

Spirituality of the Fort Pilar Pilgrims¹

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Using an anthropological lens, I aim to describe in this paper the spirituality of the pilgrims of Fort Pilar Shrine in Zamboanga City. I will start by situating pilgrimage as a subject matter in anthropology and offer my choice of treating the same subject matter, as I appropriate Michel de Certeau's praxis. I will then proceed by showing a glimpse of the historical Fort Pilar field to contextualize the physical space where the devotion to the La Virgen del Pilar emerges through time. Tracing a history of this devotion will introduce us to a kind of practical spirituality, characterized more by actions and practices and less by reflection. Then, I will proceed to show that practical spirituality is praxis and a rich ground for reflection and spiritual discoveries. In this part, I will also attempt to imply that reflection is also praxis. Then, I will end this paper with a few suggestions on how to facilitate the practice of reflection for greater spiritual emancipation.

Pilgrimage in Anthropology

In anthropological literature, the pilgrimage phenomenon has largely been treated with a structuralist tone, if we recall Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner, although Alan Morinis (1992) gives credit to "Bharati (1963; 1970) and Turner (1973; 1974a; 1974d; Turner and Turner 1992, 7) as those who first gave the subject serious attention within the anthropological mainstream." With the Durkheimian inclination, "many writers on pilgrimage have perceived the activity as a crucial operator which welds together diverse local communities and social strata into more extensive collectivities" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 3). Pilgrimage, therefore, has an integrative function to societies and cultures. Turner, however, offers an

alternative to this functionalist view of pilgrimage. For him, it is a liminal² phenomenon, with the pilgrims' motivation towards *communitas*.³ Pilgrimage stands against, if not outside, structures as opposed to the functionalist's pro-structural inclination.

More recent field researches on pilgrimage have however challenged, if not contradicted, the Turnerian view. The problem with the Turnerian model is that it "not only prejudices the complex character of the phenomenon but also imposes a spurious homogeneity on the practice of pilgrimage in widely differing historical and cultural settings"(5). Sallnow and Eade look at the functionalist and Turnerian approaches to pilgrimage study as both with structuralist foundation because pilgrimage is "seen as either supporting or subverting the established social order" (5). In acknowledging the shortcomings, Sallnow and Eade say: "In order to transcend this somewhat simplistic dichotomy, it is necessary to develop a view of pilgrimage not merely as field of social relations but also as a realm of competing discourses" (5). The trend, therefore, shifts to discourse analysis.

While my fieldwork shows incongruence with the Turnerian model, it also deviates from a discursive treatment of pilgrimage. The main reason is that the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage is more of a practice than a discourse. If I wish, I may succeed in showing competing discourses within the whole sphere of my fieldwork, but only if I were to interrogate the pilgrims' thoughts and voices. Then I can put together those views for comparison and contrast of some competing discourses about pilgrimage. Yet, the subjects may not even think the matter worth discussing with other people. If no one asks, they may not express them. The ethnographer's text of competing discourses may not really mirror the field in which people do not really engage in discussions. In the Fort Pilar Shrine, pilgrims neither compete with their ideas on spirituality nor on pilgrimage. In fact, Dudut, one of my pilgrim interviewees, says: *Wala man namo na ginahisgutan kung unsay buhaton or unsa ang among ginabuhat didto sa Fort Pilar. Ginabuhat lang man namo* (We don't seem to really discuss what to do or what we do in Fort Pilar. We simply do).

The focus of this study then tends toward viewing the pilgrims' practices which are rooted in their tradition—interactions with locations, religious objects, built structures, and people—as they do pilgrimage at Fort Pilar and find new expressions in their dispositions. One basic element in pilgrimage is travel. As pilgrims start out on a journey, they

walk on roads, pathways, and on spaces. They may take a ride, but as they enter the Shrine, they walk on specific locations. There, they touch objects, catch smoke from the burning candles, and even kiss statues of saints. Sometimes, they may hurry to leave the Shrine. At other times, they may want to linger and pray in different bodily positions. Going to the Fort Pilar Shrine means something to them.

Yet, all this has a bearing on how these pilgrims are introduced to this kind of spirituality. Pilgrimage is a product of traditions and the pilgrims' simple improvisations. Hence, this study focuses on the spirituality embodied in the pilgrimage to Fort Pilar as a practice. To complement such kind of spirituality, this study will also show the need of reflection to harness the beauty of praxis as the nature of practical spirituality. I employ both interpretive and qualitative designs by interviewing pilgrims and personally involving myself in the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage.

Spirituality as praxis

What lens will I use as I start to see, travel, and sense with the pilgrims? Here I will demonstrate my appropriation of spirituality as not mere faithfulness to some theological doctrines whereby pilgrims have to follow what the doctrines say, but as a matter of experience only made possible but not determined by the doctrines. The miracle-legends, for example, of La Virgen del Pilar, to use Certeau's word, permit different spiritual experiences, without objectifying the legends, since these experiences cannot exhaust their permitting character. In the same way, the miraculous experiences of the Fort Pilar pilgrims allow them a different way of looking at the world and life, thereby permitting them to experience spirituality in various ways. "The event is 'historical' not because of its preservation outside time owing to a knowledge of it that supposedly has remained intact, but because of its introduction into time with various discoveries about it for which it 'makes room'" (Certeau 1997, 144). The miracle-legends of La Virgen del Pilar seem to have become a condition for pilgrimage and devotion to Fort Pilar.

