

The Filipino Face of Christ

By

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"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."¹ Although Christ has remained the same, people of every age have differently viewed him.

I. THE MANY FACES OF CHRIST THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Pelikan has shown how people of the Western world had various faces of Jesus of Nazareth.² Each face influenced the politics, economy, history, and the Western culture in general. Let us review the various faces of Christ through the centuries.

- *Rabbi.* The four gospels portray Jesus as a rabbi or a Jewish teacher. His teaching in Aramaic, his way of dealing with the audience and his parables revealed the rabbinical style. Although many regarded him as one of the prophets in the history of Israel, he claimed he was superior to them all. The face of Jesus as a rabbi gave way to a new face after Rome embraced Christianity.

- *Turning Point of History.* The Romans counted their history according to the founding date of Rome. But the early Christian theologians were dissatisfied with this pagan point of reference. For these theologians Christ, not Rome, is the turning point or the basis of measuring time. Augustine founded the Christian philosophy of history. How Christ inspired people became a new

¹Translation of the *Good News Bible*.

²Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries, His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

kind of biography as in the life of St. Anthony by Athanasius. Dionysius Exiguus began the new system of reckoning history: events are either B.C. (Before Christ) or A.D. (Anno Domini, in the year of the Lord) or the Christian era.

- *Light of the Gentiles.* The thinkers of the first centuries of the common era regarded the non-Jewish (Gentile) culture and its writings as "non-Jewish prophecies of a Christ; Gentile anticipations of the doctrine about Jesus; and pagan foreshadowings or 'types' of the redemption by his death."³ Thus the early Fathers considered the writings of Virgil as a non-Jewish counterpart of the Old Testament. They regarded the Greek prophets, the Sibyls, like Old Testament prophets.

Those familiar with the pre-Vatican II liturgy may still remember the Latin Requiem Masses. The sequence called *Dies Irae* reads: "*Dies irae, dies illa,/ solvet saeculum in favilla,/ teste David cum Sibylla.*" (The day of wrath, that dreadful day/ Shall the whole world in ashes lay,/ As David and the Sibyl say.) The sequence in mentioning the Sibyls equates them as Old Testament counterparts of David prophesying the dreadful Final Judgment.

Homer and Plato were given Christian interpretations. Socrates was considered as a type of Christ. They see in Odysseus tied to the mast as a foreshadow of Christ before the cross.

- *King of Kings.* This kingly face inspired Constantine and the kings after him of the Christian empire from the second to the fourth century. This picture of Christ gave emperors the political authority to rule over the world. The events of the fourth century made it "necessary, for the next thousand years and more, to accept Christ as the eternal king if one wanted to be a temporal king."⁴ After Constantine left Rome for the new capital in Byzantium, the Pope became Emperor in Rome.

- *Cosmic Christ.* In the third and fourth centuries, Christ as the Word or Logos influenced the Christianized Platonism. The Logos was seen as paradigm for the structure of the universe.

- *Son of God* or the Revelation of God. This face of Christ was the model of Christian psychology and anthropology. Knowledge of Jesus Christ was the best way of knowing God and man without undergoing despair and pride.⁵

- *True Image.* This face inspired Byzantine art and architecture and served as the aesthetic basis of icons of the eighth and ninth centuries. An example is the icon of Christ the All-Sovereign (Pantocrator).

³Ibid., p. 35.

⁴Ibid., p. 53.

⁵Ibid., p. 73.

• *Christ Crucified.* This face not only influenced the theology but also the art and literature in the tenth and eleventh centuries or the Middle Ages.

• *Monk Who Ruled the World.* People of the monastic period saw Christ as the ideal Monk. This period of history presented celibacy as the ideal state of life. That meant the monks overshadowed the married clergy. Bishops and Popes were picked from the monastic ranks. It was ironic that "those who ruled from the world that was in the Church acquired dominion over the Church that was in the world."⁶ Since the monks ruled the Church and the State, Christ, therefore, was the model "Monk Who Ruled the World."

• *Bridegroom of the Soul.* This face inspired mysticism. It inspired Pseudo-Dionysius to combine biblical and Platonic elements. The Song of Songs was the main inspiration for seeing Christ as the Bridegroom of the Soul.

• *Divine and Human Model.* St. Francis of Assisi wanted to imitate radically the poor Christ. Francis started a movement that influenced the Church and society of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

• *Universal Man.* This face of Christ united the Renaissance people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This face inspired sacred philology, which meant a movement to return to the Greek sources such as the Greek New Testament instead of Latin.

• *Mirror of the Eternal.* This face was dominant during the Reformation. As the mirror of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, this model affected not only religion but art and literature as well.

• *Prince of Peace.* This face ironically inspired religious wars such as the Crusades or holy wars between Christians.

• *Teacher of Common Sense.* Common sense meant going beyond the rigid systematic dogma and morals of the period through absolute love and service. This face of Christ suited the people of the eighteenth century period of Enlightenment.

• *Poet of the Spirit.* This face suited the idealists and Romanticists of the nineteenth century. For them Jesus as Poet of the Spirit was the authentic Jesus "buried under tradition and dogma."⁷

• *Liberator.* Christ as the Liberator is the prophet against economic and social injustice. This recent face of Christ inspired reformers like Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁶Ibid., p. 116.

⁷Ibid., p. 198.

In the above, we have seen how different eras had their own picture of Jesus. Each picture, translated into all fields of society and culture, inspired saints, artists, writers, politicians, economists. Jesus Christ, therefore, is such a personality whose richness can never be exhausted and fathomed.

Why does every age have its own face of Jesus? What is the norm for the selection of the face? Pelikan thinks there is a strong correlation between the philosophy of the age and the chosen face of Jesus: "The way any particular age has depicted Jesus is often a key to the genius of that age."⁸ For example, why has the face of Christ as liberator been a popular image in Latin America and in the Third World? When we see the philosophy or ideology of Marxism amid the widespread poverty of the masses, Christ as Liberator becomes a meaningful symbol. We can understand why the emperors and popes of the Holy Roman Empire preferred the model of Christ as the King of Kings. They had plenty of vested interest to legitimize their temporal power.

If Christ has many faces throughout history, if he has inspired art, literature, history and civilizations, then every people has the right to its interpretation of Christ, whose love "is beyond all knowledge" (*Eph* 3:19) and in whose body "lives the fullness of divinity" (*Col* 2:9).⁹ If people of the West had their many faces of Christ, aren't other peoples like Orientals also entitled to their own face of Christ? Certainly. Filipinos are entitled to their favorite face of Christ.

II. THE FAVORITE FACES OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

Among Christ's many faces, which ones do Filipinos like most? Why the preference for such faces or images? Would this face of the Filipino Christ be applicable also to Filipinos who are abroad?

According to a survey made, the top three favorite images of Christ in the Philippine setting are: *Hesus Nazareno* (33.9%), *Santo Niño* (27.4%), and the *Crucified Christ* (23.2%).¹⁰ The first and third image can be merged to the image of the Suffering Christ. This survey confirms an earlier intuition that the favorite Filipino images are the Victim-Christ and the Christ-Child.¹¹

The Suffering Christ (Victim-Christ).

By Suffering Christ, we take the composite devotion to the *Hesus Nazareno* of Quiapo and the Christ of the *Pasyon* (Passion).

⁸Pelikan, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁹Translation from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

¹⁰Benigno P. Beltran, *the Christology of the Inarticulate, An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987), p. 57, 116 ff.

¹¹Douglas Elwood and Patricia Magdamo, *Christ in Philippine Context* (Manila: New Day Publishers, 1971).

Since the statue was brought from Mexico by the Augustinian Recollects between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, devotion to the Black Nazarene of Quiapo has never ceased to grow. The peak crowd happens during the procession of its feast every January 9 and during the other procession in Holy Week.

During the processions devotees consider it a rare privilege to be able to wipe with their towels the statue dressed in purple, kneeling and carrying a cross. Others, especially on Fridays, wipe with their handkerchiefs the feet of the Christ on the tomb (*Santo Sepulcro*) or walk on their knees inside the Quiapo church.

What makes the image attractive? Devotees claim that *Hesus Nazareno* always grants their petitions, material and spiritual. But not a few devotees are there for petitions only. One small boy whom we interviewed said that since his mother was cured of her illness, he made a vow to visit Quiapo every Friday for as long as he lives.¹² Others carry the *panata* (vow) which they inherited from their parents.¹³

Villote thinks that the image of the Suffering Christ, in addition to its being a benefactor, inspires the *bayani* (hero-martyr) symbol.¹⁴ Filipino culture encourages the Filipino young man to be a servant of his beloved. That is why he will do errands like chopping wood or fetching water. The hero-martyr element pervades the soap operas where housewives become martyrs for their families.

The image in Quiapo is called *Nuestro Padre Hesus Nazareno* (Our Father Jesus Christ). The titles "*Ama*" (Father) or "*Tatang*" (address for an old man) are used by some devotees to call him.¹⁵ The father image is authoritarian in Philippine context. The authoritarian father image of the culture is projected to Christ.

Besides the Black Nazarene is the popular face of the Suffering Christ in the *pasyon* or *Sinakulo* (passion play). Long before the biblical movement, the Filipinos, during colonial times knew their catechism through the *pasyon*. Of the three Tagalog versions, perhaps the most popular is the *Casaysayan ng Pasyong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin* (Account of the Sacred Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ), better known as the *Pasyon Pilapil*.¹⁶

¹²Documentary film, *Mga Debosyon: Biyaya o Superstisyon?* Produced by the Missiological Education and Research Office and the Communication Foundation for Asia, 1990.

¹³For a detailed expose on the motivations of devotees, see the study of Wilfred Jacob, "Religious Experience in the Quiapo Black Nazarene Devotion," in *Filipino Religious Psychology*, ed. by Leonardo N. Mercado (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), pp. 86-89.

¹⁴Ruben J. Villote, *Sapagka't Kami'y Tao Lamang? and Other Filipino Christian Reflections*, ed. by Ernesto T. Bhagwani (Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1980), p. 9.

¹⁵Beltran, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁶Elena Zarco Rivera, "Christ in the Tagalog *Pasyon*." (M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, June 1976.) The other version is that of Aquino de Belen, and the third is by de la Merced; Rene B. Javellana edited and annotated the text of Gaspar Aquino de Belen, *Mahal na Passion in Jesu Christong Panginoon natin na tola* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1990).

Mariano Pilapil, a Filipino parish priest, edited in 1814 a much earlier text. It is also called *Pasyon Henesis* because it begins with the creation in Genesis and ends with the Last Judgment. ". . . *Pasyon Henesis* retains the popularity it has acquired because it fulfills a basic cultural need of the Filipino, expressing our traits as a people."¹⁷ The *pasyon* Filipinized the figure of Jesus which at the same time is "a figure that would also be acceptable to the Spanish colonizers. . ."¹⁸ The "*Pasyon Pilapil* was. . . the social epic of the nineteenth-century Tagalogs and probably of other lowland groups as well."¹⁹

At a time when there was civil and Church censorship, the *pasyon* was one of the few things which had permission. Some critics like Nicanor Tiongson argue that the *pasyon* was made in order to inculcate loyalty to Spain. Contrary to the hopes of the colonizers, the Filipinos appropriated the *pasyon* for their nationalistic purposes. "In a society without freedom of speech and legitimate channels of protest, the *pasyon* made available a language for venting ill-feelings against oppressive friars, *principales*, and agents of the state."²⁰

The image of the suffering Christ, especially the *pasyon*, also encouraged the Filipinos during the Spanish regime to revolt against Spain.²¹ The Filipino reformers anticipated somehow the liberation theology of Latin America.

Numerous male Filipinos flagellate themselves during Holy Week while some (including a few women) are even voluntarily nailed to the cross.²² The flagellations do not necessarily mean penance because the motivation can be thanksgiving for favors received, or for a son to carry out the vow which his father did. The motive may also be as a means of reinforcing bonds with one's peer group through an ordeal of manliness. Some claim that bloody flagellations and crucifixions strengthen the body by letting out impurities. The sight of the suffering Christ is part of *damay*, that is, one's sympathy for the sufferings of Jesus or as test of friendship with him.²³

In a country where most of the people are poor, where people are oppressed, and where earthquakes, typhoons and floods are common, being in empathy with the Suffering Christ gives the devotees the courage to go on living.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁹Reynaldo Clemena Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), p. 18.

²⁰Iletto, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²¹Iletto, *op. cit.*

²²Vicente Marasigan, "Grassroots Ascetic Renewal," *Philippine Priests' Forum*, 7 (1975), pp. 92-95. Fernando N. Zialcita, "Popular Interpretation of the Passion of Christ," *Philippine Sociological Review*, 34 (1986), pp. 56-62.

²³Beltran, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

The Santo Niño (Christ-Child)

Devotion to the *Santo Niño* is much earlier than the *Hesus Nazareno*.²⁴ The *Santo Niño* was the statue which Magellan gave to the queen of Cebu in 1521. Juan Camus, one of Legazpi's soldiers, discovered it in 1565 in one of the houses spared by the fire of the fleeing Cebuanos. Legazpi enthroned the statue in the first church of the Philippines named *Santisimo Nombre de Jesus*.

The focus of the devotion is Cebu, even as the devotion has spread throughout the Visayas, Luzon and Mindanao. The various images of the *Santo Niño* have military ranks. For example, in Tacloban, Leyte, the people speak of the *tenyente* and the *kapitan*. But the *heneral* is the statue in Cebu.

The Christ Child has something mature in its statue. In the traditional picture like the Holy Infant of Prague, he is dressed as a king. He has the crown and scepter and holds the world in his hand. There are likewise other images of the *Santo Niño*. We find statues where is dressed in *barong Tagalog*, even with undershirt and patched short pants, as a boy with a fishing rod, as a boy with arms outstretched, as a child sitting on the lap of Mary, as a child carrying a cross, as a child leaning against a cross. The list can go on.

The *Santo Niño* is popular because the faithful believe that he is powerful in answering the petitions of the faithful. Tradition has stories of how the *Santo Niño* defeated enemies in battles, repulsed invaders, extinguished fires, provided food, and so forth.

Devotees perform the *sinulog*, a prayer-dance, to ask favors before the statue of the *Santo Niño*. Those who cannot perform the dance or are ashamed to do so in public hire professional dancers. These women dancers, usually also doubling as *tinderas* (candle vendors), seriously take their dancing. They believe that any "disrespectful performance would also call down" divine wrath "upon the guilty *tindera*."²⁵ A variation of the *sinulog* is the *ati-atihan* which began in Kalibo, Aklan.

The faithful approach the *Santo Niño* as a real person with pleas for mercy, even threatening him if he does not grant the petition. For example, during dry seasons the faithful in some areas bring the statue to the river or the sea and wet his feet, threatening to leave him there if he does not give rain.

(Their faith in the *Santo Niño* may be compared to the faith of Blessed Andre in Saint Joseph. Alfred Bessette took the religious name of Andre as

²⁴See Rosa C. P. Tenazas, *The Santo Niño of Cebu* (Cebu City: San Carlos Publications, 1965); Lourdes R. Quisumbing, "Religious Experience in the Santo Niño Devotion in Cebu," in Leonardo N. Mercado (ed.), *Filipino Religious Psychology*. (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), pp. 61-66.

²⁵Sally Ness, "The *Tinderas* of Opon and Cebu: Exploring the Relationships Between Social Structure and Dance Style," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 13 (1985): 72.

brother when he joined the Holy Cross Congregation in Canada. He attributed the numerous miraculous cures of the sick to Saint Joseph. During the construction of the enormous Oratory of Saint Joseph in Montreal, he was told that the funds were not enough to finish the roof. Those were hard times during the Depression in 1931. Brother Andre had the statue of Saint Joseph exposed to the elements. He said that Saint Joseph would have to cover himself from the sun, rain and snow. After that act of faith, more contributions came to finish the roof. The construction, however, was not finished when he died on January 5, 1937 at 91.)

Devotees to the *Santo Niño* ask for forgiveness, give thanks and promise a vow if the petitions are granted. In many churches of Manila where the statue is found, people wipe them with their handkerchiefs in the belief that divine power will transfer to the handkerchiefs which in turn will be used for curing sicknesses.

Our office has a documentary on Filipino popular devotions. The parish priest of Tondo, whose church is dedicated to the *Santo Niño*, narrates one typical example. He said that one day a poor old woman, not a parishioner, came to him and gave him a thick envelope. When he saw that it was money, he told her that perhaps she needed it more. The woman insisted that the priest accept the offering because of her promise. She said that one late evening while she was asleep, a child whom she did not know woke her up. The face of the child was like that of the *Santo Niño* of the Tondo church. The woman said that she saw her little home altar just caught fire. With a little effort, she managed to put out the incipient fire. She said that if she were not awakened, she would have died. She promised to give her wealth to the church because she believed that the *Santo Niño* would not abandon her. The next time the priest saw her, she was well dressed. It meant that her devotion paid off!

What makes the *Santo Niño* attractive besides being a benefactor? Villote thinks that one reason is that Filipinos treasure the baby-symbol in their psyche. "Deep in the heart of every Filipino is a baby-symbol, a childlike attachment to his father and mother."²⁶ That is why the Filipino by nature is *malambing* (tender loving), *talo-saling* (vulnerable), *maramdamin* (feels deeply when hurt) and *mapagtanim*, *matampuhin* (nurses the hurt feelings for a long time). These traits make him identify himself "with the weak, the wounded, the defenseless, with anyone as *mahina* and *talo-saling* as himself."²⁷ Villote concludes that "devotion to the *Santo Niño* also makes us laugh at our own incongruities, and keeps us from believing that we are demigods."²⁸

²⁶Villote, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 19.

Abuses

Pope Paul VI in his *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states that while popular devotions are basically sound, they also need correction or improvement. He says:

“...we must be sympathetic in our approach, quick to appreciate its inherent nature and its desirable qualities and zealous to direct it so that the dangers arising out of its errors may be avoided. When it is wisely directed popular piety of this kind can make a constantly increasing contribution towards bringing the masses of our people into contact with God in Jesus Christ.”²⁹

Perhaps, an example will bring out the point. An old man in Pangasinan, a devotee to the *Santo Niño*, was proud about his devotion. He said that *Santo Niño* answers all prayers. He said if Christ had believed in the *Santo Niño*, he would not have been crucified! In the old man's thinking, Christ and the *Santo Niño* are two different persons!

Likewise during town fiestas, “many do not feel the need to attend the Mass as long as they have already lighted their candles, joined the procession, danced before the *Santo Niño* or touched the carriage bearing the *Hesus Nazareno*.”³⁰

Common Denominators

What are some of the common denominators of the devotions to the *Hesus Nazareno* and the *Santo Niño*? One common denominator is the humility or *kenosis* of Christ. The *Santo Niño* is humble in the sense that the powerful Lord becomes a helpless child.

Although both images are the humble Christ, they also have the elements of Easter triumph. The rays of Easter shine on the crown of thorns of the *Hesus Nazareno*. Likewise, the *Santo Niño* with the crown and scepter and holding the globe represents the cosmic after his resurrection.

The emphasis of Easter is fairly recent, especially with Vatican II. In the West, Easter was not theologically emphasized as Calvary. O'Collins assigns several reasons for this neglect.³¹ According to him, the pre-Vatican II theology stressed more the soul than the body. It neglected the Holy Spirit. It emphasized the Crucifixion and its link to the Eucharist. The individualistic theology “found Christ's death more congenial than his resurrection.”³² This

²⁹Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 48.

