

Exposing Hypocrisy: Rizal's Critique of the Philippine Religious Culture and Bulatao's Split-level Christianity

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Abstract: Filipinos are known for being emotional to the extreme when it comes to their respective religions. During times when Filipinos are in a disconsolate state, they conjure religious beliefs out of their own form and manner to alleviate their impoverished situation. Filipinos have developed devotions to the Virgin Mary depending on the nature of their desires and aspirations. They have also organized town fiestas, not to mention long procession walks, in honor of different saints and patrons. In this paper I will relate Friedrich Nietzsche's famous expression "God is dead" to the Philippine religious culture. God is dead because we have killed Him through the dis-values we have created out of being so called "believers" in God. The Filipino religious culture is in a state of nihilism, taken in a pejorative sense, whenever it uses God as a shield for self-interest and protection. This makes for what Jaime Bulatao describes as our "split-level Christianity," countless examples of which can be found in Dr. Jose Rizal's great novels and other writings. Graft and corruption, crimes, and human rights violations are just some of the problems of our society that belie our vaunted religiosity. How can we relate these problems of Filipino religiosity to the works of Nietzsche who is critical of the traditions and beliefs that tend to make humans weak? Here we can see the root of the hypocrisy of the Filipino people when it comes to religion.

Keywords: Filipino Religious Culture, God is Dead, Nihilism and Value

This paper focuses on the religious culture of the Philippines, from its history up to the present. Moreover, the works of the Filipino intellectual, Jose Rizal, will be used here in order to know the history of the Philippine religious culture. Not only the work of Rizal pertaining to history will be used in this research, but also his novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) and his minor writings such as: "La Vision Fray Rodriguez" (The Vision of Friar Rodriguez), "My Young Countrywomen of Malolos", "Por Telefono" (By Telephone), "Annotations to Morga's 1609

Philippine History", "Filipinas dentro de Cien Anos" (The Philippines a Century Hence), and "La Indolencia de los Filipinos" (The Indolence of the Filipino). Albeit compiled only in one book entitled *The Religious Thought of Jose Rizal* by Eugene Hessel, these works are the product of Rizal's religious thought as he battled against the Spanish hegemony during his time. The researcher will not only discuss the history of Philippine religious culture, but he will also take up its present situation, including its problem called *hypocrisy*.

Historical context is necessary in this research in order to see the foundation of the Philippine religious culture, for the Filipinos' beliefs and values are the product of the historical development of its religious culture. Rizal's religious thought is significant in the discussion of the Philippine religious culture, for he already saw the problems of it during his time. Rizal was right in singling out the abuses and problems brought about by the religion taught by the Spanish religious leaders who influenced the contemporary Filipinos to be such hypocrites.

History of the Philippine Religious Culture

In discussing the history of Philippine religious culture, the researcher will use the book *Nationalism and Christianity in the Philippines* of Richard Deats¹ to explain the history of the country's predominant religion, Roman Catholicism, and its cultural outcome.

Christianity came to the Philippines in the 16th century. The Spaniards travelled around the world to extend their empire, and it was then, in 1521, that the group of Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Philippines by accident. The Spaniards established their empire here in the Philippines, and their main strategy in convincing the Filipinos was through Christianity. Filipinos were converted to Christianity, mainly Roman Catholicism, by the Spaniards. If their purpose was to convert the whole of Asia, they must have failed to do so because they triumphed only in the Philippines. Converting the Filipinos was easy for the Spaniards; they easily baptized several Filipinos around the archipelago before they united the people from the different islands as Christians. The Filipino people opened their minds to nationalism and then formed their own government system; this is how they invented the "barangay." This unifying process,

obviously so necessary in the building of a nation, was further aided by Catholicism and a common moral code spread over the islands. