



Christ and Filipino Cultures: The Changing Faces of Christ in the Philippines¹

ABSTRACT

This paper draws inspiration from the insights of Filipino creative artists, both literary and visual, in constructing a Christology that could be an impetus for ecclesial and societal transformation. It also builds on the previous pioneering scholarly research done by Filipino theologians and attempts to synthesize the prevailing images of Christ embedded in Filipino culture for almost five centuries. It recognizes the diverse images of Jesus inherent in the gospels. The first part describes the different portraits of Christ in diverse historical situations in the Philippines. Secondly, it deals with the challenge of Jesus Christ to the new Filipino. Thirdly, it attempts to present a Filipino Christology that provides an impetus in bringing about a liberational transformation in church and society. The paper concludes with the image of the risen Christ who accompanies us in the vicissitudes of our struggles—the Christ who died, buried but rose again in victory! He is the Risen Lord who challenges us to care for the least of our sisters and brothers. He assures us: “I will be with you always till the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

¹I am grateful to Dr. Connie Semy Mella, UTS Academic Dean, for challenging me to present this paper before the regular monthly Faculty Forum on February 24, 2021. Heartfelt thanks also to Pastor Amihan Asi, UTS Librarian, for her assistance in looking for hard to trace Filipiniana books needed in the writing of this paper.



INTRODUCTION

As we celebrate the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines this year, we must engage ourselves in confronting the central figure of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ! Almost eighty years ago, a man inside a lonely prison cell wrote a letter to his friend: “What is bothering me incessantly is the question... who Christ really is, for us.”² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was a German pastor executed by Nazi regime on April 9, 1945, due to his involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler. In our time, the question raised by this martyr has become a concern not only among theologians but even by poets and public entertainers. The now famous rock opera “Jesus Christ Superstar” raised the question through its chorus:

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ.

Who are you? what have you sacrificed?

Jesus Christ, Superstar.

*Do you think you are what they say you are?*³

“Who Jesus Christ is?” is a basic question that every Christian, especially we who are engaged in theological education, need to wrestle with. Thus, we have to engage our students and colleagues in wrestling with this fundamental question. Even the New Testament dealt with this question. Jesus himself raised the question to his disciples: “Who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:15; Mk. 8:29; Lk. 9:20). Simon Peter’s reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,” became a classic declaration, repeated by every Christian for over two millennia. Let me point out also that Martha’s declaration is as profound and full of conviction as that of Peter’s confession. With all the weight of a woman’s conviction, Martha declared: “I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of

²The letter was addressed to his friend and biographer (Eberhard Bethge). See *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Geoffrey B. Kelly & F. Burton Nelson (eds). New York: HarperCollins, 1995. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1972, p. 29; Geoffrey B. Kelly, *Liberating Faith: Bonhoeffer’s Message for Today*. Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2002 p. 29; Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

³Timothy Rice and Charles Weber, “Jesus Christ, Superstar.”

God, who was to come into the world.” [John 11:27]. Later, both formal declarations, became a concise creedal formula with an acronym ICTHUS (*Iesou Cristou Theo Huios Soter* “Jesus Christ, God’s Son and Saviour.” The acronym forms the Greek word for FISH. Thus, FISH became the symbol of early Christianity.

In this paper, I propose a Christology that speaks of the struggle of the Filipino people for personal and social transformation. It is an understanding of Jesus’s life and works gleaned from the Filipino religious tradition and especially from the people’s popular culture and religiosity. It seeks to understand Jesus as viewed by the gospels and recognizes the diverse images of Jesus inherent in the gospels. These varied images help us construct a Filipino Christology that brings a synthesis of the Jesus of the gospels and the Jesus that has become part of the lives of the struggling Filipinos. At the outset, let me reiterate the common themes found in the Jesus of the gospels and the Jesus portrayed in Filipino popular religiosity. The first part describes the different portrayals of Christ in different historical situations in the Philippines. The second part deals with the challenge of Jesus Christ to the new Filipino generation. Thirdly, the paper attempts to present a Filipino Christology that provides an impetus in bringing about a liberationist transformation in church and society.

