

**Teaching Across the Cultural Digital Divide:**  
***Cross-Cultural Christian Ethics on the Pacific Rim***

By

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A little over three years ago I began a cycle of teaching every other summer at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) in the Philippines the same course in Catholic moral theology I had been teaching for nearly a decade at the Jesuit School of Theology-at-Berkeley (JSTB), a member of the nine-school ecumenical consortium of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California. While both the course material and the teacher were the same, the student bodies were quite diverse, and I thought it would be mutually advantageous and broadening for all parties if I bring my Manila and Berkeley students into some sort of contact with one another. I had begun to utilize the *Blackboard* course-ware in my teaching at the GTU and I thought that this might help facilitate some sort of cross-cultural student interaction. While not all of my original hopes were realized, I believe that quite a bit of learning has taken place on a number of different levels for both the professor and the students, ranging from the rudimentary technological to the more sophisticated theological planes. Sharing of this whole experience, with both its successes as well as its failures, might encourage others to investigate similar opportunities for teaching and learning across the cultural digital divide.

Before turning to some of the nuts and bolts that this teaching experiment entailed, let me touch briefly on some of the foundational assumptions I brought to the project. While terms like “globalization,” “inculturation,” and “contextualization” have all become well established catchwords in contemporary theological discourse, we still have very far to go before we can claim even a modest cross-fertilization of these global and inter-cultural exchanges into the

discipline of moral theology. My combined experiences of living for a decade in Asia and Europe for the decade prior to coming to Berkeley confirmed for me for moral theology in both the new millennium and the new century must pay greater attention to how ethics is approached in various parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> I have devoted a good deal of my writing to this topic, but I have learned that trying to teach in an explicit cross-cultural context brings up a number of additional challenges, both practical and theoretical.<sup>2</sup> Developing an inculturated moral theology is at least a two-way street, if not a more complicated intersection such as a traffic rotary: we need to bring into a (safe, secure, and orderly) intersection theological voices from around the world. It will not be sufficient for inculturation to be essentially a one-way street in which those non-Western cultures are encouraged to look into their own traditions to try and discover an authentic approach for doing a moral theology which speaks to this or that culture. While much has been done in the name of inculturation in liturgy, art and music, biblical and dogmatic theology, to date the field of Christian ethics has tended to be rather wary of immersing itself in these potentially troubling theological waters. My operating premise is that contemporary Christian ethics, grounded in a genuine tradition of theological education, both can and must take much more seriously the challenges posed by inculturation and the ongoing development of the Church as a truly global entity.

I was convinced that an ethics done from a cross-cultural perspective I was attempting to navigate must pay special attention to developing a better dialogue process as part of its fundamental methodology. This cross-cultural dialogue is necessary so that each culture can have its own say, without being prejudiced or forced into a conceptual framework of another culture's ethical tradition, which in turn may obscure and/or distort the insights which the first

culture has to offer in deepening our shared understanding of not just the Gospel and its ethical ramifications, but the broader ethical tradition as well.

### **Teaching in Manila; Teaching in Berkeley**

My Berkeley class numbered sixteen, coming from five different GTU member schools, and was comprised of three Jesuit seminarians, two Dominican friars, six Catholic laywomen, three Catholic laymen, and two other men, one a Baptist-turned-Episcopalian man and the other a former Catholic now enrolled in the non-denominational Pacific School of Religion (PSR). Ethnically this same group counted one white South African, one Vietnamese, one Hong Kong Chinese, one Filipino, one mixed-race Korean-American, and eleven Caucasian Americans from various parts of the States. The age-range stretched from a couple of recent college graduates to a couple of second-career grandparents with the instructor just squeaking into the bottom of the upper-third of the age bracket. Though this description seems to show a fair amount of diversity in a number of areas, politically, economically, and theologically the mix was far less diverse.

Class sizes are much larger at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) located on the campus of the Ateneo de Manila in Quezon City, the largest city in Metro Manila. My LST class numbered forty-six: twenty-six male seminarians, eight religious women, ten lay women, and two lay men. Of this number two were Protestant and the rest Catholic. Though LST does have a number of non-Filipino students (coming mostly from other parts of East Asia) my particular class was entirely Filipino, though coming from a variety of different provinces, each of which had its own culture and language. The language of instruction was English, as is the norm in Filipino graduate education. Politically my students mostly were “liberal” in the sense that few

would admit to having been Marcos supporters, though I heard frequent and often sharp criticisms of the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Theologically though the student population was much more conservative, at least if contrasted with most of my Berkeley students.

