Punctuating Life's Message: a Grammatical-Philosophical Exercise on the Quest for Meaning," *Santalka (Co-activity)*, XVIII, 4 (2010), pp. 81-92; http://www.coactivity.vgtu.lt/en/ we refer to these moments as "comma moments" as they help us punctuate life's message to enable us to read its message.

[8] This meaning of "context" is also applicable to philosophical thinking, a point that will be treated later in this essay.

event, lends itself to a better grasp of the nuances and complexities of that particular idea or event.[9]

But "context" has also been employed—and is so used here—to suggest the concreteness of the situation.[10] Whereas philosophical thinking is very often dismissed as too abstract and too generalized to be of use in practical situations, in actuality the basis of much philosophical thinking is none other than the concrete situation in all its details and particularity. Often it is in such a situation, in its specific context, that one begins to wonder and ponder.[11] It is useful to keep this in mind as we address the what and why of philosophy.[12] Contrary to popular misconception, the reference to the ivory tower which philosophers allegedly inhabit is misplaced. Its home base is more akin to what the poet W. B. Yeats in his "The Circus Animals' Desertion" describes graphically when he states: "I must lie down where all ladders start,/In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." Philosophical thinking does start from and end in the same "shop"; that is, concrete life.

Philosophizing and its Source

This leads us to a consideration of the source of all this questioning. Why do questions, particularly fundamental ones, come to the surface in the first place? What triggers off the quest for answers? Who is asking the questions? As was already noted, the symbol of the question mark "curls back", seemingly to suggest that we take a good look at the base. Indeed,

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[9] This insistence on the context of one's answer or comment is not always popular in media circles which prefer soundbites. It will grate on the ears of those who demand straightforward answers, typically a "yes" or "no" or at most "*dos palabras*".

[10] This is particularly true in process philosophy—a philosophical perspective which has considerably shaped my thinking in various areas. Cf. Appendix: "Process Thought as Conceptual Framework: a Philosophical Odyssey".

[11] Philosophy has been presented as "starting with wonder". It is as if the exclamation point of wonder—to resort to the language of punctuation marks—needs to turn to itself (*reflectere*) to ponder.

[12] Whitehead's well-known reference to the flight of the aeroplane is particularly appropriate here: it starts on the ground, soars up into thin air but lands back on the ground. Speculative thinking, he maintains, is embedded in the concreteness of life, but lifts off into abstract thinking only to return to the ground of life with renewed vision and energy. The same sentiment, it seems to me, is poetically described by T.S. Eliot in his "Little Gidding": "...we arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time."

an examination of the questioning process inevitably brings us to the nature and status of the questioner.[13]

In raising questions, the questioner has already started to philosophize.[14] Even the child or the untutored is already engaged in it. At that stage, it is an activity that is tentative and probably unstructured. It may even be confused and confusing. Sometimes it is spontaneous—occasionally in conversation, one is said to be "philosophizing"—but more often one philosophizes in response to certain situations. In such situations one wants to "make sense" or one needs "to know". Accordingly, one is motivated to press ahead with an enquiry. This is when questions surface as an initial step forward. Questioning is a process that is in quest of answers.

Questions arise because of the sort of beings that we are. Philosophers have frequently referred to human nature as rational. Endowed with rationality, humans are equipped to think intelligently and to act freely. The process of questioning or philosophizing is possible because the questioner has the ability to know reality. Moreover, the questioner does not just perceive or sense (and accept) reality but also, and more importantly, conceives and even constructs it. The questioner is capable—and has the will to so do—of laying out a different reality. The questioner is gifted not just with the ability of sensing reality but also with the talent for reshaping what is there. And for all that to happen, one starts on the quest for understanding through asking questions, probing into reality, in the hope that it will lead to its transformation. That transformation of reality, brought about through questioning, also inevitably changes the questioner. Curiously, the more we humans ask questions and the more intense the quest for answers is, the more we develop our own nature as human beings.

Philosophizing, i.e. the questioning process, takes place at different levels, from the more mundane to the highly specialized. It would be rather presumptuous to hold that insofar as one is raising a question, one's activity can already be labelled as seriously "philosophizing". There is a certain amount of competence and skill required. Moreover, not everyone has the leisure or the pleasure to engage in this activity. Nonetheless, it lies within every human being's reach precisely because it is a human activity; that is to say, "in accord with our nature". At the most elementary level,

[13] In more philosophical language, one could say that the effect reveals something about the nature of the cause.

[14] There is a distinction between "philosophizing" (which I believe is more generally practised) and the "study of philosophy" (which only a few are in a position to pursue).

philosophizing is simply "wondering". The higher levels of this activity are merely a matter of strengthening, deepening or sharpening that sense of wonder.

Philosophizing is usually associated with the intellect. For this reason it is classed as an intellectual activity of which only rational beings are capable. There is much support for this observation, particularly at the higher levels of this activity. But philosophizing itself should not be interpreted so narrowly either. The process of questioning occurs not because we possess an intellect—although it is what enables us to follow through with our quest for answers—but because we confront reality, including ourselves, in all our humanity. And this nature of ours includes our feelings, our sense experience, our imagination and other such traits and gifts.[15]

Question and Context

Earlier in this essay, there was a reference to "context" meaning "background" or "setting". This complementary meaning of the word has added significance here, and it would be helpful to examine it further. While questioning (and philosophizing) may and indeed does take place in specific situations or contexts, it is equally important to "contextualize" it; that is to say, to situate the question (and the possible answers) against the backdrop of the larger picture.[16] There is a need to set the particular or the detail against a so-called horizon in daily life. The same can be said in philosophizing.[17] This is because one asks a specific question only because there is an implicit more general knowledge. And that implicit general

[15] The distinction held, for example, between "the mind" and the "heart" is, I believe, a false one. It is important, of course, to make a "conceptual distinction" but the reality itself is one.

[16] This claim would be challenged and dismissed by postmodern thinkers—which, I believe, is a mistake on their part and of those who subscribe to that view. There is the presumption that such a claim is an attempt to return to the metaphysics of the past. Process metaphysics, however, would reject that misconception. It seems to me that it is important to distinguish between metaphysical thinking itself and specific metaphysical systems which illustrate it (some of which are indeed to be rejected).

[17] Many have commented that the financial crisis that has gripped society at large and the lacuna experienced by many in their lives can be traced back to the lack of an over-all vision. See Chapter Ten: "Economic Crisis and Accountability" in Santiago Sia, *Society in its Challenges: Philosophical Considerations of Living in Society* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, 2015), pp. 189-206.