Certeau claims that "the event is lost precisely in what it authorizes" (145). What it authorizes is a manifestation which "is no more than a multiplicity of practices and discourses which neither 'preserve' nor repeat

the event" (146); that is why the original event is lost in the plurality of what it allows. Certeau also mentions however that "the initial event becomes an *inter-location*: Something *said-between*" (145). It seems then that as the original event becomes "more and more hidden by the multiple creations" (147), it also reveals itself as it is said in between, though not revealed in any one. It is in the continuing growth of the plurality that we might see the increasing revelation of the past event. This revelation, however, does not finalize in any form of multiplicity, hence the past event still cannot be objectified in knowledge or in a doctrine. Similarly, the Fort Pilar pilgrims' continuous devotion to La Virgen del Pilar is a plurality of spiritual experiences made possible by some past events, revealing the richness of its beginning without objectifying it at once. The past event dies in the particular but lives in the plural.

It is by this that we can posit the authority in the plural as Certeau puts it: "The plural is the manifestation of the Christian meaning" (148). In this light, the truth of the Fort Pilar pilgrims' spirituality lies not with any group known in the Fort Pilar Shrine or any priest managing the communal activities, but in the plurality of the pilgrims' experiences. This plurality is not reduced to one. What marks spirituality is its capacity to pluralize in difference. Difference should not be placed in the context of opposition, but in the context of plurality manifesting a reality of spirituality.

In the context of difference, every "one" has a limit. "The limit is the ultimate law of death (the irreducible existence of the other is manifested in the experience of one's own limit and death), of solidarity (each one is needed by the others), and of meaning (which cannot be identified with an individual presence or with knowledge or an objective property because it is given by the very relationships of faith and charity as an *inter location*)" (149). It is by this that we suspend our judgment about the so-called fanaticism often associated with popular religiosity.⁴

While the condition of the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage implies a past event, its understanding implies the integration of the present, which in turn implies a moving on to the future. Moreover, pilgrimage is not just a movement in time but also in space where boundaries are traversed. It is in crossing boundaries that one realizes its limit. Popular spirituality is indeed a movement-praxis. Praxis "belongs to a different order from the institutionalized or theological statements from which it starts, and which it may condition" (152). Language, and perhaps meaning, cannot

contain praxis. It departs from them and conditions another language and meaning. In other words, praxis is an act in the light of knowledge, but also in its darkness. It is a risk. "Praxis always brings about... gradual or abrupt displacements which will make possible other laws or other theologies" (152). Hence, Fort Pilar spirituality may spring from the miracle-legends, but continually reformulates them in a variety of new personal miracles, stories and experiences.

It is this spirituality as praxis that in turn sustains the pilgrims' sacred journey as practice, from which it is also grounded and permitted. "Irreducible directly to language, yet finding its meaning in language and providing yet new levels of meaning to language, this praxis, formed by separation from and transcending language, is fundamentally a necessary and permanent conversion" (153). The pilgrims' spiritual travels are enriched by the same pilgrimages, which also enrich their spirituality. Fort Pilar spirituality may indeed be a new form of spirituality made possible by praxis.

The Fort Pilar in Zamboanga City

One of the oldest and most historic structures in the Philippines is a square-shaped stone fort called Fort Pilar. It is situated at the southeastern part of Zamboanga City. At its corners are four bastions, of which the main is at the southwest corner facing the sea, forming an ace of spades technically known as *orillon* (Spoehr 1969, 4). Originally, there were two entrances: One was where the present and the only entrance is situated; the other was located where the present shrine stands and was the main entrance then (6). "Subsidies (for its construction) came from Mexico and from within the community in Zamboanga. After Cavite, it was the most important naval outpost in the entire country [Philippines]" (Rodriguez 1995, 30).

As early as 1598, the Spanish colonizers under Juan de Ronquillo built a fort in La Caldera⁵ to protect the first Christian communities. It did not last, so another fort had to be built, this time near Rio Hondo⁶ in Zamboanga City. Under the supervision of Father Melchor de Vera, SJ, a famous missionary-engineer and architect, the Fuerza Real de San Jose was built on 23 June 1635.⁷ The Spaniards abandoned this fort on 7 January 1663 in order to fortify embattled forces in Manila. Over time, the fort succumbed to neglect. By order of General Gregorio Padilla y

Escalante in 1719, the Fort was reconstructed over the ruins of its old foundation under the direction of the Jesuit priest and engineer Juan de Ciscara. It was renamed Real Fuerza de La Virgen Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza.⁸

Gen. Vicente Alvarez attacked the Fort and defeated Spanish Gen. Diego delos Rios, who surrendered on 18 May 1899. Led by Gen. J.C. Bates, the American forces seized the Fort on 16 November that same year. On 2 March 1942, Fort Pilar was seized and occupied by the Japanese Imperial Forces. The American liberation troops, in collaboration with the Philippine Guerillas, recaptured the Fort three years later. The Fort was taken over by the Republic of the Philippines on 4 July 1946. Later, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) claimed Fort Pilar in its name.⁹

It was perhaps the protection and security provided by the various forces that occupied the Fort that allowed its surrounding communities to develop. The influence of the Fort Pilar on Zamboanga and its people is indeed historical and it is for this reason that its influence has continued to the present.

According to Enriquez (1984, 89): "Her image [Our Lady of the Pilar], a garishly painted *baso rilievo*¹⁰ of a woman with a child [Jesus Christ] in her arms, high up on the parapet of the moss-covered muralla [Fort Pilar], was, on the 12th of October of each year, the object of the biggest pilgrimage in all Mindanao."

At the start of every October begins the festivities intended for the celebration of the Fiesta Pilar in Zamboanga City. For a week or so, the festivities include agri-aqua trade, regatta,¹¹ street dance, street party, parade, cultural presentation, beauty contest, sportsfest, competition, concert, exhibit, and other entertainment. The traditional afternoon procession and the High Mass at the Shrine of La Virgen del Pilar highlights the feast day on the 12th.

Stores proliferate in and around the Fort Pilar Shrine. Within the Shrine itself are the altar, the trapezoidal houses, the Blessed Sacrament, the benches, the Shrine's office and, the candle site. Pilgrims visit the Shrine with certain levels of interests—some influenced by their promise, some by the need of grace, and others for thanksgiving. They buy candles from the stores or from itinerant vendors who begin to ply their trade as early as five o' clock in the morning. The vendors also sell different religious objects. Pilgrims can also have souvenir photos of their visit taken by photographers who actively encourage them to avail of their business.

Within the Shrine are locations of prayer and devotion where pilgrims visit with indefinite priorities because of the unpredictable conditions brought about by having to share space with other pilgrims. There are times though, like at noon, when many of these locations are deserted. There is also the Shrine's office where pilgrims can ask about thanksgiving masses and other Shrine activities from the clerk assigned by the administrator, who is usually a priest from the diocese. There are two main groups that coordinate with the administrator: One is the La Liga that serves in the mass activities, and the Corte de Honor that helps in the physical maintenance of the Shrine. These groups attain some cultural and social capital as they develop themselves to better serve their purpose in the Shrine. The Philippine National Police (PNP) secures the Shrine in coordination with the administrator.

The Fort Pilar Shrine may be seen as a field of "structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital" (Swartz 1997, 123, citing Bourdieu). But as a field of pilgrimage, it is beyond being a field "of power struggles among holders of different forms of power, a gaming space in which those agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital to be able to occupy the dominant positions within the respective fields confront each other using strategies aimed at preserving or transforming these relations of power" (Pilario 2005, 170, citing Bourdieu).

A history of the Fort Pilar devotion

Taking off from biblical and theological bases to some concrete observations, Rodriguez (1995) describes the national as well as international historical development of Marian devotion. The extensive historical observation of Marian devotion in the Philippines only points to the needed situational observation on Our Lady of the Pillar devotion, particularly in Zamboanga City. It needs historical digging from literary archives of the people of Zamboanga and empirical evidence of what precisely these devotees in Zamboanga City perceive and do about their devotion. Thus, a line between doctrinal prescription and actual manifestation must be drawn in representing the devotees of a particular setting.

Moreover, the rapid processual changes in the Fort Pilar Shrine and in the devotees appeal to the need to focus on these people on the manner of their belief, predisposition, and spirituality. The particularity of the devotion in Fort Pilar to Our Lady of the Pillar of Zamboanga may show a different historical process of devotion indeed. For instance, Rodriguez says, on the one hand, that “the historical development of Mary’s cult can be attributed, as both cause and effect, to an extraordinary flourishing of Liturgical texts; especially well known are songs and homilies by Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church” (47). On the other hand, Enriquez says that “this undocumented incident [the miracle-legend of the sentinel and the Virgin]¹², enacted in *veladas*¹³ during her fiesta almost every year at the Fort, must have given rise to the people’s belief in the Virgin’s love for Zamboanga” (190), hence their devotion. What used to merely be a frontispiece atop the main entrance of the Fort Pilar became a shrine after the miracle incident of the sentinel and Mary. In time, the Shrine earned the reputation of being miraculous to both the Catholics and the non-Catholics who go there (Navarro, 1982; 1984, 197). In this sense, the devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar in Zamboanga City was born out of the legendary miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary for the City and the people therein.¹⁴

All this only points to a further research that does not see devotion only according to what is written, but also according to the pilgrims’ practices, which are rooted in previous events. It might be helpful at this point then to reiterate Fr. Alejo’s appeal on matters of popular religiosity: “Please let us give serious attention to the way ordinary people are finding God” (Alejo 2004, 52).

Tradition, according to Ellanie, a nun and a pilgrim of Fort Pilar, is mainly the first element that brings many people of Zamboanga to the Fort Pilar Shrine. Their relatives or guardians would usually bring them to Fort Pilar for various religious purposes. Mamang Choleng traces the roots of her devotion to the La Virgen del Pilar: *Porcansa se na mi maga mayores* (It was because of my parents that I got to go to the Shrine). Daisy and Dudut, said: *Ya principia yo mi debocion cuando ya segi yo con mi mayores si ta anda sila na Pilar* (I started my Fort Pilar devotion by going with my parents when they went to the Fort Pilar Shrine). Today, many parents bring their babies to the Fort Pilar Shrine, notwithstanding the dusty roads and crowding people. Even the “elbow to elbow” crowd during the street dance on 12 October does not prevent parents from carting

their babies or small children on the roadside to watch the spectacle. Jojo, another Fort Pilar pilgrim says: “My mother used to bring me to the Shrine when I was a child.” This clarifies what Nanay Presing, an old Fort Pilar volunteer and pilgrim, also says. In her words: *Cuando ya abri yo miyo ojos, ansina ya man kame* (When I opened my eyes, that’s the way we did things already).

There are stories and miracles about the Fort, to include miraculous apparitions of the La Virgen del Pilar, told in some legends and as experienced by the pilgrims’ relatives or guardians. These testimonies are taken on faith and serve to influence Zamboanga pilgrims to personal devotion. Enculturation obviously plays a major role as to why Zamboanga residents do pilgrimage at Fort Pilar. However, these are not the only reasons.

Some start their devotion because they experience great personal problems. For this reason and with the advice of other pilgrims, they visit the Fort Pilar Shrine to ask for guidance, help, or healing. Eventually, La Virgen del Pilar’s indulgence is felt as they find relief and alleviation from their difficulties. Tintin, a married pilgrim, has a story: *“El di miyo andada na Fort Pilar porcansa na maga pesao problema ya pasa cumigo cuando casao ya yo. Ya pruba yo primero pidi ayuda alla na Fort Pilar. Despues ya experiencia yo el epecto poreso hasta ana ta anda yo siempre alla na Fort Pilar”* (My going there was because of some compelling problems that happened to me when I got married. I tried at first to seek help from Fort Pilar. Then I experienced the effect, so that until now I still go there at the Fort Pilar Shrine). This then leads her to the belief, in the same way other pilgrims are led to, that La Virgen del Pilar is miraculous.

Mamang Choleng, a Zamboangueña pilgrim, has her own reason, too: *Ya principia yo serioso anda na Pilar cuando ya experiencia yo un milagro. Un dia, yaman aksidente yo. Dol nu puede ya yo kamina. Ta lleba cumigo mi tata na Fort Pilar y ahya ta resa iyo. Despues, ya queda yo bueno como un milagro kay maka estrania el di miyo alibio* (I started to seriously go to Fort Pilar Shrine when I experienced a miracle. I met an accident and it was almost impossible for me to walk. My father brought me to the Fort Pilar Shrine and there I prayed. Then, I got miraculously healed).

Belief, then, has something to do with their experiences rather than with what they simply hear from other people or from teachings. As pilgrims like Jojo, Mommy Angelin, and Nanay Presing acclaim: *Ta cre yo ay ya experiencia yo su milagro* (I believe because I experience her miracles).

As the pilgrims continue to go to the Shrine, they eventually internalize the practices and gain a sense of owning their experience. This means visiting the Shrine is not based on sheer obedience, tradition, or the novelty of the experience, but also because they will it. The belief they have of Fort Pilar and its patroness is, in the first place, a product of their interaction with the Fort environs from which emerges a personal explanation of their need to go to the Shrine. The foundation of the belief they have of the Lady and the Fort finds connection and relevance to their current needs. For the pilgrims, these needs are usually special and important; they are relative to survival, health, economics, moral, mental, attitudinal – almost constitutive of a person's well-being.

The belief they have of La Virgen del Pilar is historical and not limited to only one epoch or to the many legends attributed to her that pilgrims vaguely remember today. It is not also traceable only to their observations with their *parientes* (relatives) from long time ago. Included in the sources of their belief are the day-to-day experiences of the many answered prayers believed to have been miraculously facilitated by the La Virgen. Ellen, an Episcopalian pilgrim of Fort Pilar, confidently says: *Cuando ya pidi yo ayuda cunel La Virgen, ya pasa yo miyo board exam* (When I asked help from the La Virgen del Pilar, I passed my board exam). Dudut has the same story when she passed the Test on English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) that allowed her the qualification to work abroad. They believe that it is God who answers their prayers, but La Virgen plays a big role as intercessor. This makes La Virgen their “mother.” Yet, there are those who think that it is La Virgen del Pilar who directly answers their prayers.

Other people's experiences of answered prayers strengthen belief and motivate many to go to the Fort Pilar Shrine. The pilgrims seem to be the kind of people who are willing to try what others suggest or believe, especially when urgent needs arise. Perhaps many of them uphold what Mommy Angelin, an old pilgrim, claims: “To see is to believe.”

For many, the Fort Pilar is a more inviting destination to express their hopes and desires. The churches are considered merely as places for attending masses and for normal thanksgiving or prayer. In the Fort Pilar Shrine, aside from the everyday mass, the pilgrims sense the loving presence of a mother who can guide and help them in fulfilling their important needs, especially the difficult-to-achieve ones. That is why

Dudut, a nurse and a pilgrim, professes: *Mu unba ko'g Fort Pilar labi na kanang depressed or broken hearted ko* (I go to Fort Pilar especially when I'm depressed or brokenhearted). She considers Mary as her “ordinary mother.” Ellanie, another pilgrim, even considers Mary as a real friend with whom she has an intimate relationship.