While I planned that the *Blackboard* course web-page provided a common syllabus, course documents, and shared ethical case study responses, it was the template's discussion board feature which I hoped would create a sort of virtual community bridging both the geographical and theological distances between my two groups of students. I had divided my Berkeley students up into three different groups. The first week each member of Group A was responsible for posting a reflection question on the week's readings, each person in Group B was then to post a response to one of these readings, while members of the Group C were only required to read the various postings. The following week the assignments alternated with Group B posting a question, Group C a response, and Group A only had to read, and so on throughout the semester, until each group had performed each of the discussion functions three times apiece.<sup>3</sup>

Once classes got underway though in Manila I discovered a number of problems that I had not anticipated, or which I had thought could be resolved more easily than proved to be the case. In the United States virtually all of our students, even those coming from Third-World countries, arrive on campus with active e-mail accounts and at least a rudimentary working knowledge of how computers and the internet function. Since I had already taught once in LST I thought I knew sufficiently both the electronic resources at hand and the relative familiarity the students would have with computer-related technology. The school itself is actually quite well

fitted out. The library is wired and there are a good number of computers there with internet access and there is an excellent media center in the classroom building. In fact, the school's own technological resources were far superior to what we had at the time at JSTB. Additionally, since I had been living in the theologate community while I was teaching, I had observed the Filipino Jesuit seminarians at work in the community's computer rooms, and had assumed that the other religious formation houses would have both similar equipment and a good familiarity in how to use it. Alas, this was *not* the case at all, and led to probably the greatest practical tension in the course.

Beyond some of the technical problems regarding internet access and e-mailing lay the broader issue of technological culture. At school in the United States we do so much now by way of e-mail, including basic communication with students and faculty and even submission of course papers. I thought that if e-mail accounts and internet access were provided, then my students in the Philippines would quickly adopt this mode of communication as well. LST did provide computer and internet access, and e-mail accounts could easily be created using free commercial servers such as Yahoo and Hotmail, but I discovered that just because you build it does *not* mean that they will come. What is different in the Philippines is that the culture of technological communication is not e-mail based, but rather relies on the texting function of cell phones. It is through this cell-phone texting that Filipinos contact one another, and even some of my faculty colleagues in Manila only looked at their e-mail every couple of weeks. I could go on at greater length about some of the particularities of the differences across the digital divide, but for the purposes of this paper it will be sufficient to note that there are in fact considerable

differences not only in what is available, but how people chose to use the resources they have. Cultural differences were greater than I had imagined.

Of course, I was aware of how culture does intersect with every area of our lives, moral theology included, and I did try to bring this fact into sharper focus for my students as well. Early in the course, both in Manila and in Berkeley, I asked them to read an article I had written on cultural particularity and globalization of ethics,<sup>4</sup> and showed them in class a rather elaborate mixed-media Power Point presentation on culture and art entitled “Catholic Cross-Cultural Ethics” (which I then uploaded on the school server so it could be revisited by the students).<sup>5</sup> I had several aims in this presentation: to open up a bit more the students’ imagination and awareness of the diversity of the world around them, to challenge them to think more deeply about a number of their own cultural presuppositions about the “way things are” or the “way things should be” in the world, and to plant an idea in their minds that Roman Catholic moral theology itself might be more pluralistic than they had suspected and that a legitimate pluralism should develop even further.

In my approach to teaching I stressed that since only God can know completely the whole of reality as it exists in all of its complexity this means that for the rest of us our grasp of the moral world is going to be partial at best. Since our understanding is going to be of necessity limited and partial I go on to develop a working epistemology based on a simplified version of paradigm theory. To illustrate how paradigms work in concrete moral evaluation I then presented the issue of making a moral decision about means used to prevent conception which confronts two hypothetical couples named respectively Bob and Carol Greene, and Teodoro and Alicia Marone.<sup>6</sup> Bob and Carol are professionals in their early 30's, each with a good job, enjoy

