

**GRASSROOTS THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES AS A THIRD  
WAY BEYOND LIBERATION AND PENTECOSTAL  
THEOLOGIES**

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This work is an addition to existing theological academic literature with regard to the relationship between faith and public issues in the context of the Philippine multi-religious-ethnic-linguistic society.<sup>1</sup> Religion plays a highly significant role in shaping Filipinos' lives and worldviews. If we acknowledge this, the need for a real grassroots theology becomes more urgent as we Filipinos search for a truly Filipino faith-based understanding of Philippine political, psychological, and cultural/religious problems. A young Filipino Christian writer and activist Rei Lemuel Crizaldo describes,

We have to wake ourselves to the reality that we do not have doctrinal articulations for the most practical concerns of life and not even for the most fundamental aspects of our being a Filipino living in this corner of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Philippine 2016 national election, the newly elected government has offered promises of sweeping political and economic reforms. The new administration is expected to bring a new period of numerous changes and challenges. These changes will affect people's lives. In response, it is imperative that the Philippine church interacts with the life issues Filipinos are facing. Contextualization of the gospel is the key to both relevant and effective contextual understanding of our faith. An American

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<sup>1</sup> The following important articles and books have been written by Filipino theologians: Louie Hechanova, "The Christ of liberation" in *With Raging Hope*, 1, (Quezon City, Philippines: SPI and Claretian Publications, 1983); Edicio de la Torre, *Touching Ground, Taking Root. Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*, (Manila, SPI, 1986); C. Arevalo, "Some Thoughts on 'Filipino' Theology," *Landas*, 12, (1998): 91-103; Jose M. De Mesa and Lode L. Wostyn, *Doing Theology: Basic Realities and Processes*, (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990). Eleazar Fernandez, *Towards a Theology of Struggle*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), previously published by Orbis Books in 1994; Everett Mendoza, "Theology of Struggle Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," (Lecture Material in Silliman University, 20 May 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, "The Problem with Theology", *Every Square Inch*, (July 1, 2016). Accessed August 23, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/every-square-inch/the-problem-with-theology/986198998166584>.

Christian anthropologist Charles H. Kraft writes, “We are called to contextualize God’s message by living in such a way that [God’s] witness comes across accurately through our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

Filipino theologians, in response, integrate different theological disciplines in multiple challenges in the Philippine social problems. We Filipino Christians are incarnational in how we express and practice our Christian faith in the public space. Being incarnational, as Filipino theologians argue, Filipinos are demonstratively religious.<sup>4</sup> We Filipinos recognize Christ’s presence within our ordinary lives. We have portrayed Jesus Christ in many and different ways. One of the most celebrated religious feasts, for example, is the public procession of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo Manila. The Black Nazarene statue of Quiapo Manila symbolizes the suffering and persistence of Jesus Christ. Filipino Catholic devotees find a way to identify with the suffering and resilience of Christ under the hardship of life. Although there have been disagreements among Filipino Roman Catholic priests and theologians, the religious feast still draws a million Filipino devotees each year. According to Filipino Catholic organizers, from 2011 to 2015 about 6 to 12 million people attended the event from January 7 to 9, with an annual growth rate of 20 percent.<sup>5</sup> During its procession, millions of Filipinos pack the streets of Manila trying to get close and touch the black statue of Jesus Christ for healing, forgiveness, and blessing. For Filipino Catholic devotees, it is a unique way of displaying our Filipino faith in the public sphere.

However, it should be said that inculturating and contextualizing the Gospel is a slow and ongoing process in the Philippine context. As Filipino Maryknoll Sister Virginia Fabella explains:

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<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Kraft, “Contextualizing Communication,” in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 128.

<sup>4</sup> Leonardo N. Mercado, *Christ in the Philippines*, (Quezon City: Divine Word University, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See Ed Umbao, “Black Nazarene Feast 2016 Draws 15 Million Crowd,” *Philippine News*, September 1 2016, accessed September 1, 2016, <http://philnews.ph/2016/01/09/black-nazarene-feast-2016-draws-15-million-crowd/>.



It is evident that inculturation still has a long way to go in the Philippines. It is a slow ongoing process that involves the local community of the faithful, and not just a few experts of erudite researches, as John Paul II in “Redemptoris Missio: The Mission of Redeemer” reminds us. It is imperative that evangelizers, both women and men, lay and religious, be formed in a ‘Filipino way’ (para. 210). The Church, then needs to develop ecclesial structures and approaches responsive to needs of the Filipino people, especially the marginalized sectors – the youth, the women. This means the formulation of a catechesis, liturgy and theology that are not inculturated, but holistic, integrated and inclusive as well.<sup>6</sup>

Today, poverty is one of the malignant social problems in the Philippines. Research shows that poverty in the Philippines is a social consequence of widespread corruption in public offices around the country. Liberation theology, in response, has become a popular theological approach among Filipino theologians to deal with Philippine poverty. For Filipino liberation theologians, who want to liberate the masses from poverty, theology should be concretely involved in concerted actions against oppressive systems, such as government policies (not people-centered development), laws, and church hierarchy. Filipino liberation theologians see their role as prophetic, denouncing any form of social injustices, and proclaiming a vision of shalom. Unfortunately, it seems that this theological enterprise is not appealing to the marginalized Filipinos. For the Filipino masses, the politicization of the Christian faith is not agreeable and raises too many questions. Aside from this, the fear arises among the informed Filipino masses that the gospel of Christ would be reduced to political-economic liberation.

For some, liberation theology appears to be a disguised ideology and has become a highly specialized academic field. On the one hand, there are various attempts to reconstruct and contextualize the Latin American liberation theologies in the Philippine experience. In the Philippine experience, for example, Edicio de la Torre, a Filipino theologian, argues that ‘theology of struggle’ is a more appropriate term for

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Fabella, “Inculturating the Gospel: The Philippine experience,” *From The Way*, No. 39, (2), (Heythrop College, London, 1999), 118-128.

doing Filipino liberation theology rather than simply copying the Latin American liberation theologies. In short, theology of struggle is a localized result of the Latin American liberationist movements.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Filipino liberation theology has caused both frustration and fear among informed Christian communities because they have become aware of its ideological orientation.<sup>8</sup> I have witnessed, for instance, how the Filipino liberation theologians have failed to compel religious Filipinos due to their position on armed struggle as a realizable course toward social change in the Philippines. Up to the present moment, this is a hotly debated topic between conservative Filipino Christians and liberationists in the Philippines.

The emergence of Pentecostalism in the Philippines from 1920 to 1929 transformed many Filipino local churches. With the growth of Pentecostalism in the United States and Hawaii, baptized Filipino Pentecostal returnees started their pioneering works in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup> Filipino Pentecostalism led many local believers and churches to turn to Pentecostalism. The rise of Pentecostalism was a reaction against the liberalism and formalism of mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in the Philippines. The majority of the Filipino Pentecostal churches that emerged in the 1960s to 1970s could be classified as classical Pentecostal movements. This is the main reason why most of the Filipino Pentecostal churches have become focused more on saving souls than on social issues such as corruption, climate change, human rights violations, and structural change. Presently, Filipino Pentecostal churches are growing numerically at a rapid rate in the Philippines. Why? According to Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, "...the church has a dream of reaching people not only nationwide, but worldwide and

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<sup>7</sup> Edicio de la Torre, *Touching Ground, Taking Root: Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*, (Quezon City, Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Victor Aguilan, "Encountering Jesus in the Midst of Struggle: A Christology of Struggle," Lecture, Mindanao Theological Forum, Davao, Philippines, March 6 & 7, 2014. Accessed August 19, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/22745894/ENCOUNTERING\\_JESUS\\_IN\\_THE\\_MIDST\\_OF\\_STRUGGLE\\_A\\_Christology\\_of\\_Struggle](https://www.academia.edu/22745894/ENCOUNTERING_JESUS_IN_THE_MIDST_OF_STRUGGLE_A_Christology_of_Struggle).

<sup>9</sup> Conrado Lumahan, "Facts and Figures: A History of the Growth of the Philippine Assemblies of God, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, (2005), 331-344.

establishing a global outreach...the first is extensive Bible studies at home, offices, and communities.”<sup>10</sup>

Apparently, while liberation theologians have been preoccupied with social and political changes, Pentecostal churches have been focused on numerical growth and church planting in Southeast Asian regions. Now, the pertinent question is, why is Pentecostalism so compelling to the masses, specifically to the Filipino masses? The subject has been addressed by Simon Chan in his book entitled *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014). The book examines the shift of Asian theological discourse from “elitist theology” toward “grassroots theology”, drawing not only upon recent debates but also upon traditional theological loci: God in Asian contexts (ch 2), humanity and sin (ch 3), Christ and salvation (ch 4), the Holy Spirit and spirituality (ch 5) and the church (ch 6). For Chan, Asian theologians have failed to address the needs of the grassroots believers’ lived experience. In order to address the issue at hand, Chan argues that grassroots theology reflects and derives from the lived theology of Christians in their ecclesial experience. In short, it requires cooperation between the people of God and the theologian.<sup>11</sup> As Chan argues,

Speaking of ecclesial experience in this way helps us avoid two major pitfalls. First, it avoids conceiving theology as purely objective facts or propositions (as in fundamentalism) or as primarily subjective experience (“faith” in Schleiermacher’s sense). Second, it does not consider individuals as the primary agents of doing theology. Doing theology is essentially an ecclesial endeavouring cooperation between the people of God and the theologian.<sup>12</sup>

Most Pentecostal preachers, Chan stresses, address the intimate concerns of the Filipino individual such as freedom from sin, prosperity gospel against drifting towards poverty, protection from any sickness, and they promise supernatural power

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<sup>10</sup> Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, “Growing Churches in Manila: An Analysis,” *Mission in the Spirit: Toward a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*, (UK: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2010), 135-137.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Chan, *The Asian Grassroots Theology*, (Downers Grove IL, Intervarsity Press, 2004), 15-18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

to fight evil spirits. As Chan simply puts it, grassroots believers are seeking another liberation, personal liberation. Although this is often contested, Filipinos in general have various perspectives on Philippine social problems such as poverty, corruption, and structural evil. For the Filipino masses, the way liberation theologians practice their faith appears to be the way the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist movement practices its ideology. However, the researcher argues that grassroots believers' concerns and ecclesial experiences would bring both opportunities and challenges for Filipino "elitist" liberation theologians.

In that respect, as Chan reiterates, the fact that "the liberation theologies opted for the poor while the poor opted for Pentecostalism" remains an important challenging reality for Filipino liberation theologians.<sup>13</sup> As I noted earlier, Pentecostalism has been a compelling and popular movement in the Philippines, and it turns out that liberation theology has had little impact and seems to be an outdated approach to the Philippine issues, particularly in response to poverty.

## 1.2. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

From the outset, the researcher seeks the possibility of constructing a theological model that will go beyond liberation and Pentecostal theologies in the Philippine context. Thus, the researcher will explore a '*triangular conversation*' with three participants: Filipino liberation theology and Filipino Pentecostalism conversing together about God as He revealed himself in the Scriptures.<sup>14</sup> A triangular conversation is introduced through the article by Benno van den Toren entitled "Intercultural Theology as a Three-way Conversation" (2015). For van den Toren, the notion of a '*triangular conversation*' proposes to elevate God as a third reality between laity and the theologian. By recognizing God as third reality, the researcher believes, it would be possible to avoid romanticizing Chan's proposal of 'ecclesial

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup> Van den Toren, "Intercultural Theology as a Three-way Conversation," *Exchange* 44, (2015), 123-143.

experience' in constructing a grassroots Asian theology. Throughout this study the researcher will secure the image of God as an active agent in human history and culture. In the canonical Scriptures this God became uniquely known to us in Jesus Christ. Securing this image of God is our primary goal in doing intercultural theology.

**Main Question:**

Can Simon Chan's notion of 'grassroots Asian theology' help in constructing a Filipino Christian response to Philippine reality which will go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies?

Specifically it would answer the following questions:

1. How do Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies respond to Philippine reality?
2. What is Simon Chan's notion of grassroots Asian theology and does it provide means to go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies?
3. What could a grassroots Asian theological response to Philippine poverty look like?

### **1.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of going beyond Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies. This will be achieved through critical engagement with Chan's book entitled *Asian Grassroots Theology: Thinking the*

*Faith from the Ground Up*. Currently, there is a significant amount of related literature available on this topic. The researcher will rely on library works and consult online resources on the internet.

#### **1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study does not pretend to provide an ultimate answer or answers to the question. However, the study does endeavour to propose a third way of doing theology beyond liberation and Pentecostal theologies in the Philippines, and to make a positive contribution to the debate on the appropriate model of doing contextual theology in the Philippines. Moreover, the study explores the possibility of going beyond liberation and Pentecostal theologies by dealing with Simon Chan's proposal of "ecclesial experience" as a concrete form of doing a grassroots Asian theology. Ecclesial experience, according to Chan, derives from the lived theology of laity and theologian. Hence, ecclesial experience as a form of grassroots theologies requires cooperation between the laity and the theologian. In addition, for Chan, grassroots Asian theology is not only derived from the subjective experience of individuals or theologians.

#### **1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 sets up the background of the study, the research question, research methodology, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework used to address the research question. First, the researcher will give a descriptive exposition of Simon Chan's notion of ecclesial experience in broad outlines. Ecclesial experience is addressed intensively by Chan in his book entitled *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014). The book puts forward a necessary paradigm shift of Asian theological discourse from 'elitist theology' toward 'grassroots theology', drawing not only upon recent debates. For Chan, Asian liberation theologians, for instance, have failed to address the needs of

grassroots believers' lived experience. According to Chan, grassroots Asian theology reflects and derives from the ecclesial experience of the laity and the theologian. Simply put, an authentic formulation of grassroots Asian theology, as Chan argues, requires cooperation between the laity and the theologian. Next, the researcher will critically evaluate if Chan's theological claims are valid and appropriate in the Philippine theological landscape by asking the following questions: what does Chan mean by "elitist Asian theologies"? What does Chan mean by "grassroots Asian theology"? And where is God in Chan's ecclesial experience? These questions will show if Chan's proposal is appropriate in the Philippine context. Afterward, the researcher provides a flexible-dynamic diagram that can be used to construct a grassroots Asian theology beyond Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies. In chapter 3, the researcher will present a brief historical background of the liberation theology movement, key Filipino liberationist figures, and the indigenization of Latin American liberation theology in the Philippines. After that, the researcher offers some observations on Filipino liberation theologies. Concerning these observations, the researcher indicates that Filipino liberation theology is an unfinished and ongoing project of Filipino theologians. In chapter 4, the researcher will discuss a brief history of global Pentecostalism, the diversity of Filipino Pentecostalism, and contemporary Filipino Pentecostal proposals in the Philippines. In doing this, the researcher shows that Filipino Pentecostalism is complex and faces different challenges. The conclusion, as the final section, gives a general summary and concluding suggestions for further research related to the subject of doing a grassroots Asian theology in the Philippine context.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework used to address the research question. To provide the scope and context of the study, the researcher will give a descriptive exposition of Simon Chan's notion of ecclesial experience. In the second part, the researcher will critically evaluate Chan's notion of ecclesial experience by asking the following questions: what does Chan mean by "elitist Asian theologies"? What does Chan mean by "grassroots Asian theology"? And where is God in Chan's ecclesial experience? In the closing section, the researcher provides a flexible-dynamic diagram that can be used to construct a grassroots Asian theology beyond Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies.