Yet, there is also a gray area as to why people go to the Shrine. In many instances, pilgrims say, *mi sabe yo porque* (I don't know why). After acknowledging the element of belief and miracles, some would still find mystery in what they do and could not really say why they go. As Ellanie muses, *Ta lleba lang conmigo miyo pies* (I am just carried by my feet). In moments of deep emotional stress, she just finds herself in the Shrine. Pilgrims find mystery in why they just find themselves preparing to go to the Shrine without much planning and decision. They find themselves in the practice of pilgrimage and do not have enough awareness why they travel.

This is not to say that they do not entirely know why they go to the Shrine. This is only to imply that pilgrimage and devotion is more of an act than a fact. Pilgrimage and devotion is not usually talked about, but walked about. Thus, words fail to explain why and it is only when they are asked, like in an interview, that they start to articulate what is implied in their pilgrimages. It is in this sense that I find the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage a potent phenomenon to explore.

Practicality in spirituality

I notice in my encounter with the pilgrims of Fort Pilar that they organize (although with much variation) space, time, meaning, and communication implicitly. By implicitly, I mean the organizing acts lie much in the level of practice than in the level of reflection. For example, Daisy, a working mom and a pilgrim, says: *Hinde ya yo ta pensa cunel camino* (I don't think of the route anymore). Tintin, another pilgrim, also says, “The length of travel is not important. We do not think of it anymore.” Their devotion starts in tradition then proceeds to belief. They organize time as manifested by their choices and temporal manipulation. Their spirituality is formed through the immediacies and urgencies of their daily life, but they hardly reflect on them. They organize communication as they have ways and forms of praying or dialoguing with their Deity or saints. They convey messages in their gestures and in their silence

without really reflecting on these. In Daisy's words: "It has been practiced, but not discussed." They organize meaning as they put value and significance on many things they do in the Fort Pilar Shrine. They also have the sense of the many figures and symbols in the Shrine, but very few feel moved to articulate this. Their spirituality takes form in the re/creation of meaning, but they hardly sense this.

Pastoral theologian Mary G. Durkin (1988, 19), comments that "parents are the first and most influential religious educators." For many of these pilgrims, the beginnings of the devotion to Fort Pilar rest on the practice of accompanying guardians or parents as they go on their pilgrimage. There is an element of blindness here. Aside from having been brought to the Fort Pilar Shrine at a very young age, children were not clarified by adults on what and why they do such and such. Perhaps these parents and guardians were also products of practical spirituality. Children continue this practice and, though they reach the age of reason, they more often than not carry on this tradition of practical spirituality, seldom feeling the call to articulate it.

The central characteristic of practical spirituality is practice. It is a spirituality of actions and practices rooted in a culture less of reflective expressions of piety. It is a popular religiosity in the context of ordinary spatial, temporal, and communicative involvement. To be reflective is to be consciously sensitive to the messages and implications of what happens, to be thinking beings actively "re/reading" human experiences to further awareness. Practical spirituality does not necessarily help the pilgrim grow in terms of reflective ability, but it may very well be for this reason that it can recruit practitioners.

This, in as far as I reflect, is my reading of the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage. I must, however, warn that I do not intend to purport the idea that no one practices reflective spirituality in the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage. There are those who reflect on what they do as they travel to Fort Pilar, but they are few. This phenomenon perhaps explains the pilgrims' struggle to find expression about what they do when they are asked about their pilgrimage. Most readily admit that *Nu sabe yo porque yo se ta ase* (I don't know why I am doing that). Others say, *Ansina ya came cosa ta ase* (That has been how we do things), *Ansina ya came ya engranda* (We grew up with this kind of practice), and *Por cuasa se na di amon mayors* (It is because of our parents or guardians). The most unexpected answer I got as to why

they go the Shrine was, *No bay lang* (It is just nothing). At that time, I was tempted to think that perhaps the question was wrong because it assumed reflective spirituality on a phenomenon that lacked such.

Part of the practical spirituality is the habit of simply hearing (as different from listening) religious doctrines and popular experiences. Even if many attend the everyday mass at Fort Pilar Shrine, many still do not exhibit the messages in their communities. As diocesan priest Fr. Mike says: "(It) is widely observed that people do not apply what they hear and say" – and indeed, the observation may hold true for many Christians in Zamboanga City. During mass, recollections, and retreats, the priests remind the faithful of the gospel messages in layman's terms. As one observes, there are many churches in downtown Zamboanga City and in its barangays. The people attending masses in these places of worship are numerous, too. Yet, the question still lingers, "Why don't we do what we hear and say?" Perhaps it is because people are embedded with practical spirituality. Of course, there are many who apply what they hear and say within the context of their belief. Yet, my interviews with many pilgrims of Fort Pilar seem not to show this.

During the 2004 and 2005 Ateneo de Zamboanga University (ADZU) processions to the Fort Pilar Shrine, the novena prayers were said loud enough, attracting much attention from the people on the sidewalks. The procession/pilgrimage to the Fort Pilar was indeed full of prayers and show of sacrifice. No wonder, my impression was that it was a spiritual act and an expression of who the participants were. This impression was not entirely wrong.

My interviews with some students and friends who participated in the 2005 ADZU pilgrimage did not disprove the mentioned popular opinion—of not doing what they hear and say—perhaps because my interviews were not about it. However, there was a common thread that ran through their answers to my queries: They did not bother to ask what they were doing in relation to their spirituality. The students agreed that they were not really thinking about the pilgrimage, even as they participated in it. What was quite clear to them was that they joined the procession, they walked, they prayed, and they went with their companions. Behind the actions was nothing really related to the question of their action and spirituality.

There seems to be a rich spiritual experience as many pilgrims do pilgrimage, novena, rosary, and attend mass. However, this spiritual experience seems to lie more in practice than in awareness. Many of my questions about what they did and what these actions meant were left unanswered. They seem to do what they hear perhaps because they think less of what is heard. Also, these pilgrims who do not often think of what they do seem not to do what they say. Perhaps this is because these pilgrims think less of what they say. Saying is actually doing, hence practical. It is an act that very few of the pilgrims think about or reflect on.

This is where the organization of spirituality rests more on practice than in awareness. However, there seems not much growth in simply doing things without being aware of them or internalizing them. What growth would there be in the self when it is not deeply aware of itself?

Praxis and reflection

To understand practical spirituality requires that one not only relate it to its past or dig up its characteristics, but also to situate its being present in the context of a process for the future. As a continuing act, practical spirituality is a movement-praxis. Practical spirituality may spring from events and discourses of miracle-legends or from a tradition, but that it also continually reformulates them. "Irreducible directly to language, yet finding its meaning in language and providing yet new levels of meaning to language, this praxis, formed by separation from and transcending language, is fundamentally a necessary and permanent conversion" (Certeau, 153).

One example that leads to this point is perhaps how many pilgrims of Fort Pilar consider La Virgen del Pilar as the mother of Jesus Christ who serves as the intercessor to the grace of God the Father. In other words, many pilgrims are aware that when they ask for healing or any help, they first share it to La Virgen del Pilar and ask her to deliver those pleas to the Most Powerful God the Father.

But there are pilgrims who directly pray to La Virgen del Pilar in the belief that she can miraculously heal and help them. They feel no need to bother God the Father with their concerns. They think of La Virgen del Pilar as a Divine Mother who miraculously helps them in their needs and problems in the same way as God the Father does. The pilgrims'

communication to La Virgen del Pilar has become so intimate that the dialogue seems to have gone exclusive and personal. Hence, to these devotees, La Virgen del Pilar seems to be on the same footing as God, a belief that courts unorthodoxy if not outright heresy. Whatever the case, many pilgrims articulate their spirituality in the context of religion with small "r" rather than with capital "R".¹⁵

In recognition of the pilgrim's tendency toward this unorthodox belief, the administrator of the Fort Pilar Shrine tries to lead pilgrims into the eucharistic awareness rather than what is believed to be popular religious practices.

It can be noted, however, that this unorthodox belief does not even threaten the day-to-day pilgrimages in the Fort Pilar Shrine, contrary to what Turner implies when he says, "I am at present inclined to favor the view that a pilgrimage's best chance of survival is when it imparts to religious orthodoxy a renewed vitality, rather than when it asserts against an established system a set of heterodox opinions and unprecedented styles of religious and symbolic action" (1972, 229-230). There are many other unorthodox practices in the Fort Pilar Shrine that are observable up to the present, like some of the sacramentals (*punas-punas*, putting of rosary beads in the vehicle for safety, kissing the statues of saints, etc.), but do not in anyway lessen the pilgrimage's survival. On the contrary, I am inclined to believe that they contribute to the propagation of pilgrimage to the Fort Pilar Shrine because many have proven the emancipatory effects of these unorthodox practices in their ordinary lives. Pilgrimages like this promise to proliferate because their value and significance resonate with the humanness and the mundane life of pilgrims.

The pilgrims' dialogue with the Deity and/or deities does not only show dependence vis-à-vis providence, but also intimacy. This intimacy is clear in the way pilgrims relate to La Virgen del Pilar. This relationship is so intense that in its being so popular, some describe this religiosity as unorthodox. Beyond comparing this religiosity to doctrines is its appeal to solidarity in prayer - an appeal more to the truth of the pilgrims' being as experienced in everyday life than to the truth found on texts.

This observation surfaced during my interview with those pilgrims. However, the observation was not foremost in their mind. It was my series of questions that led us to acknowledge their communication

with La Virgen to be so, especially to those pilgrims who have a background on some Catholic doctrines. This only implies that they do communicate more than they think about their communication. It is in an event, like an interview, that a realization such as this happens. It is in communication still, like in an interview, that how they communicate and what it implies can be observed. To assume, therefore, that "you can't wink (or burlesque one) without knowing what counts as winking or how, physically to contract your eyelids, and you can't conduct a sheep raid (or mimic one) without knowing what it is to steal a sheep and how practically to go about it" (Geertz 1973, 12) is without assurance.

The pilgrims' consideration of La Virgen del Pilar as God implies praxis that may have been influenced by some institutionalized doctrines (although much of the influence is from the miracle-legends of La Virgen in the Fort Pilar in Zamboanga City), but which may condition or influence the same doctrines. This practice is indeed different from the institutionalized prescription on Christian spirituality. This does not even resonate with what many learn from schools or from seminaries.

It is in this fashion that the institutionalized spiritual language finds difficulty in accommodating this peculiar practical spirituality. It is the nature of this kind of spirituality that challenges the language of dogmatism and orthodoxy. What is exciting here is what this practice can contribute as it shakes norms and accepted maxims. It can indeed open up new theologies or new ways of becoming spiritual. In it lies the potential for better understanding and learning of popular spirituality.