excellent health, and have been married for two years. They desire to avoid having any children since they fear that having youngsters of their own would be inconvenient and might cramp their comfortable life-style. The other couple, Teodoro and Alicia Marone, are Filipino immigrants in their mid-40's. They have been married for twenty years and have five children. Ted, Jr., the eldest is a freshman in college, John and Mary are in high school, Susan is in the fifth grade, and Andy, who is five, is a Downs Syndrome child. Teodoro just managed to graduate from high school and has struggled to make ends meet over the years as a sales representative of various companies. He must be on the road a considerable amount of time. The last two pregnancies were especially hard on Alicia and her doctor has strongly advised to avoid another pregnancy, since it might actually put her life at risk. Teodoro and Alicia are aware of the Catholic Church's teaching on artificial contraception, and sincerely want to follow it, yet they are also grappling with the belief that they simply cannot have any more children. They have tried various natural family planning methods ever since Ted Jr. was born, but their success has been limited.

The case of these two couples sets up a contrast between what is usually termed the physicalist and personalist paradigms of natural law interpretations. From the physicalist paradigm traditional interpretation of current magisterial teaching on artificial contraception there is very little real difference in the morally relevant features of the case of these two couples. The decision of either to use any form of artificial contraception would be viewed as *contra naturam* (against the moral nature of the sexual faculty) and ipso facto immoral. However, from a personalist paradigm the morally relevant features which differentiate the two couples are both numerous and potentially decisive. My introduction of paradigm theory in

general, and this case in particular, points up both a clear difference and a subtle commonality in the classes in Manila and Berkeley. The difference is probably predictable: the students in Manila tend by and large (especially the seminarians and religious) to accept the ability of the Magisterium to pronounce clear moral directives in general, and most of the students accept the rectitude of the position against artificial contraception. In Filipino culture hierarchy itself is generally seen as a positive value. The Berkeley students fall mostly into the opposite camp on this particular issue and are extremely skeptical of the ability of official Church authority (the Magisterium) to enunciate moral directives in the area of sexual ethics. The Manila students are initially uncomfortable with the idea that moral theology is paradigm-dependent, as this seems to smack of moral relativism, and the personalist paradigm looks to them like a close cousin or evil twin of the dreaded “situation ethics.” The Berkeley students seem to accept the notion of paradigm theory easily, and their own moral evaluations usually fall heavily along the lines of the personalist paradigm.

Yet, I have discovered that there is a subtle common point which both groups share, even though each might be reluctant to admit it, namely each group was fairly confident that in fact they do see the complexity of the moral world straight on, and have taken into account all of the necessary moral features and principles in coming to their ethical judgments. Disabusing each group of this epistemological bias is a challenge indeed! It was precisely this challenge that first gave me the impetus to try and bring the two groups into greater contact with one another, since I felt that if students from each of my classes were to really get to know one another and to carry on a sustained dialogue some of these differences were bound to occur naturally, and the realization of these significant divergences could be mutually enlightening. Ideally it would

have been desirable to have all of the students, or at least a representative contingent of each group, to come to the other theologate and spend a couple of weeks there. However, that was not feasible so I had to content myself with bringing a contingent from my Berkeley class to Manila.

### **Berkeley Students' Immersion Trip to Manila**

JSTB had obtained a generous grant from the Luce Foundation to foster Pacific Rim initiatives and this enabled myself and five students to spend two weeks in Manila.<sup>7</sup> The five students included one Filipino Jesuit seminarian, two women with adult children of their own, and a lay man and lay woman in their twenties who were recent graduates of Santa Clara University. In addition to the goal of having the visit result in a meaningful level of exchange which would hopefully be broadening to both groups, I had some additional goals in mind that pertained mostly to the Berkeley students. One of the things that had struck me most in my earlier teaching experiences in Manila was the various apostolates in which my LST students were engaged, and how these experiences really did help shape their understandings of the theological disciplines they encountered in the classroom. Of course, the field education component in the standard American master of divinity curriculum is meant to do something similar, but from my vantage point this culturally contextualized theology for ministry was being accomplished better in Manila than in Berkeley. I hoped that perhaps my Berkeley students would take away from their visits to some of these sites a better perception of how academic theology might intersect with concrete realities in which the faith is encountered and lived.