### 2.2. SIMON CHAN'S ECCLESIAL EXPERIENCE AS A WAY OF DOING GRASSROOTS ASIAN THEOLOGY

Simon Chan has gained widespread popularity in recent years for his rethinking of grassroots Asian theology, Asian Pentecostalism, and his critique of elitist forms of Asian theologies.<sup>15</sup> The subject is addressed by Chan in his book *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014).<sup>16</sup> The main concern of this book is the content of theology and how theology ought to be done in an Asian context. The presentation begins with the methodological questions (ch 1). The book traces the shift of Asian theological discourse from 'elitist theology' to 'grassroots theology', drawing not only upon recent debates but also upon traditional theological loci: God in Asian contexts (ch 2), humanity and sin (ch 3), Christ and salvation (ch 4), the Holy Spirit and spirituality

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<sup>15</sup> Simon Chan (Ph.D., Cambridge) is Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. He has written several books related to Asian Pentecostalism and liturgy. Accessed September 4, 2016, [https://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/author.pl/author\\_id=879](https://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/author.pl/author_id=879).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



(ch 5) and the church (ch 6). For Chan, Asian theologians have failed to address the needs of the grassroots believers' lived experience. In order to address the issue at hand, Chan argues, grassroots theology should be derived from the lived theology of the laity and theologian—ecclesial experience. In other words, for Chan, cooperation is required between the laity and the theologian, in the light of the larger Christian tradition.<sup>17</sup> As Chan writes,

Such a theology, however, cannot be derived solely from Asian cultural resources. Any authentic theology must be developed in the light of the larger Christian tradition. The appeal to Christian tradition is not simply a matter of preference but essential to our theological quest.<sup>18</sup>

Simon Chan's book raises some interesting concerns. However, the researcher focuses only on Chan's notion of '*ecclesial experience*' as a way of doing grassroots Asian theology. For Chan, '*ecclesial experience*' is an alternative proposal to elitist forms of Asian theologies. The first question Chan tries to answer is: how did Asian theologians lose their way? Why did Christian theology become an elitist enterprise? According to Chan, Western-trained Asian theologians carried the legacy of Enlightenment ways of thinking and reading, and sometimes imposed their categories on locals.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Christian theology appeared to use presuppositions that ignored the lived experience of faith communities and prevented these from participating in the process of constructing local theologies. Consequently, the Christian theological discourse became a highly contentious elitist agenda to view theology as a specialized field rather than a corporate endeavor.<sup>20</sup> It became largely irrelevant outside of its tiny cloister of academic parthenogenesis by Western-trained Asian theologians.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15-18.

Prior to providing the basic ideas of a grassroots Asian theology, Chan urges the reader to give up debating about Western versus Eastern anguish. He argues that any engagement to describe different patterns of thought in terms of Eastern and Western ways of thinking is not helpful anymore.<sup>21</sup> To have an appropriate response, Chan contends that both Eastern and Western ways of thinking must significantly reflect changing global realities in the formation or construction of local theologies. Therefore, both ways of thinking must be components of our ongoing theological inquiry, so that we can develop an authentic Christian theology that is never confined to just one particular time and context but is always relevant to the fast-changing global context. For Chan, one of the main tasks of theology is “...to develop a contextual or local theology in an Asian context...: what spiritual and intellectual resources of the Christian faith can we bring to bear on the Asian context such that an authentic Christian faith can be effectively communicated and received?”<sup>22</sup> Instead of getting a vicious and polarized debate between Eastern and Western ways of thinking, Chan suggests that intercultural theologians should not confine themselves to the specific context but also include today’s fast-changing postmodern context.<sup>23</sup>

Christian theology, according to Chan, should not be treated as just propositional statements or a collection of faith stories, but as drama that provides a better way of understanding the relationship between the scriptural text and the ecclesial community that uses the text.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to elitist ways of doing theology, Chan argues that goal of the Christian community is to translate the Gospel message to make sense to every group of people and it should be carried out within the context of the people in symbols, languages, and lived experiences that they will understand. Chan amplifies Vanhoozer’s notion of doctrine as a prompt:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13.

If Scripture is a kind of dramatic script, translating the gospel into new contexts is not a matter of translating concepts but more like interpreting a drama, which is a more fluid process. The Bible is the redemptive drama, which is not reducible to abstract, fixed concepts. When we attempt to do local theologies we are not merely trying to explain the meaning of a script; rather, we are interpreting the gospel drama by indwelling the text, enacting it and improvising as we go, much like how good actors act out the script of a play. In this process of improvisation, new understandings emerge.<sup>25</sup>

The betrayal of faith communities or the grassroots by elitist theologies or Asian liberation theologians pushes Chan to offer ‘*ecclesial experience*’ as a form of grassroots Asian theologies. The notion of ‘*ecclesial experience*’ is rooted in the lived experience of Christian communities. Furthermore, for Chan, *ecclesial experience* helps us to avoid two major pitfalls that the present researcher mentioned above: first, Christian theology should not be treated as just propositional statements or objective facts. Second, individual or subjective experience is not the primary agent of doing theology.<sup>26</sup> To conceptualize the nature of ‘*ecclesial experience*’, Chan argues that it is an ecclesial endeavour to construct local theologies derived from faith communities, the theologians, and Scripture under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Chan writes,

Theologians therefore must endeavor with utmost seriousness to listen to what God by his Spirit is saying through the laity. If they speak they must speak from within the church, as fellow worshipers with the whole people of God, before being able to speak to the church and for the church to the world.<sup>27</sup>

As Chan explains, *ecclesial experience* is a form of a grassroots Asian theologies which posits a critical theological reflection to elitist Asian theologies. It is assumed to offer an alternative to elitist theologies. Elitist Asian theologians perceive Christian theology as mere propositional statements and purely a product of subjective

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 18.

experience. For Chan, this kind of theologizing undermines the lived experience of grassroots communities in the process of theological conversation. He suggests ‘*ecclesial experience*’ as a remedy for the elitism of Asian theologies. How? *Elitist theologians* have failed to recognize the ethnographic context as a valid source for theological expression, but *ecclesial experience* as a form of grassroots theologies takes seriously both socio-political and ethnographic contexts of faith communities.<sup>28</sup>

Subsequently, Chan advances his notion of grassroots Asian theology by expanding and elaborating the nature of *ecclesial experience*.<sup>29</sup> He starts from the central argument that we must distinguish *ecclesial experience* from *subjective* or *cultural experience*. Why? Cultural experience causes a number of basic problems. The danger, for Chan, is that if we solely base our theology on cultural experience, we fall into the elitism of some Asian theologians. According to his analysis, there are three causes by which Asian theology becomes elitist in nature, namely: *fallenness of humanity*, *cultural bondage*, and a *selective approach to culture*. Naturally, cultural experience informs our theology, but the problem is that cultural experience has ended up as determinative for constructing local theologies.<sup>30</sup> However, cultural experience belongs to the realm of fallen humanity. Chan’s non-Catholic understanding of cultural experience obviously shows. As he writes:

Cultural experience may provide an important context for theology by posing questions that theology must address. But cultural experiences cannot be the source of theology since they belong to the realm of fallen humanity rather than the humanity renewed by the Spirit in the church.<sup>31</sup>

A second cause is cultural bondage. According to him, cultural bondage tends to end up privileging some aspect of culture and making it determinative for theology.<sup>32</sup> This

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 19.

causes a theological problem. According to Chan, it produces a string of disastrous compromises with cultural bondage culminating in an uncritical stand toward local cultures. Cultural bondage reduces everything to subjective experiences and considers individuals the primary agents of doing theology. It also undermines the genuine universal salvation history of Christianity. For Chan, we need to be faithful to the core message of the Scriptures in spite of our cultural context, but at the same time we have a mission to contextualize the gospel to our particular cultural experience in order for people to understand it and embrace it. However, contextual theologians must be aware of the cultural accoutrements that they attach in the process of inculturating the gospel message.

The last cause is the selective approach to culture. Sadly, Asian contextual theologians moved in the opposite direction. They produced a highly academic concept of local theologies inspired by Enlightenment thinking, reduced Christian spirituality to socio-political liberation, and ignored the ethnographic dimension or lived experience of faith communities. As Chan succinctly writes:

The third problem is that a theology of cultural experience is actually quite limited in scope and reductionistic. Often a multidimensional theological theme is reduced to a single referent. For instance, one gets the distinct impression from an Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) publication like *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* that spirituality is nothing but the spirituality of social and political liberation ... This highly selective understanding of what constitutes Asian theology must be challenged, not only for its uncritical assimilation of Enlightenment epistemology and the resultant lack of theological discernment, but also for the way it totally ignores vast swathes of Christian movements in Asia: the evangelical and Pentecostal movements in much of Asia and more specifically, the indigenous Christian movements in India, Japan and China.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the second characteristic of *ecclesial experience* recognizes the diversity of grassroots theologies. This diversity among grassroots theologies is a valid source for theological expression. As Chan argues, *ecclesial experience* affirms ecumenical

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

theology in constructing local theologies.<sup>34</sup> For example, *elitist theologies* define the problem of the grassroots and decide what they really need, while *ecclesial experience* as a form of *grassroots theology* listens to what God by his Spirit is saying through the laity or faith communities. Simon Chan's provocative analysis reminds us of the top-to-bottom origins of doing theology that often ignored the ecclesial experience of the people of God due to the use of presuppositions and methods shaped by Enlightenment thinking rather than by those arising in Asian cultures. Chan's observations have much to offer and not only to scholars, who have yet to explore how the elite created and reproduced elitist Asian theologies. Chan's analysis of how exclusion arises and is perpetuated points to the need for change in both the content of theology and the practice of inculturating the Gospel message. There is a need to move away from 'elitist theology' that constructs exclusion of the ecclesial experience, rather than arising as a 'grassroots Asian theology' from interaction between the people of God and theologians. However, an important part of our understanding of *ecclesial experience* is that the specific role of the church in the process of doing grassroots Asian theology is not merely to promote social justice but to proclaim the gospel message. As Chan puts it, "to be the church of Jesus is to be shaped by the gospel story".<sup>35</sup>

Chan reaches these reflections by looking at the 'loci' of theology, that is, the fundamental reference points for the theological task, namely; the Trinitarian God in Asian contexts, humanity and sin, Christ and salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the church as the communion of saints in the continent of Asia. Since Asians have a strong family or communal sense, Chan argues, "If our theology is oriented towards the family, then the following loci of theology will have a different emphasis." To sum up, *ecclesial experience* as a form of grassroots Asian theology reflects and derives from the lived experience of the people of God and theologians.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 39.

## **2.3. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CHAN’S NOTION OF ECCLESIAL EXPERIENCE**

To begin with a critical evaluation of Chan’s proposal, the researcher believes, it is necessary to ask the following questions: What and Why? More specifically, (A) what does Chan mean by “elitist Asian theologies”, and (B) what does he mean by “grassroots Asian theology”? Finally, the last question is (C), where is God as third reality in Chan’s notion of ecclesial experience?

### **2.3.1. WHAT DOES CHAN MEAN BY “ELITIST ASIAN THEOLOGIES”?**

Chan’s thorough and careful theological research demonstrates how liberation theologians went drastically wrong in Asia. Chan claims that Asian liberation theologians became ‘elitist’ for the following reasons. In the Preface, Chan argues that much of what the West knows as Asian theology consists largely of elitist accounts of what theologians are saying, and elitist theologians seldom take grassroots Christianity seriously.<sup>36</sup> In chapter 2, he mentions the following elitist Asian theologies and some Asian theologians: Dalit theologies, Minjung theologies, liberation theologies in the Philippines, Kazoh Kitamori, C.S. Song, Kosuke Koyama, M.M. Thomas, and Stanley Samartha.<sup>37</sup> Chan identifies some problematic issues with elitist Asian theologies: firstly, he believes that elitist Asian theologies reduce the Christian faith to cultural experience. He observes that cultural experience becomes one of the sources of theology. Chan contends that if our Christian theology is based solely on cultural experience or human experience, then problems begin to arise: (a) at first sight, cultural experience seems to offer a more comprehensive vision of reality compared to a propositional theology, however, cultural experience is the product of the fallenness of humanity; (b) privileging some aspect of culture—cultural bondage;

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<sup>36</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 22-27.

and (c) a selective approach to culture.<sup>38</sup> Chan perceives that Asian theologians reduce Christian theology to cultural forms and expressions instead of critically challenging this approach. However, this general description of Asian Christian theology cannot be validly applied to Filipino Pentecostal and liberation theologies. At the very least, one should avoid giving any hasty generalization about the contemporary religious landscape in the Philippines.

To explore liberation theology movements in the Philippines, we should be aware that liberation theologies are not one directional flow of ideas, motifs, and identities. Filipino liberation theology is not a monolithic discourse, but is divided on the basis of realities, historical context, and local customs. Although Chan mentions different Asian scholars, theological models, and countries, yet Chan tends to perceive that all Asian liberation theologies are to an extreme degree products of cultural experience or personal experience. For instance, Chan uses the singular term “Asian”, implying a serious accusation toward all Asian liberation theologians, including Filipino liberation theologians. In chapter 3, the researcher shows that Filipino liberation theologies are diverse, complex, and historical movements.<sup>39</sup> The relevance, contribution, diversity, and complexity of Filipino liberation theologies cannot merely be dismissed by Chan on the basis of his limited Filipino sources. Moreover, it is misguided to charge Filipino liberation theologies with being merely cultural and selective forms, and with privileging some aspects of Filipino culture over others. On the contrary, Filipino liberation theologies are reactions against the social, economic, and political deprivation of the Filipino masses.<sup>40</sup> In fact, both Filipino Catholic and Protestant theologians claim that the growing gap between the poor and the rich has led to the rise of contemporary Filipino political theologies.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>40</sup> Harris, “The Theology of Struggle: Recognizing Its Place,” 83-107.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



### 2.3.2. WHAT DOES CHAN MEAN BY “GRASSROOTS ASIAN THEOLOGY”?

Chan tries to comprehend and redefine contemporary Asian theologies. In doing so, Chan uses the term ‘grassroots’ for Asian Pentecostals, to denote that Pentecostals are more grassroots in comparison with liberation theology movements in Asia. For Chan, grassroots refers to popular Christologies that reflect the spiritual dimension of salvation and personal needs. This broad term, however, has no full consensus among Filipino scholars. Nonetheless, for Chan, the term grassroots is simple to define. For instance, in chapter 4 of his book, he strongly argues that grassroots Christianity or Pentecostals tend to highlight the ethnographic dimension such as healings, deliverance from demonic spirits, answered prayers, and special providence—lived experience. By contrast, for Chan, liberation theologies strongly focus on the socio-political context while largely ignoring the ethnographic layer of their followers—lived experience. So, Chan simply describes the term grassroots as the ethnographic dimension of grassroots believers such as healing bodies, freedom from the fear of evil spirits, and fatalism.<sup>42</sup>

In the Philippine context, however, the term ‘grassroots’ is often used as a rough synonym of non-government organizations working with poor, marginalized and oppressed communities.<sup>43</sup> In addition, ‘grassroots’ denotes decentralization of power, social justice advocacy, community transformation, community-oriented over individualist, and the overcoming of exclusivist culture among Filipinos. From a religious perspective, Emo Yango, for example, a Filipino theologian and missionary, argues that Filipino theology, in order to be grassroots, should be informed and shaped by the everyday struggles of Filipinos. These everyday struggles, for Yango, connote the experience of political-economic and socio-cultural marginalization, not

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<sup>42</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 126.

<sup>43</sup> Alpaslan Özerdem & Sukanya Podder, “Grassroots and Rebellion: A Study on the Future of the Moro Struggle in Mindanao, Philippines,” *Civil Wars*, 14:4 (2012), 521-545.

merely the physical and psychospiritual.<sup>44</sup> Today, the term ‘grassroots’ is used and defined in the context of various fields of scientific study, for example, anthropology, sociology, political philosophy, community development, religious studies, theology, and in diverse Filipino contexts. Furthermore, Chan uses a narrow sense of the term ‘grassroots’ for the Asian Pentecostal movement. However, to claim Pentecostalism as a more grassroots movement, in contrast with the liberation theology movement, is an uninformed or problematic statement in the Philippine context. First of all, there is no uniform or monolithic Filipino Pentecostal movement.<sup>45</sup> Like the Filipino liberation theology movement, it is divided on the basis of realities, historical context, and local customs. It is a diverse, dynamic, and complex religious movement in the Philippines. Hence, in chapter 4, the research is dedicated to showing how complex the Pentecostal movement in the Philippines is.

