

Communicating Holiness to the Filipinos:
Challenges and Needs
The Path to A Filipino Theology of Holiness
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Introduction

In 1982, eighty-five evangelicals from 17 countries gathered together here in Seoul, Korea. Their task was to develop an Asian theology that seeks to address concerns that are relevant to Asian Christians. They all agreed that the goal of Asian theology is the faithful proclamation of the Word of God in Asia that gives importance to Asian contexts.¹ Today we are gathered together with the same purpose of articulating and proclaiming the Wesleyan message of holiness in the Asia-Pacific region. As Wesleyans, the message of holiness is central to our proclamation of God's full salvation. We believe that the full Gospel involves the message of holiness—the very reason why Jesus suffered and died outside the city gate of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:12).

This task of articulating and proclaiming holiness in Asia and the Pacific contexts has long been overdue. Wesleyan theology of holiness, for several decades, has been dominated by the Western thought, leading to our inefficiency and ineffectiveness in communicating it contextually at the local level. For example, in the Philippines most Filipino Nazarenes do not fully understand the doctrine of holiness and are not able to explain it to others. This is so because holiness theology continues to wear its western jacket. Hence the majority of the Filipino Nazarenes remain in what I call a *theological fog*—believing but never understanding.

Doubtless, we Filipinos need to hear the message of holiness. I personally believe that we, as Wesleyans, offer a better, if not the best, message. Our message is the answer to the Filipino search for true and meaningful spirituality—the true hope of our motherland. But it has to be communicated contextually.

And we who call ourselves Wesleyans and advocates of the doctrine of holiness must take the challenge upon ourselves and seek to communicate holiness to our own people—in my case the Filipino people—in their own context.

The path to contextual communication of holiness is not easy. The road is rough and the journey is tough. However, it is a road we have to pass if we want our message be heard and understood. Now is a good time to begin our journey. Today I would like to delineate for you the challenges and needs in communicating holiness contextually to the Filipinos—the path to a Filipino theology of holiness.

Challenges In Communicating Holiness to the Filipinos

¹ Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur, eds., *The Bible and Theology In Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology* (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 4.

A theology that fails to consider the significance of the context faces the greater potential of being misunderstood and misapplied. Hence, in our communication, we must engage in the process of understanding the context and face the challenges cultures pose to us. Wilson Chow rightly says, “The context places a demand on us that we cannot ignore.”² In the Philippines, theological reflection must address several challenges.

Cultural Values

Though Filipinos have been influenced by modernism, many have remained traditional.³ Traditional values continue to affect and shape the Filipino understanding of himself and his *sitz im leben*. Outwardly, a Filipino may be considered a part of modern society. But his *loob* (inner self) is still governed by the values he possesses from his traditional orientations that determine his thoughts, emotions, and behavior.

There are two major traditional orientations that surface among the Filipinos: the family system and the *hiya* concept. Like other Asian countries Filipinos are family-oriented. Interpersonal and social relations revolve around *kadugo* (blood ties), *kasambahay* (marriage), *kamag-anak* (kinship) and *compadres* (ritual family)—terms which define the Filipino family. Each member of the family is expected to behave in relation to the rest of the family. Roles, statuses, duties, privileges and obligations are clearly defined to protect the family.⁴ Love and loyalty are first and foremost given to the family. Hence, Filipinos have the natural tendency to be exclusive at the expense of wider social relations. Nacpil, a Filipino theologian, believes that due to narrow family and kinship loyalties, Filipinos have shown lack of civic consciousness and concern for the national interest.⁵

The Filipinos are also shame-oriented, that is, their major concern is social approval, acceptance by a group, and belonging to a group. Their behavior is generally dependent on what

² Wilson B. Chow, “Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Theology in the Third World,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 81.

³ According to F. Landa Jocano, there are two models of Filipino values: Exogenous (foreign model) and Indigenous (traditional). The exogenous model represents the legal and formal. The best example of this is the bureaucracy in the Philippine government inherited from the western culture (Europe and America). The indigenous model represents that traditional and non-formal, which guides the Filipino subconscious behavior. Jocano believes that the indigenous model is embedded in the deeper strata of our individual and collective subconscious. F. Landa Jocano, “Issues and Challenges in Filipino Value Formation,” in *Filipino Value System*, vol. 1 (Quezon City, Philippines: Punlad Research House, 1992), 1-22.

⁴ Some believe that the Filipino system has served to strengthen the notorious practice of nepotism and favoritism in the social spheres; others believe that it strengthens the Filipino traditional politics.