Thus, I want to present an understanding of Jesus the Christ which is at the center of the forces and processes of ecclesial and societal transformation. I venture to show a Christology that brings about transformational experiences in people who are engaged in the struggle and, therefore, not interested in an abstract academic Christological formulation. Intellectual discussion on the doctrine of Christ is not the concern of people whose survival is constantly threatened and who make do with *isang-kahig-isang-tuka* existence.

DIFFERENT PORTRAITS OF CHRIST IN FILIPINO RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

In a pioneering study Fr. Jose Mario Francisco, S.J., finds different portraits (faces) of Christ that have emerged from different historical situations.⁴ [He gives a caveat in his opening paragraph: “*Mapanganib ang mamangka sa dalawang ilog...*” *Gayon pa ma’y kanyang ginawa ito at siya’y nagtagumpay*]. Literature has been a reliable mirror that reflects truth in any given time of history. The relationship between literature and truth is an ancient and complex question, for as Peter Lamarque argues: “just how literature intersects with truth, what relevance truth has to literary value, whether literature is essentially to be conceived as a vehicle for truth...these questions go to the very heart of literary studies.”⁵ Using Filipino religious and secular literature from the period of Spanish colonization up to the post-WW II, Fr. Francisco has drawn three changing images of Jesus Christ, namely: a) Christ as Exemplar of Humankind; b) Christ as Basis of Moral Order; c) Christ as Messiah of Society. Let me elaborate each.

A) Christ as Exemplar of Humankind

This Christ-image was the foundational structure in the establishment of the Filipino Catholic society. After a century of Hispanization, writes John L. Phelan, the poblacion in a typical Philippine municipality is comprised of the following: one would find a church made of stone at the center of the town; facing the church across the main street is the presidencia or municipal hall; down the road are the residencia of the elites.⁶ This established catholic society in the Philippines during the 17th and 18th centuries shaped the types of Filipino literature. Francisco uses the analogy of a religious procession to describe the shape of Filipino literature. It started inside the church which shows writings related to ritual

⁴Jose Mario Francisco, SJ, (1977) “Nagbabagong Larawan ni Kristo sa Panitikang Pilipino,” *Philippine Studies* Vol. 19, pp.186-214.

⁵Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 25; 92.

⁶John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959).

and doctrines like the *pasyon*. From the church, it comes out to the main street with writings that are used in homes like *koridos* and songs, until they reached the public plaza where zarzuelas [plays and drama] were staged. When the 19th century came, continues Francisco, Catholic society was well-established and worn like a lady's dress that covers even the sole of the feet which, according to a play [*Urbana at Feliza*], should not be exposed to the public.⁷

In this Catholic society, the predominant image of Christ that emerged as reflected in literature is a Christ who is an exemplar to humankind. Christ is an exemplar in his life and death who should be imitated by Filipinos. There are four variants of this image: *first*, Christ's self-surrender to God's will; *second*, Christ's demand to his followers to obey their parents and the teachings of the church; *third*, Christ's portrayal as one who is "meek, humble, and good-natured" [this image had been used by the colonizers as a convenient way of silencing and controlling the indios];⁸ *fourth*, a portrayal of Christ who demands humanity's solidarity with God and with fellow human beings. It was this image of Christ that emerged from the teachings of Apolinario dela Cruz or Hermano Pule who organized the *Confradia de San Jose* in 1832 which led to the people's revolt against Spain in 1841.⁹ Hermano Pule insisted that the Christ who should be the exemplar for our life is One whom we could have an intimate relationship with. In contrast to Hermano Pule's image of Christ, the official Catholic church portrayed a Christ who is so detached from daily life. In brief, the Christ-image as exemplar of humankind was used as an instrument of the colonizers in controlling and domesticating the Filipinos. And so, like a double-edged sword, the image of Christ as exemplar of humankind could be used to silence the natives. But under the leadership of Hermano Pule, it became a potent arsenal in their rebellion against the abuses of the Spaniards.

⁷Francisco, "Nagbabagong Larawan," p. 191.

⁸Ibid., p. 194.

⁹Reynaldo C. Ileto, (1979) *Pasyon and Revolution: Peasant Movements in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, pp. 37f.

B) Christ as Basis of Moral Order

The second image of Christ found in Filipino literature and history is one that portrayed Christ as the foundation of moral order in society. This Christ-image emerged during the period of the American occupation. What does it mean for a Christ-image to be moral foundation in society? The literature of this era presents the Christ-image as “the basis of moral order” and as “the rationality behind the universe,” because Jesus is the judge of people’s life and destiny.¹⁰

Toward the turn of the twentieth century, Aurelio Tolentino [Filipino playwright] wrote a play with a Christ-image as its central character. He presents an image of Christ “thoroughly thought through; seen walking among Filipinos in their daily struggle, and expressed in the uniquely Filipino way from the beginning to end.”¹¹ Tolentino, like the more famous Andres Bonifacio, was born and reared in Tondo, Manila. After finishing his Bachiller en Artes from San Juan de Letran, he worked as a clerk in the Court of First Instance. His nationalistic inclination drew him into the circles of Andres Bonifacio and other patriots. He was involved in the work of the KATIPUNAN, founded on July 7, 1892. Expectedly, Tolentino was arrested by the authorities. In his recollection, he wrote: “In September 1896, two weeks after the outbreak of the revolution, they took me out of my house, arrested me and put chains upon my feet.”¹²

Tolentino made use of his time in jail for his literary outputs. He wrote *Bagong Christo* [New Christ], a three-act play, where he conveyed his belief on the “right relationship between labor and capital and on the bright future that was in store for the Filipino laborers.”¹³ The central character in the play is named JESUS GATBIAYA. Gatbiaya’s concern was to conscientize the wealthy factory owners to the conditions of the poor laborers as

¹⁰Francisco, “Nagbabagong Larawan,” p. 199.

¹¹Aurelio Tolentino, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Edna Zapanta Manlapaz. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1975. See also Nicomedes Yatco, SJ, *Jesus Christ for Today’s Filipino*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983, p. 15.

¹²Cited in E Arsenic Manuel, *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*. Vol. 2. Quezon City: Filipinas Publications, 1970, p. 373.

¹³Yatco, op. cit., p. 20.

well as to unite the laborers and provide them the hope for a bright future. The Christ image is “seen walking among Filipinos in their daily struggle and expressed in the uniquely Filipino way from the beginning to end.”¹⁴ Tolentino’s Christ-image is a man who unselfishly lived and fought for the working Filipino people. His life was a concrete proof that justice in society is the same as the commands of God. The theme in the writing of Tolentino was reinforced by other nationalist writers like Jose Corazon de Jesus, Lope K. Santos, etc, who insisted on the perennial pair: the quest for justice is the quest for love. In their writings, the theme about Christ being the model in the world was replaced by the theme in which Christ is portrayed as the foundation of moral order in society. What is stressed is the conviction that the moral order is based on the person of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we can see the Christ-image as providing a consistent critique of the self-seeking and decadent lifestyle in Philippine society.

C) *Christ as Messiah of Society*

This Christ-image emerged in the literature of the post-World War II era. Alejandro G. Abadilla’s novel *Pagkamulat ni Magdalena* portrayed Jesus as Messiah of society. Abadilla insists that the road toward moral order is found in the liberation of individual where in the Christ-image proclaims: “I am the world.”¹⁵ The fundamental basis for moral order is in a free spirit of the Christ-image who insists on the need for resistance in the transformation of society. The literature during this period became radically nationalistic due to the intense political contradiction since 1946 up to the proclamation of Martial Law in 1972. Famous among the literary figures of this period was Amado V. Hernandez who wrote *Isang Dipang Langit*¹⁶ and *Luha ng Buaya*.¹⁷ Through his works and political involvement, Ka Amado was imprisoned with

¹⁴Nicomedes Yatco, SJ, (1983) *Jesus Christ for Today’s Filipino*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, p. 15.

¹⁵Alejandro G. Abadilla, *Pagkamulat ni Magdalena*. Manila: DLSU Press, 1988.