### **2.3.3. WHERE IS GOD IN CHAN’S ECCLESIAL EXPERIENCE?**

Chan does not adequately demonstrate where God is in his notion of ecclesial experience. In chapter 2 of his book, in doing grassroots Asian theology, he puts greater emphasis on cooperation between the laity and theologians. However, Chan fails to unpack this shorthand phrase to offer a picture of God as a third reality between laity and theologians. Although Chan offers a broader description of ecclesial experience as ecumenical and socially engaging,<sup>46</sup> he fails to provide us with the important role of God through the biblical text in the process of doing intercultural

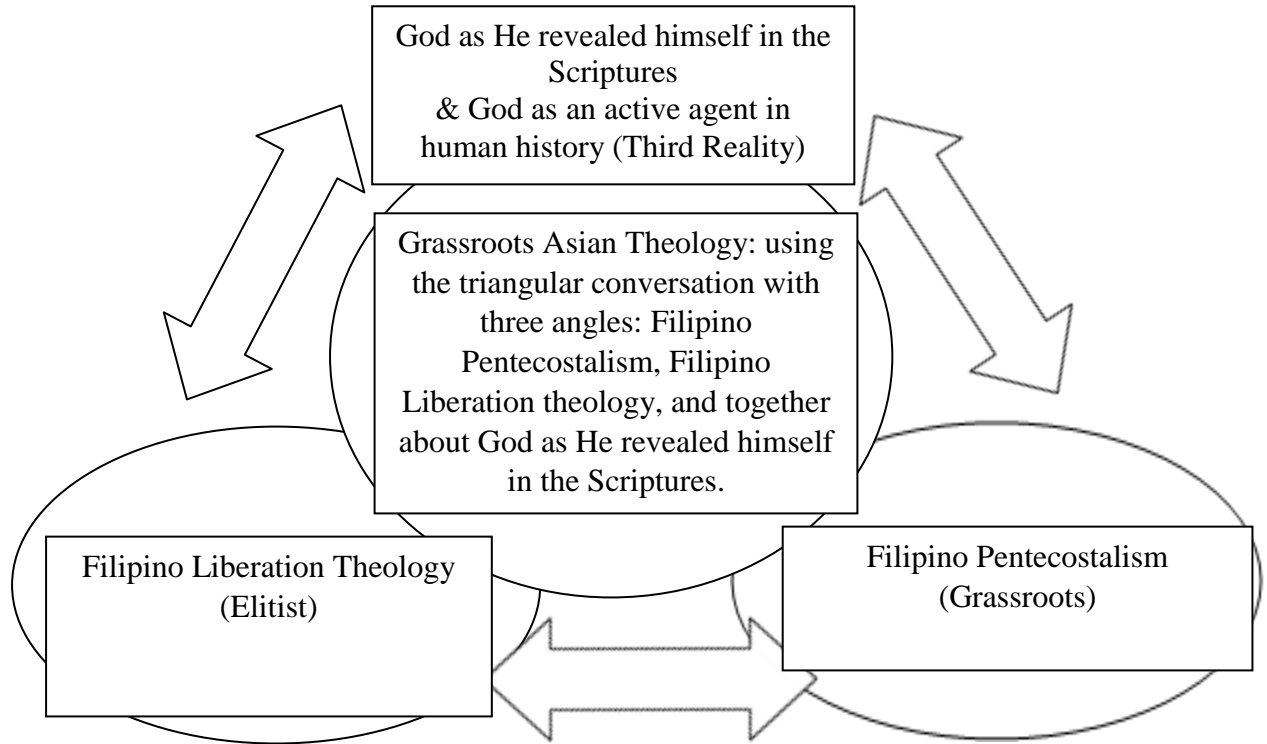
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<sup>44</sup> Emo Yango, “A Locus for Doing Theology: Theological Stories at the Front Lines of Grassroots Mission Engagement,” *Doing Theology in the Philippines*, edited by John Suk, (2005), 24-36.

<sup>45</sup> Allan Anderson, “Global Pentecostalism, Charismatic Movements and Independent Churches,” Lecture for the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, (November 18, 2013). Accessed June 26, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/6068798/Global\\_Pentecostalism\\_Charismatic\\_Movements\\_and\\_Independent\\_Churches\\_Christianity\\_Shifting\\_Southwards\\_Historical\\_Overview](https://www.academia.edu/6068798/Global_Pentecostalism_Charismatic_Movements_and_Independent_Churches_Christianity_Shifting_Southwards_Historical_Overview).

<sup>46</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 27-41.

theology. To supplement God as third reality<sup>47</sup> in Chan’s ecclesial experience, the researcher arrives at the following diagram:



The figure above illustrates a flexible-dynamic diagram that can be used to construct a grassroots Asian theology beyond Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies. This procedure will hopefully illuminate further the essential task of inculturating the Gospel message in a manner that is truly Christ-centered, nourished by the living biblical word of God, and authentically Filipino. The three double-headed arrows around the triangular model imply two things: first, God as third reality is not just an object-subject or static but also a conversation partner who speaks to us through His Word (2 Tim. 3: 16-17), and between personal and ecclesial experience. Secondly, the double-headed arrows show that a three-way conversation is not a one-way or two-way communication but a three-way communication; from ecclesial experience to personal experience; from ecclesial experience to God as third reality through the Scriptures; from God through the Scriptures to ecclesial experience; from God as third

<sup>47</sup> Benno van den Toren, “Intercultural Theology as a Three-way Conversation,” *Exchange*, 44, (2015), 125.

reality who reveals Himself through the Scriptures to personal experience; from personal experience to God as third reality through the Scriptures.

## **2.4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it is recommended that Asian believers continue to seek a balanced approach in doing intercultural theology and should always emphasize God as third reality through Scripture in the process of theologizing between laity and theologian. In short, God is not a supplement to Chan's notion of ecclesial experience; we should be clear that God who revealed himself in the Scriptures is the key component of doing intercultural theology in Asia.

## CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES

### 3.1. THE RISE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is a movement which achieved considerable influence in twentieth-century Latin American churches. The conference of Latin American Bishops or CELAM organized a series of meetings from 1962 through 1965 that discussed the role of the church in liberating the poor and marginalized.<sup>48</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez is one of the well-known ‘founding fathers’ of Latin American liberation theology. In his first book, entitled *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*,<sup>49</sup> these meetings are used as references in developing the argument for the formation and foundational text of liberation theology. Some scholars have considered Gutiérrez’s notion of liberation theology to be divided into his pre- and post-1986 writings. As Fernando Segovia explicitly acknowledges and writes,

...given the fact that he [Gutiérrez] has never stopped revisiting, deepening, and recasting his original insights. Anyone who moves from his early study of 1968 “Notes for a Theology of Liberation,” where the term “liberation” appears for the first time (Theological Studies 31[1970] 243-61); through his reflection of 1988 on “Expanding the View,” (A Theology of Liberation, Fifteenth Anniversary Edition, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), making the twentieth anniversary of Liberation Theology; to his study of 2003 on “The Theology of Liberation: Perspectives and Tasks”...where he argues that the historical juncture that gave rise to Liberation has by no means disappeared but rather become even more entrenched—anyone, I repeat, who moves through these works realizes that this is a mind ever self-critical, ever shifting, and ever radical.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-16.

<sup>49</sup> Originally published in 1971 and translated and published in English by Orbis Books in 1973.

<sup>50</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Hermeneutic of Hope* with an introduction by Fernando F. Segovia, Vanderbilt University, September 2012. Accessed August 08, 2016, <http://as.vanderbilt.edu/class-resources/media/A-Hermeneutic-of-Hope.pdf>.

In the revised edition of *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (1988), Gutiérrez provides an illuminating overview of the three main dimensions of liberation; the first dimension is the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice—structural evil. The second dimension, liberation, involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden, and the oppressed from all those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves free from any form of alienation. Lastly, liberation theology involves liberation from selfishness and a re-establishment of the relationship with God and with other people.<sup>51</sup> Liberation theology, as defined by Gutiérrez,

is a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human...to give reason for our hope from within a commitment that seeks to become more radical, total, and efficacious. It is to reconsider the great themes of the Christian life within this radically changed perspective and with regard to the new questions posed by this commitment. This is the goal of the so-called theology of liberation.<sup>52</sup>

Inspired by Karl Marx's political-economic-social analysis, Gutiérrez utilizes Marxian analysis and vocabulary in his assessment of the social, political, and economic climate of central and South American countries. Gutiérrez puts forward a

...Marxian-inspired critique of the historical, economic, and political dynamics of injustices and oppression suffered by the majority of Latin Americans and a critique of mainstream "academic" or "traditional" theology whose main concern with metaphysical transcendence and the individual spiritual life was understood as passively supporting the material conditions of injustices and oppression prevailing at the time.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, [1973] revised edition, 1988), 1-174; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells – The Spiritual Journey of a People*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 1-137.

<sup>52</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, First edition, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (London: S.C.M, 1973), xiii

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Gutiérrez was disturbed by the poverty and the growing unequal distribution of wealth he saw during his time. Gutiérrez argues that praxis as a form of action is the starting point from which theology should begin. It is a new way of doing theology that is characterized by belief in a divine preference for the poor and their liberation. John R. Pottenger explains, "...the political theory of liberation theology derives its commitment to helping the poor from the morals of biblical stories."<sup>54</sup>

At the time Gutiérrez was writing and for many years afterward, liberation theology became an essential tool for theological analysis of social problems, specifically of poverty. For Gutiérrez, 'poverty' means that the world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is fundamental but not all-inclusive. In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one's human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in areas of self-expression, politics, and religion. Gutiérrez describes that poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals; it is called "institutionalized violence", to which must be added the equally unacceptable violence of terrorism and repression.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Gutiérrez's work challenges contemporary theological thinking as well as the institutional church. In the first edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez makes amply clear his commitment and aspiration to the Catholic teaching of "preferential option for the poor". The Catholic teaching of "preferential option for the poor" is a milestone in contemporary Catholic theological thinking about the church's relation to the modern world. It is not easy to summarize Gutiérrez's thought and the liberation theology discourse. It contains a number of changes through time. For example, Juan Luis Segundo, Leonardo Mercado, and Clodovis Boff draw inspiration from Gutiérrez's method of theology, but they expand and enrich the method of liberation theology.

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<sup>54</sup> John R. Pottenger, "Liberation Theology's Critique of Capitalism: The Argument from Gustavo Gutiérrez," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. XVII, Number 2, (1989), 4-5.

<sup>55</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, [1973] revised edition, 1988), xxi.

### 3.2. THE SUBJECT OF THEOLOGY: WHY DOES LIBERATION THEOLOGY REMAIN RELEVANT?

Why does liberation theology remain relevant today? This important question is being asked nowadays. One of the common stereotypes is that Latin American liberation theology is rooted in Marxist or socialist ideology. However, as Jon Sobrino<sup>56</sup> contends, “As for the notion that liberation theology is no longer relevant due to the fall of socialism, let us observe that socialism was never at the root of this theology, although obviously—as with some of the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II—it may have contributed to the critique of capitalism and the positing of certain utopian horizons.”<sup>57</sup> For Sobrino, it is wrong to conclude that if socialism fails, liberation theology automatically fades away. He further argues,

The origin, thrust, and direction of the theology of liberation is not in socialism, but in the experience of God in the poor, an experience of grace and exigency. Therefore so long as this experience exists and is conceptualized, there can be a theology of liberation. And so long as oppression exists, there must be a theology of liberation.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, why does liberation theology continue to be valid? For Sobrino, it is the “synthetic experience” or “praxis of faith”. He explains synthetic experience as follows: “In other words, at the ultimate root of liberation theology, whether thematically or operationally, is objective (positive) faith, the word of God, or revelation.”<sup>59</sup> However, for him, this is not all. He further writes,

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<sup>56</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology: Readings from *Mysterium Liberationis**, (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), vii-xii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology: Readings from *Mysterium Liberationis**, 1-2.



Next, structurally and dialectically connected to the perspective of objective faith, comes the perspective of the oppressed, that is subjective faith. This is what makes our theology precisely a theology of liberation.<sup>60</sup>

Like most liberation theologians, Clodovis Boff argues that recognizing the dialectic between objective faith (Word of God) and subjective faith (experience of the poor and destitute) makes liberation theology continue to be valid up to today.<sup>61</sup> In short, the synthetic experience of poor people and the Word of God or revelation constitute primary liberation theology and should become the starting point for further theological reflection.

### **3.3. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS THAT LED TO THE EMERGENCE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES**

On September 21, 1972, President Ferdinand E. Marcos placed the Philippines under martial law; at the same time, the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines (RCC) was in the process of implementing the reforms initiated by the Vatican II Council seven years earlier.<sup>62</sup> Vatican II put a greater emphasis on social justice as the basic element of the church's mission of salvation. It became part of a wider rethinking of Catholic teaching which Filipino Christians have used to justify the 'politicization' of the Philippines Catholic Church.<sup>63</sup> The RCC became aware of its role in the political and social situation in the Philippines. Kathleen Marie Nadeau, an American social-cultural anthropologist, traces the emergence of liberation theology to the Filipino Catholic grassroots movement that was inspired by the Vatican II vision of a renewed

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Sobrino, *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology: Readings from Mysterium Liberationis*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>62</sup> Amado L. Picardal, "The Prophetic Mission of the Church under Martial Rule," *CBCP News*, (July 18, 2017). Accessed July 18, 2017, <http://www.cbcnews.com/cbcnews/?p=4566>.

<sup>63</sup> Dennis Shoemith, "Church and Martial Law in the Philippines: The Continuing Debate," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (1979), 246-257.

church.<sup>64</sup> According to Nadeau, it was pioneered by the Philippine Roman Catholic Church in the form of Basic Christian Communities, commonly known as BCC, which later became Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC).<sup>65</sup> BEC are small Christian communities that are committed to meet on a regular basis with other members. BEC are the place where the members can discuss their own struggles, social issues, community works, and faith. Karl Gaspar, a Filipino Catholic lay theologian and martial law survivor, supported Nadeau's claim. For Gaspar, BEC as inspired by liberation theology contributed to the self-interpreting and self-defining moment of a local community to work together to surmount social and political challenges.<sup>66</sup> Gaspar writes,

By now everyone knows that the BEC had its origins in Latin America (De Sta. Ana 1979, Gutiérrez 1983, Boff 1986). Those who are well-versed with contemporary Filipino church history know that our BEC was inspired by this Latin American experience through the efforts of the Maryknoll Missionaries working in what is now the Dioceses of Tagum and Mati. From there it spread out to the rest of the country and our BECs have developed their own identities (Claver 1983 and 1988, Kinne 1990, Gaspar 1990 and 1994, Cacayan and Apuan 1990, Picardal 1995, PCP II Acts and Decrees 1993).<sup>67</sup>

As well as Filipino Catholics, the mainline Protestant Churches also joined the grassroots movement and offered their own sanctuary/church building for political-economic debates and advocacy during the martial law period.<sup>68</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, a well-known Filipino Protestant theologian, writes,

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<sup>64</sup> Kathleen Marie Nadeau is currently a full professor in the Department of Anthropology at California State University. Accessed January 3, 2017, <http://phonebook.csusb.edu/FacultyProfile.aspx?ID=769>.

<sup>65</sup> Kathleen Marie Nadeau, *Liberation in the Philippines: Faith in a Revolution*, (Greenwood Publishing Groups, Inc., 2002), 75-100.

<sup>66</sup> Karl Gaspar, "Localization Resisting Globalization: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in the Postmodern Era," *East Asian Pastoral Institute Review*, 2001/4. Accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.eapi.org.ph/resources/eapr/east-asian-pastoral-review-2001/2001-4/localization-resisting-globalization-basic-ecclesial-communities-beccs-in-the-postmodern-era/>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Oscar A. Suarez, *Protestantism and Authoritarian Politics: The Politics of Repression and the Future of Ecumenical Witness in the Philippines*, (International Publishing, Inc., 1999), 50-56.

Catholic and Protestant church involvement in human rights advocacy is well known. The withdrawal of support by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines to the Marcos dictatorship contributed to his downfall. Protestant groups, like the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines have made statements, especially from the moribund stage of the Marcos dictatorial regime to the present, that are critical of the prevailing system and in support of transformative politics.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, since Philippine history is a history of struggle under foreign rule, some Filipino theologians contend that prior to the emergence of liberation theology movements, early Filipinos already had been doing contextual theology in response to colonization.<sup>70</sup> For example, Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, a well-known Filipino historian, who wrote *Pasyon and Revolution: The Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, proves that Filipino revolutionary movements used folk songs, local poems, and religious traditions or Gospel stories in order to articulate suppressed features of the thinking of the masses. The appropriation of Christ's public life, suffering, death, and resurrection provided a cultural and political framework for the Filipino masses to become aware of the politico-economic and socio-cultural oppression under Spanish rule.<sup>71</sup> Iletto, a founding father of 'history from below' in the Philippines, argues that local religious resistance really occurred in the Philippines under Spanish rule. However, it took on different forms of resistance. *Pasyon*, for instance, a religious text, appeared in 1703 or 1704<sup>72</sup> and was translated into different

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<sup>69</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Toward A Theology of Struggle*, (Oregon, US, Orbis Book, 1994), 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> Fernandez, *Toward A Theology of Struggle*, 6-10; Karl Gaspar, "Localization Resisting Globalization: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in the Postmodern Era," *East Asian Pastoral Institute Review*, (2001/4); Timoteo D. Gener, *Re-Rooting the Gospel in the Philippines: Roman Catholic Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization*, A Thesis presented to the Institute for Christian Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Philosophical Foundations in Systematic Theology, (November 1998), 4-16.

<sup>71</sup> Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

<sup>72</sup> The first published text is Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion ni Jesu Christong Panginoong Natin na Tola* (Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Verse), which is appended to a book of prayers for the dying. See Rene Javellana SJ, ed., *Casaysayan nang Pasiyong Mahal ni Jesuchristong Panginoon Natin na Sucat Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988); *Mahal na Passion ni Jesu Christong Panginoon Natin na Tola*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990).

vernacular languages from its first Tagalog version.<sup>73</sup> It was used by the Filipino revolutionary movement as an effective method of raising the consciousness of the Filipino masses during the Spanish period.<sup>74</sup> *Pasyon* depicts the life of Jesus Christ—his birth, death, and resurrection. In *Pasyon*, Iletto claims that the lowly origins of Jesus Christ provided the Filipino masses with an idea and model of the potential leadership among the poor to challenge unjust oppressive rulers.

### **3.4. PROMINENT FILIPINO LIBERATION THEOLOGIANS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Having limited space here, we will consider three of the most influential theological exponents of Filipino liberation theology. First, we will briefly discuss the noted Filipino liberation theologians Edicio de la Torre, Karl Gaspar, and Eleazar Fernandez. This will be followed by a discussion of their important written works that inspired the next generation of young Filipino liberation theologians. It is important to mention here that, unlike Gustavo Gutiérrez, who wrote the popular book *A Theology of Liberation*, de la Torre and Gaspar have no comprehensive and systematic biblical-theological writings that deal with liberation theology in the Philippines. Instead, both de la Torre and Gaspar give their own personal reflections inspired by Latin American liberation theologians. However, Fernandez attempts to conduct a systematic discussion on Filipino theology of liberation or theology of struggle. Finally, the researcher will give his conclusion.

#### **3.4.1. EDICIO DE LA TORRE'S THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILIPPINE STRUGGLE**

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<sup>73</sup> The Tagalog language is spoken by the majority of Filipino people.

<sup>74</sup> Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, (Manila, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

Edicio de la Torre is an Filipino Catholic priest and activist. Stirred by Fr. Luis Hechanova's challenging statement, "We shall call our theology a theology of struggle rather than a theology of liberation," de la Torre starts to reflect on the Philippine conditions for searching for a Filipino theology. During the martial law period, Fr. de la Torre was the head of a Maoist-inspired and underground Christian movement known as the Christians for National Liberation (CNL). In *Touching Ground, Taking Roots: Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*, de la Torre provides a new way to articulate the political role of the Filipino Christian theology inspired by the Maoist movement in the martial law period.<sup>75</sup> This book is the first creative attempt to theologize a Christian political theology in the martial law period. The book is a collection of his essays, speeches, and reflections and is divided into five sections. *The first section* is devoted to a search for Filipino theology, the role of the religious sector in social reforms, and the rediscovery of the Filipino peasant by using Maoist class analysis.<sup>76</sup> *The second section*, "In search of a political line", discusses the challenges of Maoism in the Philippines and the church in the Philippines.<sup>77</sup> *The third section* is dedicated to the victims during the martial law period.<sup>78</sup> In *the fourth section*, de la Torre reflects on being a political prisoner and introduces the Theology of Struggle (TS).<sup>79</sup> Finally, *the fifth section* is a collection of his interviews.<sup>80</sup>

In the first section, de la Torre further argues that our main focus is on the struggle, not liberation, in the Philippines. Why? For him, liberation is still in a distant future. The focus of the theology of struggle is the present struggle, not liberation, which is considered to be still in the future tense.<sup>81</sup> In the second section, de la Torre starts to provide a correct political or ideological line that will guide and inform the Christian

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<sup>75</sup> Edicio de la Torre, *Touching Ground, Taking Root: Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*, (Quezon City, Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1986).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-49.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-103.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-127.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-159.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-213.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-33.

movement to ground their political theology. This way, doing theology in the Philippine experience becomes more grassroots, pro-people, and anti-imperialist. Then, he introduces Maoist analysis. He argues that the Maoist model is the appropriate form of analysis in the Philippine context.<sup>82</sup> By using Maoist analysis, for de la Torre, Filipino liberation theology will be able to start with the struggle in dominant large sectors in Philippine society.<sup>83</sup> For de la Torre, the emphasis is on sectors like farmers, fisherfolk, workers, and illegal settlers as the subject of doing Filipino liberation theology. Through this lens, the Philippine Maoist movement makes a correct analysis of many problems in the Philippines. He adds, “Now, Maoism, or more concretely, the national democratic movement, presents itself as the most vocal, concrete programme (Maoist model, rural guerrilla strategists or moving from rural to urban insurrections, in contrast with Lenin), and ideology (Mao, Anti-Imperialism and US).”<sup>84</sup>

After identifying the Maoist/Marxist model as a correct political or ideological line, de la Torre starts identifying the main task of the theology of struggle. De la Torre argues that the main task of the Filipino theology of struggle is to change the Philippine social structure through the principles of Maoist/Marxism.<sup>85</sup> He writes, “The Church’s first task is to denounce the unjust structure, not as one who judges from without, but one who acknowledges her own share of the responsibility and the blame.” He further states, “but the Church we believe in is also a hierarchical Church, with consequent distinction of roles between laity and clergy. Although the whole Church, all Christians, have the prophetic task of denouncing injustice, the bishops speak with official voices. Hence it is not enough that laymen and priests speak out. They also appeal to the Bishops to exercise official moral leadership.”

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 50-103.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 64.

Moreover, he criticizes the false accusations and inappropriate presentation of the Filipino Christian political involvement in the Philippines. For example, Christians for National Liberation was accused of being purely ideological and terrorist.<sup>86</sup> In response, de la Torre gives three answers by way of clarification: firstly, Christianity is faith, not ideology and not a party. He adds, “There is no such thing as the Christian system.”<sup>87</sup> Secondly, “The worst error a Christian can commit is to be satisfied with a system as to identify it with Christianity.”<sup>88</sup> Lastly, “the basic attitude of a Christian should be to be critical and dissatisfied with any system and to express it.”<sup>89</sup>

### 3.4.2. KARL GASPAR’S PRISON REFLECTIONS

Karl Gaspar is a Filipino Catholic lay theologian and activist.<sup>90</sup> Like de la Torre, Gaspar is one of the prominent Filipino theologians who pioneered the theology of liberation or theology of struggle in the Philippines. Gaspar’s prison reflections also received significant inspiration from Latin American liberation theology and the Vatican II council. *How Long? Prison Reflections from the Philippines* is a collection of essays, reflections, and conversations with the editors, Sister Helen Graham, M.M. and Fr. Breda Noonan, S.S.C., during his second detention.<sup>91</sup> The book starts with a brief “biological chronology” of the important dates in Gaspar’s story.<sup>92</sup> The first (“The Beginning”) along with the fifth (“Diary of a Fast”) and eighth (“The Court of

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<sup>86</sup> Fox Butterfield, “Nuns and Priests Working with Communists Divide the Church,” *The New York Times*, (March 2, 1986), accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/02/world/nuns-and-priests-working-with-communists-divide-church.html>; Jose Maria Sison, “The National Liberation Movement in the Philippines and the Terrorist Listing by Foreign Powers,” *Jose Maria Sison: Teacher and Educator*, (2012), accessed July 19, 2017, <https://josemariasison.org/the-national-liberation-movement-in-the-philippines-and-the-terrorist-listing-by-foreign-powers-2/>.

<sup>87</sup> De la Torre, *Touching Ground, Taking Root*, 75.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Thomas H. Green, review of *How Long? Prison Reflections from the Philippines*, by Karl Gaspar, (Quezon City, Claretian Publication, 1985).

<sup>91</sup> Karl Gaspar, *How Long? Prison Reflections from the Philippines*, (Quezon City, Claretian Publication, 1985), 259-261.

<sup>92</sup> Green, review of *How Long? Prison Reflections from the Philippines*, 260.

Justice’) sections give a chronological account of Gaspar’s arrest and early imprisonment.<sup>93</sup>

However, the most important section is Gaspar’s conversation with Sr. Graham and Fr. Noonan about discipleship and its meaning for the committed Christian in today’s context, specifically in the Philippine martial law period, entitled “Discipleship viewed through barbed wire”.<sup>94</sup> In this conversation, Gaspar was asked how to be an effective disciple of Christ. He answered this question by presenting his own experience as a martial law political detainee and by reading the contemporary societal context. The starting point of theological reflection, for Gaspar, is lived experience and the incarnation of ourselves in the context addressed by the Gospel today. Gaspar argues,

There is no question but that we have to strive to incarnate the Gospel in our contemporary societal context. But we must also incarnate ourselves into the context addressed by the Gospel today, a context which is dominated by poverty deprivation and marginalization. We are challenged to genuinely take a preferential option for the poor, to truly understand the cry of the deprived to reclaim their lost dignity, and to immerse ourselves in the struggle of the marginalized for the freedom to chart their own destiny.<sup>95</sup>

Gaspar further argues,

A church that refuses to be incarnated in the lives of the poor and powerless has no right to claim to be witnessing to the gospel. A church that celebrates the people’s struggle to be fully human by being in the center of this historical, creative process is truly Christ’s legacy for his followers through the ages.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Gaspar, *How Long? Prison Reflections from the Philippines*, 87-211.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 101.



Like de la Torre, Gaspar suggests that truly doing Filipino theology takes place within a particular context, a context which is dominated by poverty, deprivation, and marginalization. Gaspar further argues that being Christ's disciple is costly and risky. Committed Christ's disciples may expect to be harassed and tortured, akin to what happened to the early disciples.<sup>97</sup> For instance, Gaspar cites several cases of *desaparecidos* (disappeared people), particularly religious individuals who were persecuted, politically detained, tortured, and killed under martial law by Ferdinand Marcos. Gaspar contends,

Persecution is to be expected whenever an option is taken to denounce injustice and to announce the Kingdom of truth and freedom. You are manifesting a discipleship rooted in justice. Those who stand to lose much power and wealth upon the inauguration of a just society tremble at this form of witnessing. They will not allow you to continue disturbing the "peace and order" which is so essential to the established order they want to keep intact.<sup>98</sup>

Lastly, Gaspar argues that Filipino Christians need to have a liberating spirituality. Liberating spirituality, for Gaspar, is based on the gospel of Luke. He describes,

In Luke 4: 8-19 we see the basis of this spirituality which comes with the anointing of the Spirit. We have to be instruments by which the Good News is confirmed in the lives of the poor. We have to let go of all the trimmings of a consumerist and materialistic society and take on a way of life that nurtures true human values. We have to seek the end of all forms of bondage and enslavement so that there are no more captives.<sup>99</sup>

Here, Gaspar argues that our Filipino Christian spirituality should be anchored in the biblical vision of a just and humane society. He further states, "For such a reconciliation to be genuine it has to go beyond the personal level to the level of structure."<sup>100</sup> Gaspar, like de la Torre, contends that there no reason for committed

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 89-205.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 209.

Filipino Christ disciples not to challenge and transform the social structures into a just and humane society. He continues, “The evil that lurks in the heart of the societal structure must be abolished and in its place must be the grace that makes possible the reign of justice and peace.”<sup>101</sup> In the final analysis, Gaspar contends,

In the establishment of such a just and humane society the Kingdom is foreshadowed. Here is made manifest the covenant of the people with the Lord of history. Class struggle would be no more since the believers would be “one in mind and heart and they would share with one another everything they have” (Acts 4:32). In such a scenario Christ reigns and our spirituality finds its fulfilment.<sup>102</sup>

### **3.4.3. ELEAZAR FERNANDEZ’S THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE**

Eleazar Fernandez is a Filipino ordained Protestant minister and theologian.<sup>103</sup> In his famous book, at least among Filipino Protestant and Evangelical scholars, entitled *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, he attempts to articulate and thematize Filipino liberation theology or theology of struggle.<sup>104</sup> Unlike de la Torre and Gaspar, Fernandez provides a historical background, theological themes, and theological method. The book is divided into seven chapters; Chapter 1, The Context: The Pathos and Hope of a Struggling People; Chapter 2, Christians in Struggle and the Emergence of the Theology of Struggle; Chapter 3, Cry for Deliverance; Chapter 4, Struggle for Historical Selfhood and Humanity; Chapter 5, The Christo-Praxis of a People; lastly, Chapter 6, A Search for an Ecclesiology of Struggle. However, Fernandez argues that the study is mainly divided into three phases: firstly, the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> He is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. Currently, he is president of the Union Theological Seminary-Philippines. Accessed July 20, 2017, <https://www.unitedseminary.edu/academics/faculty-2/eleazar-s-fernandez/>.

<sup>104</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, (USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009). The first edition was published by Orbis in 1994.

Philippines context as the locus theologicus; secondly, the theological construction of the theology of struggle; lastly, the method.<sup>105</sup>

In the Introduction, Fernandez briefly states his main goal in this book. He writes that his study attempts in the most general and modest way: *first*, to contribute to the continued growth of the theology of struggle; *second*, to critically assess its growth, methodology, and content; *third*, to thematize its salient points; *fourth*, to sharpen its critical apparatus and perspective; *fifth*, to engage in a constructive hermeneutical activity; and *sixth*, the theology of struggle in the context of Third World theological reflection.<sup>106</sup> In chapters 1 and 2, Fernandez states his belief that to know the past is the best way to understand contemporary Philippine society. Similarly to de la Torre and Gaspar, Fernandez starts with a social analysis of Philippine history. For Fernandez, to view our history as “the struggle of the Filipino people” would liberate the Filipinos from colonial thinking and oppression. Like de la Torre and Gaspar, Fernandez argues that the history of the Filipinos is identical with the history of resistance and struggle against colonial rulers.<sup>107</sup> For Fernandez, the early, long struggle and tragic colonial experience of the Philippines put Filipino theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, in a very favorable position to adopt and engage with what we called “progressive theology” or Latin American liberation theology. He writes,

The history of Filipino people is a history of struggle: a struggle to form a nation that truly embodies the sentiments and aspirations of the people, and a struggle against the negative forces, both within and without, that continue to abort the people’s cherished dream. Caught up in the vortex of the rise and fall of global empires, the Filipinos found their dreams always nipped in the bud by their supposed liberators.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 6-18.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 8.

He continues,

Though oppressed and despite the fact that many accepted their plight with resignation, Filipinos have risen from the culture of silence to reclaim their rights as a people. The long history of oppression did not totally crush the spirit of the Filipinos. Filipino history is not only a history of exploitation, betrayal, cowardice, and subservience to both local and foreign powers, it is also a history of resistance and struggle.<sup>109</sup>

In short, Fernandez argues that there was religious resistance or struggle against colonial or foreign rulers, even earlier than the American colonization period. Furthermore, Fernandez claims, “The struggle continues to pose a challenge to the church to be faithful to its calling, although in spite of the church the struggle of the people has go on.”<sup>110</sup> In chapters 3, 4, and 5, Fernandez discusses the need to transfigure Filipino suffering and hope into political struggle.<sup>111</sup> Next, he presents the diversity of Filipino expressions and images of Christ. He then focuses on Jesus as the Suffering One, in relation to Filipino everyday struggles.<sup>112</sup> Thus, similarly to de la Torre, Fernandez argues that liberation theology is not an appropriate term to describe Philippine struggles and realities. Fernandez contends, like de la Torre, that the use of “theology of struggle” to describe Philippine realities would be more authentic, accurate, appropriate, and would begin to fulfil the role of faith in the Philippine struggles.<sup>113</sup> He adds, “The starting point of the theology of struggle is reflection on the real and concrete struggles of people who are oppressed and exploited.”<sup>114</sup> Over the decades, the term ‘theology of struggle’ has been used with varied and sometimes contradictory meanings.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 33-63.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 64-96.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

In chapters 6 and 7, Eleazar describes and outlines the method of the theology of struggle. He understands this method to be grounded in Marxist social analysis, social constructivism, and postcolonial theory. His theological method seeks constructive outcomes. He summarizes his process of enquiry as, *(first)* “Theology, being a product of community, is not an exception,” but everything “here” below has its analogue “up above”;<sup>115</sup> *(second)* “premised on the first point, a reading of texts and social contexts, is not simply a reading of what is there, but always from the very beginning an interpretation; because interpretation is constitutive of one’s social being”;<sup>116</sup> *(third)* “readings or interpretations that are oblivious of their locations, or that claim to be neutral, objective, timeless, and universal, should be viewed with suspicion and subjected to ideological critique”;<sup>117</sup> *(fourth)* the dominant ideas of the age are generally the ideas of the triumphant and the powerful”;<sup>118</sup> *(fifth)* “anyone who has committed oneself to the people’s struggle must employ a hermeneutics from the underside, a subversive hermeneutics that overturns reigning conceptions in order to get into the buried memories, thus there is need, along with the hermeneutics of suspicion and ideological critique, for hermeneutics of retrieval”;<sup>119</sup> *(sixth)* “a hermeneutics for struggle and liberation is not so much concerned with getting rid of one’s presuppositions, as identifying what they are and taking account of one’s location in favor of the marginalized”;<sup>120</sup> lastly, “interpretation is a struggle. Theology, being an interpretative activity, is one of such struggles. The theology of struggle seeks to be a companion in the struggle of the people, interpreting theologically the context of struggle as it itself is waging a theological struggle.”<sup>121</sup>

Finally, Eleazar clarifies the method of doing theology of struggle. He writes, “The goal of theology of struggle is also the art of living it; this is how method as *techné* should be understood.”<sup>122</sup> He argues further, “The theology of struggle’s method is

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 97-126.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 183.

embedded in its spirituality; it is not a set of separate principles and techniques to be applied; the very act of doing is itself the unfolding of the method.”<sup>123</sup> He adds, “In the very act of reflection there is action, in the very act of transformation, there is reflection.”<sup>124</sup>

In conclusion, for Fernandez, the interlocutors of the theology of struggle are the poor, marginalized and oppressed Filipino people. The theology of struggle is a living faith that is rooted in hermeneutics from the underside (poor, marginalized and oppressed Filipino people), ever interpreted and understood anew, taking account of one’s location in favor of the marginalized.