⁵ Emerito P. Nacpil, “A Gospel for the New Filipino,” in *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 127.

others will think, say, or do.⁶ This is shown in the concept of *hiya*, which could mean a sense of shame, embarrassment, inferiority, or timidity. *Hiya* strongly controls the behavior of the Filipino. Let me give you three major areas of Filipino behavior affected by *hiya*: first, it affects his self-esteem (*amor propio*) and his public relations. His *pagsunod* (obedience), *pag-galang* (respect) and *pakikisama* (public relation) may all be attributed to *hiya*. For example, Filipinos have difficulty saying “no” to a request or invitation because of *hiya*. It also manifests in the Filipino use of polite language such as Sir or Boss. Likewise, out of *pakikisama*, Filipinos resort to indirect approaches, euphemism and ambiguous expressions to avoid conflict.

Second, *hiya* also affects the Filipino ability to excel in life. The average Filipino usually feels inhibited to speak out or to act for fear he may fail or lose “face.” The belief in fate supports the unwillingness to disturb the status quo as implied in the *hiya* concept. *Hiya* in turn supports the feeling that there is nothing we can do about our “assigned status” in life.⁷ Third, *hiya* affects the Filipino morality. His ability to confront and rebuke wrong doings is limited by *hiya*. Corruption, red tape (bribe) and nepotism are also traceable to *hiya*.

In our effort to communicate holiness, we must deal with these value orientations. How do we liberate Filipinos from an exclusive structure of social relations and false sense of shame? These orientations are potential dangers in our communication of holiness to the Filipinos if not properly addressed. The family orientation, on the one hand, limits the Filipino understanding of love and commitment. On the other hand, *hiya*, though it may help the Filipino achieve his potential, opens a path to dishonesty, hypocrisy, and euphemism. Such practices do not agree with the principles of holiness.

Socio-Economic and Political Issues

The socio-economic and political situation of the Filipinos is another challenge. If the message of holiness has to be relevant to culture, it cannot ignore major cultural issues such as socio-economic and political issues. This is not to say that we must allow these cultural issues to define our message of holiness. Theology, though having to be culturally relevant, must remain biblical.

Poverty is a major economic issue in the Philippines. Why talk about poverty? Gabino Mendoza believes that poverty deals with the Philippines’ most crucial problem.⁸ Filipinos have had to deal with this issue. In fact, most of the socio-political struggles that we have as a nation today are caused directly or indirectly by this problem. The government has always considered poverty a priority and has vowed to lessen, if not eliminate, it in the country. But despite the government’s massive programs, poverty remains a major national problem.

⁶ Isabel S. Panopio and Realidad Santico-Rolda, *Cultural Anthropology from a Philippine Perspective* (Quezon City, Phil.: Katha Publications, Co, n.d.), 70.

⁷ Rodrigo D. Tano, “Toward an Evangelical Asia Theology,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 111.

⁸ In Ruth S. Callanta, *Poverty: The Philippine Scenario* (Manila, Philippines: Bookmark Inc., 1988), ix.

Poverty is widespread in the Philippines. In 1985, researchers showed that 50% to 74% of all Filipino families lived in poverty. This means that there were about 4 to 6 million Filipino families in relative or absolute poverty.⁹ Statistics had risen since then and continue to rise. Analysts say that if nothing is done about it, many Filipinos will die of starvation, illnesses or diseases related to poverty in the near future.

Poverty results in moral degradation, educational ignorance, material deprivation, social injustices and spiritual bankruptcy. All of these are evident in the lives of many Filipinos. How then can our message of holiness answer the challenge of poverty in the Philippines? This is an issue that we must deal with as we seek to communicate holiness to suffering Filipinos whose mental orientation is towards survival rather than the existential meaning of their souls. It has been often asked, “What is holiness to a hungry Filipino?”

Along with the Filipino problem of poverty is the problem of politics. Politics is intertwined with Filipino life. It is almost everywhere: in homes, schools, the church, business, and the government. Though the Philippines is a democratic country, the political situation is unique.¹⁰ Several problems confront Philippine politics. First, politics has been largely dominated by the elite of our society who use their money, military position, and manpower to gain a position in the government. These politicians are generally driven by selfish desire for power and prestige. Their philosophy of leadership is tainted with greed and corruption.

Second, the electoral process in the Philippine is marred by several problems. Candidates resort to vote buying, dirty campaigns, illegal donations, cheating (*Dagdag-Bawas*) and many other methods to ensure victory. People generally show lack of political maturity. Hence, Philippine politics can produce leaders that are either tyrannical or corrupt, who abuse their power and use their office to promote their own good and not the welfare of the nation.

Third, despite the government’s massive campaign against it, corruption continues to be the major problem of almost all government agencies. Red tape (bribe), fixers (illegal assistants), and falsification of public documents are just some of the problems in the government.

What role do the Wesleyan tradition and its message of holiness play in the political life of the Filipino? How do we develop a theology of holiness that addresses the political problems of the country? These are some of the questions we must deal with in our articulation of our message—a challenge that we cannot ignore but must take seriously.

⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰ Philippine politics has undergone several political experiences such as tribalism, conquest, colonization, unification, centralization, revolution, decentralization, war, liberation, independence and nationalization. They have been Sinonized (Chinese), Hispanized (Spanish), Americanized (American), and more recently Filipinized (Philippines). Leadership has at one time or another been traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Filipinos, like many other people, are very religious. Filipino religiosity is seen in the country's diverse religious beliefs and practices. Fernando G. Elesterio writes, "And speaking of the Filipino, it may be said that part of his humanity is made up of his religious beliefs and practices derived from Islam, Roman Catholicism, American Protestantism, or from more ancient roots—that is, from elements which are considered as pre-Islamic or pre-Christian in the context of Philippine cultural history."¹¹ Hence, one seeking to understand Filipinos or to communicate with them needs an understanding of their religious beliefs and practices. A failure to understand Filipino religiosity is a failure to understand their being.

The Philippines is a predominantly Roman Catholic country. The majority of Filipinos profess to be members of the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholicism in the Philippines is unique. It is a mixture of Christian and Animistic beliefs. Animism in the Philippines is pre-magellanic (Pre-Roman Catholicism). Our ancestors believed in the supernatural and spirit beings (*anitos*). They perceived them as ultimately responsible for the good things that mankind enjoys. These supernatural and spirit beings were the source or creators of things in the world. Events in the world were also ultimately traced to them, including human sufferings and death, the rain and the drought, the thunder and the lightning, and many observable phenomena which need not only a proximate but also an ultimate explanation.¹² Fiestas originated from the practice of appeasing the spirits to restore peace and prosperity in the land. These animistic beliefs were adopted by the Roman Catholics and replaced by Christian beliefs. For example, belief in the *anitos* (spirits) was replaced by veneration of saints and angels; belief in God took over from *Bathala* (the native supreme deity); the *babaylans* (native priests) were replaced by Catholic priests, etc. Fernando Elesterio writes, "This replacement, however, was not total. For while outwardly the Filipinos appeared very orthodox in belief and practice, they were secretly still believers in many ways of their traditional pre-Christian practices."¹³ This mixture is labeled as "folk Catholicism."¹⁴ Folk Catholicism embraces both beliefs, though such is not the official stance of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the church tolerates animistic acts on

¹¹ Fernando G. Elesterio, *Three Essays on Philippine Religious Culture* (Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press, 1989), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ A number of books have been written on Folk Catholicism. Some attack the practice, while others do not. Father Vitaliano R. Gorospe writes, "Consequently, even today, especially in the rural areas, we find merely the external trappings of Catholic belief and practice superimposed on the original pattern of Christian superstitions and rituals" (*Christian Renewal of Filipino Values* [Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1966], 37). Father Jaime Bulatao, in his article, contends that Filipinos possess two inconsistent religious systems. He describes "split-level Christianity" as the "co existence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other." ("Split-Level Christianity," in *Philippine Sociological Review*, XIII:2 [April]: 2; Cf. Leonardo Mercado, *Filipino Religious Psychology* [Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977]).

grounds that they do not contradict the important teachings of the church. Rodney Henry calls this practice “conspiracy of silence.”¹⁵

Both official and unofficial Roman Catholic doctrines pervade the beliefs and practices of Filipinos. The teachings and doctrines of the church evidently influence Filipino understanding of spirituality. The Filipino sense of morality (holiness) is based on the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices that are embedded in the culture.

Despite the Roman Catholic predominance in the country, other religious sects find their place in the Philippine soil.¹⁶ Except for the Protestants, these religious sects are considered to be indigenous. The rise of these indigenous sects may be attributed to Filipino religious ingenuity—the ability to create, organize and propagate religious propaganda.

