THE FILIPINO FACE OF CHRIST:
Ferdinand Angelo M. Alipis

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Church throughout the centuries has understood that its primary mission is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and His Good News. This is the central task of evangelization, a long-standing challenge to all local Churches; this is uniquely true of the Philippine Church which, along with East Timor, is the only Christian country in Asia.

Historically, Filipinos were evangelized five hundred years ago (PCP II 3). The acceptance of the faith for this span of time all the more warrants that the Church in the Philippines take responsibility in proclaiming Jesus Christ to the Asian continent. As the recent document Ecclesia in Asia (EA) notes, it is quite unfortunate and difficult to understand that Jesus is a stranger in most of Asia (EA 20d) although He was of Asian descent (EA 1a).

Inherent in the Church's duty of proclaiming Christ is the requisite task of theological reflection on the person, life, and mission of Jesus. This continuing process forms part of an endless effort to deeply
understand who Jesus is and what his significance is for all peoples in various contexts and situations. After accepting the faith for five centuries, it could be presumed that the Philippine Church must have had enough time to explore the mystery of who Jesus is in its effort to understand its faith. To articulate this understanding is a constant imperative.

Theological reflection on Jesus Christ has received impetus in various periods in the history of the Church. Jesuit Catalino G. Arévalo, who taught Christology at the Loyola School of Theology in Manila for many years, has noted a renewed interest in Christology in the last four decades (1960-2000). This is evidenced by the numerous books and articles published on the subject. This phenomenon is true on the global scale as well as in the local Philippine setting.

Situated in the Philippine context, Filipino and non-Filipino theologians based in the country have written about the person, life, and mission of Jesus and have had their works published in the country. There have been significant publications on Christology, both scholarly and popular. An initial survey of these many books and journal articles, which may be termed as “Filipino Christological literature,” shows clear proof of how serious Philippine scholars are in articulating a Filipino understanding of who Jesus is, an understanding that is firmly grounded in concrete Philippine realities. These Christological publications become an integral part of the strategy to spread the word about Jesus Christ. These publications are a witness to the faith made available to the Filipino people for five centuries.

In light of this background, one may validly assert that anyone interested in the study of the person, life, and mission of Jesus in the Philippine context has to be engaged with a significant amount of published materials on Filipino Christology.

---

1Catalino G. Arévalo, *Notes for Lectures: Seminar Workshop on Christology: Notes and Readings* (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 2001), 1.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Doing Christology basically involves answering Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:27). First addressed to Jesus’ disciples, the same question continues to be asked of Christians today. Having known and accepted Jesus Christ for five centuries, Filipinos might be in a better position to confront this question.

As a piece of theological literature, the New Testament contains many affirmations of who Jesus is. For example, the Gospel of Matthew records a confession about Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). Paul wrote of Jesus who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and suffered death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7ff). In a more metaphysical way, John viewed Jesus as the “Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14).

Contemporary theologians and scholars continue to address the same Christological question in the Philippine context. The richness of Philippine culture, the predominance of poverty with the yearning for liberation, the tension-filled socio-political situation, and the increasing complexity of Philippine life in this globalized era all prove to be rich and challenging grounds for intensified theological reflection which seeks answers to this mystery of Jesus. Evidence of interest in Christological investigation in the Philippine context is clear as witnessed to by a reasonable amount of literature on the topic. This manifests that theologians and pastoral agents in the Philippines are doing serious study of Jesus; they have as their goal the writing of a “Filipino Christology.”

Considering the bulk of literature generated on this subject matter, the current study aims to address this question: What are the central themes of Filipino Christological writing in the period from 1965 to the year 2000? This central question involves a thematic analysis²

²This thematic analysis is employed to identify certain factors relevant to doing Christology in the Philippines. The themes include dominant topics, context, resources, and characteristics of Filipino Christology.
of the Christological writings found in pertinent journal articles and books considered as primary sources in this study. Addressing these themes aims to unfold the concerns of the writers in relation to the person and function of Jesus.

This study also considers, to a lesser extent, these related questions:

1. What are the factors which contribute to the emergence of these Filipino Christological themes?
2. What are the resources employed in the development of Filipino Christological themes?
3. What characteristics of Filipino Christology do these Christological themes portray?

Filipino Christology (like all theological reflection) does not emerge out of a vacuum or outside a context. It emerges out of a milieu, a concrete Filipino situation, a crisis engulfing Philippine society, or a glorious moment for the Filipino nation.

As a systematic endeavor in a scholarly arena, theologians in the Philippines have relied on certain resources available to aid them in the process of theological reflection or Christological reflection. These resources may be concrete or abstract in character, may date back to the earliest period in the history of Christianity or simply be a contemporary phenomenon.

The question of Christological themes that provide a shape to Filipino Christology undergirds the concern to discover what characterizes Filipino Christology. The writers involved are Filipino or non-Filipino theologians based in the Philippines or persons writing with due consideration of the Philippine context.

**Scope and Limitations**

Taking into account the volume of published materials available and those considered as “Filipino Christological literature,” the following points serve to define the scope and limitations of this study:
1. The books and periodical articles considered in this study are those published in the Philippines. An initial survey shows that there are significant publications on the topic.

2. The books and periodical articles included in this research are those published in the English and Filipino language.

3. The books and periodical articles covered in this study are those authored by theologians, clergy, bishops, religious sisters, Church leaders, and lay people regardless of their educational background and nationality.

4. This study considers the writings of mainline, Christian authors regardless of their religious denomination. It is to be recognized that both Catholic and non-Catholic theologians have a significant contribution to the literature in this field.

5. The materials included in this study are those published from the years 1965 to 2000.

6. In determining what book or journal article to be included in the annotated bibliography, the main criterion for inclusion in this study is the Christological content of the document. A book or a journal article that deals with the person of Jesus or certain aspects of his life and ministry, in whole or in part, is considered relevant in this study.

7. There are books with a single author which are primarily Christological in content as all chapters deal with Jesus' person and other aspects of his life and work. In this particular case, each chapter is considered a single unit of document for annotating and indexing. The rationale for this approach is to achieve depth or exhaustiveness in annotating and indexing. Depth or exhaustiveness is important and crucial as it allows for the Christological themes to surface in the process. It is to be noted that one document may deal with one Christological theme and others may deal with multiple themes. In terms of the annotation, a 100-word annotation may not do justice to a 200-page book with several chapters. Hence, each chapter is considered a single unit for abstracting.
8. There are books, be it by a single author or a collection of essays by various authors, which contain just a chapter or two which deals with a Christological theme. In this particular case, only pertinent chapters are considered for inclusion in this study.

9. An individual Christological article in a journal is considered a single unit of document subject to annotation, indexing, and inclusion in the bibliography.

10. A good number of materials included in this study comes from newspapers and magazines. As newspapers primarily contain news items, they also publish columns and feature articles. For example, a Sunday issue of a newspaper may contain a column or a special feature which can be a reflection on Sunday readings, a homily, or a meditation on a certain theme. For as long as they have Christological value or deal with a Christological theme, they are included in this study. A magazine issue at certain times of the year, especially during the seasons of Lent, Holy Week or Christmas, may publish special articles which are Christological in nature. These articles are considered relevant and included in this study.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is rooted, first and foremost, in the spirit and desire of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) “to take stock of where we are” as a Church in the Philippines. Having heard of the Good News of Jesus Christ and accepted the faith in Him for five centuries, the Church in the Philippines, says the Council, needs “to take stock of where we are” as far as this faith in Jesus Christ in concerned considering its various expressions and articulations (PCP II 7).

The “taking stock” involves looking back at the historical past, the period before the coming of the Spanish missionaries. During this
period, the Philippines, though not known then as such, had a culture, civilization, and history of its own which to a great extent blended with the religious upbringing and formation of the first Filipino Christians in the Spanish era. The encounter of the pre-hispanic Philippines with the preaching of the Spanish friars left a permanent mark on Filipino religiosity and influenced the molding of Filipino theology in general and Filipino Christology in particular.

Secondly, PCP II expressed a Christological statement manifesting its Christological orientation when it said that "we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, sent by the Father out of love for us so that we might have life through Him" (PCP II 37). This statement is a confession of faith consistent with its pastoral thrust of Church renewal rooted in Christ.

This study dwells on the task of PCP II "to take stock of where we are"; it views Christological affirmations as significant points of departure for this study providing focus in this theological enterprise. Surveying and identifying the available materials, referred to in this study as "Filipino Christological literature," is a serious attempt at taking stock.

