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EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



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PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

Largest denomination	Methodist	4,361	1,240,000
Korean Methodist Christian Church			

Pentecostal: denominations	8*1,429	*1,252,535
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Yoido Full Gospel Church	10 Churches	Satelite	706,000
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Evangelical Church: 2 denominations	Holiness*2,542	*1,067,534
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Baptist: 5 denominations	*1,910	*850,384
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1994 Statistics from the Christian Newspaper, 1995

* 1993 Christian Almanac, Christian Literature Press, Seoul, President, Young Je Han

Dr Bong Rin Ro is Director of the WEF Theological Commission and Missions Director, Torch Centre, Seoul, Korea. [p. 354](#)

Theological Issues in the Philippine Context

Rodrigo D. Tano

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There are those who believe that systematic theology (traditionally formulated and taught) is the only valid theology because it is the only type that is biblically informed. Any other type, particularly contextual theology, is not valid since it may not be biblically based; hence, it should be rejected. Little do they realize that traditional systematic theology is itself arbitrarily organized around a system.

The traditional understanding of theology, systematic theology in particular, is that it is a discipline that presents an orderly, unified formulation of truth about God, man and

the world as set forth in divine revelation. This concept of the nature and function of theology is exemplified by A. H. Strong in his description of theology as the ‘ascertainment of the facts respecting God and the relation between God and the universe, and the exhibition of these facts in their rational unity, as connected parts of a formulated and organic system of truth’.¹

The basic—if not the sole function—of theology, according to this understanding, is the logical formulation of biblical teachings into a comprehensive, integrated whole. Accordingly, the desired end in theological activity is a ‘*theologia perennis*, the ever self-identical, unchanging articulation and application of immutable divine truth’.²

It has to be recognized that the systematic and comprehensive explication of biblical faith is most essential. Since the teachings of Scripture are not arranged in an orderly and comprehensive manner, it is most helpful to individual Christians and the church at large if such teachings are systematized.

It also has to be noted that although systematic theology is necessary, it is not sufficient for Christian thinkers simply to build p. 355 theological systems. Christian or biblical truth must be a living and transforming power. It must address issues and problems; it must meet people’s practical needs; it must enable the church to be God’s people where they are situated. The contextual realities which the church faces demand a pastoral and prophetic theology. This will require not the setting aside of biblical, systematic or historical theology, but going beyond these disciplines into critical but relevant theological reflection. Theology in Asia, then, as suggested by Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama, does not begin by ‘studying Augustine, Barth or Rahner with an English-Indonesian (or English-Chinese, or English-Thai) dictionary nearby. It must begin with an interest in people.’³

One may be a student of theology but not a theologian, for a theologian is one who moves beyond mastering a theological system (a finished product) and engages in theological reflection and creative formulation (a continuing process). Theological reflection ‘involves a proper grasp of the meaning of God’s revelation in history and its relation to the present moment’.⁴ To understand the present the theologian should have a knowledge of the past, and a thorough understanding of the relevance of historical, cultural, social, and economic forces presently at work.

Theological activity, particularly in the Third World, should include wrestling with both the text (Bible) and the context, seeking the meaning of the present in the light of God’s Word and his purposes. As evangelicals we uphold the Scriptures as the unchanging basis of Christian teaching and practice. Given varied and changing situations, there will be a variety of formulations and applications of this unchanging truth. Therefore, we can speak of one truth but many ways of communicating and applying God’s truth in view of changing situations from country to country and from region to region. It is in this sense that we can have Asian or Latin American theology, Filipino or Japanese theology. Thus, to speak of a certain type of theology as Western, Asian or black or feminist, is to recognize its specific marks—its method, emphases, themes and concerns.

¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 2.

² David Lutz, ‘Theology at Risk’, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (Spring-Summer 1974), 171.

³ Kosuke Koyama, ‘Reflections on Associations of Theological Schools in Southeast Asia’, *Southeast Asia Journal of Theology*, (1974), 22.

⁴ Rodrigo D. Tano, ‘Toward an Evangelical Asian Theology’, in Bong Ro and Ruth Eshenauer, eds., *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts* (Tainan: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 94.

