



# THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF SECULARIZATION TO ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THEOLOGY

DAVE CAPUCAO

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION  
ST. VINCENT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
frdave2000@gmail.com

*One should not overlook the fact that Asia is a home to humanism, atheism, and secularism. In the 18th–20th century, atheism, communism and other forms of western liberalism and humanistic ideology had taken their roots in several Asian societies. In recent history, various forms of secular worldview, humanistic, atheistic, communistic, agnostic, etc. have also found their niche in the Philippines. Hence, we set out this study to probe the extent of secularization in the Philippines today and from there, to draw some challenges it poses to the future of Asian theology and Christianity.*

*The first part of this article will tackle the answer on the first question presented. I will be presenting both a theoretical and empirical representations in the macro, meso, and micro level for us to examine the phenomenon of secularization. It is to help the readers to investigate how this phenomenon is manifested empirically among the Filipino youths. On the second part of the paper, I will draw some challenges which secularization poses to the future of theology and Christianity in Asia. This study hopefully will modestly contribute to the configuration of an Asian paradigm of theology that proffers some perspectives in helping individuals, communities and society to envision and live out the contingencies of their faith in the future.*

Keywords: Secularization, Christianity, Theology, Empirical Studies

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Asia is generally known as the 'birthplace' of world religions. It is recognized as a continent resplendent with religion and spirituality. However, one should not overlook the fact that Asia is also home to humanism, atheism, and secularism. Felix Wilfred (2008:265), one prominent Asian theologian remarks: "Generally, Asia has been associated with religiosity and religious pluralism. But the fact is that secular thought and praxis are as much at home in Asia as the religious ones. There has been a strong secular humanistic current in the Asian traditions." He adds: "secular humanism in Asia is as old as its religious tradition. Unfortunately, this side of the story is little known" (2008:280). As early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, great systems of beliefs like Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, and some sects of Hinduism already introduce contemplative and humanistic life bereft of the idea of deities. Later, in the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c., atheism, communism, and other forms of western liberalism and humanistic ideology had taken their roots in several Asian societies. According to a 2012 survey conducted by Pew Research Center, the religiously unaffiliated in Asia (including agnostics and atheists) constitute 21.2% of the world population.<sup>1</sup> According to the same survey, the religiously unaffiliated are the majority of the population in four Asian countries/territories, namely North Korea (71%), Japan (57%), Hong Kong (56%), and China (52%).<sup>2</sup> Indian Archbishop Thomas Menampampil (2001:1), said that while Asians are known to be religious but then "the ideologies of dialectical materialism on the one hand and of consumeristic materialism on the other, have dominated Asian thought and controlled vast areas of Asia during the last half of a century or more", he adds: "a consciousness is growing that the present trend of secularization is irreversible."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Religiously Unaffiliated," *The Global Religious Landscape*, December 18, 2012. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-unaffiliated> (accessed June 6, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In recent history, various forms of a secular worldview, either humanistic, atheistic, communistic, agnostic, etc. have also found their niche in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup> While it is considered as one of the two countries in Asia that has a majority Christian population, some observers say that the contemporary Philippines is seen as progressively becoming more secular. This is particularly true among the young generations (Capucao & Ponce 2016, 1-126). However, some divergent views are saying that secularization is a purely western construction and does not apply to Asian countries like the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> Gentz (2009:241), for instance, argue that "in countries in which religion and the state have for centuries had a very different kind of relationship, it is not meaningful to speak of a process of secularization". Some believe that the country is "increasingly secular, but still deeply Catholic." (San Martin 2015). Whether these positions are factual or not requires an empirical investigation. Hence, we set out this study to probe the extent of secularization in the Philippines today. In this paper, we want to answer two questions: first, to what extent are the contemporary Filipino youth secularized? Second, what future challenges do they pose to theology and the church?

### A. A SECULARIZED YOUTH?

Are the contemporary Filipino youth becoming 'secularized'? To answer this question, we need

<sup>4</sup> "Some Contemporary Asian secular and humanist groups are the International Humanist and Ethical Union whose membership includes Humanist Society of Singapore, the Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society, etc. Most of these organizations do not have a direct reference to religion or transcendence/ but claim to be committed to working for a just, compassionate and humane society. Their conviction is grounded on the belief on the power of human agency and collaborative efforts to bring about social harmony in a given context." See *Religion in Southeast Asia: An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*, ed. Jesudas M. Athyal, (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2015), 122.

<sup>5</sup> "Critical scholars regard secularization as European myth; others say that there is not a 'disenchantment of the world' but a 'return to God', a 'desecularization of the world'; it is not that "God is dead" but that secularization is dead." See Dave Capucao & Rico Ponce, "Secularization and Spirituality from a Theoretical and Empirical Perspective," *Secularization and Spirituality: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities*. (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2016), 5.





to look for a solid theoretical framework to base our empirical investigation. This will be discussed in section 1. Then, we will present the empirical findings in section 2.

## 1. SECULARIZATION - A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are various definitions of secularization.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have discussed at length these diverse nuances.<sup>7</sup> For this paper, however, we take *secularization* to mean “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Peter Berger 1967:107).

José Casanova (2006) provides three distinct descriptions of secularization: (1) as the decline of religious beliefs and practices in modern societies, often postulated as a universal, human, developmental process; (2) as the privatization of religion; and (3) as the differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science), usually understood as ‘emancipation’ from religious institutions and norms. This distinction, according to Casanova, may move beyond the impasse of the secularization debate towards a comparative historical analysis that could account for different patterns of secularization, in all three meanings of the term, across societies and civilizations (Casanova 2010:8).

### INDICATORS OF SECULARIZATION

Secularization manifests itself through various and diverse ways like the continuing

diminishment of religion; the decline in the saliency of religion; and religion playing a minimal or entirely insignificant factor in the societal and personal lives of people. Other indicators include an increasing institutional differentiation, growing rationality, rising individualism, detraditionalization process,<sup>8</sup> the decline in church membership, dwindling number of churchgoers, lessening of attendance in sacraments, and a sizeable number of members opting out.

Some of these signs are noticeable in the present-day Philippines. The survey of Social Weather Station (SWS) reveals that compared to eight years ago, Filipino church members who now attend ‘church services more frequently’ are outnumbered by those who now attend ‘less frequently’ (Mangahas & Labucay 2013). Further, it states that in the entirety of its 70 surveys from 1991-2013, weekly attendance was always lower among Catholics than among other Filipinos in general. It further reports that “one in every eleven Catholics sometimes think of leaving the Church”. It says that those who contemplate leaving the church among catholic members are common among (a) those who are relatively less religious, (b) those with relatively less frequent church attendance and (c) those whose present church attendance has decreased from eight years ago. In terms of *self-assessed religiosity*, this same survey indicates that church members who classify themselves as ‘somewhat religious’ are higher than those who consider themselves as ‘very religious’, yet a very minimal percentage consider themselves to have no religious belief.

<sup>6</sup> Here, I will focus on the concept of ‘secularization’ as a social process than ‘secularism’ as a state policy. See Humeira Iqtidar, “The difference between secularism and secularization,” *The Guardian*, 29 June 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/jun/29/secularism-secularisation-relationship>.

<sup>7</sup> See Dave Capucan & Ponce, Rico, “Secularization and Spirituality from a Theoretical and Empirical Perspective,” *Secularization and Spirituality: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities*. (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> *De-traditionalisation* occurs “when important aspects of personal identity are established not in primary socialization within the family or the church, but in the secondary socialization in which the individual learns the expert knowledge, the values, norms, and behavior patterns of various roles within the diverse institutional spheres into which modern society is differentiated.” See Albert W. Musschenga, *The Many Faces of Individualism*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 7.





