



KARL GASPAR'S TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY: REDISCOVERING PRECOLONIAL PHILIPPINE SPIRITUALITY AND ITS CHALLENGES TO CONTEMPORARY FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITIES

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*Today, Philippine society is confronted by different types of social problems that require solidarity with the poor, marginalized groups, and nature. In this regard, what can Filipino theologians do to address these challenges? Carlito “Karl” Gaspar, in thinking theologically, proposes to rediscover the precolonial Filipino spirituality to address the social issues. For Gaspar, precolonial Filipino spirituality is a transformative-oriented spirituality and inherently Maka-Diyos, Maka-Tao, Makakalikasan (For God, People, Nature). Gaspar argues that reclaiming the roots of our connection with precolonial spirituality could lead us towards developing solidarity with the poor, with marginalized groups, and with nature. Analyzing Gaspar’s *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul* (2010) as resource dissipation, this paper is an invitation to explore precolonial Filipino spirituality as a source to transform power structures. The paper is divided into five parts: First, the paper gives a brief introduction to the life and work of Karl Gaspar. Second, the paper offers an overview of Gaspar’s book, *The Masses Are Messiah*. Third, the paper discusses Gaspar’s transformative spirituality. Lastly, the paper advances the precolonial Filipino spirituality as a potential source for a holistic model of Filipino spirituality, especially for Filipino Pentecostal spirituality. Therefore, Filipino Pentecostal spirituality becomes meaningful, useful, and relevant in the Philippine context.*

Keywords: Indigenous Belief System (IBS), Pentecostalism, Pre-Colonial Filipino Spirituality, Transformative Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the persistence of poverty and corruption,¹ the Philippines is one of the most religious countries in the world. According to WIN/Gallup International 2017, Philippines ranked fifth among the most religious of countries.² True enough, this can be observed in the frantic procession of the statue of the Black Nazarene every year. In 2019 for example, the feast of the Black Nazarene drew 800,000 Filipino Catholic devotees to visit the Basilica in Quiapo, Manila.³ During the procession, thousands of Filipinos pack the streets of Quiapo trying to get close and touch the black statue of Jesus Christ for healing, forgiveness, and blessing. Scholars argue that the religious performance of the Black Nazarene commemorates the suffering and resilience of Jesus Christ under the persecution of the Roman Empire. Filipino Catholic devotees find some ways to identify themselves with the suffering and resilience of Christ under the hardship of life.⁴ Although there have been disagreements among Filipino Roman Catholic priests and theologians, the religious feast still draws several hundreds of thousands each year, especially young devotees.⁵

Moreover, there has been broad discussions on the religious performance of the Black Nazarene among Filipino social scientists, including philosophers.⁶ It has been a staple of debates

among students and scholars of religion.⁷ Some Filipino anthropologists, sociologists, and Catholic scholars have a more positive view. They regard the feast of Black Nazarene as an indigenous religiosity of Filipino Catholics. Others see it negatively. For instance, due to the imposition of Western scientific ideas and categories, the feast of the Black Nazarene has often been viewed as paganism and idolatry, especially among outsiders. According to a Filipino sociologist Jayeel S. Cornelio:

Meaning like Father Bulatao (Jesuit Catholic priest) who we know (that) that is his big argument, that [sic] say “Catholics are split level.” They go to church and yet they do something else. You know, practice corruption and so on and so forth. That same understanding, that same theoretical framework has also been used to analyze say popular religiosity. How come people still go to mass and yet they still use amulets for example? So thereby creating what we know as folk Catholicism. But from the point of view of everyday authenticity, we reject these kinds of hierarchies of religiosity simply because for many ordinary Catholics, all of these are expressions of their Catholicism. Peter Bräunlein, a German anthropologist calls this 100% Catholic so people who flagellate themselves or people who crucify themselves during Holy Week say in Pampanga or in Bulacan, they might be accused of not being faithful to the Catholic doctrine or to the Catholic practice because you don’t really need to crucify yourself but for these people, this actually expresses their Catholicism.⁸

Like many Filipino scholars, Cornelio perceives “split-level Christianity” as an inadequate

¹ “Religion Prevails in the World,” *Gallup International*. <http://gallup-international.bg/en/Publications/2017/373-Religion-prevails-in-the-world>. (accessed January 02, 2019).

² “Religion Prevails in the World,” *Gallup International*, *ibid*.

³ “Black Nazarene statue draws 800,000 Philippine Catholics to procession in Manila,” *South China Morning Post*, January 9, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2181294/black-nazarene-statue-draws-800000-philippine-catholics>. (accessed January 06, 2019).

⁴ “Philippines: Over five million join ‘Black Nazarene’ procession,” *Independent Catholic News*, January 19, 2019. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36325>. Originally published in *Agenzia Fides*, http://www.fides.org/en/news/65356-ASIA_PHILIPPINES_Over_5_million_pilgrims_at_the_Black_Nazarene_feast. (accessed January 09, 2019).

⁵ “Philippines: Over five million join ‘Black Nazarene’ procession,” *Independent Catholic News*, *ibid*.

⁶ Matienzo, Rhochie Avelino “The Quiapo Leap: A Kierkegaardian Reading of the Religious Experience of the Black Nazarene Popular Devotion,” *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2016): 29–43.

⁷ Janella Paris, “Things to know about the Feast of the Black Nazarene,” *Rappler*, January 8, 2019. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/220515-things-to-know-about-feast-black-nazarene>. (accessed January 08, 2019); See also, James Loreto C. Piscos, “Poststructuralist Reading of Popular Religiosity in the Devotion to the Black Nazarene in Quiapo,” *Scientia: The International Journal on Liberal Arts*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (2018): 101-115; Faysaleyyah, Abdullah, et. al. *Organized Chaos: A Cultural Analysis of Quiapo*, Unpublished paper. https://www.academia.edu/3684663/Organized_Chaos_A_Cultural_Analysis_of_QUIAPO_in_the_Philippines. (accessed January 08, 2019).

⁸ Jayeel S. Cornelio, “Philippines beyond clichés: ‘Catholic country,’” *New Mandala*, July, 2018. <https://www.newmandala.org/beyond-cliches-catholic-country/>. (accessed January 11, 2019).

⁹ According to Miguel Angelo B. Amit, “Split-level Christianity means the co-existence of two or more thought and behaviour systems within the same person which are inconsistent with each other. In this case, a split-level person is one who, at one level, professes allegiance to ideas, attitudes and ways of behaving which are mainly borrowed from the Christian West, but who, at another level, holds convictions which are





description of popular religiosity or popular devotion among Filipino Catholics. As a matter of fact, Bulatao's concept of "split-level Christianity" has several critics. They argued that popular religiosity encapsulates the complexity of a Filipino religious worldview that defies western religious categories.

Now, devotees of the Black Nazarene are also increasingly gaining critics and setbacks. For example, according to Jose Eric Lacsá, after the procession, devotees of the Black Nazarene leave piles of garbage that something needs to be addressed.¹⁰ In fact, the last report indicated: "146.59 tons of garbage consisted mostly of plastic bottles, Styrofoam boxes, and plastic bags used to hold ice-cold water".¹¹ Lacsá argues that Filipino Catholic popular devotion must place emphasis on cleanliness, comparing it to spiritual purity. He writes:

Christians always used space as our meeting place with God. The space that we used is in itself 'sacred.' In Quiapo during the Feast of Nazareno, it was an overwhelming sight to see people cramping in space (*di mabulugang karayum*) in order to touch the Holy Nazarene, or just to get hold of the long rope used to pull the Nazareno. Holding the rope at many instances is good enough for some devotees considering the great struggle one has to face in order to touch or throw a handkerchief to wipe the Poon. That sacred space is a place where we meet and experience God and brings into our consciousness that "Jesus is there." Christ dwells in that sacred space because people

more properly his "own" ways of living and believing which were handed down from his ancestors, which do not always find their way into an explicit philosophical system, but nevertheless now and then flow into action." See Miguel Angelo B. Amit, "Exposing Hypocrisy: Rizal's Critique of the Philippine Religious Culture and Bulatao's Split-level Christianity." *Talisik: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 3, No.1 (2016): 13; See also Jaime C. Bulatao, *Split-level Christianity* (Manila, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1966) and *Phenomena and Their Interpretation: Landmark Essays 1957-1989* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1992). Today, however, Bulatao's split-level Christianity has passed through a variety of critics as mentioned above.