As praxis, practical spirituality emerges as a rich ground for reflection and spiritual discoveries. Its being practical for quite a long time in the history of the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage increases its potentiality for understanding and meaning. It awaits its revelation through the pilgrim's reflective responses. It is there, ready to be deciphered and to be reflectively organized. It is waiting to be thought of and to be articulated. In a culture of much practicality, the call for reflection is not only more of a need, but also of a promising project for spiritual growth.

Abstract images usually accompany reflection. The latter in its process would normally find much sense and product by focusing on the former. It is my contention, however, that reflection can best harness its worth when complemented with praxis. Abstract images can indeed broaden imagination and reflection, but may not find expression in the

actuality of life. Many of those imaginations are enjoyed mostly by the mind, less by the body. In this sense, reflections from images empty of actuality usually have short life spans in the consciousness of people. It is perhaps when reflection is derived from praxis that it will easily be practiced. What use does reflection have when it does not penetrate into the everyday life of people? Its worth is seen when it is able to give language to what is happening in communities and by which new praxis emerges to continue this process.

Considering practical spirituality as praxis would constitute a call for attention and focus. This call, however, is never a simple cultural project. It may require a paradigm shift, but this shift must start on the practical level. A culture with much focus on practicality has to use what it has mastered in developing a new habit. Reflection, therefore, is not a mere mental act but must also be practiced. Pilgrims have to slowly make a habit of reflecting over their own spiritual experiences. Making reflection a habit will surely unearth the mysteries of the long-been-waiting practical spirituality to be self-manifested in language and praxis. It is by developing the habit of reflection that the Fort Pilar spirituality may be given proper attention and pilgrims may gain better grasp of their own spirituality.

Juxtaposing reflection with practical spirituality may give pilgrims the venue for better spiritual understanding. It will be a process of organizing meanings on the nature of their spirituality. Their spiritual experiences will then be given names and descriptions. It is by this that practical spirituality will be given processual form and substance and would truly become praxis.

The call for reflection over practical spirituality then is a call not only to understand the kind of popular spirituality pilgrims practice, but also to decipher its relevance for the everyday life in the community. Durkin (21-4) suggests that there is a failure to link Marian devotion to real-life situations, like the male-female relationship and family life. Perhaps the reason for this gap is that the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage is a practical spirituality with less reflection and hence the same project of reflection may bridge the gap. Even Durkin's suggestive integration of Mary's images in the family spirituality (26-31) presupposes a reflective element in the believers.

If indeed it would seem difficult for a culture immersed with practicality to reflect over its spiritual experiences, reading reflections that are based on events rather than mere words would be helpful. These reflections are often read in papers and heard in masses or spiritual discourses. Reflections based on words or texts may help, but much more proper for reflection is the popular spirituality of the people themselves. This is because praxis is richer than words. Any event is an opportunity for reflection. It may perhaps be better to reflect on how things are said than what are said. In the Fort Pilar Shrine, it is the pilgrims' practical spirituality as praxis that would serve as food for thought, which in turn would be challenged by consequent spiritual practices. This process, I am inclined to believe, emancipates pilgrims who are faithful to what they do.

For roughly 300 years, Protestants considered additional enthusiasm for Mary a form of "Mariolatry." However, Protestants are now restoring Mariology (Van Biema 2005, 40), perhaps because of the undeniable force of reflection over human spiritual experiences. It may be a new way of interpreting Mariology: Not merely as texts in the Bible, but also as Mary's event. In the same way, the recent concern of many religious denominations to Marian reinterpretations is, for me, a result of the reflective response to the forceful call of popular Marian spirituality in the grassroot level. Taking this as praxis may indeed challenge previous doctrines and theologies. In the end, only when theologies are reflected from spiritual experiences can we spiritually grow and put substance to a profound adage: "Life is a pilgrimage."

Zürich trained Jungian analyst and clinical psychologist Thomas Patrick Lavin (1988, 32-47) theorizes that there is such a thing as Christianity's Mary Complex, which in history has been repressed by the patriarchal foundations of Christian theologies. This repression has resulted to the denigration of the female identity through the years and the hindrance of discovering the "divine aspect of the feminine and/or the feminine aspect of the divine as symbolized by Mary." Borrowing Carl Gustav Jung's neutrality of complexes and their potentiality for human wholeness, Lavin, in a forceful way, suggests the balancing of the Mary Complex as a religious emancipatory project through which Mary's images become a source of deep religious experience and discovery of God. In this way Lavin believes that the Mary Complex will heal a suffering culture.

In the contemporary period, as Lavin implies, there is an increasing Marian attention both in the Church and in popular piety. Marian devotion is central in the Fort Pilar. This, however, does not automatically imply a full participation in Lavin's exhortation on Mary because the Fort Pilar Pilgrimage is more of a practical spirituality than a reflective one. Pilgrims there manifest Marian spirituality, but much of the actual Marian images and symbols are not yet quite clear and reflectively processed in their consciousness. Hence, I propose that only in habitual spiritual reflection can the pilgrims of Fort Pilar actively participate in what Lavin suggests and find emancipatory growth in spirituality.

Notes

¹ Prepared for the "Seventh Spirituality Forum", 7-9 August 2007 at the Titus Brandsma Center, 24 Acacia Street, New Manila, Quezon City.

² "We are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss Liminality, but with the essentially unstructured (which is at one deconstructed and prestructured). Liminal is that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both" (Turner 1967, 98-99). "The attributes of Liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner 1969, 95).

³ *Communitas* emerges recognizably in the liminal period as a society, as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus* community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (Turner 1969, 96).

⁴ Perhaps, this also offers us another way of looking at the participation of the Muslims, Buddhists, and Protestants in the pilgrimage to Fort Pilar.

⁵ Alexander Spoehr elaborates: "Figueroa began the conquest of Mindanao in 1596 and was killed the same year fighting the Maguindanao. Juan de Ronquilo succeeded Figueroa and in 1597 led an expedition against the Maguindanao and the following year made a foray against Jolo. During his campaign, Ronquilo

established a base for water, wood, and provisions at Caldera, a small protected bay west of what is now the town of Zamboanga. In 1599, Governor Tello posted a small garrison under the command of Toribio de Miranda at Caldera, but the garrison was almost immediately withdrawn to Cebu to strengthen the Visayas against Moslem raids from the south" (1973, 35). La Caldera is now a barangay called Recodo, a coastal village 14.45 kilometers west from the Zamboanga City Hall.

⁶ Also known as Campo Muslim.

⁷ This date is based on the following sources: Salvador (1942, 1); Bautista (1966, Jul. 31); Spoehr (1969, 5); Navarro (1984, 197; 1987, 115); Lamb-Sobrepeña (1984, 66); Mandi (n.d., 87 citing Fr. De la Costa); Cruz (1986, Oct. citing Vic Hurley); Lim (1993, 7); Arevalo (1993, Oct. 8); Malcampo (2002, 8); and de Castro (2005, 66). Rodriguez (1995, 30) says that the first stone was laid on 1 June 1635.

⁸ The data here are from the following: Spoehr (1973, 37, 40); Navarro (1984, 197; 1987, 115); Arevalo (1993, Oct. 8); Lim (1993, 7); and Malcampo (2002, 19, 23).

⁹ In this paragraph, the data are derived from the following sources: Navarro (1984, 197; 1987, 115); Bautista (1984, 87-8, 92); Lim (1993, 56, 68, 80, 81); Lamb-Sobrepeña (1984, 66); Rodriguez (1995, 13); Spoehr (1969, 5; 1973, 40-1). There are some variations here. Lamb-Sobrepeña (1984, 66) says that the surrender of Gen. Diego delos Rios was not in 1899 but 1898. Perhaps, Lamb-Sobrepeña based it on a marker found in the Fort Pilar. However, aside from the fact that many authors use 1899 as the date of Gen. Diego delos Rios's surrender in Zamboanga, Spoehr, who uses primary sources, contradicts the marker found in the Fort in this case. In the marker, it reads: "Abandoned by the Spaniards, 1898." Spoehr (1973, 40) contradicts it by saying that "the Spanish period in Zamboanga came to an end with the evacuation of Spanish troops in May, 1899." Even Lim (1993, 12) criticizes the marker: "There is an error on the marker set on the wall of the Fort Pilar. The Jesuits did not return in 1666. In that year they were still burning the hotline to Madrid begging for the restoration of the Fort." The 1899 surrender of Gen. Diego delos Rios in the Fort of Zamboanga can be traced well in a chronological elaboration which led to this event by Clemencio Montecillo Bascar in his *Maguindanao: The crescent that Spain failed to plunder*, pages 24 to 28.

¹⁰ Basso relieveo (*Bas-relief*) is a sculptural relief in which the projection from the surrounding surface is slight and no part of the modeled form is undercut (<http://www.m-w.com>).

¹¹ Regatta is a colorful rowing, speedboat, or sailing race or a series of such races usually held at Cawa-Cawa, R.T. Lim Boulevard, Zamboanga City.

¹² "Halt, who goes there?", shouted the sentinel. The Lady ignored him. "Halt, who is there?", the sentinel repeated. The Lady, again, said nothing. "If you don't answer, I will shoot," the sentinel threatened. And now the Lady turned and said: "Sentinel on duty, do you not behold the dawn of a new day? Do you not know Mary whom you have dared to halt? At once the sentinel recognized the Lady as the Virgin Mary and fell on his knees and asked for forgiveness: "Forgive me, mother of mine, mother of my heart, I am a poor sentinel, just doing my duty" (Rodriguez, 15).

¹³ A *velada* is a literary-musical program that entertains the throng keeping vigil at the Fort Pilar, which is usually held in the evening of the *vispera* (the day before the feast). The *velada* features declamation, skit, and folkdance, from representative groups of the town (Enriquez 190).

¹⁴ The devotion to Our Lady of the Pilar in Naga-Naga (Alicia, Zamboanga del Sur) is told to have its beginnings in the Virgin's appearance to Eusebia Panceras in a dream where the Lady asked for a chapel to be built in Her honor. As soon as the construction was committed, the dysentery epidemic that ran from 1924 to 1926 subsided.

¹⁵ "Religion with a capital 'R' involves itself with the institutional issues – creeds, theology, church laws, leadership – of a particular religious community. Religion with a small 'r' is about the actual experiences of God by the members of the religious community" (Durkin, 18).

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