A leading indigenous sect is the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church of Christ). Its founder and leader was Felix Manalo, who was born on May 10, 1866, in a barrio called Calzada in the Municipality of Taguig, Metro Manila.¹⁷ The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (INC) is unique. Its church building structure, teachings, worship and witnessing are all uniform. This uniformity, they say, symbolizes their unity as a church. INC believes that it is the true church called to propagate the true gospel of Christ. Furthermore, it believes that a person can be saved not only by believing in Christ, but also by joining their church. It asserts that outside the INC church there is no salvation.

Another indigenous sect worth studying is the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* (The Church of the Banner of the Race). This sect is known as an ultra-nationalist indigenous sect. The sect honors Dr. Jose Rizal, the Philippines’ national hero, as their god. Besides the Bible, it has its own literature (*El Filibusterismo* and *Noli Me Tangere*) written by Rizal. The founders of the Church of the Banner of the Race, while searching for gold, allegedly heard a voice (*Banal na Tinig*) telling them not to search for the treasure that rots and rusts but for one that would lead them to eternal life.

A common characteristic of these indigenous sects is their nationalistic orientation. They take pride in their being a Filipino church, whose beginnings are indigenous and founders are Filipinos. Furthermore, they take an active role in our government and in some social issues that affect the nations. Along with the Roman Catholic Church, these sects have become major players in the changes in our government.

Holiness articulation and communication must take into consideration these diverse religious experiences of the Filipinos. How should we address folk-Christianity or split-level-Christianity? How should we express holiness contextually so as to avoid localizing the

¹⁵ Rodney L. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World: A Challenge to the Church* (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature Inc., 1986), 12.

¹⁶ I have chosen not to include the religion of Islam, though it is a major religion in the country, because of its unique orientations and geographical limitations (its influence is only in the South). Islam warrants a separate theological reflection in the Philippines.

¹⁷ Elesterio, *Three Essays*, 20.

message? How is the Wesleyan morality different from the already high morality of the Filipinos as a result of their varied religious experiences? What role should the holiness message play in national social issues and social change?

The Filipino World-View

Despite the growing influence of rationalism in the Philippines, Filipinos are still non-rational in their view of the world. They still view the world as one over which they have little or no control. Unlike rationalism, success or failure is largely dependent upon supernatural beings or spirits. This is evident in the Filipino concept of *bahala na* (a form of fatalism). Panopio believes that this fatalistic outlook rests on the strong dependence on the “spirits” as these will take care of everything for everybody. It is the Filipinos’ inability to control circumstances that makes them resort to divine resignation.

Moreover, Filipinos view life in the world in terms of what they call *gulong ng palad* (the wheel of fortune), which rolls on inevitably with its ups and downs but leads to nowhere. They have learned to accept life as it is without question—enduring the difficulties of life and celebrating its goodness (through extravagant *fiesta*). Filipinos have little hope for new things. Life is marked by repetition of events over which one has no power to change or control. It is up to *Bathala* (Supreme deity) to determine the course of one’s personal life and of history. For example, what happened in 1986, when President Marcos was thrown out of power, was believed to be a divine act. Vitaliano R. Gorospe writes, “The power of the Filipino people cannot be explained without recourse to God’s power and providential love and care of them in their history.”¹⁸

These divine resignation and cyclic view of life must be addressed in our theological reflection. How should holiness provide the balance between divine will and human responsibility? Is holiness compatible with *bahala na* or do they contradict each other? Will holiness provide the needed spirit of freedom for Filipinos to set themselves free from fatalism and escapism on life’s reality, and to assume greater responsibility for his life and his world?

Needs In Communicating Holiness To the Filipinos

Having surveyed some of the pressing issues which serve as challenges to the communication of holiness in the Philippines, we are now ready to discuss the needs in communicating holiness to Filipinos. As Wesleyans, we believe in communicating holiness contextually. This is undertaken through the process of theological reflection through which the text enters into a dialogue with the context.

In our effort to communicate holiness in the context of the Filipino culture, we must not allow any distortion of our message. Though it is legitimate to take into consideration cultural issues, we must guard our theological endeavor against the abuses of the Scripture and uncritical use of the culture.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Elwood, *Toward a Theology of People Power: Reflection on the Philippine February Phenomenon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 17.

The Need for Valid Contextualization

Articulating and communicating holiness to Filipinos calls for valid contextualization.¹⁹ Contextualization, according to Filipino theologian Rodrigo Tano, is the process by which truth is embodied and translated in a concrete historical situation.²⁰ This process involves a dialogue between the text (biblical truths) and the context (Filipino culture). The intent of this dialogue is the clear understanding of the biblical truth so that people may positively respond in faith, without vagueness to the Gospel of Christ.

