
Spirituality of Struggle: Resistance, Repentance, Solidarity, and Renewal

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Abstract

The Philippines is known to be the only predominantly Christian country in Asia. Christianity in both Catholic and Protestant forms came with the Western colonizers. However, despite its identification with the colonizers, Christianity became the faith of the ordinary Filipinos. Western Christianity, the religion of the colonizer, became Filipino Christianity, the religion of the struggling people for independence and self-determination. Philippine Christianity developed an anti-West and anti-colonial character. It became part of the Filipino postcolonial national identity. However, neocolonialism and globalization are undermining and eroding Philippine Christianity's anti-colonial tradition. Philippine Christianity continues to emulate Western spirituality, such as the prosperity gospel and the health and wellness movement. The paper argues for a spirituality using the perspective of the Theology of Struggle (ToS) developed by Filipino Christian activists. The paper claims that ToS can foster a spirituality of resistance, repentance, solidarity, and renewal in the struggle against globalization and neocolonialism.

Keywords

Spirituality, Theology of Struggle, indigenization, capitalist spirituality, colonialism

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is known to be the only predominantly Christian country in Asia. Christianity in both Catholic and Protestant forms came with the Western colonizers. However, despite its identification with the colonizers, Christianity became the faith of the ordinary Filipinos. Western Christianity, the religion of the colonizer, became Filipino Christianity, the

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religion of the people struggling for independence and self-determination. Philippine Christianity developed an anti-West and anti-colonial character that became part of the Filipino postcolonial national identity. However, under neocolonialism and globalization, the anti-colonial legacy of Philippine Christianity is being undermined and slowly eroded.

This article will argue for a spirituality using the perspective of the Theology of Struggle (ToS) developed by Filipino Christian activists. I claim that ToS is a continuation of the Filipinos' appropriation of Christianity and is transforming it into a spirituality of struggle against globalization and neocolonialism. In 1982, the "theology of struggle" was the name embraced by the progressive Christians in the Philippines who committed themselves to the social transformation of the church and Philippine society.¹ The spirituality of struggle is basically a spiritual extension of a national struggle for identity, justice, and dignity.

SPIRITUALITY AND CAPITALISM

Spirituality seems to defy definition. The academic community is still struggling with this task. The definition and interpretation of spirituality is largely dependent upon one's worldview. In the Christian sense, spirituality conveys attitude, discipline, and lifestyle.² It is very closely tied to culture and religious traditions. Nevertheless, it is important to define what is meant here by the term "spirituality."

According to Walter Precipe, the word "spirituality" emerged in seventeenth-century European culture. It is derived from the Latin term "*spiritualitas*," which means the breath of life. This concept of spirituality is closely associated with Christianity.³ Linda Woodhead, in her article "Spirituality and Christianity: The Unfolding of a Tangled Relationship," similarly observed "that spirituality is better understood through its close

1 Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 293-358.

2 John William Drane, *Do Christians Know How to Be Spiritual? The Rise of New Spirituality and the Mission of the Church* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005).

3 Walter H. Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 12, no. 2 (1983): 127-141.

and constitutive relation with Christianity, a relationship that extends from its origins in the nineteenth century through to the present day.”⁴

Those who consider spirituality and religion as being closely related see little difference between religion and spirituality, because they both arise from a search for the sacred. The term “sacred” refers to a “divine being, divine object, ultimate reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.”⁵ In contrast, others see spirituality and religion as distinct. In a secular society like the United States, spirituality and religion are not always synonymous. The Western notion of spirituality tends to be divorced from organized religious frameworks.⁶ Robert Fuller, in his book *Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*, observed that modern spirituality has acquired a more psychological meaning popularized by such American thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow. They promoted an individualized reading of religious experiences, predominantly Christian in nature, that were internalized as private events. Their interpretation of religion facilitated a clear break between “spirituality” and its institutional moorings, opening the space for spirituality to be seen as autonomous from the established religions.⁷ Fuller wrote that “the word *spiritual* gradually came to be associated with the private realm of thought and experience while the word *religious* came to be connected with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines.”⁸

The locus of Western spirituality has moved from the institution to the individual. Western spirituality is freed from the rules of organized religion. This separation of spirituality and organized religion allows individuals to appropriate religious practices, rites, symbols, and beliefs independent of

4 Linda Woodhead, “Spirituality and Christianity: The Unfolding of a Tangled Relationship,” in *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and William H. Swatos, Jr. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

5 Peter C. Hill et al., “Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30, no. 1 (2000): 51-77.

6 Sandra Marie Schneiders, “Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3, no. 2 (2003).

7 Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chaps. 2 and 3.

8 Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, 5.

religious authority or church norms. Spirituality becomes privatized and personal. This allows a multiplicity of spiritualities. This trend has been aided by the processes of secularization characterized by rationality and scientific method as well as a move toward the explicit separation of church and state—a separation of private realms from the public sphere. It seems that modern spirituality is linked with secular values of individualism, autonomy, and liberalism.⁹

However, some scholars have observed that the commodification of spirituality has led to its commercialization. The phenomenon of “selling” the sacred and the consumers of the wide array of products on the market has been examined by a number of commentators.¹⁰ Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, in their book *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, characterize it as:

... a wholesale *commodification* of religion that is the selling-off of religious buildings, ideas and claims to authenticity in service to individual/corporate profit and the promotion of a particular worldview and mode of life, namely corporate capitalism.¹¹

The proliferation of “spirituality” literature today reflects this trend of commodification of spirituality and privatization of human meaning. The privatization of belief can be purchased and hence “experienced” a la carte according to one’s tastes and desires.

In the twenty-first century, the practices, texts, and belief systems of ancient traditions are now routinely transformed into commodities and exploited for their cultural capital with the purpose of increasing consumption and corporate profit. Carrette and King continue:

Marketing ‘the spiritual’ allows companies and their consumers to pay lip-service to the ‘exotic,’ rich and historically significant religions of the world

9 Michael York, “New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 3 (2001).

10 See Jennifer Rindfleisch, “Consuming the Self: New Age Spirituality as ‘Social Product’ in Consumer Society,” *Consumption Markets & Culture* 8, no. 4 (2005): 343-360; and Keri Davies and Paul Freathy, “Marketplace Spirituality: Challenges for the New Age Retailer,” *The Service Industries Journal* 34, no. 15 (November 2014): 1185-1198.

11 Jeremy R. Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 15.

at the same time as distancing themselves from any engagement with the worldviews and forms of life that they represent. Religion is rebranded as ‘spirituality’ in order to support the ideology of capitalism.¹²

They call this emerging phenomenon “capitalist spirituality.” It uses spirituality to promote the interest of global corporations. Some of the features of this spirituality are as follows:¹³

1. *Atomization*: the individualization of responsibility with no consideration of society.
2. *Self-interest*: an ethic of self-interest that sees profit as the primary motivation for human action.
3. *Corporatism*: placing corporate (not community) success above the welfare and job security of employees.
4. *Utilitarianism*: treating others as means rather than ends (for example, seeing humans as consumers to be persuaded, other businesses as competitors to be overcome, or employees as resources to be used).
5. *Consumerism*: the promotion of unrestrained desire-fulfillment as the key to happiness.
6. *Quietism*: tacit or overt acceptance of the inevitability of social injustice rather than a wish to overcome it.
7. *Political myopia*: a claim to political neutrality—the refusal to see the political dimensions of spirituality.
8. *Thought-control/accommodationism*: use of psycho-physical techniques, described in terms of “personal development,” that seek to pacify feelings of anxiety and disquiet at the individual level rather than seeking to challenge the social, political, and economic inequalities that cause such distress.

And in the era of globalization, capitalist spirituality is exported to developing countries as neocolonial tools for colonizing the “other” and their traditional knowledge systems.¹⁴

My intended goal with this section is to show that modern spirituality has emerged from Western capitalist economies and to describe how it

12 Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 17.

13 Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 21-22.

14 Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, chap. 3.

became a tool to promote corporate interests. In the next section, I wish to discuss briefly how Filipino Christianity is being coopted to legitimize capitalist spirituality and support globalization.

FILIPINO CHRISTIANS AND NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

In the Philippines, Christians remain the majority with 86.8 million Filipinos, or 93 percent of a total population of 93.3 million. Catholics are estimated to be 81 percent, Protestants comprise 11 percent, and one percent belong to other Christian groups. The remaining seven percent of the Philippine population are non-Christian.¹⁵

Filipinos even feel proud of being the only “Christian nation in Asia.” It seems that being a Christian and being a Filipino is one and the same. Christianity is accepted uncritically as a constitutive part of the Filipino national identity. The current dominant position of Christianity, especially its Catholic form, indicates the success of evangelization carried out by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

However, Christianity in both Catholic and Protestant forms came with the Western colonizers. Colonial Christianity was an instrument of pacification and domination. Christianity was turned into an ideology that could be used to persuade people not to resist white domination. Religion was used to legitimate, sustain, and even promote political domination and economic exploitation. It underwent a process of indigenization wherein the Filipinos appropriated Western Christianity as their own religion. John Leddy Phelan called this the “Philippinization” of Catholicism characterized by Christian forms blended with much of the pre-Hispanic animistic beliefs.¹⁶

A contemporary scholar observed that the indigenization of Christianity plays a role in the formation of our national identity. Dr. Reynaldo Ilete, in his book *Pasyon and Revolution*, showed that the reading of the passion narrative has structured the way Filipino Christians interpreted political

15 “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2013).

16 John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 72-89.

events.¹⁷ While the friars taught the native Christians to be patient and meek under the yoke of colonialism like the Lamb led to slaughter, the peasants interpreted Christ, who is shown in the *Pasyon*, as one of them, poor and ignorant, and as mirroring the darkness and oppression and lack of self-worth in their lives. When Christ died and rose again, they interpreted this as the need for them to die so that they can rise again with him to fight for freedom and establish a new society.¹⁸ Thus, the Filipinos were able to differentiate Spanish colonization from Christianity.

And when the Americans arrived and took over the Philippines from the Spaniards in the name of “benevolent assimilation,” the Filipino quest for independence and self-determination was thwarted.¹⁹ The American Protestants enthusiastically argued for the occupation of the Philippines as an opportunity to spread Protestantism in the country. Kenton J. Clymer, author of *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898–1916*, writes that “most Protestant churches encouraged an expansionist outlook. They supported the war against Spain, then lobbied for the acquisition of the Philippine Islands.”²⁰

Despite Christianity’s identification as the colonizers’ religion, Christianity became the faith of the majority of Filipinos. Today Philippine Christianity is seduced by globalization. It has embraced “capitalist spirituality.” The promises of material prosperity and quick fortune have become the goal of life. People expect religion to make them rich and prosperous. This theology, often referred to as the “prosperity gospel,”²¹ identifies Christianity with capitalism. It argues that Jesus was rich—and that he would like his followers to be rich, too. These religious groups,

17 Reynaldo Clemenña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City, Metro Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

18 Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 20-21.

19 Victor Aguilan, “The Other Side of Our Heritage: Protestant Mission and American Imperialism,” *Silliman Ministry Magazine* 61 (1997).

20 Kenton Clymer, *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898-1916: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

21 Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The prosperity gospel is also known as the “health and wealth” and “name it and claim it” gospel.

such as *El Shaddai*²² and *Jesus is Lord (JIL)*,²³ attract millions of followers. It is safe to say that prosperity theology is now the new spirituality that attracts large numbers of people by promising prosperity, wellness, and health.²⁴

Globalization is transforming everything into a commodity for sale.²⁵ Health, education, culture, happiness, relationship, and identity are all for sale or believed to be accessible in the market. We can see this, for instance, in how the indigenous festivals such as the *Ati-atihan* of Kalibu, *Sinulog* of Cebu, and *Dinagyang* of Iloilo have been transformed. First, adopted by Christians, these festivals became the celebration of the child Jesus; now they have been commodified by entrepreneurs and sold to consumers and tourists. These festivals are marketed by corporations and the state-agency for tourists and consumers alike. These indigenous religious gatherings are now reduced to artificial, merchant-created public holidays that empty them of any meaning. With money, everything can be bought for consumption. Prosperity or material acquisition becomes the goal of life.

More so, the seduction of Philippine Christianity by globalization is eroding the Filipino sense of national identity. It is the recolonization of the mind to fashion a new type of colonial mentality. According to the theories of Fanon²⁶, Freire,²⁷ and Constantino,²⁸ the effect of colonization is the internalization of inferiority imposed on the subjugated people

22 Bowler, *Blessed*, 230-231. See also Katharine L. Wiegele, "The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics," in Amos Yong and Katy Attanasi, eds., *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, Christianities of the World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 171-188.

23 Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., "Experiencing Transcendence: Filipino Conversion Narratives and the Localization of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity," *Philippine Studies* 54, no. 4 (2006).

24 Mary V. Wrenn, "Selling Salvation, Selling Success: Neoliberalism and the US Prosperity Gospel," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 45, no. 2 (2020).

25 Thomas Pradip, "Selling God/Saving Souls: Religious Commodities, Spiritual Markets and the Media," *Global Media and Communication* 5, no. 1 (2009).

26 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

27 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, new rev. 20th anniv. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993).

28 Renato Constantino, *Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1974); Renato Constantino and Letizia R. Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino* (Quezon City, Philippines: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982).

by the colonizer. Under globalization, the colonial mentality has been transformed into a global consumerist mentality.²⁹ Today, humanity is driven by globalized consumerism, which causes the loss of identity, community, and connectedness with nature.³⁰ Globalization is about promoting consumer values that feed on the perception that happiness is rooted in material growth, that choice equals ultimate freedom, and that accessibility to the market is more essential than being deeply connected with other humans and with nature. Globalization leads to the loss of the human spirit, reducing itself to a commercial value that leads to the loss of the sense of connection with oneself, others, and nature.

Facing estrangement and the fragmentation of communities, many people long for a sense of belonging and connectedness and a place to call home. Filipinos today are struggling to recover their spirituality.

SPIRITUALITY OF STRUGGLE: RESISTANCE, REPENTANCE, SOLIDARITY, AND RENEWAL

This section discusses the four practices of spirituality of struggle, namely, resistance, repentance, solidarity, and renewal. The spirituality of struggle begins with resistance.

Filipino Christians remain captive to the colonial mentality and continue to mimic American Christianity.³¹ Thus the practice of the spirituality of struggle is the practice of resistance, specifically anticolonial resistance. The spirituality of struggle is a spiritual extension of a national struggle for identity,³² drawing inspiration from the writings of Fr. Burgos and Rizal against the Spanish discrimination of the Filipinos and from the revolutionary activity of Bonifacio, Jacinto, and Mabini during the nineteenth century, which expressed this struggle for national identity.³³ It

29 Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

30 Bernard Stiegler, "Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals" (excerpt), *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 44-45 (2012–2013): 129–134.

31 Renato Constantino, *The Filipinos in the Philippines, and Other Essays* (Quezon City: Filipino Signatures, 1966); and Renato Constantino, *Synthetic Culture and Development* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1985).

32 Letizia R. Constantino, "The Katipunan's Legacy: A Vision of Social Spirituality," *Silliman Ministry Magazine*, August 1997.

33 Renato Constantino, *The Philippines, the Continuing Past* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1978).

is necessary to recover and reappropriate spiritual indigeneity by resisting capitalist spirituality. One begins by returning to one's indigenous heritage through contextualization in a process of appropriating indigenous culture as context for doing theology and spirituality. This process draws insights from the pioneering works of Father Leonardo Mercado, a Divine Word Father (SVD) who developed a method of indigenization. His two books, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*³⁴ and *Elements of Filipino Theology*³⁵ follow the traditional Catholic view of natural theology, which regards culture as an authentic way to knowing God, subject to perfection by the knowledge of revelation. There is, for example, a continuity of meaning between the Filipino view of a spiritual world (animism) and the Christian doctrine of incarnation and the sacraments. Both refer to a reality where the profane and the sacred interpenetrate.

Fr. Mercado's method involves drawing analogies between certain basic Filipino values and practices, as identified, and described by Filipino social scientists, and certain key biblical themes. The process entails a narrowing down of a cultural element's meaning to make it conform to orthodox Christian teachings. Since it is done basically for pedagogical purposes, it tends to gloss over the finer distinctions that usually preoccupy scholars. But it serves the purpose of making possible a friendly and sympathetic dialogue between Christianity and culture.

Using popular Filipino proverbs, Fr. Mercado applies linguistic analysis to draw parallels between indigenous Filipino wisdom and Christian teachings, for instance, between the Filipino concept of sin and that of the church. Traditional Filipino values are also interpreted, drawing out features that are roughly equivalent to biblical concepts, such as *utang-na-luob* (debt of gratitude) and faith, *pag-asa* and hope, *awa* and love and mercy combined. The theological principle underlying the method is that God's revelation in Jesus Christ has been anticipated in the universal work of the divine Logos in native cultures.

34 Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), 16-46.

35 Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1975).

A similar project by Dr. Jose de Mesa promises a more complex and creative interaction between Christian faith and Filipino culture.³⁶ He makes a dynamic analysis of selected core Filipino values (*loob*, *pakikipagkapwa*) as a window to understanding the main features of some basic theological concepts, such as “covenant” and “agape.” Like Mercado’s, his program conforms with the Thomistic view regarding the continuity and unity of grace and nature. Thus, in practice it appropriates indigenous resources (myths, symbols, stories, music, and vernaculars), embraces the multireligious context of one’s heritage, and nourishes the imagination by listening to, seeing, and appreciating the beauty in the diversity of one’s culture and the culture of others.

Another important work on reappropriating precolonial spirituality is Dr. Karl Gaspar, CSsR’s book *The Masses are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*. Precolonial Filipino spirituality, he observes, is based on animism, the belief that spirits are everywhere. But it has a “this-worldly” orientation, concern for others (*kapwa*), nature- and life-affirming goals such good health, prosperity, and the well-being of the family and kins.³⁷ Gaspar believes that Filipino spirituality can be a transformative 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”.³⁸

Following Gaspar’s approach of reappropriating precolonial spirituality, I suggest we consider a particular indigenous practice, that is, honoring and memorializing our ancestors. Before the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines, early Filipinos paid great respect to the dead. Precolonial Filipinos showed respect and honor to the dead by offering provisions for the “trip” to the next life, such as food, beverage, clothing, and prayers.³⁹

36 Jose M. de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture: Studies in Theological Re-Rooting* (Quezon City, Philippines: Maryhill School of Theology, 1987); Jose M. de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far from Home* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 2003).

37 Karl Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah: Contemplating the Filipino Soul*, Research on Spirituality Series / Institute of Spirituality in Asia (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2010), 83-125.

38 Gaspar, *The Masses Are Messiah*.

39 Michaelangelo E. Dakudao, “The Development of Cemeteries in Manila before 1941,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 20, nos. 2/3 (1992): 133–150; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29792084> (accessed on April 25, 2023).

Honoring the dead is a way to maintain connection to the ancestors. Memories and stories about our ancestors could bring us closer together. During family reunions, weddings, anniversaries, vigil services, and other family gatherings, I have observed the sharing of stories and memories strengthen the bond, family ties and community. It brings outsiders into the community because now they are now part of the memories. This practice of honoring our ancestors is rooted in our culture. In such a culture, it is good to emphasize such themes as being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). Memorials are intended to restore relationships of the past for future generations, which means looking back to go forward. The spirituality of struggle should reappropriate this practice.

The challenge now is how to integrate those reappropriated indigenous practices into our contemporary Christian spirituality. The lack of integration could be the reason why some scholars have described Filipino spirituality as “split-level” or folk Christianity. One of the most obvious effects of this nonintegration is that ordinary Filipino Christians have become very reluctant to discuss the *folk Christian* practices openly with their priests, pastors, theologians, and institutional representatives. This “silence” also exists between seminary students and theological formators.

There is a need to integrate indigenous practices with Christian spirituality in an open and genuine dialogue. But we need to deal with one obstacle. Filipino churches suffer from historical amnesia or embellishment.⁴⁰ We remain silent to the historical truth that the missionaries suppressed our indigenous spirituality, calling it demonic. Instead, we remember and celebrate the sacrifices of the colonial-era missionaries who came and died and their contributions to education, to social reform, and the planting of churches. We use this narrative of missionaries’ benevolence to justify colonialization. More so, we minimize the abuses, racial discrimination, and missionaries’ collaboration with the colonizers. Given Christianity’s complicity with colonialism and cultural imperialism, Christians especially from the West need to acknowledge the role of the missionaries and the churches in colonization.

The oppression, enslavement, and exploitation of people based on race and religion is never the way of the God of justice. We need to recognize the complicity of Christian missions,. Filipino Christians should also do the

40 Renato Constantino, *The Philippines*.

same since we inherited and continue to benefit from this colonial legacy. Christians must confront our own faith tradition's complex history. Too often in church and in the academy especially those who have benefitted from imperialism and those who are descendants of colonial Christianity relativize, excuse, and even justify colonialism.

Hence, the spirituality of struggle must include the practice of repentance. This includes remembering and confessing the injustices of the past so Filipino Christians and our Western brethren can move forward. We need to lament together because that is part of becoming a community: confession in the public square, speaking truth to power.⁴¹ The lack of repentance prevents real integration of indigenous spirituality and Christian practices.

The Christian practice of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation can be a means by which we can express sincere apology, recognize the errors, and restore relationship. And acknowledging responsibility for violence and injustice and seeking repentance and forgiveness is a major step to start the process of dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation.

Another aspect of the spirituality of struggle is the practice of solidarity. It must be self-conscious and intentional in its effort to renew the spiritual life of the community of faith. One of its aims is to emancipate Filipino souls from the seduction of global consumerism. Hence, it must be rooted not only in Philippine culture but also in the hands of ordinary struggling Filipinos. Thus, a radical spirituality involves immersion in the real and concrete struggles of Filipino people who are oppressed and exploited.⁴² It stresses the importance of obtaining an authentic and sympathetic understanding of the people's life situation through actual lived experience with them. It affirms the trustworthiness and reliability of grassroots people's insights about life and about the Christian Faith. Fr. Bert Alejo observed that "people of popular spirituality are a people with mixed motivation, with the struggle to find the way to go on with life, given the situation, given the powers, given the hierarchy. So, it is a way of negotiating with the Divine, a way of celebrating who they are.... If we are serious about the ordinary people, especially the poor, then we should also

41 See Anna Robbins, "No Reconciliation without Repentance: Accepting Collective Responsibility for Historical Sin," *Journal of NAIITS* 13 (2015): 119–134.

42 Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 23–24.

take their way of praying seriously. We should take their way of connecting to the Divine as seriously as we take our own way of connecting to the Divine.”⁴³ Their experiences—pain, aspirations, and struggles—as well as faith and witness, are the very stuff that constitutes a genuine Filipino spirituality. It demands solidarity. Spirituality of struggle cannot fully resist colonial or neocolonial domination if it is fragmented among many disjointed and disconnected communities. Spirituality is about relationality, belonging, interconnectedness, and community.

Lastly, the spirituality of struggle is a practice of spiritual renewal. It is a practice of returning to God, the source and foundation of spirituality. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The practice of renewal is a way of acknowledging our dependence on God. The spirituality of struggle recognizes the necessity of respiritualizing since the struggle for justice is an ongoing conflict that requires us to renew our spirit on a regular basis. The practice of renewal must be intentional and constant to become a habit.

This practice of renewal includes contemplative practices that cultivate stillness, with the intention of silencing the mind, increasing awareness, and/or creating space for God to come forward. The practice of contemplation helps one to enter the state of “receptivity and listening.” It helps in discerning the presence of God in our daily life. One method we can reappropriate is repeating a Bible verse or a favorite chorus from a hymn during meditation. This is called meditating on the Word.⁴⁴ According to Simon Chan:

Meditation is the intensification rather than the extensification of the Word. It is like bringing the diffused rays of the sun to a focal point with a convex lens so that the heat can be felt in all its intensity. It is not enough to have a cursory understanding of the truth. It must fire our imaginations and affect us so deeply that we are restless until it is put into effect. Most traditional methods employ a three-part scheme in meditation. First, the truth is read and assimilated by the intellect or understanding. Then it is made to affect the heart or, to use a traditional expression, “raise the affections.”

43 Albert E. Alejo, “Popular Spirituality as Cultural Energy,” Lecture Series 3 on Spirituality: Context and Expressions of Filipino Spirituality, Quezon City: Center for Spirituality, Manila, 2004.

44 Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 191.

Finally, the truth that has deeply affected the heart moves the will to make a resolution. Meditation is therefore the main link between theology and praxis. It is the way to make truth come alive as it courses from mind to heart to daily living. Seen in this way, meditation plays a critical role in forging the integration of heart and mind in the spiritual life.⁴⁵

Meditation on the Word is returning to God to be renewed to continue the struggle in the world.

Prayer is another activity that brings us back to God. It is a regular practice and a spiritual habit. Jesus taught his disciples to pray. In the Acts of the Apostles, the apostolic church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and *the prayers*.” The Reformers also made prayers central to their spirituality. They considered prayer to be vital to the Christian life. According to John Calvin, prayer is “conversation with God,” even “intimate conversation with God.”⁴⁶ In prayer, we both speak and listen to God. We pray in faith because we believe God hears and answers our requests. Prayer is our faith’s lifeline. Another example that prayer is an activity of the spirituality of struggle was expressed by Apolinario dela Cruz. Popularly called Hermono Puli, one of the Filipino heroes who fought the Spaniards for freedom, he gave his reason for the uprising: their group just wanted to pray.⁴⁷

The Filipino people are people of prayer. Scholars have confirmed that the popular expression “Bahala na!” is actually a prayer.⁴⁸ According to F. Landa Jocano, it is believed that “the word *Bahala* was derived from the word *Bathala* in Tagalog that literally means God.”⁴⁹ But some have interpreted Bahala na as an expression of fatalism.⁵⁰ There is a consensus

45 Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 194.

46 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.20.4; 565.

47 Ileta, *Pasyon and Revolution*.

48 See José M. de Mesa, *And God Said, “Bahala Na!”: The Theme of Providence in the Lowland Filipino Context* (Quezon City: Philippines Publishers’ Printing Press., 1979); F. Landa Jocano, *Folk Christianity: A Preliminary Study of Conversion and Patterning of Christian Experience in the Philippines*, Monograph Series / Trinity Research Institute, Trinity College of Quezon City (Quezon City: Trinity Research Institute, Trinity College of Quezon City, 1981).

49 Jocano, *Folk Christianity*, 5.

50 Lynn C. Bostrom, “Filipino Bahala Na and American Fatalism,” *Silliman Journal* 15, no. 3 (1968).

that Bahala has ambiguous meanings.⁵¹ Nonetheless, *Bahala na* expresses an indigenous spirituality that reconnects us with the Divine. Filipino Christians can reappropriate this expression as a form of sincere prayer to renew our spirit as we continue with our struggle for justice, peace, and dignity.

CONCLUSION

The spirituality of the theology of struggle must become part of the spirituality of the ordinary Filipino Christians. We can begin by practicing solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the exploited sectors of Philippine society in their daily struggles. We must join them in the daily resistance against the domination that threatens their spiritual identity as Filipinos. The spirituality of struggle is not resistance simply as a defensive stance to Western globalization discourses but is also constructive in that it reclaims our indigenous spirituality that has been suppressed by colonization. By practicing repentance, indigenous practices and Christian spirituality can be integrated to create a genuine Filipino spirituality that leads to genuine renewal. Hence the spirituality of struggle is a spirituality of renewal. It is reconnecting to God and affirming our dependence on God, knowing that the struggle continues. By the Spirit of God, the Filipino people are empowered and connected to the rhythms of the universe, nature, ancestors, and the community of faith.

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51 Tereso C. Casiño, "Mission in the Context of Filipino Folk Spirituality: Bahala Na as a Case in Point," in *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross (Regnum Books International, 2013).