¹⁰ Jose Eric M. Lacsá, "Integral Eucharist: a way to bring about Environmental Awareness," 2018. <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/pdf/conferences/arts-congress-proceedings/2018/acp-04.pdf>. (accessed January 20, 2019).

¹¹ Robertzon Ramirez and Rey Galupo, "Black Nazarene devotees leave 43 trucks of trash after traslacion," *The Philippine Star*, January 11, 2019. <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2019/01/11/1883990/black-nazarene-devotees-leave-43-trucks-trash-after-traslacion#XDXXKiDbdSywXfCBt.99>. (accessed January 20, 2019).

goes [sic] there to worship and experience God. By being conscious of God's presence in a sacred space is always helpful to 'remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.' [Exodus 3:5, NAB]. Christians at most instances pay such great respect upon knowing that the place is sacred. In approaching a sanctuary and an altar for example, we move silently and in a very respectful manner, we genuflect to show our respect and keep our silence as much as possible. We make it clean because we know that Jesus dwells there!¹²

Simply put, Lacsá sees that cleanliness is next to godliness. The meeting place or space between God and his people, like Quiapo in Manila where the religious procession of the Black Nazarene occur, turns into a sacred space. From this point of view, Lacsá contends, devotees should stop littering and desecrating sacred spaces that leads to calamitous events. Rather he proposes, Filipino Catholic devotees need to develop an "ecological consciousness" that foster a healthy interaction with the world.¹³ But, challenges still remained on how Filipino spirituality can become more holistic, sensitive, and responsive to Philippine economic-political problems.

This is the current state of Filipino religiosity and it is the intention of this paper to explore Karl Gaspar's view of precolonial Filipino spirituality as a transformative-oriented spirituality. It is my belief that Gaspar's notion of transformative spirituality demonstrates the enduring relevance of a precolonial Filipino spirituality that challenges contemporary socio-economic problems, which includes hunger, poverty, corruption, ecological crisis, greed, among others. But, it is to be noted that I do not wish to suggest that other Filipino theologians and transformative models are unimportant. First and foremost, it is important to give an overview of the life and works of Karl Gaspar. The second part offers an overview of Gaspar's book,

¹² Lacsá, "Integral Eucharist: a way to bring about Environmental Awareness," 4.

¹³ Lacsá, "Integral Eucharist: a way to bring about Environmental Awareness," 11.





The Masses Are Messiah (2010) and its potential contributions to the Filipino Pentecostal spirituality discourse.

I. KARL M. GASPAR: AN IMPERISHABLE GIFT TO FILIPINO THEOLOGIANS.

Carlito “Karl” Gaspar, CSsR is a religious brother of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and prominent figure from Mindanao.¹⁴ Gaspar is a grassroots educator, prolific writer, playwright, poet, mystic, social-anthropologist, interfaith scholar, activist, and theologian.¹⁵ He is one of the most influential and inspiring Filipino Catholic theologians in the Philippines.¹⁶ Gaspar is a former Martial Law political prisoner, who fought the Marcos dictatorship.¹⁷ Randy J.C. Odchigue described him writing:

As theology searches for relevance in this period of turmoil and transition, the method of correlation appeared to be among the viable options for theologians. Karl Gaspar appeared to embrace this method – associated with Paul Tillich – which contends that theology becomes intelligible and relevant when it holds in fruitful tension with human experience – the religious and historical – with the originary Christian witness as found in the Scriptures. Many of Karl’s writings follow this method notably in his books, *Readings on Contemporary Mindanao Church, Desperately Seeking God’s Saving Action: Yolanda Survivors’ Hope Beyond Heartbreaking*

¹⁴ Christian B. Buenafe, ‘Foreword’ *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia Publications, 2010): ii-iii.