During my previous teaching stints at LST I had had the opportunity to visit some of the barrios in which my students worked on the weekends, and so I had already established some effective working contacts before our arrival. Our schedule gave us only two weekends at our

disposal for these site visits, so we concentrated on visiting some mission stations in the poor barrios of Payatas and Montalban on the outskirts of Quezon City, and Liwanag, which is an urban squatters' barrio off of Commonwealth Avenue and technically part of St. Peter's Parish—a large edifice built to resemble St. Peter's in Rome, but which edifice seemed a bit foreboding for many of the poor Filipinos who lived within the parish boundaries.

To complement these onsite visits I was able to arrange some focus sessions with several faculty, Jesuit and lay, well versed in the social, cultural, and economic situations which my students encountered in the barrios. The students found these sessions particularly helpful and we had a good balance between academic input and practical application.<sup>8</sup> We were fortunate to arrive in Manila right before the weekend-long fiesta of the Black Nazarene, the patron of one of the two mission stations in Payatas in which some Jesuits and lay volunteers from LST and the Ateneo had been working for a number of years. Payatas is a large micro-economy built around a gargantuan garbage dump. Most of the residents are illegal squatters and a large percentage of them eke out a meager daily income of between 100-200 pesos (\$2.00–\$4.00 US) by wading through the piled mounds of refuse, looking for any odds and ends (plastic, bottles, cans, scrap metal, etc.) which can be sold back to factories for recycling into other products.<sup>9</sup> The Black Nazarene is a very popular devotion in Manila. The original statue is located in Quiapo, a poor district of Manila, and once a year men gather in procession to drag the large statue around the city streets. Both the statue and procession in Payatas though were much scaled down, but the intent was to try and create a deeper sense of religious community by involving the men—a gender which were not traditionally regular church-goers in Filipino religious culture.

A place like Payatas could provide countless little-known stories of success and failure, but the whole barrio slid briefly into the international news scene on July 10, 2000 when during a protracted series of monsoons the fifty-foot high mountain of garbage suddenly shifted and came tumbling down in a deafening avalanche and buried alive hundreds of very poor men, women and children who sustained their lives Lazarus-like picking through the crumbs dropped as the leavings of the rest of Manila. A veritable village of ramshackle huts had grown up around this garbage dump and those whose homes were buried in the catastrophe had been considered to be the upper crust of Payatas society, since the closer you were to the garbage, the better the pickings you had. I was teaching in Manila during that catastrophe and used both the pictures and fact of the tragedy in my discussion of social sin. My Berkeley students had seen these same pictures in my class and while I hoped that our exposure visit would acquaint them a bit better with the harsh reality of the darker side of free-market capitalism, I also hoped that they would see, as I had, also the great life, light, and hope that could be clearly discerned in the midst of the squalor and stench that pervaded the place.

My first visit to Payatas a few weeks after the garbage avalanche of 2000 was the occasion of at least a minor personal paradigm shift. I attended Sunday Mass in the company of Fr. Jack Carroll, S.J., director of the Institute on Church and Social Issues (ICSI), and several of the Filipino Jesuits and afterwards we went to a number of the homes for brief visits. In one of them in the course of a conversation with an extended family the grandfather implored me to remain in Payatas so that “they won’t take our garbage dump away.” Not only were the squatters there illegally, but the dump itself was to have been closed years earlier, after the tragedy talk resurfaced again about finally closing down the Payatas dump as a way of trying to

bring closure to this terrible blight. The old man believed, or hoped, that somehow the presence of a foreign American priest might protect them from the government's threats to take belated action. I doubt that anyone's presence would have deterred the government if the officials had seriously decided on action, but the old man needn't have worried. Garbage, like death and taxes, is a constant reality and there was no competition from other locations for the prestige of opening a new refuse dump, and so after a few months of suspension until Payatas when had exhausted its fifteen minutes of fame, the garbage trucks rolled back in with their precious cargo of others' refuse.