The text (Bible) should always enter into a dynamic interaction with the life-situation (context) of the church. And it is from this engagement that a life-situation or contextual theology emerges. As a theology-on-the-way, or pilgrim theology, contextual theology is neither final nor complete. From this perspective, Christian theology is not static but dynamic, and theological reflection is an ongoing enterprise. Clearly then, theology is both a finished product as well as a process, a *noun* but also a *verb*. p. 356

THEOLOGICAL SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

In assessing the theological situation in the Philippines, Filipino Protestant theologian Emerito Nacpil reported that 'there are no clearly defined theological movements or theological schools of thought'.⁵ For while evangelical theology has had a predominant influence, 'there are no great or near-great writing theologians'.⁶ Nacpil points to some factors that explain the lack of significant writing, especially among Protestants.

First, the Protestant churches in the Philippines—products of American missionary effort—resemble their mother churches. The parent missionary organizations and denominations themselves have not sought to indigenize 'the ethos of the Christian life, the modes of theological thinking and the denominational emphases ...'.⁷ Moreover, the concerns and issues affecting Protestant churches are practical in nature: evangelism, pastoral work, and church extensions. Theological reflection is minimal. A third factor is the unbalanced stress placed on the personal aspect of salvation to the neglect of the needs of the whole person and the implication of salvation in social and national life. Finally, Protestant churches have separated and entrenched themselves from the world, confining their vision and activities almost exclusively to the inner nurture and the maintenance of organizational machinery.

To a great extent, the Protestant community cares little about understanding, much less relating, the gospel to the Philippine context. The curriculum and the training programme of Philippine theological institutions, most of which were established by expatriate missionaries, hardly include a course on theological reflection. Like their mother churches, these schools are not in touch with Philippine realities. While there is a healthy emphasis upon the proper exegesis of the Scriptures, there is no concern to properly exegete the context. Filipino theological students appear to be strangers in their own native land. The so-called study of theology is often confined to the mastery of a packaged theology that is often couched in foreign categories and deals with issues arising from another milieu whose theological agenda are not relevant to the local people. Creative theological reflection and construction which confronts the context with the text/Bible is not taught. Attempts to contextualize theology are often resisted for dubious reasons.

Among Protestants, those within the mainline denominations more than groups within evangelicalism and the charismatic movement, have had greater success in interacting with the context. Very few evangelicals (this writer included) have produced theological writings of significance. Such pieces, if any, are occasional and take the form of reactions to some socio-political p. 357 issues, or attempts to adapt systematic theology to the Philippine situation.

⁵ Emerito Nacpil, 'Philippines: A New Gospel for the Filipino', in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 117.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 117.

What has been stated about Philippine Protestants does not hold true concerning Roman Catholics. Several Roman Catholic churchmen have been perceptive in their analysis of the Philippine situation and have published a considerable amount of substantial literature. Leonardo Mercado, SVD, in *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*⁸ and in *Elements of Filipino Theology*⁹ attempts to understand the Filipino as a person, as a thinker, and as one who seeks harmony with himself, with others, with nature, and with God. His approach is incarnational, as he adapts Christian concepts to popular beliefs and practices. While evangelicals may not always agree with his method and conclusions, Mercado's writings provide extensive information on the Filipino world view, especially on the world beyond, fate and freedom, sin and curse, death, the spirits, and departed ancestors.

Vitaliano Gorospe, SJ has examined Filipino values and how Christian renewal may be attained by the internalizing of Christian truths through the value system. In *Filipino Values Revisited*¹⁰ Gorospe assembles the bulk of his writings which focus on faith and justice, active non-violence, a variety of moral issues, and a theological interpretation of 'people power'. In *The Filipino Search for Meaning*,¹¹ Gorospe adapts Christian ethics to the Philippine life-situation.

Catalina Arevalo, SJ, Edicio dela Torre, SVD, and Carlos Abesamis, SJ formulate a theology of development and liberation, given the inequalities, exploitation and the attendant suffering of the masses.¹² A lay Catholic theologian, Jose de Mesa has proposed 'theological rerooting' as an approach to incarnate the Christian gospel within the local culture. This approach is demonstrated in *And God Said, 'Bahala Na'*¹³ and *In Solidarity with Culture*.¹⁴ In these works, he attempts to overcome the 'lack of synthesis between the two thought and behavior systems, namely the values of the Filipino culture and the values of the Christian faith',¹⁵ which lack has produced 'folk Catholicism', 'popular religiosity', and 'split-level Christianity'. De Mesa believes that it is only as the gospel is re-rooted within the Philippine cultural soil that it can transform the latter. p. 358

Probably the most systematized and comprehensive presentation of the major Christian concepts in the light of Philippine culture is Belita's *The Way of the Greater Self*.¹⁶ Utilizing the Filipino mythos of 'the greater self', he shows how the greater self is redeemed, enriched, nurtured, and preserved by the gratuity of God's grace in the person and redemptive work of Christ, and how life-in-community may be informed by the gospel.