For believers, the significance given to religion is either *differential* (i.e. the role of religion is only in the private sphere but not in public life), and/ or *partial* (i.e. religion as one factor among other factors and does not play a dominant role among the other aspects of one's life) (See: Capucao 2010:150).

Collins (2012:9) mentions some factors that account for this increasing secularization, namely: "growing prosperity, increased education, urbanization, clerical scandals, a rejection of Christian sexual ethics, influence of the media, pluralism, a move from institutional religion to personal spirituality and the life."

Due to the diversity of contexts, one cannot speak of a monolithic and universal scope and content of secularization. Casanova (2010:10) suggests that "a proper re-thinking of secularization will require a critical examination of the diverse **patterns of differentiation** and fusion of the religious and the secular and their mutual constitution across all world religions". And because secularization cannot be explicated mono-causally, one should rather be conceived of a *differential* secularization to show that religion wields variable influences or effects on many different areas of society.

### THREE LEVELS OF SECULARIZATION:

To consider the diversity of the secularization process in various countries, Tschannen (1991) and Dobbelaere (2002) propose to examine secularization on three levels, namely: **macro**-level or societal secularization, **meso**-level or organizational secularization, and **micro**-level or individual secularization. Casanova (2010:17) further proposes that instead of being obsessed with simply investigating the decline of religion, it would be better to focus more our investigation on the new forms that religion is assuming in

all world religions at these three levels. Let us briefly explain these three levels.

- a. **Macro-level** or societal secularization (i.e. social differentiation). On the macro-level, religion functions differently from other systems in a socially differentiated society. Various systems developed rather autonomously, albeit with some influencing. For religion, this meant less influence on other systems. An example is the separation of church and state. This does not mean that the ties between church and society or church and state are totally severed. As Casanova (2010) maintains, nowhere does an absolute division exist between church and state. Hence, any inquiry of secularization on the macro-level must necessarily include the assessment of the complex development of secularization in its historical process, like the historical ties between church and society and between church and the state (Casanova 2010:17).

Moreover, one can also speak on this level about secular nationalism or religions 'outside the church' (e.g. Bellah's civil religion) which are major carriers of national identity. This separate form of religion is expressed for instance through the rituals surrounding national memorial days, holidays, through the speeches of politicians, debates carried out in the media over questions of life and death (e.g. RH Bill), in public discussions of values and norms, and the teaching and learning processes in our educational system.

With the ongoing processes of globalization, there is also the likelihood of the re-emergence of the great "world religions" in the international scene being a globalized transnational imagined religious communities. Casanova (2010:19) believes that **globalization** bids not only as a great opportunity for the old world religions to spread out across the world insofar as they can free themselves from the territorial constraints of the nation-state and regain their transnational dimensions, but also delivers a great 'threat' insofar as globalization entails the de-territorialization of all cultural systems and threatens to dissolve the essential bonds between histories, people, and territories that have defined all civilizations and world religions.

The report of *Pew Research Center* predicts that "with the exception of Buddhism, all of the







major religious groups are expected to increase in number by 2050. But some will not keep pace with global population growth, and as a result, are expected to make up a smaller percentage of the world's population in 2050 than they did in 2010." By 2050, Islam (2.8 billion or 30% of the world population) will almost be at *par* with the Christian population (2.9 billion or 31% of the world population). Islam will be the fastest-growing religion (73% increase), Christianity is expected to rise but more slowly (35% increase), and those unaffiliated will be shrinking. The question however is the extent of the role of religion as a preserver and promoter of social cohesion in this changing pluralistic social system. Earlier studies have already shown that the intensity of religious faith correlates with a positive valuation of one's in-group and an increase in the negative valuation of the out-group (Eisinga & Scheepers 1989:127; Capucac 2010).

It is hard to point out exactly the degree of secularization in the Philippines on the macro-level, but there are significant indicators of functional differentiation in this society. In terms of politics, for instance, the Philippine political system is shaped by rules that function completely independent of religion. This was evident at the beginning of the republic.<sup>9</sup> One should point out, however, that the freedom to exercise and enjoy religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, is enshrined and guaranteed in this present constitution.

As a corollary to the codification of the 'separation of church and state' law in 1898, **Philippine society has gradually become pluralistic.** It opened up to other religious groups, both locally grown and foreign, to freely proliferate and recruit members from the general populace but mainly from among the majority Roman

Catholic members. These non-Catholic groups develop into 'competitors' in the open religious free market. They also become legitimate voices in the society that guarantees freedom and equality of all religions.

<sup>9</sup> "The framers of the 1899 constitution, particularly Apolinario Mabini, insisted on the separation of the church and state, as against Felipe Calderon's position of creating Roman Catholicism as the state religion. The position of Mabini won by a single vote." (Agoncillo 1990), 207. Article 5 of the 1899 constitution states thus: "The state recognizes the freedom and equality of all religions, as well as the separation of church and state." This has been re-echoed in both the 1935 and the present 1987 constitution (Art. II, sec. 6). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_the\\_Philippines#cite\\_note-17](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_the_Philippines#cite_note-17).

A remarkable example to demonstrate *functional differentiation* at work in the Philippine society is what happened in 2014 when the Department of Education (DepEd) tried to remove the phrase 'God-loving' from its vision statement as per the request of a group called "Filipino Freethinkers"<sup>10</sup> saying that it is a violation of the "principle of secularism" and of the "separation of church and state" as enshrined in the constitution of the land.<sup>11</sup> Although this move has been criticized by *netizens* and other sectors in the country for departing from the government's long practice of respect for the religious sensibility of the Filipinos, and that the Preamble of the Constitution also does not reflect secularism as claimed by the group but rather states "the aid of the Almighty God", nevertheless the Department of Education obliges by removing the phrase from their vision statement while maintaining the '*maka-Diyos*' (pro-God) in its core values. According to Archbishop Soc Villegas, the current CBCP president, "our pluralistic society indeed accords respect for the option of some to believe and for others not to... This respect for pluralism does not compel civil society to expunge the name of God from public life, especially when the majority of Filipinos continue to acknowledge God's sovereignty and to trust in Divine Providence."<sup>12</sup> "Furthermore," he adds, "the attitude of our laws in the Philippines towards religion is characterized as 'benevolent neutrality': the accommodation of religion whenever such accommodation does not offend law or public policy

While there is a juridical delineation or separation of power between church and state, there is however a **strong influence of the church in the political life** of the Filipinos. A strong presence of religious themes intersperses with the major historical events of this society, for instance in the 1896 revolution and the 1986 uprising against Marcos that depended significantly on religious mobilization (Abinales & Amoroso 2005:12). Hence, despite social differentiation,

<sup>10</sup> This same group is also demanding to get rid of some religious references in the offices and properties of the government, like the mention of God in the P100 peso bill "*Pinagpala ang bayan na ang Diyos ay Panginoon*" and in the P500 peso bill "faith in our people and faith in God."

<sup>11</sup> Rei Lemuel Crizaldo. "DepEd removes "God-loving" from vision statement," August 12, 2014. <http://crosscurrents.ph/nationwatch-deped-removes-god-loving-vision-statement/>. (accessed on July 18, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Tina G. Santos. "Bishops Lament, DepEd 'God-loving' no more?." *Inquirer Net: Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 30, 2014. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/634001/bishops-lament-deped-god-loving-no-more>. (Accessed on July 18, 2015).





while politics function autonomously from religion, especially in terms of the rules of democracy and bureaucracy, yet this relationship is very precarious which at times leads to dissension and discord. An example of this is the intervention of the church to topple the dictator or to protest against unjust policies of the state.