My students were profoundly struck by our visits to these barrios as well, and in the post-visit reflection papers I asked them to write each one of them highlighted these visits as key learning moments. One student wrote that the visit to Payatas

truly brought faces to issues of poverty and living conditions encountered in academic and theological realms of inquiry and discussion. I was pleasantly surprised that as opposed to a focus on the individual ..., there was a concerted effort to address and alleviate the plight of the poor, in solidarity with the poor, on the part of the seminarians and priests from the Loyola School of Theology.<sup>10</sup>

Another student "didn't realize the poverty issue is debated as much as it is or that the class structure is so abysmal. I also had the impression that the popular religiosity was somewhat mindless and childlike but what I found was deep devotion and love abounding for God and community whether or not theology is sophisticated." Still another said that

the most important thing I learned was that faith-based small ecclesial communities have tremendous power for change and that even people with little

education can become strong, effective leaders who can unite small groups into larger communities with political clout directed at social and ecclesiastical change over time. A key factor, is that those who are evangelizers or social workers must be teachers who empower the people to effect the change themselves. That way they will “own” their own community and truly care about outcomes.

Another aspect of the various trips to the barrios of Payatas, Montalban, and Liwanag which struck the students was how the poor in these places seemed better able to deal with their poverty than others in the United States who also were in situations of great relative poverty.

One student expressed this contrast in the following words:

Poor is poor, but here in the U.S. there seems to be "wealthier" urban poverty. Most poor people do not live in squatters' villages or in areas where they have to buy water to get water that is potable. There not enough, but there is much government sponsored housing. And at the same time, there seems to be a more hopeless face to poverty for many. There seems to be less overall optimistic outlook and more refuge in drugs and alcohol for escape among people who live in poverty in this country.

Speaking about the same phenomenon another student referenced the input given by Fr. Manny Flores, S.J., professor of pastoral theology at LST, who had

talked about how the 'Pinoy' [Filipino] is not primarily defined as an individual, but in relationship to his community. This makes the Filipino person generally happy. I don't remember how we got from A to B but I know it had something to do with individuals trying to plug their emptiness with materials goods and food

and communities being able to fill each other's areas of poverty without as much dependence on consumption, etc.

An experience on the other end of the religious-cultural spectrum from the Payatas fiesta was our attendance at the ceremony marking the erection of the new diocese of Novaliches in Metro-Manila and the installation of the Most Reverend Teodoro Bacani as its first bishop. I was initially a bit hesitant to take my Berkeley students to this event since I was afraid that the inevitable display of a hierarchical clerical culture might be condemned out of hand, but upon the strong recommendation of our host at San Jose Seminary, Fr. Danny Huang, S.J. we piled into our loaned SUV and threaded our way through the morning traffic to Novaliches. The decision to go turned out to be excellent. The students were able to catch a glimpse of both Cardinal Jaime Sin and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and these two commanded a certain cachet because of their respective roles in People's Power I and II. The students were also struck by how broad of a role the Church played in Filipino culture, and certainly they saw this as a potential force for good in terms of a positive transformative social change. One student noted the contrast between the respect and power the hierarchy has in the Philippines contrasted with the far lesser influence accorded to Church leaders in the United States:

I was also surprised by the way Cardinal Sin had been able to rally many thousands of people around those who were seeking to end the Marcos era of corruption at the time of EDSA I [the 1986 People's Power I Revolution]. I don't think our bishops and Cardinals speeches carry that much weight, as is evidenced by the lack of overwhelming response nationally to the church's teaching about lack of Just War criteria being met in the Bush administration's decision.

On one level the Novaliches celebration helped the students see another side of popular Catholic culture, deepening their appreciation for what some had frankly been previously dismissive about, while on another level this and similar experiences helped them realize better the complexities that a global Catholic Church has to address and contend with. Catholicism in the Philippines, with the way that it can more evidently influence public policy and even elections is different that Catholicism in the United States where the relationship with government is not as visible. Additionally, a main area of concern about the Church, stemming out of the rampant corruption in the Philippines, is the (mis)management of finances on parish and diocesan levels, whereas in the United States the main focus has been on the sexual abuse scandal.

This sentiment was echoed by another student who expressed a changed outlook towards the complex challenges those charged with Church governance face:

I am aware of what it means to be a member of the Catholic Church, which is striving to represent the culture and theology of practically the entire planet. This makes me more sympathetic to teachings of the Church which don't fit me as an American. They must fit some other community in the Church that I am not familiar with. It was stunning to travel all that way, be surrounded by difference and “other” and feel “at home” pretty much only during Mass.