³⁰Beltran, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³¹Cf. Gerald O'Collins, *The Easter Jesus* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1973), pp. 117-119.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 118.

kind of theology explains why several religious congregations were founded to honor Christ's passion. If this was the theology which Filipinos heard from the missionaries, we can therefore understand why Good Friday has been and still is the most sacred day of the year in the Philippines.

Since Easter falls on spring, the change of weather gives it a special importance in the West. Spring naturally means the newness of life. But in the Philippines, Easter is usually during summer when vegetation is dry and hot. Furthermore, the folk devotion of *Salubong*, the Easter dawn procession where the statue of the Risen Lord and of the Sorrowful Mother meet, is the joy of meeting between mother and child. Furthermore, the resurrection seems weak in the Philippines because of the Filipino concept of Communion of Saints where the departed and the living are one.

The Filipino Christ

Why is Christ — with the face of the *Nazareno* or of the *Santo Niño* — preferred that way? Perhaps the answer is in the philosophy of perception. Why do Filipinos report cockcrow as *kukuraok* (or *tiktilaok* and its variants) and not as *cock-a-doodle-doo* or as *kikeriki*? The answer is that culture makes the people perceive it according to the filter of the given culture. In other words, perception is already interpretation. Or as the scholastic philosophers put it long time ago: "*Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.*" Translated loosely: "The color of one's eyeglasses influences what he sees."

The same is true with the perception of Christ as a father. In our study of Christ among locally-founded sects, we said that they also picture Christ as the ideal Filipino father, one who is authoritarian, strict, a good provider and *maawain* (compassionate).³³

Why do devotees use the handkerchief or towel in wiping the feet of the *Nazareno* or the statue of the *Santo Niño*? The act shows the Filipino model concept of the holy. The holy may either be conceived as transcendent or as immanent. Both are two sides of the same coin. In the case of the transcendent, the prophet stresses the distance between the holy and himself. In the case of the holy as immanent, the mystic stresses unity between the holy and himself. The Filipino model of the holy is immanent or this-worldly.³⁴ That Filipinos experience Christ as mystic gives them a different interpretation on the prophet's experience of Christ.

The case of the Filipino faces of Christ is an example of the people as the best agents of inculturation. History has shown that the faithful in general are

³³Mercado, L., *Christ in the Philippines*, p. 50.

³⁴Cf. Mercado, Leonardo N., "Religious Models and Filipino Thought," *Solidarity* (October-December 1990), pp. 21-33.

the best theologians.³⁵ This is shown in history. We know, for instance, that the formation of the gospels, especially the picture which each evangelist presented, is colored by the perception of the local community which the evangelist represented.

In short, the Filipino face of Christ is the product of Filipino culture. As such the Filipino Christ has given meaning to the people. We may even say that the Filipino Christ has given the early revolutionaries the model to rebel against the colonizers.

Since culture is dynamic, we suppose the image of Christ will also emerge. For example, the growing importance of Basic Ecclesial Communities and biblical movements will certainly contribute to a different face of Christ.

III. REFLECTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Faces of Christ for Filipinos Abroad:

We have seen that the favorite images of Christ in the Philippines, namely, the Suffering Christ and the *Santo Niño* stem mainly from the Filipinos' concern. These images give him courage. Culture has plenty to explain for this perspective. We said that perception is already interpretation. So the religious experience of Jesus Christ through Philippine history gave rise to the faces of the Suffering Christ and the *Santo Niño* as meaningful to the Filipino. These faces of Christ, examples of inculturation, have sustained the Filipinos in their trials and joys in life.

Is this image of Christ also true for the Filipinos elsewhere, such as for instance those in the United States? We must remember that Filipinos easily adapt themselves in countries where they live. On the far left would be those who have retained the Filipino identity through and through. The other extreme are those who are thoroughly westernized; these would be second or third generation Filipinos. Between the two extremes we find degrees of variety. We therefore have three groups of Filipino Christians in USA: (1) those who have retained the traditional Filipino thinking and values; (2) those who are totally "Americanized"; and (3) those in-between the two extremes, that is, keeping part of the Filipino tradition but also being partly American.