Contextualization must take precedence in our effort to communicate the Wesleyan message of holiness. Donald L. Stults writes, “It is impossible to write theology without reference to a specific culture because language is tied to culture.”²¹ He adds, “To communicate theologically is to express *biblical* truth in terms understandable to a particular group of people whose culture determines the mode of expressions” (italic is mine).²² The context is indispensable to theology and its communication.

This theological discipline has to be done, however, with caution. Contextualization, if not properly guarded and guided, may lead to syncretism—a theological fallacy that distorts the biblical truth. There are two kinds of syncretism: 1) cultural and 2) theological.²³ Bruce Nicholls says, “Cultural syncretism results from the uncritical use of symbols and practices of the receptor culture.”²⁴ This is true to Roman Catholicism in the Philippines where cultural practices, mostly pagan, are “christianized” in the name of contextualization and at the expense of the truth. For example, Joe De Mesa, a Catholic theologian, writes, “God’s will is construed very often in terms of *suwerte* (luck) and *kapalaran* (fate).”²⁵ He adds, “Saints are seen as spirits which have particular powers and priests are regarded like the native *babaylans* (pagan priests).”²⁶ Such practices allow the culture to assign meaning into the text.

¹⁹ Contextualization has taken many forms in Asia. In his article “Contextualization: Asia Theology,” Bong Rin Ro categorizes Asian theology in four ways: (1) syncretism, (2) accommodation, (3) situational theology, (4) biblically oriented theology relevant to Asian needs. See, *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 69.

²⁰ Tano, “Toward An Evangelical Asian Theology,” 94.

²¹ Donald Leroy Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology* (Mandaluyong, Philippines: OMF Literature Inc., 1989), 135.

²² *Ibid.*, 136.

²³ Bruce Nicholls, “A Living Theology for Asian Churches: Some Reflections on the Contextualization-Syncretism Debate,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Joe De Mesa, “Becoming A Filipino Christian,” in *Currents in Philippine Theology* (Quezon City, Phils.: Institute of Religion and Culture, Phils., 1992), 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Theological syncretism, on the other hand, occurs when biblical truths are diluted to cultural beliefs. For example, *The Iglesia Watawat Ng Lahi* (The Church of the Banner of the Race) interpreted the divine trinity as referring to *Jehovah*, *Jesus*, and *Jose* (a Filipino name).²⁷ This is a clear distortion of the Christian concept of trinity. In his article, Nicholls discusses the nature and danger of theological syncretism clearly when he writes:

Theological syncretism seeks to reconcile or unite concepts and beliefs that go to the very heart of culture, namely, world-views and ideologies, moral values and practices. It begins by denying the finality of revelation in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as historically trustworthy and infallible and as propositionally verbalized interpreted truth. It assumes that the Bible is so culturally conditioned that we cannot know with assurance what is the Word of God. In other words, it is assumed that the sovereignty of God's self-revelation does not extend to his control over the shaping of Biblical cultures nor the overshadowing of the Biblical writers, who themselves belonged to particular cultures, so that what they wrote was not concurrent with the will of God.²⁸

In our effort to communicate holiness contextually, we must avoid syncretism at all cost. Contextualization is not "christianizing" cultural beliefs and practices that are pagan in nature. In order to do this, we must pay attention to four areas in our attempt to contextualize holiness.

First, we must uphold God's revelation and His holiness. This guards us against cultural pagan beliefs and practices embedded in the religious experiences of the Filipinos. God's revelation and His holiness are two of the most explicit theological truths founded in the Bible. The Bible bears witness to God's revelation of himself: Creator (Yahweh), Savior (Jesus), and Comforter (Holy Spirit). It also speaks of God's holiness: God is holy in nature, in character and in action. God's revelation and His holiness set the limit of contextualization and provide the foundation for our articulation and communication.

Second, we must assert Christ's superiority and the universality of his lordship. Contextual holiness theology in the Philippines must affirm the fact that Christ now stands as the Lord of all (Phil. 2:9-11). Our affirmation of the universal lordship of Christ clears the culture of all pagan beliefs and practices and puts culture under the dominion of Christ. Cultural values must be reexamined and redefined in the light of Christ's value revealed in his life and teachings. For example, the Filipino family orientation must be redefined. Jesus demanded that love for the family must not supersede love for God (Luke 9:57-62, 14:26). Love for God serves as the basis for our love for others. This kind of love is not exclusive but inclusive. Love treats everybody as neighbor: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:25-37, Mark 12:31). When this happens, Filipinos will be freed from limited social relations and will learn to take personal responsibility for others. In Christ, love for others becomes operational and transformational. Likewise, the concept of *hiya* must also be reexamined in the light of

²⁷ Translated from the original Tagalog version, this belief sounds this way:

Jehovah, Jesus, Jose
They are One only,
The reason why they vary:
To conceal their identity.