⁸ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1976).

⁹ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1976).

¹⁰ Vitaliano Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited* (Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1988).

¹¹ Vitaliano Gorospe, *The Filipino Search for Meaning* (Manila: Jesuit Educational Association, 1974).

¹² These Filipino liberationists have produced articles on liberation and development which have become part of anthologies on Filipino theology.

¹³ Jose de Mesa, *And God Said, 'Bahala Na'* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1979).

¹⁴ Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity With the Culture* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1991.)

¹⁵ De Mesa, *In Solidarity*, 8.

¹⁶ Jaime A. Belita, *The Way of Greater Self* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991).

ISSUES AND THEMES IN FILIPINO THEOLOGY

There are salient issues and themes that, to this writer, need to be dealt with in the attempt to bring the Christian faith to bear upon the local scene. Principal lines of biblical truth as well as theological motifs will be used to confront issues or develop pertinent themes.

The Filipino World View

Anthropologists consider the belief system or world view as the control box of culture. A world view is equated with the religio-philosophical framework against which the members of a culture seek to understand the universe and to relate to it in a functional manner. In terms of a local theology, this framework constitutes the context and provides the vehicle through which Christian truth may be understood and communicated.

The Filipino world view is characterized as animistic and fatalistic.¹⁷ In spite of the process of modernization and the advances in science and technology, the rural Filipino still looks at the world and nature as governed by personal, supernatural spirit beings (as opposed to the Western impersonal mechanistic view). His explanation of events in the universe is not rational nor scientific but religious and metaphysical. The Filipino farmer, for example, may rely more on planting rituals or luck than on the use of fertilizers or irrigation for a good harvest. On the whole, sickness and health, good weather or bad, volcanic eruptions, success or failure are understood in terms of a belief in the supernatural and in a capricious deterministic divine providence.

The Filipino outlook is also fatalistic. This perspective is expressed in the ideas of *swerte* and *bahala na*. *Swerte* is understood as one's predetermined lot in life, or simply one's luck. The concept is a major component of the traditional world view and supports the central value system. *Swerte* appears to be the explanation of everything that happens in one's personal life. This belief which is traceable to pre-Spanish origins emphasizes blind submission to the 'divine will'. Many Filipinos equate 'Thy will be done' with the unbiblical notion of '*pagbuot sa Dios*' (Visayan), '*itinalaga ng Dios*' (Tagalog) 'It is the will of God'. These beliefs perpetuate poverty p. 359 and oppression and undergird a theology of limited good.

Akin to the concept of *swerte* is the cyclical view of life. Popular sayings express this inclination: '*gulong ng kapalaran*' (wheel of fortune); '*gulong ng palad*' (wheel of the palm). The picture is that of riding on the rim of a wheel of fate. If one waits long enough, one will find oneself on the other side of the wheel. Now he is under, tomorrow he will be on top. The average Filipino accepts his fate and comforts himself by saying: '*Ganyan ang gulong ng kapalaran*' (That is the wheel of fortune). The attitude of *bahala na* gives rise to optimistic fatalism and baseless resignation expressed as 'come what may', 'it's up to God', '*que sera, sera*', 'What do I care?'

Consequences of the Filipino World View

How does the animistic, fatalistic outlook shape the Filipino's attitude and behaviour? Let me enumerate some ways.

First, the Filipino is constantly under the grip of fear. The spirits that inhabit and control nature are both benevolent and malevolent. Often they are considered vengeful and capricious. They need to be appeased through the offering of sacrifices, novenas or *panatas* (devotions or vows).

¹⁷ For a discussion of this subject, see Socorro Espiritu, et al., *Sociology in the New Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, 1977), 73-74.

Second, the fatalistic outlook reduces the Filipino to a hapless victim of an arbitrary and inexorable fate. Here, man ceases to be the rational, moral being God intended him to be, capable of making responsible choices that could shape his destiny.

Third, the *swerte/bahala na* mentality is behind the Filipino's lack of initiative and foresight. It explains the do-nothing or do-little attitude that produces an unwarranted sense of dependence on *awa*, or the dole out.

Christian Faith and the Filipino's World View

This outlook on life and the world with its negative consequences requires a fully formulated, biblically based but culturally relevant understanding of man, Christ, and salvation for the Filipino. He needs to hear the liberating gospel, of the Christ who came to give freedom (salvation as *kalayaan*—freedom) from the flow and grip of evil spirits, from enslaving fatalism and from the distorted view of man as a helpless victim of circumstances. Christ should be presented as the powerful One who has triumphed over the powers through his physical suffering on the cross (the *Christus Victor* motif of the atonement). The Filipino needs to encounter God, the almighty and benevolent Father-Spirit who has control over nature and the spirit world, the integrating factor in the universe.

Against the fatalistic outlook that reduces the Filipino to a puny victim of blind, inexorable fate, we need to expound the biblical teaching on man as a responsible being, capable of making responsible choices. The Bible pictures man as lord over creation with the prerogative of tending, controlling and harnessing it for his use, and as shaping history in partnership with the Creator.

Man need not submit to blind fate. He can alter physical and social conditions instead of resigning himself p.360 to fate and accepting the status quo. In Christ, man is no longer a slave but a son who can, in partnership with God and in faithful stewardship, direct history to fulfil the divine purpose.

THE FILIPINO UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST

The dominant images of Christ to the Filipino are the *Santo Nino* (Holy Child) and the *Santo Entierro* (Entombed Christ).¹⁸ The one represents the weak, innocent child and the other, the tragic victim of suffering and death. These images suit the Filipino's sense of weakness and experiences of suffering under years of colonial rule and in the face of natural or man-made calamities.

Needless to say, these two images of Christ represent inadequate views. The child Jesus never grows up to manhood. This image overlooks the man Jesus, the virile Son of Man and Son of God in the gospels who preached the goodness of God to the poor, denounced the hypocrites, and drove away the moneychangers from the temple. The Man of Nazareth was certainly not a weak, face-saving Christ. In the words of Father Villote, he was the 'disturbing Christ' who made the comfortable uneasy and assaulted the oppressive establishment.

On the other hand, the horizontal Christ who lies in state (like the Black Nazarene of the Quiapo Church) is not the Christ of Easter Sunday. He is not the risen, glorious, awesome Christ whom John the seer saw as One whose eyes were like flaming fire, whose voice was the sound of many waters, from whose mouth issued a two-edged sword.

¹⁸ See Douglas Elwood and Patricia Magdamo, in *Christ in Philippine Context* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971) for a historical and theological consideration of 'the popular Filipino Christ'.

To have a vibrant, assured faith, the Filipino needs to see Jesus crucified, buried, risen and glorified—the triumphant One. It is to the living Christ that the Filipino should give his allegiance, not to his *sakop* (group). The Filipino should make the will of Christ the rule of his conduct, not *pakikisama* (getting along) or *utang na loob* (sense of indebtedness to others). A biblically based but culturally relevant Christology for the Philippines could be formulated with the use of these titles of Christ: *Cristo Rey* (Christ the King), especially for Easter Sunday; *Cristong Matagumpay* (*Christus Victor*); *Cristong Makapangyarihang Tagapagligtas* (Christ the Almighty Saviour); *Cristong Buhay na Panginoon* (Christ the Living Lord). The meaning and implications of these titles for a Christology in the Philippine setting need to be elaborated on.

The Filipino Concept of Sin

Some anthropologists look at cultures according to their stress on either guilt or shame. A guilt culture stresses moral standards and the cultivation of moral sensitivity. In a shame culture, the concern is not to let one's sin become known. Due to a fragile sense of worth, the Filipino avoids being exposed, lest he be *mapahiya* (shamed or put to shame). Mercado makes the curious observation that when faced with the [p. 361](#) choice of being put to shame and committing sin, the typical Filipino chooses the 'lesser evil' of committing sin. (Is the Filipino the only one with this tendency?)

The Filipino's low view of sin and guilt is seen in the words used in the major dialects for sin. In his study of these words, Mercado claims that the Visayan *sala* and the Ilocano *basol* carry the idea of sin as involuntary, as a shortcoming or flaw, not as a serious offence.¹⁹ Though some Filipino proverbs show that the Filipino feels guilt and sin, the sense of guilt does not appear to be strong. Mercado cites two sayings to support his conclusion: '*Sapagkat tayo ay tao lamang*' (because we are only human); '*Masayop man gani ang kabaw nga upat may till; ang tao pa bay dill?*' (Visayan: If a carabao with its four feet takes a wrong step, what more for man?)²⁰ This means that since nobody is perfect, we should not be hard on those who fall into sin! Faults and imperfections are natural.

It also appears that the Filipino's behaviour is controlled more by the group around him (sort of an external conscience or point of reference) than by inner conviction. That is, there is the inability to internalize moral standards and stand up for them. (Again, is the Filipino the only human being on earth that behaves this way?)

Despite these observations, however, Mercado is quick to add that it does not follow that Filipinos have no feelings of guilt. There is an abundance of popular sayings that indicate this, such as the Visayan expression *Ang taong sad-an maluspad* (A guilty man turns pale), or the Ilocano *Ti adda babakna, adda aluadanna* (Whoever has sin has something to be aware of).²¹ Actually, the so-called weak sense of guilt may be checked by the Filipino concept of *gaba* (Visayan), *sumpa* (Tagalog), or *lunod* (Ilocano), which means divine retribution or curse. Mercado claims this idea is the local people's answer to the issue of moral responsibility.

Mercado, however, does not go beyond the analysis of the indigenous concepts of sin and *gaba*, so the following lines of biblical teaching must be used to deal with the problem. First, Philippine society (or any other society) should be taught that the God we worship and serve is the most high, the holy and righteous Lord who does not trifle with sin.

¹⁹ See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 77–84 for a full discussion of the Filipino understanding of sin and guilt.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

Corollary to this, the Filipino should be confronted with the true nature and consequence of sin as transgression not only against fellow human beings (horizontal dimension) but against God (vertical dimension). Second, a deeper sense of personal moral responsibility should be indicated to produce a feeling of true repentance for sin, not just remorse or regret or shame. There can be no true repentance apart from a pungent sense of culpability and guilt. Again, in relation to the points just cited, the Filipino (as well as other Asians) should be made to realize that sin is not simply the violation of some taboos or the transgression against an impersonal p. 362 cosmic force that will bring inevitable retribution (which *gala* is), in the Hindu sense of karma. The local belief of *gaba* as divine retribution needs correction or transformation with the biblical truth of divine wrath which is the eternal reaction of a personal God, not of angry capricious gods or the inexorable law of karma. Here, the gospel's gratuitous offer of pardon and acceptance in Christ should be proclaimed as an answer to the Filipino's sense of shame and fear of retribution.

God: Distant or Accessible

Though Filipinos relate almost every aspect of life and experience to God through religious rituals, they also think of him as lofty, remote and unapproachable. So in approaching him, they resort to intermediaries through which they can approach him. This 'distancing' of God gives the impression that he is unknown, remote and impersonal.²²

The concept of God as awesome, dwelling in unapproachable and dazzling glory is of course biblical. God, however, has come to us, identified with us and made himself accessible and available through the incarnation of Christ the Son. The incarnation affirmed man, and in Christ God has sought man, and made himself available to man. The God of the Bible is the 'Emmanuel'—'God with us' (the God who is '*malapit*', '*kasama natin*').

The Filipino should be enlightened with the truth that in approaching God he need not go through a plurality of intermediaries like the saints, Mary, or Christ. For example, the television programme by the 'Saint Peregrine—Jesus Help Me' group where prayers for healing and success are offered to God, Mother Mary, and to Saint Peregrine—Jesus Help Me demonstrates this plurality. Christ the Son of God is the *tanging Tagapamamagitan* (only Mediator between God and man).

The Concept of Salvation

A former actor was narrating his quest for life's meaning. He thought he would find it in wealth, pleasure and popularity. But these things did not give meaning and a sense of security. Through the reading of the Bible and listening to the gospel message via television, he met Christ, and found what he was searching for.

On the same platform with him was a Samal Christian who also shared his experience of salvation. One time he was sick. Moreover, he was bothered by Satan and evil spirits. He went to the *Imam* (priest) who prayed for him but he was not delivered. Then he was prayed for by a Protestant *Mastal* (Teacher-Pastor). God healed him of his sickness and delivered him from the spell of spirits. He then became a follower of *Isa Almasih* (Jesus Christ).

To the former actor, Christ can give meaning and a sense of security. To the animistic Samal Muslim, Christ is the powerful Healer-Deliverer. Before formulating an appropriate

²² See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* for limited discussion of the subject, 39–42.

soteriology for the Filipino, it should be noted that our Lord Jesus did not present a uniform message to all people. To the [p. 363](#) woman at the well he spoke about 'living water'. He confronted Nicodemus with the need to undergo spiritual rebirth. Indeed the New Testament concept of salvation comes under a variety of images depending on how the sinner's condition is construed: justification, reconciliation, union with Christ, spiritual rebirth, newness of life; abundant life, wholeness, etc. The search for a culturally relevant but biblically informed image of salvation for the Filipino is therefore legitimate.

If you ask a Filipino Roman Catholic to receive Christ as his 'personal Lord and Saviour' (this is the standard definition of the process of attaining salvation as presented through the witnessing tools used in the Philippines), he may respond that he 'receives' Christ every time he partakes of the bread and wine in the Holy Communion. This is the Filipino sacramentarian understanding of salvation. The majority of Filipinos believe that salvation can be earned by performing religious rituals, fulfilling *panatas* (vows, devotions) or offering sacrifice. Given the Filipino's world view and overall need, De Mesa suggests the intriguing indigenous idea of *ginhawa* as a rich and comprehensive concept with which to communicate the blessings that Christ came to bring to mankind. *Ginhawa* has a wide range of meaning within the local culture.²³ De Mesa lists the following which he elucidates with some examples: 1) Ease of life, comfortable living; 2) Relief from pain, sickness, straits or difficulty; 3) Consolation received; 4) Freedom from want; and 5) Convenience.²⁴

He believes that the idea of *ginhawa* could serve as the dynamic equivalent of the Greek *soteria*, the Latin *salus* (health), and the Hebrew *yasha* (the possession of space and the freedom and security which is gained by the removal of constriction.)

De Mesa explains that 'the term *ginhawa* is related to the different experiences of a person. These can be "physical", "emotional", "spiritual", or "material"—aspects which compose the life of man. The primary wish to every person in life is to be *maginhawa* in each of the aspects mentioned. This is really the ultimate goal of man.'²⁵ He believes *ginhawa* catches the 'reality of total well-being of man and men in God'.²⁶

What leads De Mesa to opt for *ginhawa* as the equivalent of salvation is that the term enables the Filipino to think of salvation not just in a spiritualistic but in a holistic sense. It addresses man's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. *Ginhawa* comes from God and Christ.

Much as the indigenous *ginhawa* concept appeals to the Filipino for its this-worldly holistic thrust, its emphasis is more on the physical, emotional and psychological needs of man, even though De Mesa is careful to include the spiritual and eschatological dimensions. He hardly treats man's sin and guilt and the atoning death of Christ. He may have this in mind when he speaks of [p. 364](#) spiritual *ginhawa* but he has almost nothing to say about it. These comments notwithstanding, De Mesa's effort to re-root the concept of salvation within the local culture is creative and insightful. It only needs a more careful exposition that embodies the meaning of Christ's salvific mission.

In evaluating the *ginhawa* idea, one of my students in Contemporary Asian Theology proposed *kalayaan* (freedom) as a more appropriate salvation theme for the Filipino. For Christ came to bring freedom—from sin and guilt, from principalities and powers, from a

²³ See de Mesa, *In Solidarity*, 75–101 for a full discussion of the subject.

²⁴ Ibid., 80–81.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 83.

low self-image (a mark of the average Filipino), from despair and suffering. 'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed ([Jn. 8:36](#)). 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free ...' ([Gal. 5:1](#)). In the Galatians passage, Paul speaks about freedom from the law, as the old master, from 'basic principles of the world' (principalities and powers that enslave mankind). Perhaps more than *ginhawa*, *kalayaan* should have a greater appeal to the fearful and insecure Filipino as the gift that Christ brings. This image needs to be expanded but it is sufficient simply to mention it here as a salvation image that is both biblical and relevant to the Philippine context.

SOME SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

At this point, let me isolate two socio-political issues that need to be continually addressed in the Philippines. First is the question of the relation between the institutional church and the government. Then there is the issue of social justice which requires the development of a theology of liberation. In wrestling with these questions, let me indicate some lines of teaching with which we can address the issues.

God and Caesar: The Church and the State

The political situation in many Asian countries is unstable and unpredictable. Revolutions, coups d'état, authoritarian rule, strikes and violent demonstrations and armed conflict occur frequently. What is the role of the Christian church regarding the exercise of political power? What is the relation between the church and the state? What is the place of the state in the purpose of God? From the biblical standpoint, the following statements may be made as guidelines in dealing with these issues.

First, power and authority belong to God. Government or the state reflects the lordship of God in a fallen world. Regimes and administrations may rise and fall, kings, emperors and governors may come and go, but government as an instrument which preserves order and stability remains, regardless of its forms. As a vehicle of the divine rule over the affairs of men, human government fulfils God's plan in the world.

Second, the basic functions of government are: 1) preserving order and stability (preservative); 2) restraint and punishment of evil (regulative and punitive); 3) rewarding the good (remunerative); 4) promotion of social justice and the welfare of the citizens (supportive).

Third, when a particular regime or administration fails to achieve these p. 365 functions, it ceases to fulfil the purpose of God for the state. It is therefore in need of reform, or it should be changed according to the processes and avenues available to the citizens. What these are will vary from country to country.

Fourth, government is to function within its legitimate boundaries under God. Caesar (government) is just Caesar, not God. When a ruler or regime becomes corrupt, cruel, and unjust, or if it takes the place of God, it should be exposed and when appropriate, it should be resisted and changed. For the Christian, it is better to obey God rather than men. Efforts to reform or change governments or rulers should be done peacefully and nonviolently.

Fifth, revolution as radical and violent change in the political order may or may not promote justice. It may in fact bring a worse form of bondage and tyranny. It could trigger a series of counter-revolutionary actions and reactions. It may not, therefore, be the best option. A thorough grasp and evaluation of the situation is required before action is taken.

In many Asian countries, the governing elite and affluent class are often unwilling to share the means of economic and social advancement with the majority of the citizens. Often they entrench themselves in power and seek to protect vested interests—their own, those of their supporters, or of multinational corporations that help maintain their power.

In such situations, Christians can join all men of good will in exposing exploitation, in support of just legislation that will enhance the condition of the weak and powerless, and in opposing ideologies and techniques that encourage the wrong use of power.

Social Justice and Liberation

While there are a variety of factors that bring about poverty, it is generally agreed that economic and social inequalities are related to unjust political and economic structures on the local and international level.

Brazilian Archbishop Don Helder Camara describes misery as violence in three institutionalized forms. There is the violence of the local elite who are rich and powerful at the expense of the majority. There is also the violence imposed by the developed world on underdeveloped countries through self-serving politics and an international monetary and trade system that favours the rich nations. The third form of violence is exercised by local governments which perpetuate the first two forms by maintaining the present oppressive economic and political structures.²⁷

This situation provides the matrix for a theology of development and liberation. An Asian theology of development and liberation has arisen—particularly in the Philippines and in India—where the church is constrained to address the issue of poverty and injustice.

Human development refers to the ‘development of peoples in dignity as persons and the achievement of freedom, justice, and peace in the human community.’²⁸ The goals of development are ‘freedom from misery, an increased share of responsibility without oppression of any kind and in security from situations that do violence to the dignity of man ... in brief, to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more’.²⁹ Development is not possible, however, if the present oppressive social, economic and political structures are not rearranged so that the welfare of the poor and the exploited is promoted. Thus development should be linked to the concept of liberation. Liberation is the ‘effort of an underdeveloped people to break out of a condition of underdevelopment, dependency and marginality.’³⁰ The concern of liberation then should not only be with ‘enlarging the cake’, but with changing the way it is divided and distributed.

The following lines of biblical teaching may be utilized to formulate a theology of development and liberation to respond to the conditions of poverty, misery and injustice that pertain to some Asian countries. First is the infinite dignity and worth of man. Created in the image of God, every man and woman is of infinite worth and dignity. Second, God opposes the proud and the powerful classes that oppress the poor. Through the Old Testament prophets, God denounced the crimes directed against the poor—for example, fraud in trading and land-grabbing (see [Am. 2:6f](#), [4:1f](#); [5:1f](#); [8:5f](#); [Hos. 12:8](#); [Mic. 2:2](#); [Isa. 5:8](#)). God hears the voice of the poor who look to him for help ([Job 34:28](#); [Ps. 10:14](#)), and promises justice to them ([Isa. 5:8–10](#), [10:1–4](#); [Hos. 12:8–9](#)). The Messiah is pictured as coming to defend the rights of the weak and the poor ([Isa. 11:4](#), [49:13](#); [Ps. 72:2f](#)). From these indications, we can state that though the church should minister to the rich and the poor, it should be on the side of the poor if only to expose the guilt of the oppressive rich.

²⁷ Rodrigo D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981), 102.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Catalino Arevalo, in Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 102–103.

³⁰ Ibid.

Third, the gospel brings a liberating message. Liberation is not simply from spiritual bondage. Man should be freed from every force that enslaves and degrades his personhood. The gospel of Christ addresses the total person with its message of freedom in Christ.

CONCLUSION

There are other themes and issues that could be added to this list. These include the Filipino spirit world and the Christian response to it, the phenomenon of 'split-level Christianity' in the Philippines, and the Filipino value system and how the gospel could transform it to bring about spiritual renewal in the Philippine church and in society.

The primary need is to re-root the gospel within the Philippine cultural soil in order to bring transformation. Short of this, the Philippine church will be susceptible to syncretistic faith, ideological captivity, and irrelevance. For years folk Christianity has prevailed. It is obvious by now that the process of relating the Christian faith to the Philippine situation requires the contextualization of theology. Contextualization involves: 1) the interaction of the text (Bible) p. 367 and the context (historical situation); 2) interpreting, challenging, and transforming a particular situation; and 3) adapting the gospel within a given culture.

It is to be admitted that preserving the purity of the gospel, while making it relevant to our times, is a necessary but complicated and risky task. Nevertheless, it must be done. As Argentinean pastor-theologian Rene Padilla correctly states, 'What is necessary ... is a theology that, taking advantage of that which is of value in any study, whatever its source, shows the relevance of biblical revelation to our culture, the relationship between the Gospel and the problem that the Church is facing in our society.'³¹ This enterprise requires a thorough understanding of our life-situation and the ability to interpret it in the light of the unchanging gospel. To properly 'read' our life-situation we need to utilize the research tools of the social sciences. Above all, we should study the Bible seriously and relate its teachings to our time.

There are at least three implications for theological education and the ministry of the church that arise out of this discussion. The curriculum of Philippine theological schools should go beyond the traditional biblical and theological course offerings and include a study of the contextual theological method and theological reflection. The course should be required of all students. It should deal with the Philippine context (history, world view, the value system, folk religion, historical, social and political realities), the nature and method of theology, and creative theological construction that addresses the context. Simply translating or adapting western theological traditions will not suffice. Systematic theology should be taught with sensitivity to the context. In some cases, segments of the western theological tradition may be bracketed off for lack of relevance.

The educational and nurturing programmes in the local church should deal with the question: How can I live for Christ as a Filipino, given the local world view and value system?

Further, we need to consider Schreiter's question, 'for whom is local theology intended?' It is imperative to recognize the audience of theology, as 'the question of audience affects the choice of themes, the procedures for development, and the criteria for judging its adequacy.'³² Tracy distinguishes three 'publics for theology: academy,

³¹ Padilla, Rene. 'Contextualization of the Gospel.' Unpublished paper.

³² Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 36.

church, and society.’³³ Much of what is taught and written is directed to the academy (professional theologians or seminary students).

The service of the professional theologian or biblical scholar is of infinite value not just to the academy but also to the church. However, biblical/theological truth must be communicated intelligibly to the church and the community. Theological schools can train their students to do this.

Dr Rodrigo D. Tano is Principal of the Alliance Biblical Seminary, Manila, Phillippines. p. 368

Contextualisation in Chinese Culture

Bruce J. Nicholls

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental factors in the growth of the church is our willingness and ability to interpret Christian Faith in the changing cultural contexts in which we live. This is our missiological challenge today. In this address I will attempt to speak to two changing cultural contexts mainland China with its billion plus citizens and Vancouver, Canada, a city in which one third of the inhabitants are immigrants.

We have traditionally thought of our task as one of indigenizing the church in terms of the people’s traditional cultures and we continue to recognize the importance of this goal. However during the last twenty years the term ‘contextualising’ has been widely used, implying all that is meant by indigenization, but going beyond it to take into account the ‘process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterise the historical moment of nations in the Third World’.¹ Our task, then is to relate the gospel to both our traditional culture (in the case of Chinese culture this means primal shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) and to the modern industrial culture of secular materialism, and in the case of mainland China, to communism and its consequences. We may compare the difference between indigenization and contextualization to that between the National Geographic magazine and Time magazine. I enjoy both and I am sure you do also. However our task is more complex because most people live in at least two cultures at the same time. In business hours they are secular and materialist and at home they are traditional. For some people this creates conflicts, while others try to harmonize them.

In this address, I as a non-Chinese, will try to think in a Chinese way. How far I succeed or fail will show you how difficult the task is. Therefore I shall not use the lecture method of traditional western scholars which involves abstract linear thinking, rational language

³³ Ibid., 36.

¹ *Ministry in Context*, (Theological Education Fund, UK, 1972) p. 20.