¹⁵ Gaspar published several books including; *A People’s Option: To Struggle for Creation* (1990), *The Lumad in the Face of Globalization* (1997), *Mapagpakamalinalawon: A Reader for the Mindanawon Peace Advocate* (2002), *To Be Poor and Obscure: The Spiritual Sojourn of a Mindanawon* (2006), *Mystic Wanderers: In the Land of Perpetual Departures* (2008), *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul* (2010), and *Panagkutay: Anthropology and Theology Interfacing in Mindanao Uplands* (2017). Also, Gaspar has published peer reviewed articles, essays, and commentaries. His’ works cited by many scholars, including Filipino social scientists.

¹⁶ Randy J.C. Odchigue, “Emancipating Religion from Religion: Reflections on the Contribution of Karl Gaspar,” This article was read at the Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya (DaKaTeo) – Catholic Theological Society of the Philippine General Assembly Conference in October 16-17, 2017 held at St. Vincent School of Theology Quezon City, Philippines.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Lamentations and *A Hundred Years of Gratitude*. The decidedly emancipatory and liberationist bent of his writings arose from his immersion in the context of violence, injustice and oppression in Mindanao during the Martial Law in the 70s. And his theological reflections in this period appeared to rely on the lenses of ‘reading the signs of the times’ – a phrase from *Gaudium et Spes* and Congar’s understanding of church as people of God synthesizing it with the theology of liberation. In short, the commencement of Karl Gaspar’s praxis and organic theological journey traversed the methodological terrains of correlation, ressourcement, aggiornamento and structural analysis.¹⁸

In 1986, Gaspar his work *How Long?: Prison Reflections from the Philippines* (1986) just after he was released from prison in February of 1985. The book covered the 22 months that Gaspar was incarcerated. The book is a collection of selected prison letters of Gaspar’s reflection on national and international situations. Basically, his exposed the brutality and human rights violations of Marcos regime. Many Filipino liberation theologians draw their inspiration from his work. In fact, it has become one of the sources in the formation of Philippine liberation theology that later become known as “theology of struggle”.¹⁹

Odchigue summarizes Gaspar’s contributions to Filipino liberation theology:

First, theology as an articulation coming out from the struggles of the oppressed and marginalized groups. Second, theology as overlapping spheres: “liberation as a response to dependency and social oppressions; as symbolic of the theory of history as a process of humanization; and liberation theologically understood as a hermeneutical lens to soteriology”. Third, theology requires social analysis tools to be meaningful in a context of incommensurate social-economic arrangements. And finally, theological method must leads to concrete engagements in social issues of justice.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.





Gaspar's contributions to other areas in theology: he is a strong proponent of indigenization of Filipino Catholic theology in the Philippines. Also, Gaspar works in various subjects including, social-anthropology, basic ecclesial communities (BECS), spirituality, interfaith issues, peace studies, and indigenous studies.²¹ For a proper use of the social media communication, Gaspar is committed to popularize pastoral concerns of the Roman Catholic Church. In 2017, he was a recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Asian Catholic Communicators, Inc. (ACCI). According to Carolyn O. Arguillas, "The award was given to Gaspar not just for the books and essays he has written to "popularize the concerns of the Church in the world today as a way of communicating the Gospel to the public".²² Arguillas, adds, "but also for his commitment in terms of ministry and praxis manifesting his witness."²³ Presently, Gaspar spend most of his time giving talks at public forum, engaging in indigenous human rights and interfaith advocacies, writing articles, publishing books and teaching. From 2015 to 2018, he served as the academic dean of at the St. Alphonsus Theological and Mission Institute (SATMI) in Davao City, Philippines.²⁴

II. THE MASSES ARE MESSIAH: CONTEMPLATING THE FILIPINO SOUL

The Masses are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul is a product of joint endeavor research project of Gaspar and the Institute of Spirituality in Asia.²⁵ Gaspar confesses, it is an ambitious research project because

the project involved the entire Philippine archipelago.²⁶ He confesses, "in the course of the study I conversed with representatives of practically all the sectors of our country that traverse the various regions, classes, age range, genders, ethnicities, languages, educational and cultural backgrounds."²⁷ Generally, the book is motivated by three parallel concerns. Firstly, it aims to contribute to the growing field of study of Filipino spirituality. Secondly, Gaspar made the strong assumption that Filipino Catholics out there---bishops, priest, religious, and laity---have evolved a transformative-oriented spirituality.²⁸ Lastly, the pre-colonial Philippine spirituality or indigenous belief system (IBS) has a transformative-oriented spirituality.²⁹ In conducting the study, he employed mixed methods. According to Gaspar, the research design and the main questions guided his work done both in libraries and fieldwork.³⁰ The process of collecting data derives from two major sources; firstly, primary data was derived from first-hand information through interaction with the 369 key informants (both individual interviews and focused group discussions), which he then analysed and interpreted.³¹

²⁶ Karl Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia Publications, 2010), 12.

²⁷ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ While the terms "pre-colonial spirituality," "indigenous spirituality," "indigenous religion," and "indigenous belief system," are appearing more frequently in literature on interdisciplinarity in religious studies and social sciences. But, its meaning remains somewhat ambiguous or arbitrary, particularly among Filipino social scientists. For example, Filipino anthropologists and sociologists perceived these terms as a modern construction also known as imposed categories. It also blurry the distinction between "religion" and "spirituality". so often invoked. For an early treatment that schematizes the terms as an introduction to this topic see Bjørn Ola Taford, "Indigenous Religion(s) as an Analytical Category," in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2013): 221-243; Timothy Fitzgerald, "A Critique of "religion" as a Cross-cultural Category," in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1997), 91-110; Justin Kenrick & Jerome Lewis. "Indigenous Peoples' Rights and the Politics of the Term 'Indigenous.'" *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2004): 4- 9. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227642102_Indigenous_Peoples'_Rights_and_the_Politics_of_the_Term_Indigenous; Douglas Nakashima and Marie Roue, "Indigenous Knowledge, Peoples and Sustainable Practice," *Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environmental Change: Encyclopaedia of Global Environmental Change*, ed. by Peter Timmerman Vol. 5 (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2002):314-324.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Carolyn O. Arguillas, "Tribute to Mindanao's Karl Gaspar: 3 awards in one month," September 17, 2017. <http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2017/09/tribute-to-mindanaos-karl-gaspar-3-awards-in-one-month/>. (accessed January 09, 2019).

²⁴ See the official website of the St. Alphonsus Theological and Mission Institute (SATMI), 2019. <https://satmi.org/>. (accessed January 20, 2019).

²⁵ Buenafe, "Foreword" *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, ii.





Next, secondary data or literature was available including (as well as during his fieldwork;) written accounts by Spanish chroniclers, a long list of Filipino authors who have engaged in the spirituality discourse (incorporating contemporary ethnographic studies), written materials in neighbouring South-east Asian countries. These authors include his colleagues from the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), the Institute of Spirituality in Asia (ISA) fellows, and those who have joined the various ISA colloquia.³²

From the early Spanish colonial period till today, misinformation about precolonial Filipino spirituality is spearheaded and uncritically accepted as truth. Precolonial Filipino spirituality has been perceived to be passive, complicit, irrational, and dualistic.³³ These Western views, however, are controversial and rejected by many Filipino scholars nowadays. In fact, according to Gaspar, a central characteristic of precolonial Filipino spirituality is transformative-oriented. Simply put, precolonial Filipino spirituality is holistic in nature and actively engaging. Gaspar writes:

The seeds of a transformation orientation of our spirituality were there already long before conquest and conversion and despite the impact of colonization; these never left the collective psyche of our people. In the post-colonial era we are empowered to reclaim these seeds and help them to bear more fruit.³⁴

For Gaspar, it is unacceptable how Filipino have come to accept the negative Western views of precolonial Filipino spirituality, believing that

our precolonial views are incompatible with Christian beliefs. For example, God as remote or distant; no adequate normative ethics; the line between physical and spiritual health is often blurred; irrational fear against territorial spirits; too much respect and veneration of the dead.³⁵ Rather these should be viewed as constitutive of a complex system that is life-affirming.

The awareness of the rich Filipino religious-cultural heritage, Gaspar believes that these diverse forms of precolonial spirituality are useful to the pursuit of Filipino contextual theology. He sees precolonial spirituality could quench Filipino's thirst for justice, peace, mutuality, and solidarity. In fact, Gaspar considers that precolonial spirituality might mobilize and elucidate Filipino's social problem, an aspect that has been described conclusively in this book.³⁶ He also suggests that they intersect and resonate with each other, but also diverse in different directions. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it is maybe helpful to mention at least three of the major characteristics that traverse his research, of which precolonial Filipino spirituality as (a) transformative-oriented is only one and by no means the predominant one.