¹⁶Amado V. Hernandez, *Dipang Langit*. Manila: Tamaraw Publishing Co., 1961

¹⁷Amado V. Hernandez, *Luha ng Buaya*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1974.

the charge of “rebellion.” His poems written in jail, tell us of his deep searching for religious meaning.¹⁸ In his “Ang Aking Panauhin,” Ka Amado portrays Christ as “the visitor” who expressed the wish that “before I return again/ I long for the earth to become heaven... / Every purpose that I aspire to gain/ The Golgotha of suffering/ Felt by every pure heart/ There will be no night that last / And no great desire unfulfilled.” [My own translation]

What is portrayed in this simple verse is a new understanding of Christ who strives to bring about transformation for the good of society. This Christ-image who works for change in society was given a more forceful and convincing portrayal in Kay Amado’s novel *Luha ng Buaya*.¹⁹ In short, with this clear portrayal of Christ as the Messiah of society, it is not impossible to succeed in our struggle toward humane life. It is also clear that religion plays a significant part in the struggle.

Through this broad sweep of Filipino literary works, we see the perennial pair: the quest for justice is the quest for love. In these writings, the theme of Christ being the model in the world was replaced by the theme in which Christ is portrayed as the foundation of moral order in society. Nevertheless, we can see the Christ-image mirrored Filipino literature as consistent critique to the self-seeking and decadent lifestyle in Philippine society. Francisco concludes his study with these words: “Now the poor and the oppressed who struggle for a humane existence are the Christ-image in our society. Their experience is the same as that of Christ’s crucifixion. The Christ-image ended in cruel death, [as] they became victims of a monstrous system that is established in our society.”²⁰

¹⁸Andres Cristobal Cruz, (1971) “Ka Amado: Bartolina at Barikada,” *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 19, p. 268.

¹⁹Amado V. Hernandez must have been inspired by Karl Marx’s Eleventh thesis on Feuerbach saying that “philosophers simply tried to describe the world, the point is to change the world.” See Melanio L. Aoanan, “Philosophical Roots of Karl Marx’s Radical Critique of Religion,” *TUGON*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (1992), pp. 37–48.

²⁰Francisco, op. cit., p. 208; Cf also E. Arsenio Manuel, (1970) *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*. 2 Volumes. Quezon City: Filipinas Publications.

Attempts at portraying the Filipino face of Christ had also been ventured in the area of visual arts. Paradoxically, the one who initiated this is Ms. Ade de Bethune, a Belgian-born American who took residence in Victoria, Negroes Occidental. Her artistic *ouuvres* has adorned the Chapel of St. Joseph the Worker in the compound of the Victorias Sugar Milling Company. Her mosaic and murals unmistakably portrayed Jesus Christ as a Filipino worker, emphasizing the use of local materials and Filipino concepts closely related to the life of the workers. Her portraits of Jesus Christ emphasize the human characteristics of Jesus – with a short haircut, brown complexion, beardless face, flat nose, and with a barong Filipino attire. She justifies her portrayal of Jesus as a Filipino with these words: “True, Christ was born a Jew, not a Filipino, but he was born, died on the cross, and rose again triumphantly for all Filipinos as well as for all the rest of the world... Seeing Christ suffer on the cross as a Filipino may help us see his sufferings in our neighbors, and to love them as we claim to love him.”²¹

THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE NEW FILIPINO GENERATION

Now that we have discussed the changing images or faces of Jesus Christ in Filipino literary and visual arts, let us go back to the original question of Jesus “Who do you say that I am?” In doing this, we hope to answer the question of whether or not our faith in Jesus Christ is important in our search for true Filipino identity. We need to understand the context in Matthew 16:13-16 and clarify why Jesus raised the question concerning his identity to his disciples. It was a time of impending crisis for him and for the disciples towards the end of Jesus’ public ministry. Likewise, for us, wrestling with the same question would bring a time of crisis. It is critical because to answer his question is to respond to his challenge

²¹Ade de Bethune, (1954) “Philippine Adventure,” *Philippine Studies* (December 1954), p. 30; Cf. also Douglas J. Elwood and Patricia L. Magdamo (1971) *Christ in Philippine Context*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, p. 15.

and his call for genuine discipleship. In other words, it is a moment of decision for us. Furthermore, to declare that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah] is critical because we have to take seriously the meaning behind our declaration: our words must be validated by our works.

Among the original disciples, it was Simon Peter who articulated an answer to the question. His declaration: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Yet, Peter himself seemed to misunderstand the meaning of his statement; he did not fully understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. Certainly, the same is true with other disciples. If it was so difficult for those who lived, talked and walked with Jesus to fully understand his being the Messiah, how much more difficult for us NOW who are separated from him by TIME [more than 2000 years] and by SPACE [more than 2000 miles].” Jesus Christ, who is the living Lord and Master of our life, cannot be confined to any doctrinal formulation. Therefore, we need to personally encounter Jesus as our own Master and Lord.

In the process of encountering the risen Christ, we will realize that the “I” who answers the question [“Who do you say that I am?”] needs to be transformed by the encounter with others who are also answering the same question. In encountering other answers, our beings, our backgrounds and beliefs, our problems and doubts, our hopes and aspirations in life, will be changed. To some of us, this experience may be threatening. But, ultimately, we hope that our personal encounter with Jesus will be a liberating experience. It will bring to us new conviction and commitment to Christ. a proof of the iov of Christian discipleshin.

Today, says Brown, there is a convergence between the biblical belief in Jesus as the liberator and the cry of the oppressed people for liberation. To see the world through the eyes other than our own should mean seeing the world through the eyes of the poor. What would the world look like to half-naked children who go around and scavenge for something to fill in their empty but bulging stomachs? We can no longer shut our ears to the

overwhelming human suffering of people in our land. The claim of Jesus to bring freedom and the overwhelming cries of people for freedom are inextricably linked and cannot be separated.

It is imperative, therefore, that as disciples of Christ we must proclaim the gospel of liberation. We should reach out not only to the “non-believers” but also to the “non-persons” as well. Non-persons are those whom the world ignores, or uses and after using, they are crushed and discarded. The non-persons are marginalized because they cry not only for bread but also for freedom and meaning. And their cry is simply not heard. Their personhood is simply violated and denied. Therefore, we cannot talk about the Lordship of Jesus and the reconciling love of God unless the cries of those who are victimized as non-persons become the persistent sound that we hear. We have no right to talk about the redemptive work of Jesus unless we can see the world through the eyes of the poor and oppressed. Jesus insisted that we cannot live by bread alone, yet he never pretended that we live without bread. In fact, Jesus portrays the coming of God’s reign with the use of powerful images like abundant feasts and banquets prepared for the poor and the marginalized. He left us a symbol of his loving presence concretized through eating and drinking together in the Lord’s Supper.²³ That is why St. Paul admonishes us that we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves if we share the meal with Jesus yet we deny meals to millions of God’s people because of our built-in oppressive and unjust social structures. It is clear from the biblical accounts that Jesus is not satisfied with what we know and what we see. We have to act upon what we know and what we see!

²²Brown, Robert McAfee (1976). “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites,” *The Ecumenical Review* Vol. 28, No. 1, p.15.

²³Melanio L. Aoanan, (2006). “Teolohiya ng Bituka at Pagkain Tungo sa Teolohiyang Pumipiglas,” in *Anumang Hiram Kung Hindi Masikip ay Maluwang: Iba’t-Ibang Anyo ng Teolohiyang Pumipiglas*. Edited by Revelation E. Velunta. Dasmariñas City: Union Theological Seminary, pp. 32-54.

A FILIPINO CHRISTOLOGY AS IMPETUS FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

In a benchmark study, Fr. Benigno Beltran, SVD, offers us an excellent example of doing theology with a deep “faith seeking understanding” and with a committed love for the poor Filipinos. Originally submitted as a dissertation at the Gregorian University in Rome, this work shows Beltran’s “personal journey, [and] critical reflection” which he did with... the poor in Metro Manila. It was a very ambitious social science survey research involving more than 2,400 informal settlers with the use of sophisticated software (SPSS) to validate his data. He found out what people believe about Jesus, and then reflect critically and systematically on the findings to see whether they correlate with what the church wants to teach.²⁴ It deals not only with a Christology that is focused on the story of the *pasyon* [life and suffering] of Jesus and relates them with experiences and aspirations of struggling people.

