

Article

Jesus-Centered Values Theory and Method

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Abstract

A Jesus-centered values education theory and method offers a uniquely inclusive framework that transcends the relativism of cultural and religious pluralism. Unlike pluralistic approaches that affirm inclusivity by embracing all cultures and religions as equally valid, a Jesus-centered approach grounds inclusivity in the universal and unifying historical truth of Jesus' life and teachings. This anchors values in human reality that invites scrutiny. Jesus, a revered figure in major religions embraced diversity while fostering unity based on love for neighbor as one loves oneself, affirming common values of humanity, love, justice, and peace. Such inclusivity is holistic; integrating spiritual, moral, and communal dimensions, in a way that empowers individuals from all backgrounds to flourish together under a unifying moral vision that transcends cultural divisions without negating their particularities. Jesus-centered values education affirms truth-seeking as a supreme value, that at the same time serves to critique and affirm cultures towards universally acceptable postulates.

Keywords: *Jesus-centered Values education, Colonial mentality and decolonization, Worldview formation, Animistic culture and Christian faith, Gospel enculturation*

Suggested citation:

Apura, L. (2025). Jesus-Centered Values Theory and Method. *Philippine Association for the Sociology of Religion Journal*, 5(2), 44-58. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ecstem65>

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The Christian Faith in Philippine Context

Christianity is a colonial legacy in the Philippines. Yet the origins of anti-colonial literature and revolutionary movements in the Philippines are traced to folk Christianity.¹ Christianity exposed the motherhood pretensions of colonial Spain. The fact that Filipinos revolted against Spain but remained Catholic attests to that. Yet, today, after more than 450 years of Christianity the Philippines, the only Christian nation in the Far East and with a predominantly Christian nation in the Southeast Asia,² though touted as one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia,³ ranks highest in income inequality resulting to social tensions. This is seen the prevalence of unemployment and underemployment, poverty, corruption, criminality, inadequate social services and under literacy. This situation clearly points to systemic problems, traced to the colonial legacies of Spain and the United States that has been perpetuated by the vicious cycle of entrenched practices of political patronage, dishonesty, and abuse of power. Corruption has been normalized and tolerated.

At the heart of systemic corruption in the Philippines is the deep psychological and cultural mentality that accepts hierarchical system that normalized political patronage. The masses have accepted unequal power relations as inferiors – a warped sense of identity coming from colonial mentality. Colonial mentality, according to Felipe De Leon is the reason for the continuing underdevelopment—the failure to harness the cultural resources of the Filipino society.⁴

There clearly is a need to cultivate pride in Filipino identity and culture and at the same time find a source of ethical values that will empower cultural and social change in the next generation of Filipinos. This paper is my humble push towards faith and values formation anchored in Christianity – a core identity marker for Filipinos. As the Filipino people revolted against Spain inspired by the figure of Jesus who was

¹ Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution Popular Movements in the Philippines 1840-1910* (Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979), 22. See also Agoncillo 87-101; Gregorio F. Zaide, compiler, editor and annotator, *Documentary sources of Philippine History Vol. 8* (Metro Manila: National Bookstore, 1990), 194-229, and Robert G. Woods, "Origins of the Colorum," *Philippine Magazine* 16 (7 Dec. 1929): 428-29.

² The East nations include China, Japan, North and South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan and South East Asia include Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma/Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand. Timor-Leste is the only other Christian majority with 99 percent of its 1.5 million people identifying as Christians.

³ The Gini coefficient index of the Philippines is 41.6 to 55 indicating a significant disparity in income distribution way above Indonesia 38.3%, Malaysia 37.9-40%, Thailand 34.5 %

⁴ Felipe M. De Leon, Jr. In Focus: Beyond the Dona Victorina syndrome office of the President, National Commission for Culture and [Arts@ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/infocus/beyond-the-dona-victorina-syndrome](https://arts@ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/infocus/beyond-the-dona-victorina-syndrome), posted July 29, 2011, accessed Oct. 25, 2025. A paper read on June 24, 2004 at the "Pagkataong Filipino: Looking for the Filipino Among Filipinos – The Theory, Practice and Value of Filipino Personhood" Conference held at the U.P. Film Center, June 24-25, 2005. See also the Philippine National Situation *Palaso* edited by Ma. Lourdes F. Melegrito et.al., De La Salle University Center for Social Concern and Action July 2013, Vol. 1 Issue 1: 45; and Virgina Fabella, "Enculturating the Gospel: the Philippine Experience" available on line @www.the-way.org.uk/Back/39Fabella.pdf accessed June 6, 2022.

willing to suffer and die for the liberation of his people, I propose that the figure of Jesus presents a cognitively accessible theory and model for faith-based values education. For the predominantly Christian population Jesus-centered values serve as the strongest foundation for values formation, that will at the same time decolonize the Christian faith. Postcolonial and postmodern methodologies with its fluidity further destabilize values education and faith formation because it challenges the foundations upon which values systems and moral frameworks are grounded.⁵ The theory and methodology presupposed by current critical theories are based on Western, materialist and humanist presuppositions that is inimical to Filipino Christian values. Stripped of faith, values losses its foundation and are reduced to subjective choice.