First, instead of being passive and complicit, Gaspar argues that Filipino transformative-oriented spirituality is socially engaging and revolutionary.³⁷ Since the idea of Christianization of the Philippines was associated with colonialization, Gaspar builds upon the two critical Filipino historians - Vicente Rafael and Reynaldo Ileto. According to Rafael and Ileto, the Spanish colonial ruler is marked by their efforts to control all of life, not only politics and economics, but also society,

³² Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 12-14, 83-86.

³³ Mary Therese Drum, "Women, Religion and Social Change In The Philippines: Refractions of the Past in Urban Filipinas' Religious Practices Today, School of Social Inquiry," PhD. diss. Deakin University, Geelong, Australia, 2001. <https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30023597/drum-womenreligionandsocial-2001.pdf>. (accessed January 20, 2019); José L. Gasch-Tomás, "The Hispanization of the Philippines. Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses," 1565-1700, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (2012): 452-453.

³⁴ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 352.

³⁵ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 94-96.

³⁶ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 103.

³⁷ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 293-294.





culture, and religion. But, Filipino ancestors were not passive and complicit. In fact, Rafael and Iletto contend, during the Spanish colonial period, various groups of indigenous Filipino community embraced conquest and conversion to a certain extent but also resisted the Spanish colonialization.³⁸ Following Rafael and Iletto, Gaspar insists that Filipino ancestors localized the Christian beliefs to resist the colonial power through the vernacularization of the Catholic teachings.³⁹ He also believes that the localization of the Filipino Catholic faith bears traces of precolonial Filipino spirituality as socially engaging and revolutionary. Congruent with progressive Filipino Christians, precolonial Filipino religion provides an image of God that is truly compassionate and is on the side of the poor and downtrodden.⁴⁰ Gaspar further argues that the process continues amongst Filipino Catholic communities (Church as a priestly, prophetic, and kingly people and as a Church of the poor) fleeing the unbearable political and economic strangulations in the Philippines.⁴¹

Second, Filipino transformative-oriented spirituality promote stewardship of God's creation and human responsibility for environmental reservation---caring for God's creation. According to Gaspar, "This concern is not strictly theoretical, because the emphasis on the world as God's creation also raises the issue of human being's responsibility---they were, after all, created toward this creation".⁴² For Gaspar, learning from precolonial Filipino spirituality in relation to nature, encourage ecological awareness and action at the parish, community, and national levels. It can provide

Filipino theologians with resources to enable a theological response to the ecological debate. By doing so, it is with great prudence that the Filipino transformative spirituality can contribute towards the cultivation of an ecological ethos and deeper understanding of the sanctity of the earth.⁴³

Lastly, precolonial Filipino transformative-oriented spirituality is expressed in both vertical and horizontal relations. Not surprisingly, Gaspar contends, it has a communitarian and relational focus.⁴⁴ As a matter of fact, most Filipinos perceived their own individual identity with the group identity. He also pointed out that Filipino behavior is always trying to preserve respect for another person that begins in the family, especially with dead ancestors.⁴⁵ In precolonial Filipino spirituality, "valuing the community over the individual" was one of the most important virtues in achieving community cohesion. For instance, there is no place for individual existence or one should not be left alone by others and to be able to think and act in whatever way he or she chooses. But, it is always community and relational-oriented. Everybody has their special place in the family and social life---the value of social hierarchy. Aside from this, respect for older people and healers is one of the basic characteristics of precolonial Filipino culture (Gaspar 2010, 97).⁴⁶ For example, like the biological parents, shaman (priestess) or religious specialists have a special status and social function. They were considered a specialist in the areas of the culture, religion, medicine. Therefore, the younger generation must respect and revere them. In that regard, precolonial Filipino spirituality views individual as unseparated part of society, their existence as being in the ontological sense cannot be separated from society.

³⁸ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 120-125.

³⁹ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 101.

⁴⁰ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 105-106.

⁴¹ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 296-313.

⁴² Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 96-97, 293-294, 129-131, 322-324.

⁴³ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 104-105.

⁴⁴ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 372-373.

⁴⁵ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 96-106.

⁴⁶ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 97.





To conclude this section, Gaspar expresses his positive view of emergent Filipino spirituality. He writes, “Our spirituality is becoming more integrated, more holistic. It is a spirituality rooted in a Christian faith tradition while reclaiming the indigenous belief system that enhances our advocacy for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation”.⁴⁷ Although precolonial transformative-oriented spirituality is “yet to be developed”, Gaspar reminds emergent Filipino theologians their important task of rediscovering, cultivating, and reappropriating it in fast-changing Filipino reality. With this in mind, Gaspar further argues, “But there is no question that it has long way to go before it can become even more so”.⁴⁸

III. WHAT CAN FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIAN LEARN FROM GASPAR’S TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY?

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen posits an important question about Pentecostal mission and social responsibility.⁴⁹ Kärkkäinen asked, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? In response, Kärkkäinen provided answer in twofold manner. On one hand, Kärkkäinen admits that most early Pentecostal movements failed to address social justice issue.⁵⁰ On the other hand, according to Kärkkäinen, the contemporary Pentecostal theologians have taken up the challenge to critically engage with social justice issues.⁵¹ Kärkkäinen argues:

Although Pentecostal mission is focused on evangelization, it is not to the exclusion of social concern and never has been so. The “broader mission” (holistic) has been part and parcel of the Pentecostal branch of the family “as an automatic outgrowth of its prioritization” of the great commission. And as Juan Sepulveda, a Latin American Pentecostal, succinctly notes, even though Pentecostals have been cautious to engage in politics, “the Pentecostal communities meant a powerful offering of life-meaning for wide sectors excluded from our communities.” In fact, Pentecostals have worked with the poor for social renewal in unobtrusive ways and have initiated major social reform programs and institutions.⁵²

Furthermore, according to Kärkkäinen, the backlash against massive poverty and global injustices give greater significance to an authentic commitment to reconstruct a pentecostal public theology.⁵³ Compared with Catholic and Protestant documents (or public statements) on social justice, Kärkkäinen further observes, “Pentecostals have no written statements about “preferential option for the poor,”⁵⁴ as most Pentecostal churches are “churches of the poor”.⁵⁵

In the Philippine context, this is important note in Filipino Pentecostal Movements. Unlike Filipino Catholic church, Filipino Pentecostal churches have no written statements about “preferential option for the poor”. However, most Filipino Pentecostal churches are “churches of the poor”. In addition, a lack of scholarly study limits the observation of current Filipino Pentecostal public and spiritual scholarships. However, there are significant numbers of contemporary Filipino Pentecostal scholars who are engaged in some self-criticism about the inadequacy of their own efforts to confront the movement with regards to social issues vis-à-vis on the promotion of human flourishing. Recently, a new generation of Filipino Pentecostal scholars with rigorous scholarship are engaging public

⁴⁷ Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, 353.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward A Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, ed. Amos Young, (USA: University of America, 2002), 179-190; See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? Theological and Ecumenical Perspectives,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2001): 417-431.

⁵⁰ Kärkkäinen, *Toward A Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, 180.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kärkkäinen, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? Theological and Ecumenical Perspectives,” 418.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.





issues. For example, Joel A. Tejedo and Doreen A. Benavidez, attempt to reconstruct Filipino Pentecostal theologies.⁵⁶ They re-examined their own Pentecostal theological traditions and its understanding of spirituality to make meaningful and relevant to Filipinos, especially from the marginalized sectors.

But going back to the main question above? I proposed two answers, but interrelated: First, Gaspar's transformative spirituality can challenge traditional Filipino Pentecostal view of spirituality. Until today, the prevalent dualistic thinking has continually plagued many Filipino Pentecostal churches, including Pentecostal seminaries. One of the problems of the Pentecostal dualistic thinking shapes their view of spirituality. It played a fundamental role in Filipino Pentecostal theologies away from the public arena. It created artificial line that separates spiritual and earthly concerns, especially political and economic challenges. With these challenges in mind, there is a need for a more critical approach to Filipino Pentecostal view of spirituality. If, however, the Filipino Pentecostals will engage and learn from Gaspar's transformative spirituality, it can be of great help to recalibrate their notions of Christian public life to our current social and political conditions. Although it has been seriously undermined as a result of Western colonization and today, precolonial transformative spirituality offers a holistic model of spirituality for Filipino Pentecostals. Such ways of doing spirituality, Filipino Pentecostal spirituality become responsive to socio-cultural and political-economic issues. Perhaps, it might be called a latent positive potential of Filipino

Pentecostal churches – that they may be able to inspire not just their own communities, but wider society as a whole.

Next, parallel to the proposal of a Pentecostal holistic view of spirituality, Gaspar's transformative spirituality can contribute towards the cultivation of a Filipino Pentecostal ecological ethos. Today, however, Pentecostal ecology ethos is an emerging response among Pentecostal scholars. For instance, Shane Clifton, Amos Young, Matthew Tallman, to name a few. These Pentecostal scholars take up this challenge and offer some alternative theological perspectives to address the anthropocentric view of spirituality and eschatology.⁵⁷ As far as Filipino Pentecostals are concerned, Pentecostal ecological ethos still far away. Despite research shows that the Philippines is one of the most affected by climate change, Filipino Pentecostals are lacks of capacity to critical engage the problem of climate change. The fact that Filipino Pentecostal theologians failed to develop an ecological ethos, many Filipino Pentecostal churches are indifferent to the ecological crisis.⁵⁸ Actually, many Pentecostal preachers only exacerbates the problem and make this worse by give more emphasis on otherworldly. With in-depth analysis, many Filipino Pentecostal theologians will realize that Gaspar's transformative spirituality has a large resource to cultivate a Filipino Pentecostal ecological ethos. It has a great deal to offer on the promotion of human flourishing, especially with regard to Philippine environmental problems. Although cultivating Gaspar's transformative spirituality requires much time to digest, it is worth to be explored. Therefore, the influence of precolonial

⁵⁶ See Joel A. Tejedo, *The Church in the Public Square: Engaging our Christian Witness in the Community* (Baguio City, Sambayanihan Publishers, 2016); Doreen A. Benavidez, "Pentecostalism and Social Responsibility," *Prospects and Challenges for the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century*, *Insights from the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute*, No. 12, (2016). (Geneva, Globalethics.net), 171-178. Retrieved July 13, 2017, http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403236/GE_Global_12_web.pdf.

⁵⁷ Shane Clifton, 'Pentecostals and Ecology – part 1,' *Pentecostal Discussion Blog*, May 2005. https://scc.typepad.com/scc_faculty_pentecostal_d/2006/05/pentecostals_an.html. (accessed January 23, 2019).

⁵⁸ Matthew Tallman, "Pentecostal Ecology: A Theological Paradigm for Pentecostal Environmentalism" in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009. 136.





Filipino worldview can be channeled so that it is positive resources, rather than negative.

IV. CONCLUSION

Within the contemporary missiological debate, there are Filipino scholars who contend that the attitude of early missionaries towards the precolonial Filipino spirituality or indigenous belief system was often being viewed as generally evil. Early missionaries are accused of being too much involved with their own culture, did not understand much of the Filipino worldview and culture, worked hard to destroy what they did not understand. But, Gaspar's scholarly work is an eminent move towards a better appreciation of the indigenous belief system, which aims at providing a link between the precolonial Filipino spirituality and contextual Christian underpinnings. Gaspar unshackled the precolonial Filipino spirituality from a negative view of the indigenous belief system. It enriches and empowers the emerging post-colonial Filipino theologians, especially the emergence of decoloniality project among Filipino scholars. On a personal level, I find the works of Gaspar highly stimulating, because I believe that Gaspar have something fundamental to tell about contemporary Filipino Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality. Gaspar pushed as far as it would go to show the continuities and link of precolonial Filipino spirituality and the contemporary Filipino spirituality. Gaspar has shown how precolonial Filipino spirituality helps us to make sense of many otherwise puzzling features of present Filipino spirituality. Gaspar has also shown how it helps us to understand the crucial differences between the precolonial Filipino spirituality and the western outlook.

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