Beltran says that the task of evangelization is basically a “process of communication” and the inculturation of Christianity. He raises the question of “effectiveness” of the church’s transmission of her doctrines about Christ to Filipino believers. The question of whether Christian doctrines are adequately communicated must push theologians to “look for more effective means of communicating and handing down the doctrines of the church.”²⁵

Let me share very briefly six insights from Beltran’s study. *First*, let me highlight the very significant statistical finding on the knowledge about the person of Jesus Christ: 98.81% of the respondents believe that Jesus is fully the Son of God. On the knowledge about the functions of Christ, there is a close connection of Jesus’ redemptive, revelational, and creative functions with belief in his divinity. 92% claim that salvation is possible only through Christ.²⁶

²⁴Benigno P. Beltran, SVD, (1987) *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ*. Manila: Divine Word Publications, p. 24. See also Pedro C. Sevilla, SJ’s review of the book in *LANDAS: A Journal of Theology*. Vol 2, 1988. Loyola School of Theology, pp. 137-139.

²⁵Beltran, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁶Ibid., p. 261.

Second, the socio-economic inequity has something to do with the lack of understanding of the church's teaching about Jesus Christ. There is a direct correlation between respondents' understanding of Christ and the fact that only 3% of the population control 65% of the total wealth of the nation. Says Beltran: "One cannot proclaim Jesus as Lord and defend with force a corrupt social order; one cannot declare that Jesus is consubstantial with God the Father and live casually with injustice, shouting 'communists!' whenever anyone suggests a better distribution of wealth."²⁷ Corollary to this, scientific surveys on theology and faith enable us to formulate a theoretical framework that makes intelligible and meaningful the significance of Jesus Christ in the Philippine context. Says Beltran: "Filipino Christology must attempt an exhaustive conceptual construction that answers who God is and what human beings can expect of him in the light of the belief that Jesus is the human being who is the embodiment of God's eternal, saving, gracious and loving presence."²⁸

Third, there is a need for a continuing real dialogue between church people and professional theologians. The task of theological reflection is for every believer; but not everyone should be a professional theologian. "The Church is not a Church of theology professors, yet the Church needs professors of theology." The theological task necessitates that the "fruits of the people's reflection on the Christian faith [must] filter back to the professional theologians just as the works of theologians have to be communicated back to the people."²⁹

Fourth, Beltran points to the fact that traditional western Christology has been saddled with the weakness, the tendency to be individualistic. This is contrary to the Filipino understanding of what a human being is. The human being is essentially a "being-in-relation," thus, the Filipino understanding of a human person is relational. "The Filipino conceives of humanity and personality as

²⁷Beltran, op. cit., pp. 264-265.

²⁸Ibid., p. 205.

²⁹Ibid., p. 265.

basically relation, dialogue and communion.”³⁰ Therefore, the continuing presence of the Risen Lord should become a transforming power in Filipino history.

Fifth, Beltran was intrigued by his respondents’ very low score on recognizing the image of the Risen Christ - only 10.3%. What seems to be the reasons behind the lack of importance given to the centrality of the resurrected Christ in Roman Catholic belief and piety? Beltran suggests four reasons: 1) Easter is not a charged symbol in the Filipino experience because it usually coincides with hot season that does not symbolize the new life; 2) the Holy Week usually drain the energies of the people; 3) cultural values reinforced by the folk devotions do not really focus on the victory of Christ but more on the joy of Mary; and 4) the Filipino view of history which does not “expect the new heaven and the new earth minimizes the appreciation of Christ’s resurrection as guaranteeing the coming of the eschatological kingdom.”³¹

Sixth, Beltran raises the implications of Christology for understanding how life is to be lived toward a genuine meaning of Filipino spirituality. In asking who Jesus is for us, we also ask the questions of who we are, who is God, and how we should live if Jesus is the Son of God. The crucial point in Christology is: “If God acted in Jesus to save the whole human race, then to imitate him is to participate in the very life of God.” Since a human being is essentially a related being, one who lives exclusively for oneself is blind to his/her state of inner oneness with the rest of humanity. If one is to be human, one must live a life of interrelatedness by caring for those in need. Being is coming into communion with others. There is no being apart from relatedness.³²

Necessarily, Beltran points to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as a model of a “life-in-relation.” “The Triune God is a relationship of endless, perfect, mutual self-giving... The Father gives himself totally to the Son who gives himself in turn to the

³⁰Beltran, op. cit., p. 226.

³¹Ibid., p. 139.

³²Ibid., p. 244.

Father. The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is the bond of their perfect self-giving love.” The Holy Trinity constitutes a community of persons involved in the history of women and men. Expounding further on the Trinity, Beltran writes: “The Father is God-before-us in history, giving life to things that do not yet exist and making ever new beginnings; the Son is Emmanuel, God-with-us, sharing our humanity and our destiny; and the Spirit is God-within-us as the continuing presence of Jesus to human history in a creative and more concrete way in the community of believers.”³³

CONCLUSION

The struggle to respond to the fundamental question raised by Jesus can be truly achieved in the community of the Triune God. Understood in the Trinitarian model of human existence, i.e., being-in-relation-with-others in history, our identity as Christians is of necessity an ongoing process of becoming until, in God’s own time, the reign of justice and peace is finally established. Meanwhile, says Emmanuel “Weng” Garibay [our very own UTS Alumnus], “a liberating Christology requires the re-introduction of the Biblical Christ as the ultimate paradigm of being truly human.” More than this, he firmly suggests that Christianity in the Philippines has to “reaffirm its own history, such that any Christology that evolves should also weave stories of liberation struggles of the Filipino people as a legitimate part of God’s participation in our history. We have to learn how to [venerate] our own martyrs.” Because of this, Garibay portrayed Christ who exactly resembles Andres Bonifacio, the founder of the Katipunan. He justifies this bold act with these words: “God’s incarnation if we take it seriously as an event that took place in history should transcend the confines of that one time in human history. God’s incarnation should now be taken as a continuing event that is always taking place whenever people struggle against forces of

³³Beltran, op. cit., pp. 244.

greed and destruction. God is always within people who fight to restore God's order in the world. Christology in the Philippine context affirms the presence of God in people who fight for justice and for the dignity of life. Christology is the energizing hope that gave courage to martyrs like Andres Bonifacio...."³⁴

As followers of Christ, we have a symbol that accompanies us in the vicissitudes of our struggles - symbol of the Crucified Christ, who died and was buried, but on the third day he rose again in victory! The Risen Christ serves as an impetus for transformation. The Risen Christ remains a strong inspiration in the struggle for transformation of church and society. There is a book published by the Promotion for Church People's Response that provides incontrovertible evidence of the struggle and sacrifices of martyrs: bishops, priests, nuns, pastors, deaconesses, seminarians and lay people.³⁵ Bishop Julio X. Labayen of Infanta, says in his foreword, "Their love for, and commitment to our people, particularly the downtrodden, is measured by the expression of their devotion: the offering of their lives in death and in ignominy. They prove to us that the power of the risen Lord is operative in them and among Christians today."³⁶

The struggle towards Easter and the fruition of God's reign continues. The Filipino exercises his/her faith by following Jesus to be among the poor; being like Him who preached and healed; taught and counseled; denounced evil and upheld justice. We are assured that Jesus the Christ freely loves us and lives for us so that we can also freely love and live for the service of others. Jesus the Christ is the concrete manifestation of God's love who, being in the form of God, changed his nature to be one with us [Phil. 2:6-7]. Jesus has shown us what it means to live a life of active concern and commitment for the well-being of others.

³⁴Emmanuel Garibay, (1995) "Christology in the Philippine Context," *NCCP News Magazine* (April-June 1995) p.46.

³⁵According to the report of the UCCP Human Rights Desk as of 1989, there were about 60 members of the UCCP who were victimized. See *Human Rights, Justice and Peace: Manual of Reference*. Edited by Alvaro Senturias. Quezon City: UCCP Human Rights Desk, 1989, pp. 147-150.

³⁶PCPR (1989) *That We may Remember*. Quezon City: Socio-Pastoral Institute. 1989.

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