²⁸ Nicholls, "A Living Theology," 127

Christ's lordship and teachings. On the one hand, the concept of *hiya* could enrich and inform Christ's teaching on sin and repentance. *Hiya* is a powerful image of sin as guilt or shame, which can lead to repentance—an action which God awaits from all his erring children. On the other hand, *hiya* must be transformed into power. Jesus promised the believers that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them (Acts 1:8). Paul also said, "For God did not give us the spirit of timidity (*hiya*) but of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). With Christ's forgiveness and the Holy Spirit indwelling presence, there is no need for *hiya*.

Third, we must affirm the divine-human interaction.²⁹ Affirmation of the divine-human interaction provides the balance between the sovereignty of God and man's free will. Filipinos must realize their freedom in life and the dynamism of faith, which are lacking in their cultural values. Filipino holiness contextualization, therefore, must emphasize human responsibility to correct the Filipino distorted view of God as one who wills and causes everything to happen as reflected in the Filipino values *bahala na* (come what may), *itinalaga ng maykapal* (endowed by God), *gulong ng palad* (wheel of fortune). A biblical concept that must be emphasized in support of the divine-human interaction is the image of God in man (Gen. 1:26). The image of God provides the basis for man's freedom and his moral responsibility over creation and life.

Lastly, we must use a holistic approach to contextualization. Ethnotheology is limited because it compartmentalizes cultural issues and addresses them independently from a narrow biblical point of view and is often economically and politically motivated. We must not compartmentalize issues such as theology of poverty, theology of power, theology of spirits, etc. We need a theology that promotes wholeness. A holistic theology must address the total person and seek to minister to the total needs of the person. It is this kind of theology that needs to be demonstrated in the articulation of our theology in the Philippines. There is no room for isolating the individual from his community and his spiritual needs from the physical needs. To do so is to truncate theology.

Liberation theology in the Philippines is a form of truncated theology that addresses the social and physical needs but neglects personal and spiritual needs. It seeks to resolve alienation from our neighbor but neglects alienation from God. Such theology fails to address the total person. Evangelicals, on the other hand, have the tendency to truncate theology by focusing on the personal and spiritual needs. To avoid this, holiness theology must emphasize both love and devotion for God, and love and devotion for men.

The Need for Socio-Economic and Political Relevance of Holiness Doctrine

²⁹ A borrowed term from Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

The goal of contextual theology must not only be clarity of message but also relevancy to the receptor culture.³⁰ Relevancy is attained only through addressing questions and issues that are apparent and important to culture. For a theology to be truly contextual and relevant, it must become part of the culture, defining and addressing cultural issues in the light of the biblical truths. Emerito P. Nacpil, a Filipino theologian, rightly states, “A responsible theology is attained mainly when the Christian faith is interpreted in conscious relationship to the fundamental problems of human life as they appear in specific forms and in particular environments.”³¹ The Wesleyan message of holiness faces the challenge of incarnation theology. Holiness must find its place in the culture’s life and existence for it to become relevant. The best example for this is God himself, who in his desire to redeem humanity from sin and its consequences chose to communicate to the people of Israel in their struggles. His revelation of himself to the people of Israel was in the context of Israel’s search for freedom and nationhood (Exodus 3:7-10).

John Wesley himself championed theological relevancy. His theology of holiness was not driven by a desire for intellectual supremacy or scholarly work. Rather, John Wesley sought to be relevant to his culture. Wynkoop rightly observes that,

The lure of Wesley is not primarily his theology; that was traditional enough. He was not an innovator. The contribution of Wesley is in his ability to put theology into flesh and blood. The goal was theology incarnated in mere man.³²

If we must be truly Wesleyans, we must seek to be relevant to culture as Wesley was. A truly Wesleyan holiness theology is a contextual holiness theology.

³⁰ Stults’ judgment on the motive of Asian theologians in writing their own theology falls short of understanding the cry for relevancy. It is not for recognition that we do theology in Asia, as Stults seems to look at the Asian theological endeavor, but for relevancy in culture. Western theology, for so long, has not been able to address Asian issues simply because it is written from a different perspective with different issues. And it is for this reason that theologians in Asia cry for Asian theology—a theology that is true to text and context.