Humanist and secular presuppositions imprint Western knowledge structure. This is an added colonizing layer that is foreign to the Filipino worldview—a worldview that is more attuned to Jesus of Christianity.⁶ Originating from the core that benefited from colonialism, comfortable academicians, with their tenured positions, presume knowledge superiority based on rationalism and secularism. It is the presumption of cultural superiority and civilizing intent that propelled Western imperialism. These are imbedded in Western epistemology. But Jesus, by his life and teachings liberates as attested by the impact of Christian teaching all over the world throughout history.⁷

Filipinos are innately attuned to the supernatural world but colonially sponsored Roman Catholic piety of the 17th century failed to reform Filipino animistic worldview. The animist is interested in aligning oneself with power or manipulating it, understanding human beings as subject to “seen and unseen” powers. In the Philippines, the introduction of Christianity failed to eradicate this transactional relationship to the deity. God is still understood as the remote transcendent being beyond reach. Intermediaries are needed. Meanwhile, one has to pacify spirits who can be malevolent, through rituals or offerings. The same difference if not honor is accorded to powerful patrons—to move power favorably or to secure favor. Animists are unable to discern a coherent order in lived reality. Protestant piety brought by the

⁵ E. San Juan, Jr. a Filipino intellectual analyzing the Philippine predicament says, “...the Philippines today exemplifies a disintegrated socioeconomic formation in which the major contradictions of our time—antagonistic forces embodying the pressures and impulses of class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, sexuality, and so on—converge into fissured disjunctive panorama open for misinterpretation, critique and ecumenical exchanges.” E. San Juan, Jr., after *Postcolonialism Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations* (Maryland, U.S.A: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2000), 93.

⁶ See Virginia Fabella, *ibid.*, 122-23.

⁷ See for instance: See the books: Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (2017), Tom Holland, *Dominion: How Christian Revolution Remade the world*, (2019), Guillaume Cuchet, *How the World Stopped Being Christian*, (2020), Rodney Stark, *Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism and Western Success*. Random House, 2005 and many others.

American in its turn also stressed faith as a private personal matter. The focus on afterlife further resulted to Filipino split-level Christianity, where salvation is postponed to after life and confined to private sphere. The alternative materialist worldview promoted by the communists however reduces the gospel to a purely secular utopia that history has shown again and again to have installed more oppressive regimes by unrestrained violence.

Central to the decolonization project is the conceptual framework that informs the content and method of values education and formation. Cultural integration of Christian values is the task of the receiving culture. Christianity will grow and bear fruit reflective of the soil and climate that nourished it--the Filipino thought and culture. Decolonization is its natural outcome. Hence, I propose gospel contextualization as worldview reconfiguration and values formation-- the continuing work of proclamation and discipleship towards understanding and actualizing the teachings of Jesus—the Good News. As Constantino proposes:

The Filipino must now discover himself in the realm of consciousness—that is, a consciousness that articulates its own economic, political and cultural aspirations and contraposes itself to an all-pervading consciousness that seeks to keep the Filipino people permanently integrated in a worldwide system that produces poverty, wars and degradation of the underdeveloped nations of the world.⁸

This paper argues that this can be achieved through the enculturation of the teachings of Jesus in Philippine context. The teachings of Jesus must be sown in Filipino psyche and culture.

The Foundation: Orienting Worldview

Worldview is the lens with which individuals interpret reality, discern what is true, and decide what to value. Dr. George Barna known for his research on faith, worldview, and cultural transformation says, ‘A person’s worldview starts developing in the fifteen-month to eighteen-month age and is largely in place by the age of thirteen.’⁹ Drawing from his research, Dr. Barna reveals that failing to instill the biblical worldview is strongly associated with frequently experiencing anxiety, depression, life-affecting fear, and susceptibility to emotional instability. He attributes this to lack of foundational beliefs that can lead to lives marked by inconsistency, lack of direction, frustration and lack of meaning. The lack of foundational beliefs can lead to moral relativism and moral confusion. Embracing a biblical worldview does not

⁸ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: The Past Revisited Vol. 1* (Quezon City, Philippines: Constantino, 1987), 54.

⁹ Discussed extensively in George Barna, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* (Arizona Christian University Press, September 2023), particularly p. 7. George Barna author of 60 books on faith and culture is the director of Research at the Cultural Research Center Arizona State University.

guarantee an easy life, but foundational beliefs inform choices and decisions that helps avoid mal-adaptive behaviors. Worldview is the source of clarity, meaning and a sense of purpose that forge emotional resilience.

Cognitively, Biblical worldview shaping, according to Walter Brueggemann functions to critique dominant cultural narratives, while simultaneously reconstructing or re-imagining reality. One can imagine how Jesus' servant and self-giving leadership can subvert hierarchical and oppressive leadership. The teaching that persons are created in the image of God and the eternal worth of human soul can foster the idea that all humans regardless of status, gender, and race can never be a commodity and that human life is sacred. Or Jesus' expelling merchants and excoriating hypocritical Jewish leaders of his time invite critique and withdraw of support from corrupt religious and political leaders. His insistence truth and the priority on human well-being over rigid rules can serve to delegitimize deceptive ideologies and harmful cultural practices.

Worldview serve to create order and affect reconciliation with reality relieving anxieties about the vagaries of life in relation to things beyond one's control: the supernatural order, nature and human society.¹⁰ Authorities in anthropology and sociology such as Mircea Eliade, Peter Berger, Roy Rappaport, and Émile Durkheim propose that religion or worldview fundamentally provides meaning, social cohesion, and order to human life.

Conversely, the cited authors point to the loss of Christian worldview as the cause for the erosion of education, weakened identity, and social cohesion. Without the Bible as the foundation, drawing the line between the sacred and mundane, the ethical and psychological foundations of society unraveled. This triggered moral and meaning crisis resulting to social and fragmentation and political instability. Christianity is one of the most important pillars that built and sustained the west.

The Worldview of Jesus

Based on Jesus' teachings, God the author of life in His infinite love and power created the world (Gen. 1:26-28; John 1:1-4; 3:16; Romans 5:8 3:18).¹¹ The world is beautiful and orderly. Everything was designed by the wise and all-powerful God: the heavenly bodies, the land and all the plants, the sea, the sky, and the animals. "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" at the moment of creation. The crowning glory of God's creation were human beings. God did not

¹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, "The State of Nature" in the *Origins of Political Order: From Pre-human times to French Revolution* (New York: Farras and Straus and Geroux, 2011), 4-5, 26-46. Anthropologists Ry Rappaport, Emile Durkeim before him, and Peter Berger have solidly established the positive function of worldview in orienting individuals to the realities of life. See Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Emile Durkeim, *The Elementary Forms Religious Life* translated by Ward Swain (Illinois: the Free Press, 1947), Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a sociological Theory of Religion* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1990), Mircea Elaide, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion* (New York etc.: Hartcourt Books, 1957).

¹¹ Scripture references used is NIV and also follows the verse division of this version.

only fashion them and gave them his breath but created them in his image. He wanted human beings to be a part of his family with the heavenly hosts. The image of God in human beings is central to the biblical worldview affirming the dignity, worth and unique identity of humankind. Human beings are loved by God and were created to know and love God, take care of God's creation and reflect God's goodness to each other and in the keeping of God's creation. Humankind was created free of sin with freedom to choose to love God back, hence the warning not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

However, the first human beings choose to disobey God, and follow the suggestion of the serpent instead. In choosing to follow the serpent instead of loving and submitting to authority of their loving creator, sin entered the world bringing brokenness and suffering. Human repudiation of the sovereignty of God resulted in judgment, God's perfect creation was broken, natural calamities occurred (see Isaiah 24:19-20, Psalm 18:8; 82:5), henceforth human beings came under Satanic power, and like him was separated from God.

But instead of scrapping human creation knowing they fall to sin, from the very beginning God planned the redemption of the whole creation and humanity through the son of the woman who will crush the head of serpent (Gen.3: 15; Eph. 1:3-7). Disobedience to God brought suffering and punishment because God is holy and the transgression of God's will bring judgment. But God loved humanity and his creation. The Old Testament recounts the ways God, time and time again demonstrated his love and grace, working out his plan to bless and save humanity from the power of the serpent. The Old Testament recounts God's dealings with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and eventually his people Israel.

When Israel after a very long history failed to faithfully live their part of their sacred covenant with God, God promised that he will in the future recreate the earth and heaven through a chosen obedient servant. Through his life, death and resurrection, the Lord will renew humanity and the whole creation. The chosen one—Jesus--will transform the heart and life of all who will follow him reconciling people to God.

Foundational Elements of the Jesus' Teachings

The central focus of Jesus ministry and teachings is the advent Kingdom or rule of God on earth. Jesus calls his audience to return to God (repent) and believe his message. One can imagine the news spreading among the Jews that the savior sent by God has indeed come! He preaches powerfully and with authority. He heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, feed the multitudes, he even brought back to life persons who were dead! People who have seen and heard him, tell of the good things he was doing. Those who had interactions with him, tell of his kindness and love. In his person one can feel the love and presence of God. He is forgiving and not condemning. Sinners who met him found love and redemption, their relationship with God was restored. It was like God himself was with them saving them giving them a new start. Jesus

summarized the duty of human beings into two commands: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' This for him is the greatest commandment because the two are connected: love for God is seen in loving others, and loving people demonstrates love for God.

For a time, Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem, the base of the religious authorities and did his ministry in Galilee where he was very popular. **But opposition against Jesus grew.** As Jesus was getting more and more popular, the religious authorities resolved to get rid of him. He was not legalistic of the law like the "religious" people. To him each human person is important, his understanding of the law differed from the traditions of the religious leaders. So, the teachers of the law who are so zealous for the law, eventually opposed him and decided they have to kill him.

On the third year of his ministry, *Jesus spent time with his disciples away from the crowds.* This time he asked them who they think he was. Upon hearing Peter confessing his true nature as God's Son, he began to tell them that he must **journey to Jerusalem where he will rule.** But his own people will reject him. He will be arrested and will suffer. He will be killed. But on the third day he will be raised to life.

Indeed, *Jesus was the rightful ruler not only of the Jews but of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). But he is different from earthly rulers. He is a ruler who did not come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. When he was arrested, his disciples lost courage and abandoned him in his suffering and crucifixion. Only John, the beloved disciple and the women stayed with him in his last hours. He died, was buried. But on the third day he was rose to life!*

Jesus' resurrection transformed the disciples. It galvanized them to proclaim the story even if it cost them their lives. This story was told and retold, written about. At a point in history God in Christ came to save his lost creation: calling us back to be reconciled to God (repent) and be a part of God Kingdom. Christ revealed a forgiving God who loves us and want to transform the world into God's Kingdom--the New Heaven and the New Earth. God want all to be a part of this new creation--Gods salvation--realized by the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is the good news! It was not only good news for the Jews at that time, but it was also good news for all people and for all time.

Jesus-centered Religious and Values Education

The Jews were hoping for the Kingdom of God—a just and peaceful kingdom under the rule of the Messiah—but an imperial one nevertheless.¹² Under the rule of the Messiah, wealth will flow to Jerusalem, and it will become the new power center

¹² See Anntti Laato, *A Star is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and rise of Jewish Messianic Expectation* International Studies in the Formative Christianity and Judaism (University of South Florida: Scholars Press, 1997). Anntti Laato argues that the Davidic Royal ideology which parallels Mesopotamian and Egyptian ideas captured in Davidic Royal ideology is the dominant in the Old Testament carried over to the time of the Second Temple Judaism.

as nations recognize the law. Jesus confronted this imperial and narrow understanding of God's Kingdom in Luke 4:16-30.¹³

Jesus turned the imperial structure upside down. In his kingdom, the ruler is a suffering servant.¹⁴ The triumph of God's rule happens in the crucifixion, death and resurrection of the ruler. In Jesus, God's sovereign rule on earth and heaven is re-established. The Roman Empire is exposed as a project of those in power. Jesus by perfect life and his suffering fulfilled his mission as the anointed one.¹⁵ Jesus, is Savior, not the emperor. He deserves absolute allegiance. In Christ, divine power is now bestowed upon Christ's followers for them to overcome both earthly and spiritual powers. The Roman officials are at times portrayed favorably in the gospels.¹⁶ They are able to recognize the superiority of Christ's authority. Knowing coercive authority, they recognized Jesus as the true Savior and Lord over against the emperor.

Peace, is an important theme in the gospels. It will be realized not through might or sword or human effort, but by the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit concretely manifested in Jesus' life and ministry. In his resurrection the same Spirit empowers and transforms individuals and communities. While appearing weak and foolish, Jesus emptied imperial ideology of its legitimacy. Empires are built by force because it lacks legitimacy. Whereas Jesus realized the year of Jubilee, empire impoverishes peoples and nations.¹⁷

Jesus subverted the Roman empire. He asserted his authority over the Jews and the Romans indeed over earthly and spiritual realm. He is, however, the suffering ruler who proclaimed repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Repentance is to be interpreted as change, not only on the basis of personal sin, but also on the basis of being complicit with the dominant power. Repudiation of the empire is "good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed." We see Jesus restoring the humanity of the victims: the last the least, the lost. In the person of Jesus, the earthly and demonic powers that enable empire is

¹³ Lily F. Apura, "Luke Against Empire: A Postcolonial and Resistance Reading of Luke 4:16-30" *Quest Studies on Religion and Culture, Chung-chi Divinity School Journal*, forthcoming).

¹⁴ Quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, in declaring his mission, Jesus omits "and the day of vengeance of our God." This was not lost to his townspeople who were "amazed at his gracious words." He proclaims jubilee for all—a new start! His message was good news indeed—to the oppressed and to the oppressors as well. Right at the very start he was rejected.

¹⁵ Abraham Malherbe J., Christology in Luke-Acts 2. *Restoration Quarterly*. 1958;2(3):115-127. Accessed October 14, 2022. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdah&AN=ATLA0001597284&site=ehost-live>

¹⁶ See Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament Introduction 2nd Ed.* (New York: HJB Publishers, 1982), 300-301. Mallen's analysis of Isaiah and Luke conclude that Luke in comparison emphasized that Jesus' mission 'lacks nationalism' and is universal in scope. See Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

¹⁷ This is evident in the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth and by religious leaders. In contrast the Roman centurion who is commended Luke 7:1-9, 24:47 recognizes Jesus' higher authority and power.

transformed or judged making way towards the realization of God's just and peaceable Kingdom.

Jesus as critique of the Status-quo

But even the Jews, his own people were not spared. Jesus re-orientes Sabbath and law observance towards inclusion and restructuring of the social hierarchy. Jesus undermined the legitimating idea behind Jewish Sabbath practices as series of prohibitions, towards the anticipation and realization of God's jubilee.¹⁸ Sabbath's anti-poor and pro-religious establishment practice was transformed into a day of celebration, worship, fellowship, and sharing. He critiques normative Jewish culture, and promulgates his teaching of radical hospitality, love, and forgiveness for instance in the most known parables in Luke: the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son.

Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus asserts his authority over the temple establishment and confronts the authorities in Jerusalem. He asserts his power over Caesar,¹⁹ boldly claiming he is king and Lord in entering Jerusalem. He declares his authority over against the highest officials of the land: the High Priest, Herod Antipas the king, Pilate the Roman governor indeed his sovereignty over all as the Son of Man.²⁰ Jesus' life climaxed in Jerusalem, where he was enthroned in the crucifixion and triumphed over his enemies in peace and power. He brings peace by exposing and suffering the empire's violence at the cross, calling for repentance and offering forgiveness of sins not only for Israel but also for the nations (Greek *ethnon* Luke 24:47). Thus, the human Jesus' decolonizing method. He relentlessly arrogated power unto himself against earthly and spiritual powers, exposing the empire's impotence.

Jesus and the Filipino Animistic Worldview

Prior to the introduction of Christianity, Filipinos believed in a just and benevolent God known by a variety of names such as *Bathala Meycapal* (Author and Maker of Everything), *Lauon* (Ancient One) *Akasi* among the Zambals, *Gugusang* for Bicolanos, *Apo Laqui* among Ilocanos. But traditional religion considers the supreme God remote and inaccessible. Like his name that cannot even be uttered, *Bathala* is so sacred to have anything to do with mundane things in life.²¹

Forced to convert on pain of punishment, Filipinos accommodated the colonizers' religion. Schools were established primarily to indoctrinate natives to the

¹⁸ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Christ and the Lord's Day: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), 52.

¹⁹ I interpret this passage as an allusion to human beings made in the image of God and are accountable to God. The Roman coin is stamped by an image of Caesar who is worshipped as a god by the Greeks as a form of idolatry.

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²¹ Juana Jimenez Pelmoka, *Pre-Spanish Philippines* (Philippines: Self-published, 1990), 115. Fray Juan Francisco de San Antonio, *The Philippine Chronicles of Fray San Antonio* trans by D. Pedro Picornel (Manila, Casalinda and Historical Conservation Society, 1977) 149. Rosario Mendoza et.al. *The Filipino Saga: History as Social Change* (Quezon city: New Day, 2000), 21.

faith. Learning was by rote.²² Life in the *pueblos* revolved around Christian feasts for Saints, Christmas, and the long Holy Week celebrations.²³ Days start and end in prayers, the week is punctuated with processions during Saturdays and Sundays. Even community gatherings such as funerals and weddings were venues of Christian teaching for the inculcation of the faith as non-Christian literature are censored.²⁴

Yet, Filipino everyday life continues to be ruled by taboos, superstitions, and practices essentially built on the animistic beliefs. In politics, the masses sought to align themselves with those in power, preferring the most winnable candidates. The idea that certain people are endowed with power not less state power, makes Filipino Christians vulnerable to personality cults and influence peddling. Animists are unable to critique power, as it is perceived as neutral which only needed to be manipulated to one's end. Ultimately, it is the benefit that counts, not its source or consequences in the larger scheme of things. As God is distant and inaccessible, people are left on their own devices to survive. God is seen to have nothing to do with everyday lives. The multiplicity of spirits is left free to operate. There are no uniting principle or foundational beliefs that support societal structures and values.

Filipino animistic worldview absorbed Christian rituals and practices. The cross and the Bible were regarded as amulets, with magical powers to protect and ward off malevolent spirits.²⁵ The masses sought the help of intermediaries, performed rituals, and acquired holy objects through which they can avail of power to ward off spiritual or human victimizers.

Protestants came with the Western secular view of reality and a Christianity built on the consciousness of sin and the need personal conversion. Filipino masses however, steeped in the beliefs and practices of animistic faith, accepted Christianity in their own terms. Externally, they embraced the Christian symbols and cultic practices. Inwardly, they retained their animistic beliefs. Thus, Protestant or Roman Catholic Filipinos are known for their religiosity and piety. The words of Douglas Rutt, I believe, also applies to other animistic cultures reached by the gospel, "(T)his does not necessarily signify, however, that an accompanying change has taken place in the domain of values, beliefs, and least of all, worldview."²⁶

²² Teodoro Agoncillo, *Revolt of the Masses* (Dilliman, Quezon City: UP Press, 1956), 9.

²³ *Pueblos* were Spanish resettlement of the native population in the lowlands for the purpose of pacification and Christian indoctrination.

²⁴ Encarnacion Alzona, *A History of Education in the Philippines* (Manila, 1932), 50. Printing Presses were a monopoly of Religious Orders. See also John J. Phelan, "Philippine Linguistic and Spanish Missionaries, 1565-1700," *Mid-America*, XXXVII, July 1955, 158-59.

²⁵ Alfred W. McCoy, "Baylan: Animist Religion and Philippine Peasant Ideology." *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 10, no. 3 (1982): 141-94. See also Reuel U. Almocera, "Some Popular Filipino Spirit World Beliefs with a Proposed Theological Response." *Journal of Asian Mission* 7 (2) 2005: 223-43., 232. Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1988) 109.

²⁶ Douglas L. Rutt, *Ritual and Animism: Liturgical Symbols and Rituals in an Animistic Context—What Do They Mean?* *Mission Apostolica*, 5 (1) May 1997: 4-18: 7.

Imagining Jesus-centered Faith and Values Education

Jesus' transformative impact on human societies is undeniable. His life-saving death on the cross elevated the value of human life to the sacred. Individual worth is graphically affirmed in Jesus' teaching (see for example Mark 8:27 and Luke 15:1-31). Imperially imposed peace like *Pax Romana* is not peace. The in-breaking of God's reign subverted empire. By the fourth century, the Roman Empire needed the Christians' integrity to stay in power. With this hindsight, Jesus' indifference towards the Roman empire is understandable—the proclamation of the Kingdom of God will dismantle it. Eventually, Christianity shaped Western civilization. A result of worldview change, that led to the rejection of enslaving beliefs and values.²⁷

Today, the impact of gospel proclamation in nations around the world is undeniable. In India, Babu B. Verghese asserts that bible reading spurred the development of languages, that in turn significantly impacted culture and nation building.²⁸ This is affirmed by Lamin Sanneh in Africa.²⁹ Vishal Mangalwadi asserts, "I call the Bible the soul of Western Civilization because it propelled the development of everything good in the West: its notion of human dignity, human rights, human equality, justice..."³⁰ Reading in one's own language ensures the translation of the gospel into the local thought and reality. Worldview change impacts beliefs and values which invigorates cultural productions in art, music, and literature. Gospel proclamation and translation advanced knowledge and science through education.

A uniting worldview is necessary to critique beliefs, power structure, and culture. Critique is circumvented in fragmented split-level worldview. In history, the biblical worldview presupposed in the gospels, humanized law and cultures. By way of example, it was the British who enacted the law to end slavery. In the Philippines, the revolution against Spain gained support based on the popular understanding of the passion story. Christ was seen as an example of suffering and death, for the sake of others in supporting a just cause.³¹ However, Filipino revolutionary cause did not prosper as the elite revolution leaders colluded with American colonialists. The formation of a common Filipino identity was interrupted. Colonial values were

²⁷ See Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019). See also Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe* (the Good Book company, 2022). In Scrivener's words "We continue to use the convictions, the thought-forms, and even the metaphysics of the faith we are so keen to reject."

²⁸ Babu K. Verghese, *Let there Be India* (WOC Publishing and Media Concerns: 2014). See also Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: the Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009).

²⁹ This is forwarded by Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (Basic Books, 2019).

³⁰ Jonathan Petersen, "How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization: an Interview with Vishal Mangalwadi" Biblegateway Blog, <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2015/07/how-the-bible-created-the-soul-of-western-civilization-an-interview-with-vishal-mangalwadi/> accessed June 3, 2022.

³¹ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movement in the Philippines 1840-1910* (Quezon City, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), 109, 111. See also Robert G. Woods, "Origin of the Colorum," *Philippine Magazine* 16(7 December 1929):428-29 as cited by Ileto. The prominence of religious themes in the Philippine revolution documents is also noteworthy.

promoted in education and popular literature. Filipinos did not have a strong national identity that can withstand colonial interest.³² The revolutionary narrative that fostered common identity and aspirations was not established. Coopted by the colonialist government, educated Filipinos failed to use literary production in the service of the Filipino. The complicit elite and intellectuals betrayed the Filipino masses who fought and died for the revolution.³³

Max Weber asserts, religions with more systematized teachings have more positive impact on the society, as opposed to those which focus on emotion or needs gratification. In the same way, those with developed ethical teachings expect higher degree of rationality and responsibility from those which simply impose taboo behaviors.³⁴ It is through intellectual exercise that religions systematize, clarify, and define worldviews. Weber proposes that sacred texts advances rationalization as it becomes the center of preaching and teaching, and, therefore, shapes community values. It is through rationalization that human beings become deliberate and responsible for their action and therefore order their daily lives accordingly. Foundational worldview facilitates rationalization, leading to systematization. Rationalization weans faith away from magic, which is mainly concerned with manipulation of events to serve one's end as opposed to the ordering the whole of life according to faith. It is however too simplistic to think that ideas translate to action. Weber stress the importance of "religious mood" and the presence of religious methodologies such as sanctification or mysticism as a path to salvation:

Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, that govern man's action. Yet, the "world images" that had been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, very often determined the tracks, within which action have been pushed by the dynamics of interest.³⁵

Walter Brueggemann's proposition on how scripture affects change is illuminating:

The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand serve to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. ...engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, the alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to energize persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation towards which the community of faith may move.³⁶

³² Michael Cullinae, *Illustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule 1898-1908* (Quezon City: Published by Felina G. Mapa et.al. eds., 2002), 216-18.

³³ Bienvenido and Cynthia Lumbea, *Philippine Literature: A History and Anthology English Edition* (Pasig, Philippines: Anvil, 2005), 94-95.

³⁴ Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*. Translated by Ephraim Fischhoff (U.S.A., Beacon Press, 1963).

³⁵ Max Weber, *The Social Psychology of the World of Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946) pp. 252, 280.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: fortress Press, 2002), 3.

Worldview change is a way of “redescribing” reality, that is, constructing it alternatively “...an alternative version that is in fact sub-version that rests beneath the dominant version in a less aggressive mode. The alternative reading of reality--alternative version, “sub”version—by its very nature, intends to subvert dominant description of reality...”³⁷ individually or communally. Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God relocates ultimate power countering the empire’s claim to power as it asserts Christ’s power and the power given by God to his followers. Jesus asserts a greater power than the power of temporal rulers, proclaiming their end, constructing hope for the future based on love, justice and peace.

Jesus in his ministry sought to place the whole created order under God’s rule. A Jesus-centered values education theory is premised on Jesus the Christ as the foundation of beliefs, values and social structures. It provides unifying values towards love of God and love of neighbor (Mark 12:28-34). Such a command is general enough to qualify for what Roy Rappaport calls ‘universal postulates’ that affirm the most basic propositions that the human community has to live by for the community to flourish.³⁸ Timeless truth or ‘sacred postulates’ cannot be subjected to verification or confirmation since its verity is beyond logic or human perception. Located at the apex of the hierarchy of truths, eternal truths are intrinsically true, immutable, and foundational.

Jesus’ teaching and way is decolonizing because it prioritizes the well-being of the marginalized in the society not the imperial core. Anchored on faith, it imprints uniting and universal values calling individuals to take part and experience the sacred, thus providing the venue to promulgate and affirm truth, and take the action necessary. The gospel books connect truth pertaining to the divine, with the cosmic reality, time, morality, and meaning; but still gives room to diverse cultures and languages: Jew, Greek or Gentile. Gospel truth is empowering and liberating.

The gospel projects an alternative vision that is translatable in human reality but only partially. Utopian vision inspires action, while functioning as a source of critique to the present. But unlike Marxism, it is governed by sacred universal values that guards it against human excesses. Here, the weakness of postcolonial criticism becomes evident. First, it rejects the concept of truth and idealizes the indigenous and/or hybrid culture. It appears to promote decolonization for decolonization’s sake. To insist on hybridity is to invalidate both the carrier and the recipient cultures which also have the valid right to flourish in God’s economy. Secondly, it revels on fluidity of truth undermining metanarratives which are necessary for worldview and identity formation.

Furthermore, postcolonial criticism fails to account for human sin manifest in society and culture. Empire is still a reality. Postcolonial criticism has a flawed premise

³⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality: What We Do when We Read the Bible* (London: SMC Press, 2009), 4.

³⁸ Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 287-289.

and equally flawed estimation of human cultures and persons. Cultures need critical impulses within and without towards refinement. Bible readers are as flawed as its transmitters. A Jesus-centered values theory provides the critical and homing impulses because it is universal and translatable. In a time of post truth, Jesus the Christ provides the uniting principle and values necessary for societal stability. A historical human figure, Jesus' life and teachings can be a source of uniting values even for those who reject his transcendental claims. Without Christ's Truth, the choice is nothing, anything or everything.

Faith and Values Education as discipleship, not just an Academic Exercise

Jesus is the authority over all principalities and powers. The proclamation of the gospel is real engagement with demonic and human powers. In the Philippine context, where encounters with spirits is expected, God's supernatural character is most real and needed. Todd Klutz in his study of the exorcism states:

Jesus...stands not only in horizontal axis that connects him with the ideal figures and prophetic expectations of Israel's sacred traditions but also at the top of the hierarchy, over whose unclean spirits and divinatory daimons he enjoyed unqualified authority."³⁹

The supernatural aspect of the faith points to the cosmic authority and power of Christ. God's power is at work in Jesus, reclaiming the world from demonic and earthly powers. Filipinos need to know that Christ's followers have power to be agents of change. Jesus' militant engagement with the Roman and Jewish imperial ideologies, institutions, and the popular culture can then be seen for what it is--the Christian example of faithful obedience. Social change is the result of human ingenuity and concerted effort. Threats are real and cannot be warded off with amulets or "*oraciones*" (magical prayers). Conversely, those in power are unmasked as a fellow human being who like Roman emperors are accountable.

At the heart of Christian worldview is Emmanuel—God with us. This is the reverse of the distant inaccessible God in Filipino animistic belief. The theme of God as the Lord of history runs through the Old Testament. But God's intervention in human affairs, the subjugation of the spirits, the ruling out of magic, and the demythologization of the charismatic leaders are important concepts necessary to free the Filipino masses from their hold. Failure to enact a viable and meaningful societal order in relation to the spirits, nature, and human society is related to a fragmented split-level Filipino worldview – a worldview that on one hand, distorts reality towards maladaptation and on the other, covets what the West have. Indeed, it is based on a fragmented identity rooted in its animistic past, unable to make sense of reality and

³⁹ Todd Klutz, *The Exorcism Stories in Luke-Acts: A Socio-stylistic Reading Society of New Testament Studies Series 129* (Cambridge: Ebook, 2004), 267.

confused as to how to chart its future. In folk Christianity, there is no established moral law nor divine relationship linked to societal law and order. Faith fails to translate to social norms, because the moral order is not linked with a sovereign God or transcendent authority.⁴⁰ There is no perceived moral order that can be a basis for critique and social engagement.

Jesus Christ the Lord of the Church is the decolonizing figure and power that transforms lives and social structures.⁴¹ A humanly incomprehensible event has transpired. In Jesus, God's Reign has been established starting in Jerusalem to the nations reclaiming the earth from spiritual and earthly powers (11:14-20). Of this the apostles and the faithful today are witnesses.

Conclusion

Theology is an academic discipline that can be so fixated on academic progressivism and rationality. As such, it is cognitively beyond the reach of lay teachers and pastors who cannot keep up with reconciling curriculum with theologically sound theory and content. And yet, the rigor of truth seeking cannot be compromised. Jesus' life and teachings provide a constant and comprehensible theory and method that is holistic—a theory and method of teaching in dialogue with life, historical context, and anchored in a community. In Jesus, Gospel proclamation is not an academic exercise, it is a lived life and mission. The study of Jesus' life, works and teachings is a way of discipleship because it outlines a concrete way of living, and it ground truth in real life and relationships laying these as foundations for life to flourish. Jesus transforms and liberates as the *Word* is made flesh or translated to life. Certainly, Jesus' life-story is accessible and translatable. A Jesus centered Faith and Values education eschew Western knowledge, it is empowering and life-giving. It is good news to the nations and particularly to Filipinos.

A Jesus-centered theory and method in values and faith education can empower critique and social movements towards transformation by grounding ethics, social analysis, and action in the Christian worldview and emphasizing God's kingdom as a countercultural political and moral order.

⁴⁰ Henri Frankfort says that though the ancients have a conception of what is just, it did not translate to social norms, because there was no accepted moral principle behind the law nor divine relationship linked with it. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religions as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278.

⁴¹ Max Turner, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts," *Word and World* volume 23, Number 2 Spring 2003: 146-153, 151. Turner says, "The way narrative of Luke-Acts develops strongly suggests he understood salvation in the broader sense of...participation in God's dynamic, liberating, restoring, and transforming eschatological reign—the kingdom of God...in and through the Pentecost gift of the Spirit."