

Urban Faith Transits: Tactical Spaces in the Everyday Ordinary

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Abstract

The paper starts from narratives of ordinary lives in Davao City and presents these narratives as points of departure for theological reasoning and a missiological response of the local Church. The new evangelization of the Church must include listening to the stories of “the least, the last, and the lost” as well as being immersed in their situation. In this context, the mission of the Church is to journey alongside her faithful, most especially, the ordinary people, pushing forward towards liberation and salvation.

Introduction

The metropolis is a theater of stories. It is a place of encounter between narratives of persons and the historical, cultural and religious milieu of the city. Hence there exists a multitude of identities, a plurality of meanings converging or diverging at an urban territory. Within its walls, we encounter narratives of ordinary people who traverse the urban jungles and make sense of what seems utterly senseless. Their struggles against harsh realities of the city such as poverty, displacement and social injustices are sojourn stories whose destinations are perpetually beyond and unheard of. From the perspective of theology, we view them as a people of faith in a continuing transit.

This theological synthesis is a tapestry of ideas that has one overall trajectory: to articulate a theological reflection on the everyday experiences of ordinary people in the city. Making Davao City as the context of this theological pursuit, this synthesis looks at the narratives of the common person from the perspective of faith. In the narratives I share, the storytellers serve as protagonists who come from different walks of life and thus have diverse experiences. Despite the heterogeneity of their experiences, one common strand that holds all their stories together is the fact that they can be likened to pilgrims on a journey. The term “Urban Faith Transits” is neologism I invent to capture this aspect of “pilgrimage in the city” in the narratives. It describes their everyday experience of constantly being engaged in episodes of “perpetual departures” and “spiritual displacements.” Utilizing the thoughts of Michel de

Certeau¹ regarding the “everyday life”, I seek to disclose in this paper, as Nick O’Brien puts it, “a series of ‘tactics’ that constitute acts of resistance and that can therefore be read as signs of faith in something better, more humane and, ultimately, divine.”² This study puts forward the idea that narratives of everyday experience are potent points of departure for theological reasoning and missiological response of a Church that looks at the city as locus for mission and evangelization.

¹Michel de Certeau is a Jesuit who, according to Philip Sheldrake, is one of the most creative French intellectuals of the late twentieth century. A contemporary of Michel Foucault, his intellectual expertise is seen in various scientific disciplines such as philosophy, theology, psychology, politics, cultural theory and other social sciences. This paper utilizes his thoughts in the book “The Practice of Everyday Life”, especially his notion of “tactics” as a framework for interpreting the everyday experiences of the common person in the urban context.

² Nick O’ Brien, “Faith as ‘Journey’” in *Spirituality* vol. 22 (May/June 2016), 151.