### **3.5. THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE: AS AN UNFINISHED AND ONGOING PROJECT OF FILIPINO CHRISTIANS**

Over the years, Filipino liberation theology or theology of struggle has developed into different forms and expressions, so that there is now no single definitive theology of struggle. The theologies vary in goals, methodologies, strategies, affiliations, and contexts. Often they overlap, and some Filipino liberation theologians identify themselves with several branches of post-colonial theologies.<sup>125</sup> For instance, Danny Franklin Pilario and Catalino Arevalo, two leading contemporary Catholic theologians, classify contemporary theological efforts in the Philippines into three areas of interest.<sup>126</sup> “The first area is what [Pilario] calls ‘mainstream theology’—one which uses the discourse of the magisterium as its base for reflection.”<sup>127</sup> The “second sphere of theological interest is ‘culture’ in general. Part of the conscious attempt to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> James R. Wheelchel, *The Path to Liberation: Theology of Struggle in the Philippines*, (Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 1995), 77.

<sup>126</sup> Daniel Franklin Pilario, “The Craft of Contextual Theology: Toward a Conversation on Theological method in the Philippine Context,” *Hapag*, No. 1 (2004), 5-39.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

construct a distinctly ‘Filipino’ theology, this theological trend delves into the complexity of the Filipino traditional culture, its popular religions, its language and cultural structures, in order to discern the Good News already embedded in it.”<sup>128</sup> And the “third trend directly engages Marxist analysis and praxis towards the economic, political, social and cultural transformation of society.”<sup>129</sup>

“Being part of the Two-Third World,” Pilario contends, “one of the most appealing fields for theological reflection is that of the liberationist thematic.”<sup>130</sup> However, Pilario also states that this third group is divided into further groups. First, “Filipino theologian-members of the EATWOT and the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) whose social analyses are parallel to those of the left-wing political parties.”<sup>131</sup> For example, Edicio de la Torre and Karl Gaspar. In the second group, “we have a centrist group which ‘consciously and explicitly’ relies on the official ecclesial magisterium in the discernment of an appropriate Christian praxis in our times.”<sup>132</sup> Lastly, in the third group, we see “‘theological’ reflection going on among grassroots communities (BECs) whose political position ranges from ‘far left’ to ‘left of center’.”<sup>133</sup> However, Fr. Pilario and Fr. Arevalo only mention Filipino Catholic liberation theologians. They fail to recognize and include non-Catholic or Filipino Protestant liberation theologians, such as Eleazar Fernandez, Levi Oracion, Everett Mendoza, Melanio Aoanan, Oscar Suarez, and the Evangelical theologian David Lim, to name but a few.

Today, Filipina feminist theologians, like all other feminists around the globe, are developing a feminist reading of the “theology of struggle that emerged in the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, edited by Susan Frank Parson, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-19.

Philippines.<sup>134</sup> For example, Elizabeth Tapia and Agnes Brazal. Rosemary Radford Ruether, a prominent American feminist scholar and Catholic theologian, writes,

Filipino Protestant women, such as feminist theologians Elizabeth Tapia, professor at the United (Union) Theological Seminary in Cavite, are an integral part of this circle. Although the Catholic women cannot be ordained, they have a strong independent base for their social activism and theological reflections through their women's religious orders. They are also closely related to the Filipina feminist movement. Mary John Mananzan, for example, has also been the president of Gabriela, the main umbrella organisation for Filipino feminism.<sup>135</sup>

### **3.6. A GENERAL OBSERVATION ON THE FILIPINO THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE**

The Filipino theology of liberation or theology of struggle faces several challenges today. This is evident both from a reading of the history of Filipino liberation theology and from the wide variety of current understandings of its nature and task. Some Filipino liberation theologians who are members of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) contend that the task of Filipino liberation theology is to focus on the socio-economic-political perspective.<sup>136</sup> Other Filipino liberationists emphasize the importance of translating official Christian teaching into terms that are intelligible to the Filipino cultures, and then to discern an appropriate Christian praxis in Philippine realities.<sup>137</sup> For others, the Filipino theology of

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Lode Wostyn, "Doing Liberation Theology: A Filipino Agenda, Forum for Liberation Theologies," *Center for Liberation Theologies Annual Report 2002-2003*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 5-10. Accessed July 31, 2017, [https://theo.kuleuven.be/nl/onderzoek/centra/centr\\_bevrijding/centr\\_bevrijding\\_archives/centr\\_bevrijding\\_archives\\_forum/FLT02-03chronicles.pdf](https://theo.kuleuven.be/nl/onderzoek/centra/centr_bevrijding/centr_bevrijding_archives/centr_bevrijding_archives_forum/FLT02-03chronicles.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> Pilario, "The Craft of Contextual Theology: Toward a Conversation on Theological Method in the Philippine Context," 6-7.



liberation/theology of struggle faces some significant challenges, showing that it is an unfinished and ongoing project among Filipino liberationists.<sup>138</sup>

With the constant changes of the Philippine context, the theology of struggle requires a new understanding and new reformulation of its theological method. Bernie Mabalay, a Filipino liberation theologian and EATWOT member, contends, “The changing nature of context and theology pushes theologians not only to do contextual theologies, but to entextualize, decontextualize, and recontextualize their contextual theologies.”<sup>139</sup> For Mabalay, the emergence of a new context demands a new theological approach to doing theology of struggle in the Philippines. He further argues that Filipino theologians should perform self-criticism by critically reflecting on the sources and contents of previous Filipino liberationist theories.<sup>140</sup>

From this perspective, the present researcher will attempt to describe four significant challenges that Filipino liberationists should take seriously. Firstly, the ideological captivity of theology of struggle. Secondly, Filipino liberation theologians’ justification of the armed struggle. Thirdly, Filipino liberationists do not give enough attention to the ethnographic dimension of Philippine Pentecostal-charismatic movements. Lastly, Filipino liberation theologians tend to inculturate the Gospel message and construct a local theology without conversing or dialoguing with the laity in the church.

### **3.6.1 THE IDEOLOGICAL CAPTIVITY OF THE THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE**

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<sup>138</sup> Wostyn, “Doing Liberation Theology: A Filipino Agenda, Forum for Liberation Theologies,” 6-7.

<sup>139</sup> Bernie Mabalay, “Reshaping Theology of Struggle in the Context of Globalization,” Christian Conference of Asia, Congress of Asian Theologians, CATS VIII, Cochin, Kerala, (India April 18-22, 2016), 2.

<sup>140</sup> Mabalay, “Reshaping Theology of Struggle in the Context of Globalization,” 3-4.

In his dissertation entitled “Social Transformation in the Philippines: Three Methodist Contributions”, Wilfredo H. Tangunan, a Filipino bishop of the United Methodist Church and theologian, critiques the imbalanced view of the theology of struggle on transformation. Tangunan observes that most Filipino liberationists attempt to demonstrate the compatibility between Christian faith and Marxism, which leads to a greater emphasis on structural change.<sup>141</sup> He contends that “its strong alliance with Marxist ideology results in a serious theological problem.” He further argues “the problematic character of the theology of struggle’s notion of ideological captivity, demonstrating how the Filipino theology of struggle became a victim of ideological captivity, resulting in its failure to demonstrate a truly holistic and indigenous theology.”<sup>142</sup> Tangunan explains,

The theology of struggle’s strong focus on the structure itself, led to the collapse of the holistic for the socialistic structure. The urgent concern of the theology of struggle was the transformation of the Philippine social structure, which implies the eradication of poverty.<sup>143</sup>

He adds,

The theology of struggle’s strong concern for social transformation and its extreme emphasis on the social structure resulted in an imbalanced view of the holistic approach. Consequently, the failure of the state and the church has drawn the theologians of struggle to accept Marxism as a principle of transforming the Philippine society.<sup>144</sup>

For him, one of the indicators that the theology of struggle is an ideological captive of Marxist and Maoist ideology is its strong concern for social transformation and its

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<sup>141</sup> Wilfredo Tangunan, “Social Transformation in the Philippines: Three Methodist Contributions”. A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Division of Religion of Drew University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey October 2007.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

extreme emphasis on social structural change. In perhaps the most blatant view, Tangunan noted, Edicio de le Torre put greater emphasis on Marxist/Maoist ideology than on Christian theology. He writes,

De la Torre states that the time of seeking alternatives is also a time to acknowledge the importance and relevance of ideologies. Being drawn to the challenge of Marxist ideology, de la Torre suggests that ideology is more practical and useful than theology. As a critic of the traditional imported theologies, de la Torre emphasizes that instead of being useful, they became a hindrance to the effort of social transformation. De la Torre elaborates that “theology as such does not breed commitment—at best, it hinders revolutionary commitment.”<sup>145</sup>

Moreover, in de la Torre’s book, Tangunan observes that the conformity of Filipino Christians with Marxist-Maoist ideology is striking. He warns against the excessive emphasis on social structural change that would lead to ideological captivity of the Christian teaching. He writes, “Thus, due to its excessive emphasis on the transformation of the social structure and its strong advocacy for socialism as an alternative structure for the Philippine society, the theology of struggle ended in collapsing the holistic approach into a socialistic ideology, leading to its new captivity by Marxist ideology.”<sup>146</sup> In the final analysis, Mabalay argues,

Filipino theology of struggle is the only well-articulated Filipino contextual theology developed by Filipino theologians based on centuries of struggles against foreign and domestic oppression and exploitation. This is a genuine theology, not mere ideology. Deideologization, however, may be necessary in the process of decontextualizing and recontextualizing theology of struggle. Due to its Marxist rhetoric, this theology did not successfully contribute to contemporary theological discourses in the Philippines.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>147</sup> Bernie Mabalay, “Revolutionary Christians on Pope Francis’ Philippines,” (2015). Accessed July 5, 2017, <https://www.ndfp.org/revolutionary-christians-on-pope-francis-philippine-visit/>.

### 3.6.2 FILIPINO LIBERATION THEOLOGIANS' JUSTIFICATION OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE

The second challenging issue is the Filipino liberationists' justification of the armed struggle. It remains a popular subject of debate between centrist groups and left-wing Filipino liberationists. For instance, Christians for National Liberation (CNL), established by Edicio de la Torre, has chosen a comprehensive revolution, which includes 'armed struggle' as a path towards social transformation.<sup>148</sup> CNL members believe that to live out their Christian faith in and within their revolutionary activities demonstrates a consistent faith-praxis. Victor Aguilan, a Filipino theologian, writes,

Fr. Edicio dela Torre, one of the earliest advocates of the theology of struggle, has painted an image of an angry Christ. According to de la Torre, there is urgency to transform the existing social order. In his view, the only realistic means is the violent overthrow of the status quo. He portrayed a Christology of struggle depicting Jesus as a revolutionary Christ.<sup>149</sup>

Making use of the Marxist-Maoist ideology, informed Filipino Christians ask whether this CNL version is still compatible in its Christian faith with our Judeo-Christian tradition. Similarly, Tangunan states,

The justification of the armed struggle by using the Christian tradition and Marxism demonstrates the theology of struggle's failure to produce an indigenous theology. The theology of struggle successfully conjoined Christianity and Marxism not only in its acceptance of the socialist vision, but also in its advocacy for armed struggle as the method for bringing about socialism as an alternative structure for the Philippine society. The theology of struggle was drawn into Marxist ideology not only due to its radical emphasis on the social structure, but also by its desire to legitimize

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<sup>148</sup> Victor Aguilan, "Encountering Jesus in the Midst of Struggle: A Christology of Struggle," Lecture, Mindanao Theological Forum, Davao, Philippines, March 6 & 7, 2014, 1-10. Accessed August 19, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/22745894/ENCOUNTERING\\_JESUS\\_IN\\_THE\\_MIDST\\_OF\\_STRUGGLE\\_A\\_Christology\\_of\\_Struggle](https://www.academia.edu/22745894/ENCOUNTERING_JESUS_IN_THE_MIDST_OF_STRUGGLE_A_Christology_of_Struggle).

<sup>149</sup> Tangunan, "Social Transformation in the Philippines: Three Methodist Contributions," 41.

armed struggle as an effective means of transforming the oppressive structure.<sup>150</sup>

As Filipino liberationists become militant and integrate themselves into the armed struggle movement, fear and resentment is generated among the church leadership. Inspired by Marxist ideology, Christians who have embraced the revolutionary struggle make an open pronouncement, as they seek to incarnate the Gospel message of salvation and Christ's commandments of love by joining the Marxist-Maoist revolutionary movement. For Tangunan, however, this obviously would lead to the captivity of the theology of struggle by Marxist ideology. He argues, "The acceptance of socialism as an alternative reality for Philippine society and its advocacy of communist revolutionary struggle as a means in bringing up the imported socialist structure, demonstrates the theology of struggle's downfall into the trap of Marxist ideological captivity."<sup>151</sup>

Despite weaknesses and some dangers, the left-wing Filipino liberationists within CNL are still advocating this form of theology of struggle. Hence, Mabalay reminds the Filipino liberationists, "The absence of faith in God in Marxism has reduced it to mere ideology; however, in theology of struggle, faith is a vital component, thus it is a genuine theology."<sup>152</sup> He adds, "The nature of theology of struggle, however, does not follow systematic and classical theological discourses; rather, it is aimed at articulating in theory and practice a social identity where Christians and nonbelievers can take part in liberating the nation from oppression through 'guns and the Cross'."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>151</sup> Mabalay, "Reshaping Theology of Struggle in the Context of Globalization," 13-14.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

### 3.7. CONCLUSION

The thinking and approaches of Latin American liberation theology retain a great influence far beyond the Philippine context. However, doing theology of liberation or theology of struggle is an unfinished and ongoing project among Filipino liberation theologians. But one thing is certain: Latin American liberation theology is an open door for the development of local theologies such as Asian theologies, womanist theologies, grassroots theologies, minjung theologies, queer theologies, theologies of struggle, and dalit theologies.<sup>154</sup> In 1976 this led to the establishment of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians also known as EATWOT in Dar-es Salaam, Tanzania.<sup>155</sup> Inspired by the “option for the poor”, the main goal of the EATWOT was to address the poverty and oppression in the Third World or developing countries.<sup>156</sup>

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the theology of Pentecostalism in the Philippines.

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<sup>154</sup> *Getting the Poor Down from the Cross, Christology of Liberation*, José María Vigil (organizer) International Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians EATWOT / ASETT Second Digital Edition (Version 2.0), 1-305.

<sup>155</sup> See *History of EATWOT 1975-2006*, accessed June 7, 2016, [http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/wab/ldpd\\_6306796.pdf](http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/wab/ldpd_6306796.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> José M. Vigil, “The Option for the Poor Is an Option for Justice and not Preferential,” *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, (2004), 7-21.

## CHAPTER 4: THE THEOLOGY OF PENTECOSTALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

### 4.1. THE FIRE FROM HEAVEN: THE RISE OF GLOBAL PENTECOSTALISM

Nowadays, religion has become an important subject for public debate. True enough, our aesthetic appetite or taste regarding religion has become more evident than our appetite for reason. The rise of global Pentecostal-charismatic movements, for instance, has become one of the central themes in academic and non-academic discourses. Contemporary academicians and policy makers realize that the public influence of religion nowadays demands respect and acknowledgement. Contrary to earlier claims of social scientists, with the recognition of the global rise of Pentecostalism, religion can no longer be a private matter. For example, the prominent sociologist Peter Berger publicly confesses,

Max Weber has, correctly up to a point, ascribed to Protestantism an important role in what he called the “disenchantment” of the world. Much of what goes on in the world today could be called re-enchantment (or counter-secularization). Pentecostalism is a very loud version of this development. Those of us who prefer a more quiet version if you will, ‘the still, small voice,’ need not apologize.<sup>157</sup>

The point of view stated with such force and clarity by Berger implies that classical sociological theories, modernization and secularization theories, are challenged by the resurgence of religion in contemporary societies, particularly global Pentecostalism. For Berger,

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<sup>157</sup> Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger, (USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 1-4.

The contemporary world does not at all show what so-called secularization theory asserts: that modernity leads to a decline of religion. With some exceptions, notably Europeans and an international class of intellectuals, most of our contemporaries are decidedly religious and not only in the less-modernized parts of the world. There are many large religious movements, only a few of them violent, most of them resulting in significant social, economic, and political developments. Arguably the largest and most influential (and almost entirely nonviolent) of these movements is Pentecostalism.<sup>158</sup>

It is often argued, as Berger also tries to explain, that if modernization and secularization were to accelerate developments of non-religious worldviews, the sense of spirituality or religiosity in the public space would be eroded. However, a relatively new study shows that several global trends related to religious affiliation are apparent. The 2013 report by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity states that in 1970 nearly 82% of the world's population were religious. The CSGC report also states that by 2010 this had grown to around 88%, with a projected increase to almost 90% by 2020.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps one might ask what forms of global Christianity are growing. Interestingly, Todd M. Johnson, the director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, argues that Pentecostalism and related charismatic movements are one of the fastest-growing segments of global Christianity. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians and 305 million charismatic Christians in the world.<sup>160</sup> This means that Pentecostal and charismatic Christians together make up about 27% of all Christians and more than

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<sup>158</sup> Peter L. Berger, "A Friendly Dissent from Pentecostalism," *First Things*, (November 2012). Accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/11/a-friendly-dissent-from-pentecostalism>.

<sup>159</sup> *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020. Society, Religion, and Mission. June 2013*, Pew Review Center, (February 2013), 1-92. Accessed June 16, 2016, <http://www.gordonconwell.com/netcommunity/CSGCResources/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup> "Global Pentecostalism: Ecstasy and Exodus," *The Economist*, (January 23, 2016). Accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21688880-charismatic-christianity-thrives-among-people-move-ecstasy-and-exodus>; "Spirit and Power: 10 Country Survey of Pentecostalism," Pew Review Center, (2006). Accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/pentecostal-resource-page/>. See also "Migration, Religious Diasporas, and Religious Diversity: A Global Survey. Counting Pentecostals Worldwide," *Pneuma*, Volume 36, Issue 2 (January 1, 2012), 3-22.



8% of the world's total population.<sup>161</sup> Pentecostalism thus continues to expand at a global level, at times providing a foundation for new forms of contemporary spirituality.

At the moment, the available literature about Pentecostalism and charismatic movements is surprisingly diverse, so much so that it is often difficult to see a common denominator. The books written by Pentecostals and outsiders cover a broad spectrum. The literature has steadily proliferated, especially in Western academic circles. Amos Yong, a Pentecostal scholar and theologian, states that the explosion of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century has been of great interest not only to Pentecostals themselves but also to non-Pentecostal scholars.<sup>162</sup> The development of studies regarding the Pentecostalism and charismatic movements among social scientists is evident in written works by, for instance, Peter Berger, Harvey Cox, and José Casanova, to name but a few. These social scientists vary in goals, methodologies, strategies, affiliations, contexts, and views. In short, there is a wide range of eclectic approaches that apply distinctive social theories to the study of the global Pentecostalism and charismatic movements. They often overlap, and some scholars identify themselves with several branches of Christianity.

#### **4.2. THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT OF PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY**

Never before in the history of Christianity has the strong essential role of the laity been as dramatically emphasized as it is now, especially in the case of global Pentecostalism. For Pentecostals, the individual lived experience of the believer is crucial when it comes to doing theology.<sup>163</sup> The subject of Pentecostal theology is the

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<sup>161</sup> "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distributions," Pew Research Center, (December 19, 2011), accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/>.

<sup>162</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, (USA: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

<sup>163</sup> Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 71.

individual lived experience through the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and incorporation into a community of believers.<sup>164</sup> Here, the knowledge of God is found and communicated.<sup>165</sup> To overcome individualism, Pentecostals believe that it is through the community of believers that God does his work in the world. For example, Simon Chan criticizes elitist theologians “who theologize about the poor and oppressed that largely ignores the view of the ordinary people themselves, especially the ordinary members of the church.”<sup>166</sup> Chan not only critiques but gives a strong vision for community when it comes to doing theology. The object of Pentecostal theology is its strong emphasis on God’s revelation, especially in classical Pentecostalism or the restorationist movement.<sup>167</sup> In the following sections the subject of Pentecostal theology will be discussed in greater detail. Despite the difficulties in defining Pentecostal theology, it is clear at once that Pentecostal theology, like Latin American liberation theology, has a dialectical connection between individual lived experience incorporated into a community of believers as subject and God’s revelation as object.<sup>168</sup>

#### **4.3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF PENTECOSTALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Terence Chong, senior fellow and regional editor of the Yusok Ishak Institute-Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, argues that Southeast Asian Pentecostalism, specifically in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, are simultaneously recognizable as part of a global phenomenon of Pentecostalism.<sup>169</sup> In 2006, according to the Pew Review Center report, the Philippines is one of the top

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 71.

<sup>166</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 27.

<sup>167</sup> Sturla J. Stålsett, ed. *Spirit of Globalisation: The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age*, (London: SCM Press, 2006).

<sup>168</sup> James P. Bowers, “A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Approach to Christian Formation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 6, (1995), 55-86.

<sup>169</sup> “Pentecostal megachurches in Southeast Asia,” IEAS-Yosuk Ishak Institute, *The Newsletter from Southeast Asia*, No.75, Autumn 2016.

Asian countries that has growing Pentecostal and charismatic movements.<sup>170</sup> This PRC report is confirmed by Allan Anderson, a British Pentecostal historian and theologian. He writes succinctly,

Christians form a sizeable minority in South East Asia, especially among Filipinos and the Chinese minorities, and Pentecostals are found throughout the region (142)...Although the Philippines is predominantly Catholic, Pentecostalism has a high profile there, and because of a strong Catholic Charismatic movement, Pentecostals and Charismatics were almost 22 per cent of the population in 2010. The first Pentecostal missionary to arrive in the Philippines was Joseph Warnick in 1921, who with local preacher Teodorico Lastimosa began the Philippine Church of God. The first AG missionary in the Philippines, Benjamin Caudle, arrived in 1926 but soon returned to the USA. The first of these, Cris Garsulao, commenced churches in the south-west in 1928. In 1939 another US missionary, Leland Johnson, set up the AG under the US headquarters, to become an autonomous district in 1953. Vincent Defante, a Filipino convert of Aimee McPherson, commenced the Foursquare Church in 1931. The three largest Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are the Jesus is Lord Church founded by Eddie Villanueva in 1978, the Jesus Miracle Crusade (both these are Filipino-founded churches) and the AG. There are also more distinctly Filipino movements of a Pentecostal character, such as the Santuala movement among the mountain peoples of Luzon. Large new Filipino Charismatic churches have been established like Jesus is Lord, which grew to 300,000 in ten years and is now the largest Charismatic church in the Philippines with over a million affiliates, a television station and an active socio-political programme.<sup>171</sup>

Allan Anderson strongly believes that the Pentecostalism and charismatic movements are the most popular and fastest-growing social forces in the Philippines. For instance, Cathedral of Praise, Bread of Life, and the Catholic charismatic movement.<sup>172</sup> Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, subsumed under “other Protestant churches,”

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<sup>170</sup> “Spirit and Power – A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” Pew Review Center, (October 5, 2006). Accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/>.

<sup>171</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 142, 145-146.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

have grown at the expense of Protestant mainline denominations.<sup>173</sup> In fact, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism affects every corner and every level of Philippine society.

Moreover, the history of Pentecostalism in the Philippines has not transpired in a vacuum. According to Conrado Lumahan, a Filipino Pentecostal historian, it can be divided into three stages: firstly, the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church (1521-1889); secondly, the arrival of Protestant Christianity (1889-1940); lastly, the emergence of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity (1920-1953).<sup>174</sup> Also, he claims that these Pentecostal/charismatic groups are the fastest growing religious bodies and the number of their adherents is second only to that of Catholics in the Philippines.<sup>175</sup>

The Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God, Inc. (PGCAG) is considered the largest Trinitarian Pentecostal organization in the Philippines. Based on information from the World Assemblies of God website, PGCAG has 4,000 local churches in the Philippines.<sup>176</sup> The PGCAG traces its roots back to the first American missionary Benjamin H. Caudle and his wife, who arrived in 1926.<sup>177</sup> After a short period of time, Caudle's wife got sick and was forced to leave the mission work in the Philippines.<sup>178</sup> However, Trinidad E. Seleky states that there were six Filipino and only one American pioneers of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines. After their training in the United States of America, the first six Filipino Pentecostal missionaries and one American decided to work as missionaries in the Philippines. In September

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<sup>173</sup> Christi Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ, "Responses to Rapid Social Change: Populist Religion in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Spring 2006), 73-96.

<sup>174</sup> Conrado Lumahan, "Facts and Figures: A History of the Growth of the Philippine Assemblies of God," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 8:2 (2005), 331-344.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>176</sup> World Assemblies of God, accessed June 21, 2017, <http://worldagfellowship.org/fellowship/countries/wagf-participating-members-m-r/philippines/>.

<sup>177</sup> "Our History," The Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God, Inc., accessed June 9, 2016, <http://www.pgcag.com/site/who-we-are/our-history/>.

<sup>178</sup> Trinidad E. Seleky, "Six Filipinos and One American: Pioneers of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2001), 119-120.

1926, Pentecostalism began to be transplanted in the Philippine soil. Since then, Pentecostalism has been a growing and successful movement in the Philippines.

For eleven decades, Philippine Pentecostal and charismatic movements have influenced and challenged different religious independent groups, ideas of liturgies, contemporary spiritualities, dogmas or traditional theologies, and religious institutions. For instance, charismatic Protestant and Catholic movements have become increasingly popular in the grassroots. The best-known charismatic Protestant movement is the Jesus is Lord movement (JIL). JIL claims to have 4 million members.<sup>179</sup> Among Catholics, with the spiritual lay leader Mike Velarde, the El Shaddai Movement claims 7 million members in the Philippines and 10 million more among the expatriate Filipino community.<sup>180</sup> According to Esmeralda Sanchez, a Filipino social anthropologist, El Shaddai is undoubtedly the largest lay Catholic organization in the world.<sup>181</sup>

#### **4.4. DIVERSITY OF PENTECOSTALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES**

The Philippines being known as a multi-faceted society with a long history of colonization and struggle for independence, Filipino Pentecostals have hardly remained static. The complex Pentecostal theology, Pentecostal ministries, and the dialectic of Pentecostalism with colonial experience have thus shaped such facets of

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<sup>179</sup> Paterno Esmaguel II, "JIL's Bro Eddie calls for 'revolution of righteousness'," *Rappler*, (October 26, 2013). Accessed August 18, 2015. See also "Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Philippines," Pew Research Center, (2006), accessed June 21, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-philippines/>.

<sup>180</sup> Katherine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines*, (Honolulu: University of Honolulu, 2005), 4.

<sup>181</sup> Data on the number of members were provided to Esmeralda F. Sanchez by the managers of El Shaddai's membership ID System, Amorsolo, Makati, Philippines January 25, 2017. See "El Shaddai and the Charismatic Transformation of Philippine Catholicism," *Catholic and Culture*, (2017), accessed June 21, 2017, [https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/philippines/el-shaddai-and-charismatic-catholicism#footnote1\\_e3n9q2m](https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/philippines/el-shaddai-and-charismatic-catholicism#footnote1_e3n9q2m).

the wider society as identity, class, gender roles, ministry, and public discourse.<sup>182</sup> Ignoring the inherent diversity of Filipino Pentecostalism fails to do justice to the complexity of the Pentecostal worldviews, theologies, and practices in the Philippines.<sup>183</sup> In short, it would be naïve to think that Philippine Pentecostals are a uniform or monolithic movement.<sup>184</sup>

Using the Hartford Institute definition, Al Raposas, a Filipino historian and award-winning blogger, sums up the major Filipino Pentecostalism and charismatic movements that have arisen in contemporary Philippine society.<sup>185</sup> Firstly, Jesus is Lord Church Worldwide (JILCW) is the largest mega-Pentecostal or charismatic movements in the Philippines.<sup>186</sup> According to Leadership Network, JILCW claims to have 53,000 members in Asia alone, and they have exercised a controversial influence over Philippine politics.<sup>187</sup> For instance, in the May 2016 elections, the spiritual leader Brother Eddie Villanueva endorsed some political candidates for several public offices. However, the mix of religion and politics in the Philippines is not new.<sup>188</sup> Secondly, the second largest Pentecostal church is the Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG). It has been reported that membership grew to more than 12,000. As of the year 2000, it was reported that PGCAG had 198,000 members and an attendance of more than 420,000, leading one author to label the church as the

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<sup>182</sup> Teresa Chong, “The State of Pentecostalism in Southeast Asia: Ethnicity, Class, and Leadership,” ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, *Perspective*, No. 53 (2015), 1-9.

<sup>183</sup> Allan Anderson, “Global Pentecostalism, Charismatic Movements and Independent Churches,” Lecture for the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, (November 18, 2013). Accessed June 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/6068798/Global\\_Pentecostalism\\_Charismatic\\_Movements\\_and\\_Independent\\_Churches\\_Christianity\\_Shifting\\_Southwards\\_Historical\\_Overview](https://www.academia.edu/6068798/Global_Pentecostalism_Charismatic_Movements_and_Independent_Churches_Christianity_Shifting_Southwards_Historical_Overview).

<sup>184</sup> Joseph R. Suico, “Pentecostal and Social Change,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 8:2 (2005), 199.

<sup>185</sup> Al Raposas, “Protestantism in the Philippines: Megachurch fever,” *Filipino Historian*, (January 20, 2017). Accessed June 26, 2017, <https://history-ph.blogspot.be/2017/01/megachurch.html>.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> “JIL to endorse 2016 candidates,” (2016), accessed June 26, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/jesusislordchurch/posts/10153712363008674>.

<sup>188</sup> Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Politics of Religion in South and Southeast Asia*, First Edition, (London: Routledge, 2011). Steven Rood, “Religion and Politics Mix in the Philippines,” Asian Foundation, (February 29, 2012), accessed June 26, 2017, <http://asiafoundation.org/2012/02/29/religion-and-politics-mix-in-the-philippines/>.

“largest evangelical body in the country”.<sup>189</sup> Thirdly, a megachurch affiliated with the Assemblies of God is Word of Hope Christian Church (WOH). Their main church in Quezon City Metro Manila has a seating capacity of 6,500. Currently, based on Leadership Network, WOH has 35,000 members and a seating capacity of around 4,000 for their main center. Fourthly, Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF) is also a megachurch in the Philippines. The church reports a membership of 7,000. Meanwhile, Leadership Network shows a figure of 8,000 members for GCF and a seating capacity of around 1,500 in its main center.<sup>190</sup> Lastly, the Church of the Foursquare Gospel in the Philippines (CFGPI) is a Pentecostal church branched from the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.<sup>191</sup> According to the church reports, CFGPI has 95,000 members.

Aside from theological differences, these megachurches have different views or convictions on politics. For example, Brother Eddie Villanueva was outspoken about dirty politics and corruption in the Philippines.<sup>192</sup> By contrast, the GCF and PGCF were not politically outspoken on Philippine social problems, and it is very rare for GCF and PGCF to make a political statement on any social issues.<sup>193</sup> On a closer look, however, due to the diversity and complexity of Philippine Pentecostalism, the situation does not admit of gross generalizations. Aside from this, the largest Oneness Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines are not included in the above report, for example, The Kingdom of Jesus Christ The Name Above Every Name Inc., the United Pentecostal Church Philippines (UPC Philippines), and the Jesus Miracle Crusade International Ministry (JMCIM), to name just a few.<sup>194</sup> With these things in

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<sup>189</sup> “Protestantism in the Philippines: Megachurch fever,” *Filipino Historian*.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Jim Montenegro, *Fire in the Philippines*, (USA: Creation House, 1975).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> “Ecumenical Leadership on Politics: What good will it bring? Eddie Villanueva,” Ichor26.wordpress.com. Accessed June 26, 2017, “JIL holds prayer rally to mark 29th year,” *The Philippine Star*, (2007).

<sup>194</sup> Johnny Love King, “Spirit and Schism: A History of Oneness Pentecostalism in the Philippines,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham (2017).

mind, it is now difficult to make hasty generalizations about the Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the Philippines.

## **4.5. THE CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIES**

### **4.5.1. THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN PENTECOSTALISM**

As this thesis project unfolds, it will be apparent that there are many significant American Pentecostal organizations involved in the development and spread of Pentecostalism in the Philippines. As Suico mentioned, there are two American and several indigenous Pentecostal churches that initiated Pentecostalism in the Philippines. The Assembly of God USA (AG) and the International Foursquare Gospel Church (ICFG) are the two American organizations who became the precursors of Pentecostalism in the Philippines.<sup>195</sup> Both the Philippine General Council of the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church Philippines are localized extensions that adhere to the American Pentecostal teachings or basic doctrines. However, the teachings can only be found in doctrinal statements, Sunday school teaching materials, sermons, liturgies, personal testimonies, organizational histories, and academic journals like the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*.<sup>196</sup> The Jesus is Lord movement (JIL) is one of the biggest indigenous megachurch-Christianity,<sup>197</sup> self-governing, and self-propagating Pentecostal movements in the Philippines.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Joseph Suico, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, edited by Allan Anderson & Edmond Tang, (UK: Regnum Books International & APTS Press, 2005).

<sup>196</sup> Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies, *Asian Pacific Theological Seminary*, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.apt.edu/index.cfm?menuid=94&parentid=54>.

<sup>197</sup> Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, "The indigenisation of megachurch Christianity: Jesus is Lord in the Philippines," IAS, *The Newsletter*, No. 75, (Autumn 2016), accessed July 26, 2017, [http://ias.asia/sites/default/files/IIAS\\_NL75\\_17-1.pdf](http://ias.asia/sites/default/files/IIAS_NL75_17-1.pdf).

<sup>198</sup> Suico, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, 353-354.



Thus far, a number of valuable sources have attempted to explain and systematize Filipino Pentecostal theology for contemporary readers, but few of them are on an academic level. The present researcher must, therefore, limit his research and concentrate on the fundamental doctrines of mainline classical Pentecostal churches such as the Philippine General Council of the Assemblies of God, the Philippine Foursquare Church, and selected contemporary articles from the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*. The research divides this section into two subtopics, a description of classical Filipino Pentecostal theology and an attempt to reconstruct contemporary Pentecostal theologies.

#### 4.5.2. CLASSICAL FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY

The fundamental doctrines of the Philippine General Council of the Assemblies of God and the Philippine Foursquare Church are very similar and can be summarized as follows.<sup>199</sup> First, the Scriptures are inspired, meaning that the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired by God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2 Tim. 3:16); second, there is only One True God, the Trinitarian God or one Being of three persons (Matthew 28:19); third, the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23); fourth, the fall of Man, meaning that man was created good and upright, for God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God (1: 26-27); fifth, the salvation of man is divided into elements: a. man’s only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God; b. evidence of salvation both inward and outward (Luke 24:47); sixth, the Ordinances of the Church (Mark 16:16; Act 10:47-48); seventh, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8); eighth, the initial physical evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4); ninth, sanctification or an act of separation from that which is

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<sup>199</sup> Statement of Fundamental Doctrines of the PGCAG, *Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God*, (2015), accessed July 25, 2017, <http://www.pgcag.com/site/what-we-believe/> and Foursquare Declaration of Faith, *Church of the Foursquare Gospel in the Philippines*, (2014), accessed July 25, 2017, [http://www.foursquare.org.ph/aboutus\\_belief.html](http://www.foursquare.org.ph/aboutus_belief.html).

evil (Romans 12:1-2); tenth, the church and its Mission or fulfilling the Great Commission (Eph. 1:22-23); eleventh, the ministry or evangelization of the world, worship of God, building a Body of saints, and meeting human needs with ministries of love and compassion (Mark 16:15-20); twelfth, divine healing (Matt. 8:16-17); thirteenth, the blessed hope (1 Thess. 4:16-17); fourteenth, the Millennial Reign of Christ (Matt. 24:27); fifteenth, the Last Judgement (Mark 9:43-48); sixteenth, the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21-22).

The Jesus is Lord Fellowship Worldwide (JIL), unlike the General Council of the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church, has been the most visible Pentecostal group in socio-political issues.<sup>200</sup> Using his own personal testimony, Eddie Villanueva has deepened and strengthened his indigenous Filipino Pentecostal movement. From being a communist to being a Christian believer, Villanueva believes that he and his movement have a mandate from God to transform the Philippines and the world, not just spiritually but also socio-politically. This is the reason why the JIL movement is deeply involved in socio-political activities.<sup>201</sup> However, as Suico describes, “Like other classical Pentecostals, the lack of contextual reflection in its theology is most noticeable.”<sup>202</sup> He adds, “However, when it comes to socio-political issues—Bro. Eddie is quite clear where his church should stand.”<sup>203</sup>

#### **4.6. AN ATTEMPT TO RECONSTRUCT CONTEMPORARY FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIES**

As noted in the previous section, very little scholarly research was conducted prior to the 1998 establishment of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* (AJPS). The Asian Pacific Theological Seminary Baguio Philippines launched the AJPS academic

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<sup>200</sup> Suico, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, 353.

<sup>201</sup> “Secrets of JIL’s Success,” Jesus is Lord Church Worldwide, (2017), accessed July 25, 2017, <https://www.jilworldwide.org/bro-eddie>.

<sup>202</sup> Suico, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, 354.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

journal to facilitate permanent and transparent scholarly forums for the theological presentation, scrutiny, and discussion of research into Asian Pentecostalism, its theology or beliefs.<sup>204</sup> However, contextual Pentecostal theologies, like the Filipino theology of struggle, are still an unfinished and ongoing project among Filipino Pentecostal scholars. Moreover, there are many others the researcher could mention who have offered insights and who may be considered influential in contextual Filipino Pentecostal theological discussions. Unfortunately, due to space limitations and the focus of this research project, the researcher will confine the discussion to Wonsuk Ma and two Filipino Pentecostal theologians who, the researcher believes, have made the most significant impact as principal sources in this movement. We will discuss each theologian in order of our estimation of his or her relevance to the task of reconstructing contemporary Filipino Pentecostal theologies.

#### **4.6.1. WONSUK MA'S CONTEXTUAL PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIES**

Interestingly, the emergence of contemporary Filipino contextual Pentecostal theologies is indebted to the writings of some Western Pentecostal theologians and foreign missionaries, for instance the Korean missionary Wonsuk Ma. Ma was a missionary to the Philippines from 1979 to 2006.<sup>205</sup> Ma's writings have stimulated contextual Asian Pentecostal discussions among many Filipino theologians since the mid-twentieth century. In his article entitled "Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology," which appeared in the first publication of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, he attempts to systematize Asian Pentecostal theology.<sup>206</sup> He poses a series of challenges that provokingly summarize the Asian Pentecostal theologians, specifically Filipino Pentecostals. Ma states,

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<sup>204</sup> The first issue of AJPS appeared in January 1998.

<sup>205</sup> Currently, Dr Wonsuk Ma is a distinguished Professor of Global Christianity at Oral Roberts University, USA, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.oru.edu/academics/faculty-profiles/profile.php?id=266>.

<sup>206</sup> Wonsuk Ma, "Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (January 1998), 15-41.

The present discussion is meant to raise awareness among Asian Pentecostal thinkers concerning their unique capability and calling to engage in theological reflections within their local context. Secondly, this discussion will include an attempt to explore ways to effectively communicate some theological reflections in relevant ways to Asian recipients.<sup>207</sup>

These challenges have continued to inspire many Filipino and Asian Pentecostal theologians to undertake constructive Pentecostal theologies from a contextual spectrum. Ma further states, “Theology, simply defined, is a process which takes the divine truth, the revelation of God, and applies it to a specific human setting.”<sup>208</sup> He adds, “By doing this, theology allows God to speak to human beings.”<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, in doing Asian Pentecostal theology, Ma contends, the process can begin from either end: divine truth or human needs. Hence, one can easily recognize three critical elements in theological reflection: (a) divine source, (b) human source, and (c) an agent mediating the two sources.<sup>210</sup> Firstly, the divine source or God’s revelation. According to Ma, in God’s revelation,

God reveals not only who He is, but also what His will is in two venues. One is through His words. This includes the written revelation, the Scripture, as well as revelation through experiences. Through contemporary events, God continues to reveal His character and will. The other is God’s revelation in history, or in deeds. The history of Israel is viewed as God’s revelation of his salvation history (e.g., Acts 7:2-50; 1 Cor 10:1-5).<sup>211</sup>

For Ma, the primary source of contextual Asian Pentecostal theology is God’s revelation. But when we say “God’s revelation”, to what are we referring? Clearly, as

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

in other theological methods, Ma is referring to the written revelation, the Scriptures, as well as revelation through experiences. Ma then proceeds to the second source, the contemporary human setting. He writes,

After the interpretation of the ancient text, the message should be “redressed” with contemporary settings in mind. Different social, cultural, and religious settings present different human needs (H). The key word in this process is “relevancy”: how to make God’s message applicable to contemporary people. As the human setting is viewed through God’s word, this functions as an object of the theological process. This human group also serves as the addressee for any theological communication.<sup>212</sup>

For Ma, text and context play a significant role in doing Asian Pentecostal theologies. From a Pentecostal perspective, he argues, these two primary sources are very important for making God’s message applicable to contemporary people.<sup>213</sup> Ma further contends that the impact of a personal Pentecostal experience is a rich and essential part of the theological process.<sup>214</sup> Lastly, the third element is the theologizer or communicator. According to Ma,

This theologizer (T) is a human instrument bringing the two elements together so that God’s message becomes relevant for contemporary hearers. The theologizer must be part of the two worlds: the divine and human. He or she must be a believer in God in terms of word and deed. Non-believers cannot truthfully do theology, on behalf of believers. This, of course, also assumes that the theologizer is a contemporary member of a given society.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

For Ma, first of all, the theologizer/communicator not only understands and has allegiance to the truth of God, but also is part of or at least possesses sympathy with the struggles and sufferings of Asians.<sup>216</sup> He adds,

For Asian Pentecostal theology, it is naturally Asian Pentecostals who will undertake the job. For this theological task, the theologizer/communicator should understand the spiritual dynamics in Asian thinking. For instance, the central concern of power among animists greatly influences how to formulate a theology for these Asians, and what Pentecostal theological element(s) should be emphasized.<sup>217</sup>

For Ma, the task of theologizer/communicator is to interpret and appropriate God's revelation (Gospel and Salvation History) intelligibly, culturally, and in a contemporary setting to understand the spiritual dynamic in Asian thinking. Obviously, the subject of Pentecostal theology, for Ma, is the lived experience of the interpreter or the believer. Ma shows the importance of the subject as the key to interpreting and appropriating God's revelation in the local context. On the other hand, Ma warns against the tendency to have an imbalanced relationship between God's revelation and human experience. Prioritizing the local setting or human experience over God's revelation is an example of imbalance. For him, it is no longer an adequate base for doing an Asian Pentecostal theology. He writes,

Having stressed the aspects of a micro, or in this case local, Pentecostal theology/theologies, where are we going from there? The ultimate goal of constructing local theologies, let's say, "Igorot Pentecostal theology of land," etc., is not to create theological regionalism (or provincialism). Nor is the Asian church called to Asianize Christianity, even though we may have to de-westernize traditional theology. It is rather to take part in formulating a healthy macro Pentecostal theology, so that ultimately Pentecostal theology will make a contribution to, and enrich, sound Christian theology.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

#### 4.6.2. DOREEN A. BENAVIDEZ: PENTECOSTAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Doreen A. Benavidez is a Filipina pentecostal minister and Professor of Biblical Studies at Bethel Bible College, the Philippines. Benavidez rightfully deserves a place in the formation of, or an initial attempt to reconstruct, a contemporary Pentecostal theology. In Benavidez's article entitled "Pentecostalism and Social Responsibility," she challenges Pentecostals to carefully analyze their theology and practice and to reflect on the social significance of Pentecostalism.<sup>219</sup> In this article, Benavidez expresses her main concern about the influence of Pentecostals on social issues. First of all, she looks at the biblical basis for establishing her arguments, specifically the Pentecostal event (Acts 2) and the Luke 4 mandate. Secondly, she principally discusses Pentecostal theology in response to social issues from two angles: social service and social action.<sup>220</sup> For Pentecostals, she argues, it is necessary to contribute to transforming the structure of society, not only to social service. She further argues that we ourselves should be active "rather than just relinquishing to government agencies the task of promoting human betterment."<sup>221</sup> She adds, "The reason of this stand is that the church has more to offer given the heavenly mandate and empowerment to fulfil such responsibility."<sup>222</sup> Moreover, Benavidez claims that Pentecostalism is not just simply about salvation. She writes,

Pentecostal scholars Roger Stronstand and Robert Menzies have argued that pentecostal theology is about witness and service rather than salvation. Empowerment for service is the reason why God poured out his Spirit to the disciples on the day of Pentecost and unto this present day. The pentecostal community is empowered for service affecting society.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Doreen A. Benavidez, "Pentecostalism and Social Responsibility," *Prospects and Challenges for the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century. Insights from the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute*, No. 12, (Geneva, Globalethics.net, 2016), 171-178. Accessed July 13, 2017, [http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403236/GE\\_Global\\_12\\_web.pdf](http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403236/GE_Global_12_web.pdf).

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

The Pentecostal community, Benavidez asserts, is empowered on the day of Pentecost to transform our society. For her, several Pentecostal theologians may have a common commitment to a certain set of practices and rules of faith, but still approach specific Pentecostal theological tasks differently and hold a variety of theological views on evangelism and social engagement. However, she points out, “The rapidly changing social face of Pentecostalism intensifies the need for a theology of church ministry that can inspire and direct the church’s moral engagement with society without diminishing the church’s historic commitment to evangelism.”<sup>224</sup> Benavidez rightly points out that evangelism and social concern should be a unified effort among Pentecostals. She remarks, “What is needed is a theology of church ministry capable of integrating programs of evangelism and social concern into a unified effort in fulfilling the church’s global mission.”<sup>225</sup>

With this in mind, Benavidez stresses the pneumatological reading of the Gospel of Luke. She writes, “Recognizing Luke’s pneumatology enables us to focus on the charismatic activity of the Spirit in the community of believers.”<sup>226</sup> She adds, “Experience as the basis of theological reflection is established in Luke’s understanding of the Spirit-gift.”<sup>227</sup> Here, like Ma, Benavidez points out that the subject of Pentecostal theology is the individual lived experience. Benavidez clarifies the key role of the individual lived experience that is incorporated into the community of believers as a basis of theological reflection. Furthermore, Benavidez’s reflections on these biblical texts, the Pentecostal event (Acts 2) and the mandate (Luke 4), point us to a question that is characteristically contextual for Pentecostal theologies. She draws on Murray Dumper, Howard Marshall, and Roger Stronstad to help articulate how the concept of the Kingdom of God is a pneumatic perspective. She writes,

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.



For Pentecostals, the concept of the kingdom is basically a pneumatic perspective, for the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in the mission and message of the kingdom. Luke presents a clear picture of Jesus empowered by the Spirit in his entire life from conception to the resurrection. ‘The kingdom is given performance and reality in the midst of the world.’ The Scripture, particularly the gospels, teaches that the kingdom of God is both a future event and a present reality. The Spirit no doubt affected the tension about the advent of the kingdom. In Luke, the special function of the Spirit is to help establish the kingdom by inspiring the mission of Jesus and the church.<sup>228</sup>

Social action is part of the Pentecostal spiritual mandate and has a pivotal role in global mission. Regarding the Pentecostal event, she contends, “Understanding the Pentecost event is significant in providing a biblical framework for social action.”<sup>229</sup> She further argues, citing Carl H. Pinnock, “Pinnock believes that ‘charismatic experience should produce potentially the most radical and also the most effective Christians in the area of social concern.’”<sup>230</sup> She adds, “In Acts 2, the Christian community is potentially a community of prophets empowered by the Spirit.”<sup>231</sup>

In conclusion, Benavidez writes,

In the Philippines alone, the majority of the Philippine people are below the poverty line. Because of this poverty, together with other social problems such as prostitution, drug addiction and corruption, the society is affected. We are living amidst of fear and social decay. What does our pentecostal belief offer to solve this problem? How can our faith be relevant to the people in the world? The church cannot afford to be apathetic when the world is suffering. The ministry of the Spirit is to control how the churches address the present socio-political and economic issues and Scripture must be recognized to provide the key principles and framework for this task.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 177.

#### 4.6.3. JOSEPH L. SUICO: PENTECOSTAL DOCTRINE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Joseph Rommel L. Suico, like Doreen Benavidez, may not be as well-known as other Western Pentecostal theologians. However, Suico's dissertation research project and his several published articles are extremely valuable for reconstructing contemporary Filipino Pentecostal theologies. In his dissertation research project, entitled "Institutional and Individualistic Dimensions of Transformational Development: The Case of Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines," he attempts to assess the validity of the prevailing perception of Pentecostals' lack of engagement in socio-economic and political issues that confront Philippine society.<sup>233</sup> Again, due to limited space the researcher will confine the discussion to chapter 2 of Suico's dissertation, "Pentecostal doctrine and transformational development".<sup>234</sup> First of all, Suico describes the context of his research project. He writes,

Pentecostalism in the Philippines has been interpreted mainly by outsiders who tend to ignore the context, particularly the socio-economic dimensions of its members. There is an obvious lack of knowledge and understanding of the significance of the Pentecostal experience especially its institutional relationship to society. Consequently, the attitude of other churches and communities is often marked by theological and cultural prejudices. It is therefore pertinent that formal studies are undertaken to assess the validity of the prevailing perception of Pentecostals' lack of involvement in socio-economic and political activities.<sup>235</sup>

Given this context, Suico has undertaken to assess the validity of the prevailing perception of Pentecostals' lack of involvement in socio-economic and political activities. However, for Suico, to engage adequately with the subject of Pentecostal

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<sup>233</sup> Joseph Rommel L. Suico, "Institutional and Individualistic Dimensions of Transformational Development: The Case of Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines," Ph.D. Diss. (University of Wales, May 2003).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-33.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

theology from a Pentecostal point of view requires that he discusses Pentecostal doctrine.

In chapter 2, Suico helpfully structures his research project. He divides it into two main sections. First, he presents Christian views of transformational development (TD) over against sociological views. Second, he examines Pentecostal doctrine in relation to transformation development. Following the Christian perspective, Suico argues, “Transformational development (DT) is actualising God’s vision of society in all relationships, social, economic and spiritual.”<sup>236</sup> He adds, “The objective is that God’s will may be reflected in human society and his love be experienced by all communities, especially the poor.”<sup>237</sup> Using the Christian model of transformational development, he contends, “The recovery of eschatology and the theology of the Kingdom of God was fundamental to the development of the notion of Transformation.”<sup>238</sup> He further argues, “TD also strives to enhance people’s awareness and ability to free themselves from the cultural, social, and spiritual bondage that causes them to remain in poverty, oppression and unjust relationships.”<sup>239</sup> Hence, Christians, especially Pentecostals, could profitably adopt this Christian model of development in order to have a holistic ministry. Suico concludes, “Transformational development emerges as a potential strategy for Pentecostals to engage in holistic ministry without losing their distinctive and strong focus on evangelism.”<sup>240</sup>

After recovering and establishing the Christian view of transformational development, Suico proceeds to Pentecostal doctrine. Pentecostal doctrine, Suico contends, “refers specifically to a ‘four-fold pattern’ (salvation, healing, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, second coming of Jesus Christ), which expresses

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 23.

the logic of Pentecostal convictions.”<sup>241</sup> Although baptism in the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion is the unifying belief among the divergent Pentecostal groups, he believes that the “four-fold pattern” is a broader way to define their beliefs.<sup>242</sup> Next, Suico provides an interesting parallel to his brief description of classical Pentecostal doctrine and the Pentecostal view of social concerns. To start with, he asks why Pentecostals have different perceptions on socio-economic and political issues. Suico summarizes his answer in five reasons;<sup>243</sup> *first*, due to different orientations on eschatology; *second*, their dualistic vision of the world; third, their reaction against the so-called “social gospel”; *fourth*, their aversion to the Roman Catholic Church due to extra-biblical teaching; *lastly*, mutual rejection “because Pentecostals rejected society because they believed it to be corrupt, wicked, hostile, and hopelessly lost, while society rejected the Pentecostals because it believed them to be insanely fanatical, self-righteous, doctrinally in error, and emotionally unstable.”<sup>244</sup> Suico gives some sympathetic criticism, but he also believes, “The Pentecostals in this study with their current emphasis on evangelism, relief, lay empowerment, strong presence among the poor are in good position to engage in a more directed effort at transformational development.”<sup>245</sup>

#### **4.7. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON FILIPINO PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIES**

As the present researcher mentioned previously, constructing a contextual Filipino Pentecostal theology is still an ongoing project among Filipino Pentecostal scholars, although the lack of Filipino Pentecostal scholarship limits the observation of current Pentecostal theologies. However, there are significant numbers of contemporary Asian Pentecostal scholars who are engaged in some self-criticism about the

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 23-31.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

inadequacy of their own efforts to confront the movement with demands regarding social issues.

#### **4.7.1. FILIPINO PENTECOSTALS HAVE THE TENDENCY TO WITHDRAW FROM POLITICAL-SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

In the article entitled “Doing Theology in the Philippines: The Case of Pentecostal Christianity,” Ma attempts to reconstruct the public theology for Filipino Pentecostals.<sup>246</sup> In doing so, he tries to adopt a multidisciplinary approach, seeking to reconstruct Filipino Pentecostalism. According to him, the bedrock doctrine of classical Filipino Pentecostalism is the “baptism in the Spirit,” often witnessed by speaking in other tongues, and this principal belief is anchored in Acts 2.<sup>247</sup> He further argues that, deeply rooted in classical Pentecostalism, most Filipino Pentecostals do not look for their legitimations outside their own faith narrative structure, neither do they believe that we should. However, Ma attempts to provoke and challenge Filipino Pentecostals to maximize their theological potential and to overcome many challenges inherited from the worldwide Pentecostal movement. He writes,

This reflection is written to help fellow Pentecostal-charismatic believers in the Philippines to become more aware of their theological potential inherited from the worldwide movement, and encourage and challenge them to be engaged in an intentional theological process. This will involve conscious awareness of the context where this theological tradition has been placed by God’s providence and the perspective to see this unique theological tradition in the context of the large Christian mandates.<sup>248</sup>

Most of the mainline Filipino Pentecostal/charismatic churches, Ma observes, tend to withdraw from political-social activities. Nonetheless, he also asserts, one of the

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<sup>246</sup> Wonsuk Ma, “Doing Theology in the Philippines: The Case of Pentecostal Christianity,” *Asian Journal for Pentecostal Studies*, 8:2 (2005), 215-233.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

potential characteristics of Pentecostalism is to empower the socially marginalized groups that can develop to make a positive contribution to society.<sup>249</sup> For instance, Ma argues that, challenged by the traditional Filipino Christian leadership, Filipino Pentecostals were able to democratize the ministry and empower the lay members to use their potential as agents of social change. He adds that there is also a possibility that Philippine Pentecostal Christianity may influence other Asian churches, particularly in the traditionally class- or male-dominated societies, through increasing missionary activities.<sup>250</sup> However, Asian Pentecostals, specifically Philippine Pentecostals, have their own flaws. For example, the mainline Philippine Pentecostal/charismatic churches focus mainly on the basics of prayer, fellowship, learning, evangelism, and church growth. Similarly, Benavidez describes, “Most of Filipino Pentecostals are only concerned with saving souls” over social responsibilities or social actions.<sup>251</sup>

#### **4.7.2. FILIPINO PENTECOSTALS TEND TO BE ANTI-INTELLECTUALIST**

Ma identifies another challenge: the mushrooming of independent Filipino Pentecostal/charismatic churches. According to him, these independent Pentecostal/charismatic churches are often led by Filipino Pentecostals with little or no proper theological training.<sup>252</sup> Under those circumstances, schisms among Filipino Pentecostal churches have become a scandal of Pentecostal Christianity in many parts of the Philippines and beyond.<sup>253</sup> For example, some of the Filipino Pentecostals are anti-intellectualist.<sup>254</sup> In the end, most anti-intellectual Filipino Pentecostals turn to

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Benavidez, “Pentecostalism and Social Responsibility,” 171.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> John Mansford Prior, “Jesus Christ the Way to the Father: The Challenge of the Pentecostals,” *Federation of Asian Bishop Conference Papers*, No. 99, 1-46.

<sup>254</sup> Wonsuk Ma, “Pentecostal Eschatology: What Happened When the Wave Hit the West End of the Ocean,” *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, edited by Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Robeck Jr., (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 229-244.

shamanism. A breakaway group from the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) is led by Apollo Quiboloy, who has proclaimed himself the Appointed Son of God.<sup>255</sup> Aside from this, Quiboloy is also politically and economically influential. In fact, he is one of the religious leaders that endorses the incumbent Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

#### **4.8. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, within Asian Pentecostal theological circles, the quest to contextualize Pentecostal theology in Asia inspired some young Filipino Pentecostal theologians to interpret and appropriate God's revelation intelligibly, culturally, and contemporarily in order to confront the dehumanized and oppressive conditions of many Filipino people. Like Chan, some Filipino and Asian Pentecostal theologians bring out the key role of individual lived experience as the subject in doing theology. Ma and Benavidez interpret and explain Jesus Christ as the one who identified with oppressive conditions, conditions under which most Filipino people live. They demonstrate the historical trends and antecedents relevant to Asian Pentecostal theology to show that Pentecostal theology is grounded in and connected to individual lived experience incorporated into the community of believers as a basis of theological reflection.

Furthermore, this chapter elucidates Filipino Pentecostalism as a complex phenomenon. Similar to Filipino liberation theologies, it clearly demonstrates that Filipino Pentecostal theology is an unfinished and ongoing project for Filipino Pentecostal theologians. On the one hand, like Chan, Filipino Pentecostal theologians argue for the key role of individual lived experience as the subject in doing theology. Contrary to Chan's general descriptions and claims, Filipino Pentecostal theology faces different challenges. For instance, Chan claims that Pentecostalism is more grassroots than the Asian liberation theology movement in Asia. Regarding Filipino

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<sup>255</sup> "See I am the Son of God". Accessed June 27, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUpp\\_UrnjFc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUpp_UrnjFc).

Pentecostals, however, this brings into question how Filipino Pentecostal theologies respond to Philippine reality. The answer is that Filipino Pentecostals have the tendency, firstly, to withdraw from political-social activities, secondly, to be anti-intellectualist. Thus, Chan's description of Asian Pentecostalism is not valid and appropriate in the context of Filipino Pentecostalism.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, the researcher will answer the sub-questions and then the main question that this thesis project started with.

To remind the reader, we will state the sub-questions again: *How do Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies respond to Philippine reality? What is Simon Chan's notion of grassroots Asian theology and does it provide means to go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies? And lastly, What could a grassroots Asian theological response to Philippine poverty look like?* These questions are central to this thesis project.

### 5.1. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS

Let us answer the first question, *How do Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies respond to Philippine reality?* For Suico, Pentecostals have always neglected socio-economic and political activities. Similarly, Benavidez indicates that most Filipino Pentecostals put greater emphasis on winning soul over social engagement. Similar to Suico, Ma makes the same observation and contrasts the Pentecostals to Filipino liberationists, especially the left-wing liberation movement. They put greater emphasis on social structural change, which would lead to ideological captivity of the Christian teaching.

Let us move on to the next question, *What is Simon Chan's notion of grassroots Asian theology and does it provide means to go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies?* In Chan's historical-critical analysis of contemporary Asian liberation and Pentecostal theologies, we saw that ecclesial experience takes centre stage. Firstly,

Chan's notion of ecclesial experience unmasks the weaknesses of some contemporary liberation theologies in Asia, specifically the left-wing Filipino liberation movement. This critical analysis is congruent with current critical evaluations by Filipino theologians (Mabalay, Pilario, De Mesa, and Tanguan). Chan clearly points out the tendency of some Filipino liberation theologies to be elitist, with an inability to incorporate grassroots logic or the ethnographic dimension (psycho-spiritual needs). However, Chan's sharp distinctions between grassroots (Pentecostals) and elitist Asian theology (liberation theologies) are inaccurate descriptions of the Philippine theological landscape. Chan fails to recognize the diversity of Filipino liberation theology. Historically speaking, the Filipino liberation theology movement arose from the grassroots movement and socio-political conditions. Filipino liberation theology emerged from the self-interpreting and self-defining moment of a local community working together to surmount social and political challenges. This raises the question: why does liberation theology remain relevant today in the Philippines? The answer is simple. As Sobrino states, "The origin, thrust, and direction of the theology of liberation is not in socialism, but in the experience of God in the poor, an experience of grace and exigency." In short, Filipino liberation theology arose from the Filipino poor and marginalized communities. In contrast, Suico observes the prevailing perception of Pentecostals' lack of engagement in socio-economic and political issues that confront the Philippines, especially poverty. As Benavidez describes, "Most of Filipino Pentecostals are only concerned with saving souls" over social responsibilities or social actions. Simply put, Filipino Pentecostals have the tendency to withdraw from political-social activities.

Secondly, ecclesial experience is always an ecclesial endeavor that requires cooperation between the people of God and theologians. Thus, Chan believes that true Christian theology comes from both laity and theologians and that without this cooperation theology is merely the imposition of the theologian's own ideas as propositional truths. However, Chan fails to recognize that liberation theology also puts great emphasis on the dialectical connection between the subject and the object of Christian theology. In short, both liberation and Pentecostal theologies acknowledge the key role of individual lived experience of the poor and destitute in

doing theology. Combining these sources will give us a more holistic approach to doing grassroots Asian theology. Therefore, Chan's description of Asian liberation theology as elitist is not accurate in the Philippine context.

Finally, the last question, *What could a grassroots Asian theological response to Philippine poverty look like?* The figure in chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework) illustrates a flexible and dynamic diagram that can be used to construct a grassroots Asian theology beyond Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies. This procedure will hopefully illuminate further the essential task of inculturating the Gospel message in a manner that is truly Christ-centered, nourished by the living biblical word of God, and authentically Filipino. The three double-headed arrows around the triangular model imply two things. First, God as third reality is not just an object-subject or static but also a conversation partner who speaks to us through His Word (2 Tim. 3: 16-17) and mediates between personal/cultural and ecclesial experience. Second, the double-headed arrow shows that three-way conversation is not one-way or two way-communication but three-way communication: from ecclesial experience to personal experience; from ecclesial experience to God as third reality through the Scriptures; from God through the Scriptures to ecclesial experience; from God as third reality who reveals Himself through the Scriptures to personal experience; from personal lived experience to God as third reality through the Scriptures.

## **5.2. ANSWERING THE MAIN QUESTION**

*Can Simon Chan's notion of 'grassroots Asian theology' help in constructing a Filipino Christian response to Philippine reality which will go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies?*

First, Chan should understand the subject and object of liberation theology. Although Chan's notion of grassroots Asian theology implies the key role of individual lived experience, he fails to recognize that liberation theology has the same understanding.

Chan strongly believes that the laity or the ordinary members of the church as the primary agents of doing theology are not separated from the community of believers. It is clear that in Chan's notion of ecclesial experience the subject of theology is the laity, who are incorporated into the community of believers. He argues that doing theology is essentially an ecclesial endeavor requiring cooperation between the laity and theologians. Likewise, Asian Pentecostal theologians like Ma and Benavidez argue that individual lived experience as the subject of theology is a key component of doing Pentecostal theology in Asia. Once again, liberation theology has the same approach to doing theology. For instance, Jon Sobrino argues that the poor and destitute are the subject of liberation theology. For liberationists like Sobrino and others, the poor or destitute are key to doing liberation theology. Like Chan, Sobrino recognizes the dialectical connection between the laity and God's revelation. However, Chan's description of Asian Pentecostalism as grassroots, in contrast to Asian liberation theology, is not accurate. In short, Chan fails to unpack the shorthand phrase "grassroots Asian theology" to offer a picture of how to go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies in the Philippines.

## ABSTRACT

Religion plays a highly significant role in shaping Filipinos' lives and worldviews. This being acknowledged, the need for a real grassroots theology becomes more urgent as we Filipinos search for a truly Filipino faith-based understanding of Philippine social problems. Apparently, liberation theologians have been preoccupied with social and political changes, while Pentecostal churches have been focused on numerical growth and church planting in the Southeast Asian region. This research project attempts to answer the following questions. How do Filipino liberation and Pentecostal theologies respond to Philippine social problems, specifically to poverty? What is Simon Chan's notion of grassroots Asian theology and does it provide means to go beyond Pentecostal and liberation theologies? And what could a grassroots Asian theological response to Philippine poverty look like? In short, this project endeavors to provide a viable and preferable alternative—a 'triangular conversation' with three participants: Filipino liberation theology and Filipino Pentecostalism conversing together about God, who reveals himself in the Scriptures. It is Jesus confessed as the Christ, it is the church which is not of, yet in, the world of today, which make the biblical God our primary goal in doing intercultural theology.

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