³¹ Nacpil, “A Gospel for the New Filipino,” 117.

³² Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 78.

A Filipino theology of holiness, therefore, must be relevant to the Filipino struggles and life issues. It must provide the balance between personal holiness and communal holiness. This balance is what is lacking in the Filipino religiosity—having personal piety but lacking social integrity. The gospel of holiness must not only be interpreted as personal freedom from sin and death, but also freedom from religious, social, and political oppressions (Luke 4:18-19). Nacpil discusses the meaning of salvation not only in the context of man as an individual but also in his national context. He believes that salvation goes beyond personal freedom from sin and death. He says that in the communal life, it signifies deliverance from structures of cruelty and injustice and the building up of a society of *shalom*.³³

Theological cry for relevancy has led Filipino theology into a different arena in the Philippines. Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant liberal theologians have embraced in principle and practice liberation theology. The Philippine struggle for freedom, justice and equality led to this uncritical hold on liberation theology—a theology that has lost its spirituality.³⁴ Its agenda has become too culturally oriented and politically motivated. Though theology must continue to address cultural issues, its meaning must remain biblical. The cry for freedom, justice and equality must all be defined and addressed from the biblical context and perspective. Contextual theology must not allow a shift of meaning.

Cultural relevancy is a serious challenge for us Wesleyans. Our message of holiness is relevant in itself. It is our story that must be told around the world—a story of love and life. John Wesley writes, “So impossible it is to keep our religion from being seen unless we cast it away; so vain is the thought of hiding the light, unless by putting it out.”³⁵ We dare not keep it secret and irrelevant. To avoid this, we must take the following considerations as necessary steps to cultural relevancy: first, we must continue to address issues and questions apparent to culture. It is the only way to meet the challenge of culture. This means that our message of holiness must be “deculturized.” We should not desire to articulate our theology from the perspective of Western culture and theology. In addressing cultural issues, we must interpret the Word of God in the light of our own contexts. For example, in addressing the socio-economic and political issues, we must develop a theology of holiness that deals with poverty and power—themes that are less important to the affluent Western world. An imposition of western theology is a danger to cultural relevancy.

Second, we must acknowledge the authority of the Bible over culture. Holiness theology must be built on the authority of the Scripture. David Ackerman, my co-professor at

³³ Nacpil, “A Gospel for the New Filipino,” 129.

³⁴ For a detailed discussion on theological critique on liberation theology, see Bruce J. Nicholls, “Hermenutics, Theology, and Culture with Special reference to Hindu Culutre,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 253.

³⁵ Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 200.

APNTS, states in his address, “We stand in the tradition of Martin Luther who acknowledged the authority of the Bible and applied his supposition, *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), to counter the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church of his day.”³⁶ The Scripture alone is our canon of faith. The Bible must set the agenda of our theology that must be appropriated by the people in their own context(s). The Bible is God’s living word to people of all cultures. Hence, theology is relevant. An unscriptural theology is irrelevant to culture and the Bible.

Third, we must affirm John Wesley’s concept of social holiness. Wesley knew no holiness but social holiness. He said,

Directly opposite to this (mysticism) is the Gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. “Holy Solitaries” is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than holy adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.³⁷

Social holiness should lead to social concern for the poor and powerless in ways that uplifts their status and gives them dignity as persons created in the image of God. John Wesley was careful not to interpret holiness as simply personal piety. The evidence for holiness, to Wesley, was the recognizable social fruits of love.

Lastly, we must assert the soteriological goal of the Scripture. It cannot be denied that the Bible is not a political nor an economic book but a book on God’s redemptive plan. Focusing on political and economic issues without emphasis on salvation might make us relevant to culture but irrelevant to the Scripture and so deny our theology. Holiness is soteriological by nature. The Bible commands us to pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

The Need for Biblical Theology of Holiness

³⁶ David A. Ackerman, “Proclaiming Biblical Holiness for the 21st Century: The Task of Wesleyan Biblical Studies” (Photocopy), 6. An induction address given at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary on January 11, 2000.

³⁷ G. Osborn, ed., *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, vol. 1* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, 1868), xxii.

Filipino theology of holiness must be founded on the Bible. I strongly believe that all theology, whether contextual or ethno-theological, must be biblical. Biblical theology is the foundation of contextual theology. George E. Ladd defines biblical theology as the discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting.³⁸ Unlike liberal theologians, we in the Wesleyan tradition highly regard the historical context of the Scripture.

We have with us the Holy Scripture as the sole witness to God's historical revelation in words and in acts that culminated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We believe that the Scripture is God's word for all people for all generations, regardless of culture. Its meaning has not changed. The task of theology is to first understand the text in its own context. Filipino theology of holiness must be rooted in the Scripture. Only when we ground our theology in the Bible can we eliminate the danger of placing the context above the text and so avoid theological and cultural syncretism.

In seeking to understand the meaning of the Scripture for us today, we must recognize the importance of setting it within its own context. Only by considering the context of the text can sound biblical theology be possible and commendable. We reject all interpretations that set aside the historical context. We believe that God's word is embedded in the historical culture, which God used as a vehicle of His self-revelation. Therefore, seeking to understand the Scripture apart from its historical context is an activity in futility.

As such, holiness hermeneutics must be guided by sound exegetical study of the Scripture. Filipino holiness hermeneutics must take the historical-grammatical approach to the Scripture as our objective tool along with the Filipino cultural preunderstandings. Holiness hermeneutics involves a dialogue between the text and the interpreter as representative of the context. This dialogue involves speaking and listening as well as reflection and identification. However, I agree with other theologians in saying that the historical-grammatical approach alone will not bring us to fuller understanding of the biblical truth.³⁹ A fuller understanding of the biblical truth necessitates faith—based on our knowledge and experience of the Living Word. Wesley believed that theology must be written in the context of personal faith in God, that is the true faith of “a believer.”⁴⁰ Similarly, William W. Klein and others say, “Only the one who believes and trusts in God can truly understand what God has spoken in his Word.”⁴¹ In other words, an interpreter must be a believer to fully grasp the meaning of the text. The Bible declares, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrew 11:6).

³⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993 rev. edition), 20.

³⁹ Ro and Eshenaur, *The Bible and Theology*, 6.

⁴⁰ Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Light and Life Communication, 1990), 98.

⁴¹ William W. Klein, et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 82.

Furthermore, the interpreter must interact with the church and the culture. Interaction with the church and the culture helps deepen holiness hermeneutics. On the one hand, the church witnesses and confirms interpretation. The church judges it from the perspective of her history and mission. John Wesley had high regard for Christian tradition. His hermeneutics is inseparable to his tradition. Holiness apart from tradition is inconceivable and impossible. On the other hand, the culture receives and analyzes holiness interpretation. It is the culture that declares the interpretation of holiness cultural validity on the basis of its relevancy.

The Need for Christian Love

Finally, let me discuss the need for Christian love in our articulation and communication of the Wesleyan message of holiness. Our entire theological endeavor must be driven by a motivation of love. There can be no greater motive than love. It defines not only our theology of holiness, but also our communication of it. The apostle Paul, a great theologian and a contextualizer of the Gospel, speaks of the necessity of love in all that we do (I Cor. 13). A theology without love is nothing.

We do theology today and seek to communicate it to the people not because we want to be recognized among the best of theologians in the world, but because we want to share the love of God in us with the highest motive of that divine love. The people whom we seek to address in our articulation and communication are persons and love is a uniquely personal thing. Wynkoop writes, "Love demands the concept of the dynamic in personhood. It is its inner drive, its outreach, its atmosphere, its social cohesion. It is fellowship, relationship, and sociality."⁴² The apostle John also tells us that love is the reason God sent His son into the world (John 3:16). God knows what a person is and what he needs.

The goal of theology is service. The Filipino theology of holiness must seek to serve the church and the country. If it does otherwise, it is not worth doing and communicating. Filipinos need a theology that will liberate them from all forces that hinder and limit them from enjoying God and his blessings, and so attain the fullness of life. We dare not do theology that will further add to the ongoing and seemingly never ending sufferings of the Filipinos. As the Filipinos often say it, enough is enough. Only a theology with the highest motive of love can help the Filipinos achieve the divine purpose and plan for themselves. Like the Lord Jesus Christ, we must not seek to be served but to serve the people. Love seeks not its own good, but the good of others. As Wynkoop says, "It destroys indifference, isolationism, the pride that cuts off fellowship, partiality, aloofness, and exclusiveness."⁴³

Love is the dynamic of Wesleyanism. It is the spirit of our theology. It must also be the motive of our contextualization and the force of our communication.

⁴² Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Conclusion

The task of articulating and communicating holiness to the Filipinos is not easy. This delineation of challenges and needs is just but a beginning. The challenge is for the Filipino church to realize its theological task of articulating holiness to her people. This task must be the concern of everyone in the church—the people, the pastors, the educators, and the leaders. It is a divine call, a holy task where the future of the church and its doctrine of holiness are dependent.