Thirdly, PCP II also mentioned the retelling of the story of Jesus. Filipino Christological literature is an attempt at narrating this story. More than just a retelling of the story, this study considers the significance of Filipino Christological literature as an affirmation of the Christological faith inscribed in the documents of the 1991 Council.

In addition, as noted earlier (cf. Statement of the Problem), this study investigates and shows the significance of three distinct issues:

1. It shall describe the factors which contribute to the emergence of Filipino Christological themes.
2. It shall identify the resources employed in the development of Filipino Christological themes.
3. It shall relate how these Christological themes manifest the characteristics of Filipino Christology.
In a more technical manner, this study demonstrates how skills in librarianship and research can be concretely applied to theological study.

**Methodology**

The presentation of the unique methodology employed in this research paper begins with a descriptive clarification of the five basic aspects of the study. These items are: (a) research design, (b) data collection, (c) the abstracting process, (d) assignment of subject or topical headings, and (e) data analysis.

**Research Design**

It has already been noted that this research attempts to investigate the central themes of recent Filipino Christological publications. An examination is made as to the context out of which Filipino Christological themes emerge. The resources employed by the authors in the course of their writing are identified in this study. Inquiry is also made as to how these themes characterize Filipino Christology.

Considering the nature of the research questions, this study is primarily descriptive in nature. Issues of themes, contexts, resources, and characteristics can best be approached by a descriptive study categorized under the qualitative research tradition.

Qualitative research generates categories, themes, and patterns. This notion of qualitative research can be closely identified with the nature of the research questions in this study.

Due to their helpful and appropriate nature, basic quantitative techniques are also employed in this study, especially in keeping track

---

of the major, recurring themes which frequently appear in Filipino Christological writing. To determine and identify the major themes, a simple frequency tabulation is considered applicable in this study.

**Data Collection**

Data collection in this study entails the identification of books and relevant articles in journals, newspapers and magazines with due consideration of the criteria as defined in the scope and limitations of this study. It involves a documentary survey of published books and articles on Filipino Christology.

The basic unit of data in this study can be a single book, a single article, or a single chapter of a book taken as a single unit of document.

**The Abstracting Process**

The abstracting process\(^4\) involves the preliminary step of identifying the raw data or basic documentation in this study. The raw data includes journal articles, books, or chapters of books taken as a single unit of data.

The raw data will be organized into an annotated bibliography where each bibliographical entry is accompanied by an annotation in the form of an abstract and the index term/s representing the subject/s or topic/s of each article, book, or chapter of a book. The accompanying annotation is in the form of an abstract which can either be an indicative abstract, an informative abstract, or a combination of both.

---

The abstracting process begins with the accurate and full recording of the bibliographic information about the book or journal article. The bibliographic data includes the title, the author, publication source, year of publication, number of pages, and other information necessary and prescribed in standard bibliographic entries.

The next and most crucial step of the abstracting process is the content analysis of the journal article, book, or chapter of a book, a process necessary in both abstracting and indexing. The abstractor narrates what the document is all about, expressing the author's ideas in his own words. The important points or themes of a document are identified, though not all points or ideas in a document need to be taken up in the abstract. Due consideration is given to the potential users of the abstract, taking note of the information they would need or find useful. Abstracts serve as representations of an article or a book such that when a researcher reads the abstract, one can determine its usefulness and decide whether to retrieve the original document that may be helpful or necessary for a particular study.

Content analysis keeps track of the objective and scope of the document, the key ideas presented and the conclusions made by the author. The main concern of content analysis is to discover the "aboutness" of a particular piece of literature. As an aid to investigation, the abstractor may note the title of the document as it may provide initial information about it. The text itself is read by the abstractor and on this basis he outlines the subject content of the document. Section headings of an article or chapter may also give additional information and provide useful data about the subject content of a document. All possible means available to the abstractor are employed and all key features of the document are examined as part of content analysis.

Finally, the actual abstract is written. At this point, the abstractor highlights the significant points of a document, including the general view of the key ideas, concepts, affirmations, and negations in a document. Outlining the contents of a document helps in writing the abstract. The outline may highlight the major topics in a document with an occasional inclusion of minor points. The abstract is usually around 60-100 words.
Assignment of Subject/Topical Headings

Aside from the abstract that forms part of the data in this study, each article is assigned a key word or key words that serve as a subject heading for the document. If an abstract is a narrative representation of a document, a subject heading is its topical representation. The same process of content analysis is undertaken to determine the subject content of a document. Consequently, a key word or index term is assigned to represent its contents. The key words are adapted from standard, controlled vocabulary such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings List as adapted by other major indexing bodies like the American Theological Library Association and the Catholic Library Association which publishes the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index.

Data Analysis

The data dealt with in descriptive, qualitative research are primarily textual in nature. In this particular study, the data for analysis are documents in the form of books, journal articles, or an individual chapter of a book including their annotations and subject headings.

Analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. The main analytical approach for this study is content analysis on the level of individual documents. Based on the research problems presented in the Statement of the Problem, the basic descriptive units are the central themes, the contexts, the resources, and the characteristics of Filipino Christology.

As each document is being analyzed, dominant themes, ideas, and concepts are noted down and related to each problematic, to each question this study attempts to answer. Focus is attained in content analysis by a constant use of the research questions during the analytical process which will be presented in chapter III of this study.

---

For the dominant, recurring themes to be determined more accurately, this study adopts the frequency distribution matrix, a basic statistical tool to account for the number of times a theme emerges in the whole bulk of literature included in this study.

In addition to the material regarding key procedures followed in this investigation, this study, entitled "The Filipino Face Of Christ: An Annotated Bibliography and Thematic Analysis of Christological Literature in the Philippines, 1965-2000," will follow a clear structure. The Introduction features the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the scope and limitations, the significance of the study, the methodology, definition of terms, and the review of related literature.

Part I presents a panoramic view of "Filipino Christological Literature" in terms of major sources and the libraries in which these sources can be located.

Part II is the annotated bibliography proper, the data which forms the core content of this study is presented here. It is a lengthy section.

Part III is the analytical section of this study. The analysis and interpretation of data dwell on the major thematic concerns in Filipino Christological literature. They are as follows: (1) central themes, (2) context, (3) resources employed, and (4) characteristics.

Part IV presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations in this theological enterprise.

**Definition of Terms**

*Abstract:* An abstract is a concise and accurate representation of the contents of a document, in a style similar to that of the original document.⁶

*Annotated Bibliography:* This is a list of citations of books, articles,

---

and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (about 60-100 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.\(^7\)

*Annotation:* This is a note added to an entry in a catalogue, reading list, or bibliography, to elucidate, evaluate, or describe the subject or contents of a book or article.\(^8\)

**Filipino Christological Literature:** As used in this study, this term refers to published or unpublished materials the contents of which include a Filipino articulation or interpretation of the person, life, and ministry of Jesus. It may be written by mainline Filipino or non-Filipino authors and is published in the Philippines.

**Christology:** This is the theological interpretation of Jesus Christ, clarifying systematically who and what he is in himself and his significance for those who believe in him.\(^9\)

*Content Analysis:* This is research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts.\(^10\)

**Descriptive Study:** As opposed to statistical study, this is an approach to research which deals with qualitative, documentary, non-numerical data and which primarily generates categories, themes, and patterns.

**Indicative Abstract:** This is a type of abstract which discloses that significant information and specific data can be found in a document.\(^11\)


\(^10\)[http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/content/pop2a.cfm](http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/content/pop2a.cfm), accessed on June 30, 2002.

\(^11\)Cleveland and Cleveland, *Introduction to Indexing and Abstracting,* 56.
Informatiue Abstract: This is a type of abstract which presents the specific data.12

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Annotated bibliographies have been published in the past on various subjects. This study considers annotated bibliographies on specific topics in theology and related fields of study. The manner in which they were organized has provided ideas for a possible structure to be adapted in this study. The following annotated bibliographies were consulted in this study:


12Cleveland and Cleveland, Introduction to Indexing and Abstracting, 57.
The annotated bibliographies mentioned present a systematic organization of bibliographic citations with their accompanying annotation. This particular study goes beyond the systematic presentation of the annotated bibliography. An analytic process is undertaken to provide a synthesis and to show how the literature is organized as an annotated bibliography of Filipino Christological literature which portrays a picture of Jesus Christ in the Philippine setting.

This effort and documentation aims to serve the process of Christological theological reflection and its concomitant pastoral-catechetical service in the local Church of the Philippines at the dawn of the Third Millennium.