### **Concluding Reflections**

I asked my Berkeley students to include in their post-visit reflections a consideration of how the two theologates might benefit from the approach privileged by the other, and the responses to this question elicited some interesting answers. One student suggested LST that if it

were to adopt “a deliberate inclusion of writings of Sandra Schneiders, Elizabeth Johnson, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Pheme Perkins, Phyllis Trible, and others in required course readings followed by either written or oral reflection and presentation or discussion in class of the ways in which views are changed when the feminist lens is applied would enrich their learning, I think.” Yet, a different student reflecting on how JSTB might modify its own approach offered the following: “JSTB could possibly approach certain topics from a more conservative vantage point (or at least incorporate such a vantage point into certain classes), given that there are many Catholics around the world who embrace such a perspective.” Having taught in both places I doubt that either of these suggestions would be quickly adopted in the other school, and I think it would be fair to say that not all of my Berkeley students would be in total agreement with either of these views. Nevertheless, I found it helpful that they were able to articulate possible points of cross-fertilization from the exchange between the two schools.

Clearly all of my students, both those in Manila and those in Berkeley, found the visit to be worthwhile. While the *Blackboard* Discussion Board virtual conversations did not pan out as I had initially hoped, many of the students remain in e-mail contact with one another and with me. So in some sense we have created at least on a minimal level some electronic community across the digital divide. I believe that the Filipino students enjoyed showing their school, apostolates, and country off to the visitors from America, and the Americans demonstrated an outward openness respect and willingness to enter into all sorts of levels of Filipino culture, even to sampling *balut*, the partially gestated duck eggs which many (including myself) regard as a great treat.

Certainly horizons were expanded, but, as I quickly discovered, there was a lot of room for expansion! One of my younger American students was not aware that the Philippines had been an American colony, and another was ignorant of the similar role played by Spain for several centuries before the United States “liberated” the Philippines in the 1898 Spanish-American War. However, besides bringing some of my students up to speed on World History 101 there obviously were much deeper insights gained, as their quotes above hopefully demonstrate. Friendships were formed, and the local economy got a slight boost from our souvenir shopping; we left both with less baggage and more possessions than when we arrived.

While the global experience of teaching in both locations and undertaking the two-week immersion visit was worthwhile to all concerned, I am not sure it would be worth repeating. At least I do not think I could invest the requisite time and effort again under equivalent conditions. The students would be surprised by my assessment, and to a certain extent the practical question is moot. I have accepted a teaching position that is slightly closer to the Pacific Rim (moving sixteen miles westward from Berkeley to the University of San Francisco). JSTB’s administration is shifting its institutional focus to another area of the “Pacific Rim,” and requiring all incoming Master of Divinity students next year to spend the January intersession in an immersion visit in Mexico. This perhaps shows one structural weakness of these sorts of teaching exchanges, namely if there is insufficient institutional commitment to an ongoing interchange then the effective results of one or two exchanges will remain largely with the specific individuals involved and not transfer in any real significant depth to the respective institutions. Manila this year, Mexico City the next—such an approach seems to ensure a certain amount of superficiality.

The positive effects of the immersion visit are clear, but I am still left with a certain nagging sense that the exchange may have helped create, or credential, a false level of expertise that my students may now feel they have regarding the other culture. I kept a diary myself during our immersion visit, and towards the end of our stay I wrote the following, commenting on my observation of the American students:

I think a couple of them are still very much in the mind-set that if we just get everyone thinking the right way (the liberal way, etc.) this will do the trick. I wonder if they can see the complexities of the situation here—I suspect not—too much to digest in too short of time. One said something the other day very romantic about Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s efforts on behalf of the squatters. Of course anything that helps these people is all to the good, but the politicians—GMA certainly included—have for so long used these people for their own political ends. There just is so much that’s “wrong” here—from the corruption in government to the garbage on the streets. Yet there is also so much that is “right” here as well. The sense of faith, the sense of family, the sense of care—all of these are very real too, and (perhaps this is my romanticism coming through) it seems that what is so “right” in the Philippines is so much less right in many other parts of the world—certainly the USA. Poverty is hardly its own reward, but maybe there in fact is something of a silver lining in poverty that either promotes, or doesn’t side-track the more human values which are in abundance here. Yet when all is said and done it would be hard to say that Payatas and Commonwealth are shining examples of human flourishing.

And of the immersion experience itself? What will be the lasting value here? Sometimes I fear that the short trip like this might be counter-productive. If people come away with just a dreadfully simplistic and/or romantic assessment of the reality, will this help in the long run? There is a risk that a string of such immersion trips devolve into a sort of glorified tourism. Yet, perhaps even a simplistic, skewed view is better than no view at all. While I am concerned at the superficial level we may have reached on our own immersion trip, on the other end one cannot plumb the depths without first traversing the surface. So, when all is said and done I do not regret in the least having made the original commitment to teach in Manila, nor to attempting this sort of teaching experience across the cultural and digital divide. Blackboards, electronic or otherwise, remain means and not ends, and I would judge that everyone involved learned something, and perhaps the professor most of all.

## Endnotes

1. For some examples of how such greater incorporation of Asian voices might impact Western ethics see these following articles of mine: James T. Bretzke, "Moral Theology Out of East Asia." *Theological Studies* 61 (March 2000): 106-121; "The Common Good in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Insights from the Confucian Moral Community," in *Religion, Ethics & the Common Good*, ed. James Donahue and Theresa Moser, (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996): 83-105; "The *Tao* of Confucian Virtue Ethics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1995): 25-41, plus these two forthcoming articles: "A New Pentecost for Moral Theology: The Challenge of Inculturation of Ethics." *Josephinum* 10 (forthcoming August 2003); and "Human Rights or Human Rites? A Challenge of Sacred Texts and Traditions to Global Moral Discourse" Conference Proceedings of *Faithful/Fateful Encounters: Religion and Cultural Exchanges Between Asia and the West*. Beijing and Berkeley (Forthcoming).
2. For a discussion of how I have tried to bring cross-cultural ethics into the classroom see James T. Bretzke, S.J., "Through Thick And Thin: Teaching Ethics in a Cross-cultural Perspective" *Horizons* 27 (Spring 2000): 63-80.
3. A helpful feature of *Blackboard* is that the teacher can retain previous semesters' material for use in subsequent semesters, so in my case this meant I had a full semester's worth of discussion material for the Manila students to read and respond to if they wished. I also was able to post (anonymously) a selection of the students' own moral case studies from each location which I

then used to highlight how social and cultural location do play key roles in constructing moral responses.

4. James T. Bretzke, S.J., . "Cultural Particularity and the Globalization of Ethics in the Light of Inculturation." *Pacifica* 9 (1996): 69-86.

5. The Loyola School of Theology graciously has allowed me to continue to host a wide variety of electronic documents I used in my course on its server. For an index of these (with live links) go to <http://www.LST.edu/prof/Bretzke/WebIndex.htm>. The link to the introductory Cross-Cultural Perspectives Power Point presentation is <http://www.LST.edu/prof/Bretzke/CatholicCrossCulturalEthics.htm>.

6. Application of this paradigm approach is discussed at greater length in the first chapter of my forthcoming book on fundamental moral theology, *A Morally Complex World*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, forthcoming).

7. Actually we could have taken more students but the JSTB administration limited funding to only JSTB students (rather than all students enrolled in the class), and two JSTB students who had wanted to go on the trip were dissuaded by their parents who had great concerns about the safety of their adult children in the Philippines. This concern arose as a result of the high publicity of the kidnaping of some American missionaries as well as bombings in Mindanao by Muslim guerrillas associated with the Moro Liberation Front. I tried, in vain, to argue that the campus of the Ateneo had extensive security and that we would not be going anywhere near the

kidnaping locations, but in the end we had obviously had to respect the wishes of the parents.

8. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Tita Go, and my Jesuit brothers, Frs. John Carroll, Manny Flores, Jose Mario Francisco, and Danny Huang for their invaluable assistance in these sessions.

9. The poverty level in the Philippines is usually defined as earning under 200 pesos a day, and so by this definition virtually all of the garbage-pickers in Payatas would be at or below the poverty level.

10. My students knew beforehand that I would be writing an article on our trip and that I asked them for permission to quote from their reflections. However, I guaranteed them that this would be done in a way to protect their anonymity so that they could be as frank as they wished in giving me their reflections. For this reason I will not identify which student said what among the quotes.

***Word Count: 6500***