There are still some aspects of secularization on the macro-level that needed to be examined, like how religion relates with other functional systems for instance the economy, education, science, communication media, money, power, intimacy, knowledge, etc. To what extent does it interact with functionally reciprocal roles like producers/consumers, politicians/voters, parents/children, teachers/learners, religious leaders/believers? (cf. Van der Ven 2007: 9). One also needs to explore the impact of migration on the changing configuration of the relationship between secularization and religion, both in the host countries of the Filipino migrants and to the individual family members left in the country.<sup>13</sup>

*b. Meso-level* or organizational secularization (i.e. the decline of significance of religion with organizations). On this level, there is a marked deterioration of religious saliency on the level of organizations and other social systems (e.g. family, school, etc.). In the church, this is revealed through dwindling church membership, less attendance in church services, diminishing participation in the rites of passage, etc. Several studies disclose that this level of secularisation is exhibited among younger generations. In terms of religious communities, an indicator of secularization on this level is the **loss of “*gemeinschaft*” (community), individualism, and societalization (*Gesellschaft*)** takes over (Casanova 2010:18).

A number of reasons have been cited to explain the decline in church participation Van der Ven (1998:28) mentions the following: (1) **holistic**

**reason** – this is explained by the process of modernization & rationalization of society, leading to the disenchantment of individual and societal life, the ideology of scientism, which because of the modern importance of science and technology, is shaping people’s thoughts and behavior to an ever increasing degree; (2) **cultural Factors** – ostensibly adversely affecting the church (e.g. pluralism of religions, ideologies, values and norms, as well as the rise in the general level of education); (3) **social factors** – include changes in marriage and family life, the rise of individualism and the decline of group and community life, and the growth of *privatism* in so-called lifestyle enclaves; (4) **institutional hypothesis** – decline in church membership is seen as the result of the following processes: the church’s failure to be relevant; failure of leadership; failure of programs, loss of internal strength, decline of strong religious convictions and a concomitant decline in compelling teaching concerning the ultimate purpose and destiny of humankind; and the (5) **congregational processes** at the local level – when local parish is functioning or at least experienced as functioning less and less as a vital community. It includes ritual aspect (experience of being a celebrating community) and diaconal aspect (support each other in times of material and spiritual need).

While the ‘old’ churches are experiencing a decrease in membership or perhaps being transformed into a ‘sect’, this situation also opens up **new and expanded possibilities for the creation of communities of all kinds of voluntary associations, and the construction of new religious communities.** New ‘cults’, ‘new religions’, or ‘new religious movements’, assume the form of voluntary congregations, but so do the most dynamic forms of Christianity, like BEC’s, Couples for Christ, Prosperity gospel groups, etc. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were only 5.95 million neoreligionists, but by 2009, this swelled to 106.18 million.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in the globalized context and the increasing migration of people, there is also this **emerging new institutional form particularly in the immigrant diasporas** like the international presence of Couples for Christ, El Shaddai, Filipino Catholic Chaplaincies in

<sup>13</sup> Note that in the United States, immigrants became more religious as they became more Americans (Will Herberg’s thesis). This ‘immigrant religiosity’, according to this theory, is not simply a traditional residue, an Old world survival likely to disappear with adaptation to the new context, but rather an adaptive response to the New World. The thesis implies not only that immigrants tend to be religious because of a certain social pressure to conform to American religious norms, something that is undoubtedly the case, but more importantly, that collective religious identities have always been one of the primary ways of structuring internal societal pluralism in American history. Perhaps this can explain the ‘immigrant religiosity’ of many Filipino migrants in the US, and even thriving of locally founded religion, like Iglesia ni Kristo, Aglipayan, etc. in other countries.

<sup>14</sup> David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “Christian World Communions: Five Overviews of Global Christianity, AD 1800-2025.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Volume 33, No. 1 (January 2009): 32.



different countries, other covenant communities, etc. Hellemans (2012) even takes a positive viewpoint on the Catholic Church. He said that the Catholic Church is already losing its negative connotation as obsolete, old, and outdated. On the contrary, there are indications that **there is a renewed interest in, and a more positive attitude towards religion (e.g. the growing interest for mysticism, the success of the Catholic world youth day, etc.)**. Conversely, modernity is losing some of its normative drive and attractiveness. The dangers related to modernity are beginning to take their toll-like intensified warfare, environmental pollution, stress and uncertainty, individualism, etc.

Hellemans also said that there is a trend from being voluntary communities to **choice catholicism**. Some of the characteristics of choice Catholicism are: (a) **possibility of choice** – the choice has been heightened by the rise of fewer institutional forms of religion; individuals can decide to live their lives outside any form of institutionalized religion, hence the significance of the secularization issue; (b) **a minority church** without enforcing power; (c) delocalized, flexible church organization; (d) experiential religion in an event church; (e) the appeal of a religionized religion; (f) part of a multicultural world church.

- c. **Micro-level** or individual secularization (i.e. on the level of the individual). Indicators on these levels of secularization include the reduction in levels of practice, belief, or affiliation at the individual level; diminishing adherence to church-dictated codes of personal behavior, especially about sexuality, reproduction, and marriage; and declining recruitment to the clergy or religious life.<sup>15</sup> *'The'* believer, *'the'* Christian have been replaced by the freedom and autonomy of each individual to determine his or her own religious way of life.

One theory that explains secularization on this level is the so-called **"rational choice" theory** (Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, et al.). It rests on the basic assumption that

through functional differentiation, there is the collapse of the all-encompassing religions ('the sacred canopy'), and is replaced by a plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews. Further, it holds that **secularization does not lead to the decline but rather to the transformation of religion**. Because of competition with rival 'spirituality', religions tend to adapt to the religious supply of human needs, apply the principles of efficiency and efficacy, professionalize religious staff, and the resultant bureaucratization of religious institutions (Van der Ven 2007:13). Based on this theory, it has been conjectured that "countries with an open religious market have greater religious participation than countries with closed, monopolistic religious markets". In other words, pluralization and deregulation generate religious revival.

Resultant expressions of religion on this level would be the phenomenon which Gracie Davie calls **'believing without belonging'**,<sup>16</sup> wherein people claim to believe in God but are unchurched. Other expressions of which are **'invisible religion'** (Thomas Luckmann), religion *a la carte* or a *bricolage*, 'longing without belonging' (Hellemans 2001:124), **individual mysticism** (William James and Ernst Troelsch), etc.

## 2. EEMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Now that we have explored the theoretical framework of secularization, we set out to investigate the phenomenon of secularization in the Philippines. Since the youth are perceived as the 'mirror' of the future and the hope of society and the church, we chose them as our research population. For this reason, we investigated 4,007 high school and college students who are selected from various schools throughout the country using survey questionnaires.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Some scholars however question whether all three levels of secularization are linked together or whether processes at one level may occur without those at another. Moreover, it has been debated whether secularization is an inevitable process as societies 'modernize' or whether instances of secularization are exceptions" See Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 2002); David Martin, "The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 42, No. 3 (1991).

<sup>16</sup> Daniele Hervieu-Leger, however, introduces the idea of **"belonging but not believing"** i.e. people continue to identify themselves as implicit members of their national churches, even after explicitly abandoning them to describe some religious attitudes of people among Scandinavian countries.

<sup>17</sup> Both purposive and cluster sampling techniques were employed (See Sevilla et al. 1992). The sampling criteria are the following: (a) representations from both public and private, (b) from at least Third Year High school students up to college, (c) from urban and rural, and (d) from provinces representing Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.





#### A. RESEARCH POPULATION:

The research population has the following characteristics: for **gender**, 1,400 (34.9%) are males and 2,604 (65%) females; for **age**, 1,760 (44%) belong to the age group of 12-16 years old, 1,427 (36%) to the age group of 17-18 years old, and 808 (20%) to 19 years old and above; for the **type of school**, 2,116 (53%) are from public schools and 1,891 (47%) from private; for the **educational level**, 313 (7.8%) are high school students and 3,675 (92.2%) college students; for the **social status of the respondent's family**<sup>18</sup>, 599 (15.1%) low level, 1,905 (47.9%) middle, and 1,469 (37%) high level; for **religious affiliation**, there are 3,035 (77%) Roman Catholic members and only 928 (23%) other church members.<sup>19</sup> There are 13 (0.3%) Islam, 1 (0%) Buddhist, and 32 (0.8%) who claim to have no religion. For **church membership**,<sup>20</sup> there are 1754 (43.8%) core members, 1894 (47.3%) modal members, and 331 (8.3%) marginal members.<sup>21</sup>

#### B. MEASURING INSTRUMENT:

To measure **secularization**, we employ the instruments constructed by *Sociaal culturele*

<sup>18</sup> Computed from the average values of the following: (a) educational level of the father, (b) educational level of the mother, (c) clustered monthly gross income of the household.

<sup>19</sup> **Islam 13 (0.3%), Buddhist 1 (0%), no religion 32 (0.8%)**, Baptist 111 (2.8%), Mormons 18 (0.4%), Iglesia ni Kristo 69 (1.7%), Born Again 221 (5.5%), Evangelical Christian 47 (1.2%), Free Association 1 (0%), Alliance/Protestant 20 (0.5%), Methodist 13 (0.3%), 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist 25 (.6%), Latter Day Saints 11 (0.3%), Jehovah's Witnesses 30 (0.7%), Aglipay 5 (0.1%), Assemblies of God 17 (0.4%), Unificationist 1 (0%), Church of God International 6 (0.1%), Four Square Gospel 7 (0.2%), Pentecostal Trinitarian 47 (1.2%), Other Christian denomination 43 (1.1%).

<sup>20</sup> Clustered according to answers on questions related to (a) frequency of reading and reciting the bible, (b) attendance in worship services, (c) how often do you pray, and (d) participation in rituals and ceremonies like baptism, marriage, Christmas, Easter, funeral, and fasting). **Core Members** answer to – (a & b) more than once a week, once a day, and several times a day; (c) once a day, several times a day; (d) participates for a religious reason. **Modal members** answer to- (a & b) at least once a month, or once a week; (c) pray more than once a week, once a day, and several times a day; (d) participate but for non-religious reasons. **Marginal Members** answer to – (a & b) never, or only on feast days or special holy days; (c) never, only on feast days or special holy days, at least once a month, or once a week; (d) do not participate and neither do my family or do not participate but family does.

<sup>21</sup> Missing answers are not counted in the computation of the frequency percentage for all these characteristics.

*ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (SOCON 2000) which contains a battery of scales consisting of the following variables: (a) religious identification, (b) religious practice, and (c) salience of religious identity. A secondary set of scales, also from SOCON, include instruments to measure (a) individualization<sup>22</sup> (b) preferred characteristics of future partner, and (c) value system<sup>23</sup>

#### C. ANALYSIS:

The data collected from the questionnaires were processed through the SPSS program. Several analyses were conducted like frequency analysis,<sup>24</sup> factor analysis,<sup>25</sup> reliability of scales (Cronbach's Alpha),<sup>26</sup> variance analysis, and Spearman's Rho correlation<sup>27</sup>.

#### D. RESULTS

In this study, we present the result of the frequency analysis, factor analysis, reliability of

<sup>22</sup> "We make a distinction between *utilitarian individualism* and *expressive individualism*. *Utilitarian or instrumental individualism* emphasizes a commitment to hard work, the pursuit of own interests, striving for wealth and success. *Expressive individualism* on the other hand underscores "commitment to values like self-expression, self-realization and richness, and intensity of feelings...It stresses the freedom to express oneself" See Robert Bella et al., *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 32-48; (see also Dobbelaere 2001, 48).

<sup>23</sup> Dave Capucan & Ponce, Rico, *Individualism and Salvation. An empirical-theological exploration of attitudes among the Filipino youth and its challenges to Filipino Families* (A Paper presented to Dakateo Conference 2015). Unpublished.

<sup>24</sup> We interpreted the mean scores of a Likert scale thus: 1:00-1.79 = *I totally disagree*; 1.80-2.59 = *I disagree*; 2.60-3.39 = *I feel ambivalent* (2.60-2.99 = negatively ambivalent; 3.00-3.39 = positively ambivalent), 3.40-4.19 = *I agree*; 4.20-5.00 = *I totally agree*.

<sup>25</sup> For the factor analysis, we applied the following criteria: communality of items >.20; factor loading >.40; explained variance >.40; the difference between factor loading of items >.15. The items that do not meet these criteria are eliminated and are indicated by the asterisk placed before the items in the appendix. We use mainly free factor analysis, and we only use forced factor analysis when in case of measurements frequently used in previous studies, the theoretical interpretability of the empirical factors from these forced analyses, is sufficiently near to the theoretical domain.

<sup>26</sup> Values equal to or above 0.7. were considered.

<sup>27</sup> The strength of correlation can be described using the following interpretation of scores: 0.00-0.19 "very weak"; 0.20-0.39 "weak"; 0.49-0.59 "moderate"; 0.60-0.79 "strong", and 0.80-1.0 "very strong". The statistical significance of the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient in the case of this study can be identified as: \*\* = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \* = correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).





scales (Cronbach's Alpha), variance analysis, and Spearman's Rho correlation.

## 1. FREQUENCY

### SECULARIZATION

#### A. RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION

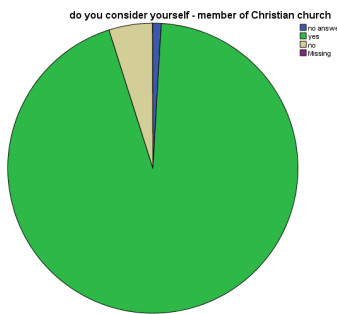


Figure 1: Religious self-attribution

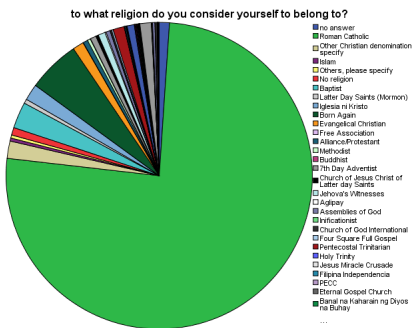


Figure 2: Religious Membership

Based on the answers to the religious self-attribution question, 94.2% (3,774) of the respondents consider themselves members of a Christian community or religious community, while 4.9% (195) identify themselves as non-members. There are 77% (3,035) who classify themselves as members of the Roman Catholic Church and around 23% (928) claim to belong to other religious groups.

There are 12% (481) who claim that they have a different religion before, while the majority of

them, 81.5% (3,267) did not belong to a different religion before.

In terms of the **type of church members**,<sup>28</sup> we have the following frequencies: core members 43.8% (1754), modal 47.3% (1894), and marginal 8.3% (331).<sup>29</sup>

#### B. RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

For religious practice, we consider the following factors: (a) *the frequency of reading or reciting sacred writings*, (b) *the frequency of attending worship services*, and (c) *the frequency of praying*. The table below (Table 1) shows the frequency of religious practice. We can note that reading or reciting the scriptures is not something that is frequently practiced by our young respondents. The highest score is only *on feast days or special holy days* (27.7%). In terms of the frequency of church attendance, those who attend *weekly* church services get the highest (41.3%). This is quite striking because if you sum up the scores of those who attend Sunday services less than once a week (i.e. at least once a month, on feast days, and never), you have already 38% of this young population. But praying several times a day is something that is still practiced by about 57.1% of our respondents.

<sup>28</sup> Clustered according to answers on questions related to (a) frequency of reading and reciting the bible, (b) attendance in worship services, (c) how often do you pray, and (d) participation in rituals and ceremonies like baptism, marriage, Christmas, Easter, funeral, and fasting). **Core Members** answer to – (a & b) more than once a week, once a day, and several times a day; (c) once a day, several times a day; (d) participates for a religious reason. **Modal members** answer to- (a & b) at least once a month, or once a week; (c) pray more than once a week; (d) participate but for non-religious reasons. **Marginal Members** answer to – (a & b) never, or only on feast days or special holy days; (c) never, only on feast days or special holy days, at least once a month, or once a week; (d) do not participate and neither do my family or do not participate but family does.

<sup>29</sup> Missing answers are not counted in the computation of the frequency percentage for all these characteristics.



**Table 1: Religious Practice**

	Frequency of Reading or reciting sacred writings (v.28)		Frequency of Attending of worship services (v.29)		Frequency of Praying (v. 30)	
No answer	48	1.2%	37	.9 %	26	.6%
Never	256	6.4%	179	4.5 %	35	.9%
Only on feast days or special holy days	1110	27.7%	693	17.3%	78	1.9%
At least once a month	771	19.2%	638	15.9%	72	1.8%
Once a week	731	18.2%	1653	41.3%	171	4.3%
More than once a week	473	11.8%	531	13.3%	339	8.5%
Once a day	283	7.1%	74	1.8%	999	24.9%
Several times a day	334	8.3%	202	5.0%	2287	57.1%
TOTAL	4006	100.0	4007	100.0	4007	100.0

### C. FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

In terms of frequency of participation in religious ceremonies, the survey shows that **core members frequently participate** in most if not all of these activities more than the other types of church members. However, one should take note of the differential answers on the religious ceremonies to which each type of church members participate. One can observe that next to the core members, marginal members participate more in baptism, Easter, and fasting ceremonies compared to modal members. While modal members, next to core members, participate more in marriage, Christmas, and funeral activities compared to marginal members. Christmas is participated by most of the core members, and fasting is the least participated by. The table below (Table 2) shows a summary of participation in religious ceremonies.

**Table 2: Summary of the frequency of participation in religious ceremonies (v. 35-40)<sup>30</sup>**

	No Answer	Marginal	Modal	Core	TOTAL
	Baptism	218 5.4%	507 12.7%	353 8.8%	2929 73.1%
Marriage	276 6.9%	545 13.6%	600 15.0%	2586 64.5%	4007 100%
Christmas	203 5.1%	251 6.3%	445 11.1%	3108 77.6%	4007 100%
Easter	363 9.1%	677 16.9%	394 9.8%	2573 64.2%	4007 100%
Funeral	314 7.8%	538 13.4%	709 17.7%	2446 61.0%	4007 100%
Fasting	424 10.6%	1361 34.0%	325 8.1%	1897 47.3%	4007 100%

### D. PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Remarkably, the majority of our youth do not belong to any religious organization (46%), although a number claim to be members (28%) and some are only supporters (25%). The type of religious organization where most students are members is the 'community-based organization (23.9%). Those who belong to a school-based organization are only 17.6%. The majority of the respondents (36%) who are involved in the activities of religious organizations in the past year participate only during special days. This data might be of significance to assess the involvement of the youth in organizations either in the parish or community or in campus ministry in schools.

Below, we present the summary of the frequency scores of the membership or supporter of

<sup>30</sup> **Marginal** represents those who answered 'do not participate in it and neither does my family' & 'do not participate in it but my family does; **modal** for those who answered 'do participate but for non-religious reasons, and **core** for those who answered 'do participate for religious reasons.



the religious organizations in Table 3, the distribution of religious organizations supported by the respondents in Table 4, and the frequency of participation in the activities of religious organizations in the past year on Table 5.

Table 3: Membership or supporter of any religious organizations (v. 41)

	Frequency	Percent
no answer	62	2%
No	1831	46%
yes, I am a supporter only	995	25%
yes, I am a member	1119	28%
Total	4007	100%

Table 4: Distribution of religious organizations supported by the respondent (v. 42)

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	1874	46.8%
School-Based	704	17.6%
Community-Based	958	23.9%
Others	471	11.8%
Total	4007	100.0%

Table 5: Frequency of participation in the activities of religious organizations in the past year (v. 43)

	Frequency	Percent
No Answer	390	9.7%
Never	418	10.4%
Only on special days	1447	36.1%
At least once a month	680	17.0%
Once a week	645	16.1%
More than once a week	427	10.7%
Total	4007	100.0%

#### E. THE SALIENCE OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

For **religious saliency**, the data reveal that our respondents generally believe that religion is important to their life. This is reflected clearly by their high score on the items: “*my religious identity is very important to me*” (90.89%) and “*without my faith, my life would be quite different*” (87.42%). However, the item that does not have a convincing agreement is on the item which says ‘influence of faith on political attitudes’ (60.60%) which also has the highest percentage of unsure answers (26.25%). The item, ‘as a committed member of religious group’ scores second lowest among the agreed answers (72.88%) which also has 20.84% unsure answers. In the table below (Table 6), we report the frequency scores on each item.



	N o answer	- Not agree)	+/- (Not sure)	+ (Agree)	Total
My religious identity is very important to me.	37 (.92%)	144 (3.59%)	184 (4.59)	3,642 (90.89%)	4007 (100%)
I see myself as a committed member of my religious group.	55 (1.37%)	197 (4.91%)	835 (20.84)	2,920 (72.88%)	4007 (100%)
My religious beliefs have a great deal of influence on my life.	65 (1.62%)	119 (2.97%)	332 (8.29%)	3,491 (87.12%)	4007 (100%)
My religious beliefs have a great deal of influence on how I make important decisions.	52 (1.30%)	143 (3.57%)	411 (10.26%)	3,400 (84.85%)	4006 (99.98%)
My religious beliefs have a great deal of influence on how I relate with others.	50 (1.25%)	177 (4.42%)	471 (11.75%)	3,309 (82.58%)	4007 (100%)
My Christian faith has a great influence on my political attitudes.	64 (1.60%)	463 (11.56%)	1052 (26.25%)	2,428 (60.60%)	4007 (100%)
Without my faith, my life would be quite different.	55 (1.37%)	158 (3.95%)	291 (7.26%)	3,503 (87.42%)	4007 (100%)
I am very interested in my Christian faith.	51 (1.27%)	118 (2.94%)	333 (8.31%)	3,505 (87.48%)	4007 (100%)

## F. INDIVIDUALIZATION:

We also examine the individualistic attitude of our respondents. We distinguish between (1) *utilitarian-egocentric individualism*, and (2) *self-expressive individualism*.<sup>31</sup> In Table 7 below, we present the attitudes toward individualism from an empirical perspective.

<sup>31</sup> Dave Capucao & Ponce, Rico, *Individualism and Spirituality among the Filipino Youth*, (A Paper presented to DAKATEO CONFERENCE 2015). Unpublished.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Utilitarian-egocentric individualism	3,937	3.45	.82	.84
Self-expressive individualism	3,944	3.98	.63	.76

In the frequency analysis (Table 7), one can observe that our respondents *agree* to both utilitarian-egocentric individualism (mean = 3.45) and self-expressive individualism (mean = 3.98), though the latter scored slightly higher. We also use the SOCON scale to examine the 'Preferred characteristics of Future Partner' based on two factors, namely: *traditionalism* and *individualistic liberalism*.<sup>32</sup> In Table 8, it is clear that our respondents strongly agree on a traditionalistic type of future partner, but are ambivalent with regards to an individualistic liberal future partner.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Traditionalism	3,968	4.59	.59	.78
Individualistic	3,968	3.34	.91	.56

We also probed the value system of our respondents based on the four distinct values namely: traditional achievement values, traditional family values, social criticism, and hedonistic values. The result of the frequency analysis reveals that our respondents *agree*

<sup>32</sup> We use the term "liberalism" to signify the concept that each person should be free to do anything without constraint or social obligation, provided he or she does not impinge on other's liberties. (See Fiske 2002, 82-83).





on both traditional achievement values and hedonistic values, but are *ambivalent* to both the traditional family and social criticism values.

Table 9: Value System					
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Spearman's Rho
Traditional achievement values	3,981	4.32	.76	.67	.48** (N=4006; .000)
Traditional family values	3,983	3.31	1.18	.84	.72** (N=4006; .000)
S o c i a l Criticism	3,967	3.30	.96	.64	.47** (N=4006; .000)
Hedonistic values	3,989	4.36	.80	.73	.58** (N=4006; .000)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); Missing pairwise

To sum up, we can say that our respondents agree to **individualistic related** scales like utilitarian-egocentrism, self-expressive individualism, and hedonistic values, but are ambivalent with regards preference for an individualistic-liberal future partner and social criticism. For **traditionalistic related** scales, they respond positively to both traditionalistic future partner and traditionalistic achievement values but are ambivalent in accepting traditional family values.

## G. DISCUSSION

Earlier, we mentioned three **primary indicators of secularization**, namely: (a) religious identification, (b) religious practice, and (c) salience of religious identity. We also included **secondary indicators** which are particularly related to 'individualization' albeit indirectly to

secularization like (a) types of individualization, (b) preferred characteristics of future partner, and (c) value system.

In terms of **religious identification** (a), our data reveal that many of our youngsters still consider themselves to be a member of a religious group (94.2%). The majority is Roman Catholics (81%), and only 32 respondents (0.8%) clearly indicate that they don't belong to any religion. From among the church members, the majority can be classified as modal members (47.3%) followed by core members (43.8%), and the marginal members (8.3%) last. **If we base our analysis of secularization on this aspect alone, one can easily reckon that the Filipinos are not at all secularized.**

However, if one observes the **religious practice** (b), one will notice that less than 50% of our respondents are attending weekly church services; and that there are 38% who attend Sunday services less than once a week or never (i.e. at least once a month, on feast days, and never). While reading the bible is less practiced, praying is still observed by more than 50% of our young people, and even more than once a day. Core members frequently participate in most if not all of the religious ceremonies compared to other types of church members. There is a differential degree of participation of each type of church member depending on the kind of religious ceremony. Many are not active in the religious organization as well.

In terms of **religious saliency** (c), the majority of our young Filipino students still consider religion to be an important aspect of their lives. However, the scores on the items regarding the influence of faith on political attitudes and its influence on how he/she relates with others is less than the other items. Less than 50% also do not consider themselves as committed members of religious groups.



The Filipino youth of today manifest a certain tendency towards **individualism**. They explicitly agree on utilitarian-egocentric individualism, self-expressive individualism, and hedonistic values. Likewise, our study reveals that while our young respondents agree on traditionalistic achievement values like *being in a good financial situation* and *having social security*, they still have an ambivalent attitude towards traditional family values like *being married* and *having children, and raising them*. This raises the question of whether the young generation of today gives more priority to material security than being married and having children. Or is it maybe because students aim to reach material stability first before thinking about marriage and having children? Nevertheless, this gives us a glimpse into the mindset of this generation of Filipinos that marriage and family life are no longer their chief value or concern. However, our study also shows that while our respondents are amenable to a traditionalistic future partner, they are nevertheless ambivalent about their choice for an individualistic-liberal future partner. This is quite interesting. While there is a tendency towards *individualism*, today's youth seem to have a different perception when it comes to choosing their partner. On the one hand, they are not sure if they would prefer an individualistic-liberal partner but they exhibit a clear preference for a traditionalistic future partner who exudes characteristics like being faithful, providing security and protection, giving importance to family ties, and having a sense of duty. Their desire to marry and form a family is however qualified by our respondents' preference for a partner who is faithful, dutiful, and one who treasures family life.

One can also discern from this study that our respondents, who represent the contemporary Filipino youth, especially the modal and the marginal church members, are not so sure about

their attitudes on *social criticism*. While they score high on hedonistic values and traditional achievement values, they seem to put little worth on being critical to issues in society. Having a critical attitude towards social evil is part of the Christian tradition. The church document *Justice in the World* (no. 6) declares that "Action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel". It is therefore a challenge for the church and society to educate their youth to be conscious of their prophetic calling and to be socially critical to issues to bring about an authentic and integral transformation of our society. It is our task "to inculcate a truly and entirely human way of life in justice, love, and simplicity" (*Justice in the World*, 51).

Another striking result is the implication of the explicit stanch agreement of the Filipino youth to *traditional achievement values* and *hedonism*. A generation that emphasizes material stability and having fun in life might have difficulties in accepting the 'cross' that is entailed in family life. Family life entails embracing not just the pleasant and bright side of life, but also the unpleasant and seamy side of it.

And so to the question of whether our Filipino youth of today are getting secularized or not, our answer is a qualified *yes* and *no*. **No** in the sense that all signs point to the 'presence' of religion in terms of religious attribution, practice, and religious saliency. But yes, in the sense that one can already observe *lessening observance of religious practices*, *de-traditionalization*, *increasing hedonism*, and *individualism* among our Filipino youth.





## B. CHALLENGES TO THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA

In the context of secularization, one has to be keen in recognizing the various configurations of theology – both *within* and *outside* religion, and on various levels from the macro-, meso-, and the micro-level. Moreover, one ought to be perceptive in locating the presence of the ‘divine’ even in the most secular or profane arena. These are frontier situations, the new *Areopagus*, that continue to invite us to look at reality from the optic of an Asian.

From the result of our theoretical and empirical assessment of secularization among our Filipino youth, we now draw some challenges to the future of theology and Christianity in Asia.

- 1. FORMATION OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE:** It is clear from our investigation that religion still plays a major role in the lives of many Filipino youth. However, our data also reveal that religion does not totally circumscribe their choices, particularly with regards to politics, choice of partners, or views on certain moral or sexual issues, etc. Our youngsters may set parameters as to the degree to which religion may intrude into their personal lives. This trend can be explained from the perspective of social differentiation going on in our society. Our earlier discussion on the *differential* and *partial* scopes of religious influence may be a plausible explanation for this phenomenon. Many of the youth today put a premium value on their personal choice, following their consciences. One important challenge to theology and the church is to contribute to *the formation of conscience* and *moral choices*. In the document *Amoris Laetitia* no. 37, Pope Francis states: “We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their discernment in complex situations. **We have been called to form consciences**, not to replace them”. This

of course has been earlier expressed in other Vatican II documents like *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* which emphasizes the notion of ‘responsible freedom’ and respect for *forum internum*.

One major task of the church is to assist the youth in making the right choices. We have to be aware that making moral and religious or spiritual choices is no longer easy for many students of today. Many of them are confronted by numerous possibilities surrounding their freedom of choice. In making choices, religion plays an important role. The choices made by individuals based on religion may not be solely motivated by religious compensators as some sociological theories would advance (Stark & Bainbridge 1987) but by the intrinsic value of Christian tradition that brings about authentic freedom to the individual. Thus, the church must be able to develop a youth and family formation program towards authenticity, towards genuine freedom of spirit construed as a “communion in the sovereign freedom with which God desires to save the world” (M. De Goedt).

- 2. INTERIORIZATION OF FAITH and KEENESS ON NON-TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF FAITH EXPERIENCES:** One of the reasons for the decline in religious practice and participation in religious activities is the ‘*detraditionalization*’ process in modern society. Many youngsters do not relate to these ‘big’ traditions any longer. One can conjecture that Davie’s notion of ‘**believing but not belonging**’ somehow expresses the sentiments of the youth of today. Perhaps Theology and Christianity in Asia are challenged to look for the sources of faith in nontraditional practices and discourses to respond to our generation of Christians, which Gauchet calls *religious after religion*. Gauchet (1997:200) says that notwithstanding the relevance of the symbolic function of religion, there is “an ineliminable subjective stratum underlying the religious phenomenon, namely **personal experience free from fixed dogmatic content.**” He said that this “subjective experience to which constituted religious systems actually refer can operate perfectly well by itself, on its own, as it were. It does not have to be projected into systematic doctrinal





representations and socially apportioned out for its implementation. It can also emerge in nontraditional practices and discourses” (Gauchet 1997:200).

Gauchet challenges theology to look at some elements of the primordial religious experience which seemingly could endure beyond (institutionalized) ‘religion’. He suggests addressing the “*non-differentiated*” in the thought contents of persons, the ‘one that suddenly appears before the mind when we go beyond the visible to examine its nondifferentiated unity and continuity” (ibid. 201).

Aside from this, he also suggests looking at the *aesthetic experience* of people which, according to him is also a primordial source of religious experience. And finally, Gauchet speaks of the ‘*problem that we are ourselves*’ as a form of experience establishing our continuity with a religious man. In other words, this perennial striving to be ‘spiritual’ comes from that innate need to deal with the difficulty of humans to accept themselves, which can only be comprehended in the interstice between self-negation and self-affirmation, “between the search for their self-effacement and the quest for a full and necessary self-identity” (Gauchet 1997:205).

The continuity of religion in the “inner experience”, Gauchet (1997:200) adds, still has some surprises in store. He said: “there can be no doubt that religion’s aftereffects will not be limited to maintaining a residual presence, but will range from the bonafide perpetuation of established Churches (now based on personal adherence, not on their original content), to widespread adherence to privately practiced beliefs, including syncretic reconstructions and constantly changing sectarian variants” (1997:200).

3. **ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC ARENA:** Based on the empirical result of this study, one can say that *religious saliency* serves as an important indicator of secularization. We can surmise that *personal* or subjective recognition of the importance of religion is a stanch marker of secularization as compared to simply church membership and church participation, albeit in some instances they are connected.

The data however show that believers are quite reticent about the link between religious salience and politics, and between religion and relationship with others. One possible explanation for this diffidence is the tendency to privatize religion as part of functional differentiation in modern society. This propensity to privatize religion is reinforced by Christian theology which bolsters individualized, interiorized, ecclesiasticized, and privatized salvation. However, as Bosch (1995:34) argues, Christians will have to do their utmost to resist this temptation. For many Asians, religion permeates all of life. Many Asians cannot dissociate one’s religion with other spheres of life in society. But this poses a great problem in some *secular* states in Asia especially those with a majority *religious* population, both in mono- and multi-religious settings.

In theology, Christians are called to ask questions about the use of power in the societies, to unmask those that destroy life, to show concern for the victims of society while at the same time calling to repentance those who have turned them into victims. Christianity, says Nicolas Wolterstorff (1983:3-22), is not an *aversive religion but a world-formative religion*. In the secularizing situation, supplying more religion is not the answer. The issue, according to Bosch (1995:35), “is not to talk more about God in a culture that has become irreligious, but how to express, ethically, the coming of God’s reign, how to help people respond to the real questions of their context, and how to break with the paradigm according to which religion has to do only with the private sphere”. This requires sometimes to prophetically criticize the existing social structures because “no socio-political system can ever adequately and fully embody the new order of God’s reign” (Shenk 1991:106 quoted in Bosch 1995:35).

Furthermore, while religion must respect the autonomy of earthly/state affairs on the one hand, it has to contribute to the public discourse on issues about society in general. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI suggests to “formulate a concept of secularity which, on the one hand, acknowledges the place that is





due to God and his moral law, to Christ and his church in human life, both individual and social, and on the other, affirms and respects the “rightful autonomy of earthly affairs.” Healthy secularity, he adds, has to do with “the effective autonomy of earthly realities, not...from the moral order but the ecclesiastical sphere” (ibid.). It involves the “affirmation and defense of the important values that give meaning to the person’s life and safeguard his or her dignity...and which (values) are human before being Christian, such that they cannot leave the church silent and indifferent.” What Benedict laments is the degeneration of secularity into a secularist ideology that is “hostile to every important political and cultural form of religion..” and which “refuses the Christian community and its legitimate representatives the right to speak on the moral problems that challenge all human consciences today” (David 2011:43).

Moreover, José Casanova has persuasively argued against the identification of *differentiation* with *privatization*. A separation out and emancipation of secular spheres, like the state, the economy, and science, has undoubtedly occurred.<sup>33</sup> But it doesn’t follow at all “that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the privatization and, some added, the marginalization of religion in the modern world. On the contrary, today we are witnessing the ‘deprivatization’ of religion’. Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity, as well as theories of secularization, had reserved for them” (Casanova 1994: 5, 20, 211, in Taylor 2007:426).

4. **SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM:** There is a connection between secularism and pluralism. Felix Wilfred remarks: “In as much as the religions cultivate the ideal of pluralism, they also contribute to strengthening the secular ideal.... Pluralism in Asia means upholding the cause of the poor and the

marginalized and secular humanism means a commitment to the transformation of socio-political order” (Wilfred 2008:282). “Pluralism is respecting the otherness of the other, celebration of life, recognition and affirmation of identities, and defense of the poor. In this sense, religious pluralism and secular humanism converge and reinforce each other. Even more, pluralism is the key to understand Asian secular humanism. Felix Wilfred (2008:282) believes that a commitment to religious pluralism, from an Asian perspective, entails a commitment to secular humanism. He said that secular humanism offers on its part avenues in Asia for the self-actualization of religious pluralism. On the other hand, pluralism is also the key to Asian understanding of the secular. There is no opposition of one to the other, as may be the case in other parts of the world” (ibid., 265).

The specific character of Asian pluralism and secular humanism and the way they are an inter-related call for a theological education that will draw from Asian resources and will continue to respond to the challenges, dreams, and hopes of the Asian continent” (Wilfred 2008:287).

With the increasing exposure of people to other religious and non-religious convictions in the globalized context, there is a need to seriously consider some requirements for theology to address the reality of religious pluralism and secularism.

Felix Wilfred proposes that a theologian must be able to read the Christian scriptures through the sacred writings of our neighbors of other faiths. One must **enable inter-textual reading**. This method will facilitate us to rethink our truth claims, our concepts of revelation, history, community, images of God, theodicy, and notion of ultimate human fulfillment, worldview, and the use of theological language. “It is by adopting this method that one may realize the ultimate irreducibility of religious experience in noetic terms” (Wilfred 2008:273). It will facilitate a transformative character in a mystical and contemplative union with the reality it deals with. The accent will be not so much a matter of content as that of a process. (Wilfred 2008:279).

<sup>33</sup> France’s *laïcité* is considered as a constitutionally sacralized principle, but also consensually shared by the overwhelming majority of citizens, who support the enforcement of legislation banishing “ostensible religious symbols” from the public sphere because they are viewed as a threat to the national system or national tradition. (Casanova 2010, 19)



Moreover, theological education in Asia needs to instill in the students **the ability to respond to the political realities of the continent in a religiously pluralist context.** “The unique situation of a convergence between religious pluralism and secular humanism calls for a mode of engagement that will be prophetic in the secular and political sphere, and at the same time respect the autonomy of these spheres” (Wilfred 2008:287).

Theology must engage with secular humanism because, as Wildred (2008:282) asserts, “of the fact that the Asian religions have often failed to articulate the voice of the people. Further, this will help theology to avoid the temptation of alienation from reality and end up in a world of mental representation. It will also help theology to become aware of its own inherent limitations.” Further he adds, “ideals of secular humanism are carried forward through various social movements bearing specific characteristics of the context. There are movements for the political, economic, and cultural rights of people and groups, movements for upholding the dignity of women, and their liberation movements for the protection of children – an issue of great importance especially in South Asia which has the highest number of child workers in the world” (Wilfred 2008:284).

In this challenging context, it is imperative to look for other sources and other mediations of God’s revelation outside one’s tradition. Theologians must be attentive to religion that occurs *outside* the church, not simply as a remnant of church religion, but as a separate form of religion (e.g. Bellah’s **civil religion**). The text from Philippians 4:8 (NIV) reminds us to ground our common search to “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy” in all things which God Himself has created. We need however to be reminded of what Bishop Kenneth Cragg said, I quote: “*Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the ground, we are approaching is holy; Else we may find ourselves treading on people’s dreams.*”

*More seriously still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.”*

5. **TRIPLE DIALOGUE PLUS:** To determine its own identity and vision for the future, doing theology in Asia requires engaging in the triple dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor as envisioned by FABC for over three decades. This is a necessary condition to have a paradigm shift towards realizing a theology with a truly Asian character. This ought to be incorporated in her *modus operandi*. The church has to move from being the local church *in* the Philippines to be the **local church of the Philippines.**

Moreover, with the emergent secularization in many Asian countries, we ought to expand the scope of this dialogue. We suggest three areas where this dialogue can take place:

- (a) **dialogue with a non-theological profession** that is today shaping the forces driving globalization (technology, business, finance, media, human rights advocacy, international law, and diplomacy, ecological analysis, **popular movements**, etc.);
- (b) **dialogue with the leaders (or future leaders)** in these areas in the kinds of **moral and spiritual dialogue** that open up the questions of the theological nature of their vocation.
- (c) To be **exposed to how religions other than Christianity have shaped their societies and cultures in distinctive directions** (and in some ways been shaped by non-religious forces); and how Christian theology and ethics can and should encounter the beliefs and morals of others.

6. **RELIGION AND PEACE BASED ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE VICTIMS/MARGINS:** Religions unfortunately have become sources of violence and infringement of human rights. Asian history is replete with instances where religion is instrumentalized or manipulated to advance the vested interests of some groups. Theology in Asia must articulate its discourse of peace and harmony which is rooted in the perspective of the victims and people from the margins. Furthermore,





theological education should also impart a positive approach to the religion of the neighbors (Wilfred 2008:279).

#### 7. BROADENING OF HORIZONS – DEVELOPMENT IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:

The developments in science and technology (e.g. neuro-science, new cosmology, quantum physics, neuro-cognitive science, health medicine, etc.) are likewise purveyors of new theological thinking in Asia. Theology must be an active interlocutor not only in civil society but also in science and technology, especially those that deal with human development and the environment. The shift from an anthropocentric perspective to a cosmocentric paradigm has deep implications for the way we do theology today. This paradigmatic shift requires a re-evaluation and re-articulation of our Asian theological categories and find some resonance with these new developments (e.g. Asian concept of interconnectedness, the notion of ‘animated world’, etc.). This also means that Asian theology must critic the tendency of science towards ‘dogmatism’ and sheer ‘technical’ perspective devoid of morality and genuine integral human concern.

#### 8. REDISCOVERY OF THE COSMOCENTRIC PARADIGMS IN ASIA:

How do we explain the pervasiveness of God or the *enchantment* of the world in the mindset of the Filipino youth? One way of explaining this is through the ‘indigenous’ substratum of Filipino spirituality which Cajés calls *anitism*. Cajés (2002:33-38) believe that the concept of *anitism* persists in the worldview of many Filipinos, both by the ancestral cultures and lowland Christianity, often lived out in their daily living through popular religiosity. Cajés describes *anitism* as the Filipino version of animism which is a “system of belief that evolves around the religious idea and practices concerning the anito/anitu. As a system, it shows the connection between the living and the *anito*, which is usually an ancestral spirit. In broad terms, it shows that the whole of reality has two interpenetrating dimensions of the visible and the invisible” (Cajés 2002:45). Their religiosity is often marked by a mixture

of indigenous beliefs and Christian symbols or some aspects of Christian faith. Quoting Fr. Bulatao, Cajés concludes (2002:39), “*the Filipino is still an animist at heart despite four centuries of Roman Catholicism.*”

#### 9. FOSTERING INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL VALUES.

Some Filipino authors like F. Landa Jocano (1992: 18-20) observe that many Filipinos today experience what he calls “inner incongruence” of values and orientation. This inner incongruence, he explains, is brought about by the existence of two dialectical value systems, a **western or colonial exogenous value system** that underscores legalism, formality, and individual merit, and an **indigenous/subconscious/traditional value system** characterized by customary, non-formal, flexible, non-confrontational, and consensus orientation. He suggests that we must promote our native values particularly in the education of our youth to develop our inner strength. The indigenous concept of *loob* and *pakikipagkapwa* (See De Mesa 1987; Brazal 2004) must complement each other. Jocano proposes to uphold values inherent in our culture like *sampalataya sa maykapal* (belief in God), *damdaming maka-bansa* (love of country above self), *pagmamahal sa pamilya* (care for the family), *paggalang sa kapwa* (respect for the individual), *mithiing pakakaugnay-ugnay* (desire for consensus), and *pagnanais ng pagkakaisa* (preference for unity and harmony). Traditional virtues like *galang* (spirit of respect for the individual), *ugnayan* (the spirit of consensus), *pananagutan* (the spirit of responsibility and accountability), *balikatan* (the spirit of burden-sharing), *bayanihan* (spirit of cooperation and teamwork), and *malasakit* (the spirit of solicitous concern) must be fostered among the youth both in the familial and national life (Jocano 1992: 18-20). Furthermore, he adds: “We need to harness a faith that has an impact not only over one’s destiny, “but also in one’s self and the goodness of one’s fellow humans. To do this is to gain inner strength and to overcome the harshness of daily routine and excesses. To have inner strength is to be in harmony with the cosmic order, to have control over the *gulong ng palad* (wheel of destiny) and ultimately, to enjoy the blessings of material wealth” (Jocano 1992a:22).







## 10. MATERIALISM , PROSPERITY, AND WELL-BEING.

One arena that needs to be further explored is the relationship between material well-being and spirituality. This type of spirituality is being preached and practiced by adherents of the 'prosperity' gospel. It is quite interesting to examine how this type of spirituality could attract different types of people from all walks of life just to attend a 'prayer meeting' or a 'prayer service'. Is *material prosperity* an anti-gospel value system? Or, should spirituality encourage material prosperity? But isn't material prosperity precisely the cause of secularization? Social scientists contend that people who live more comfortable and secure lives are less inclined to be involved in religious institutions and to various religious ceremonies. They tend to be indifferent to religious values and suspicious of supernatural beliefs. On the other hand, those belonging to vulnerable groups who live with uncertainty and risk tend to be more spiritual (Norris & Inglehart 2004:79). There are studies however that reveal that in post-materialist or post-industrialist societies, there is a shift in the value system. Inglehart (1990; 1997), for instance, speaks of 'post-traditional values and lifestyles' that emerge out of prosperity and several opportunities brought by modern society. He argues that the new generations are moving beyond the materialist values that emphasize sheer economic and physical security to post-materialist priorities which underscores the values of self-expression, autonomy, and the quality of life (Inglehart 1997:4). Many of these values, however, are positively correlated to their changing attitudes toward gender roles, attitudes toward homosexuals, abortion, divorce, religious saliency, etc.

### CONCLUSION:

In this paper, we have examined the phenomenon of secularization, both its theoretical and empirical representations at the macro, meso, and micro levels. We tried to investigate how this phenomenon is manifested empirically among Filipino youth. In the second part of

the paper, we have drawn some challenges that secularization poses to the future of theology and Christianity in Asia. This study hopefully has modestly contributed to the configuration of an Asian paradigm of theology that proffers some perspectives in helping individuals, communities, and society to envision and live out the contingencies of their faith in the future.

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