That Filipino groups abroad meet regularly through their various clubs, that they continue their devotions like the Novena to the Perpetual Help, the *Simbang Gabi* tradition of the Christmas novena, fiestas, and the like mean that Filipino culture as the bond between Filipinos continues. This bond will be transmitted even to Filipinos born abroad.

³⁵Cf. Mercado, Leonardo N., *Christ in the Philippines* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1982), pp. 24-26.

For the first group of Filipinos, that is, the traditional, perhaps also the *Hesus Nazareno* (and other faces of the Suffering Christ) as well as the *Santo Niño* will be meaningful faces. But will these faces be meaningful to the second and third groups? That remains to be seen. We shall address the second and third groups in the Christ which may suit them.

The Meaningful Christ

We know that Jesus is beyond all categories, that he is like a jewel which can give a different picture or face from whatever facet he is looked at. Jesus Christ is all of these faces, and even more, because he is the Alpha and the Omega.

The choice of the particular face comes from our limitation. For example, a young girl or a nun may prefer to look at Jesus Christ as the ideal spouse. In fact nuns have wedding rings because they are married to Christ. The nun who has Jesus Christ as her Perfect Husband has a model which will give meaning to her life. Just as a housewife finds meaning in serving her husband, so will the young girl or the nun.

The militant young man will find meaning in Jesus as the reformer, the liberator, the friend of the poor and of the oppressed.

Scientists like Teilhard de Chardin will be happy to have their cosmic Christ as the Point Omega, the goal of all evolution.

For some Orientals, Jesus as the teacher will be meaningful because the teachers enjoy a social status in their countries.

For a little boy or girl, Baby Jesus will be meaningful. So we can go on: Jesus the Healer, Jesus the Clown, Jesus the Beautiful, etc.

What we have described has been on the individual basis. But there is also the need of having a Christ which gives meaning to society. In the historical survey we gave earlier, we have seen that a particular face of Christ have the model for a particular society for its government, economy, its culture and the like.

The shared value of the meaningful Christ unites the group. We know that religion is inseparable from society and culture. This is in any religion. So the choice of the Christ for Filipinos abroad should have a similar function.

We cannot prescribe that face of Christ. But perhaps we can give some guidelines. Any choice of the face will depend on the religious experience of Christ (or of the Holy Spirit, or of the sacred in general).

Elsewhere we have explained that religious experience is colored by the culture.³⁶ We may look at the religious experience from the viewpoint of the religious experience itself, the interpretation of the said experience, and the memory of the experience. Experts say that any religion have a genuine experience of the divine. That is why the Church admits the possibility of salvation outside Christianity.³⁷

The interpretation, however, will be colored by culture. We said earlier that perception is interpretation. Thus the Filipino's incarnational or non-dualistic view of religion, his social philosophy which includes the veneration of the departed. That is why, the *pamisa* or Requiem Masses or Masses for the faithful departed are most popular. Likewise, Filipino values also color our interpretation of the said experience. The memory of the experience becomes part of tradition and gets reinforced by it. So the child who grows up in such a tradition imbibes the whole religious experience.

In short, what is the face of Christ for Filipinos abroad? That depends on how *Filipino* they have remained. If they have retained their being Filipino, then they can continue with the faces of Christ popular in the Philippines. But if they are in the process of being, for instance, Americanized in culture, then they will have to find the meaningful face of Christ that suits them.

If the Filipinos want to have an impact abroad, then they will have to act together and find the Christ that will bind them as a Christian community.

The Filipino face of Christ is an interpretation of one of the many Faces of Christ. The choice of the that particular face has emerged through the process of history and of culture. Since culture is dynamic, this face perhaps will also change as Philippine culture evolves. But the Christ will remain the same yesterday, today, and forever. □

³⁶Mercado, L., *Filipino Religious Psychology*, pp. 180-188.

³⁷Cf. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration of the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions).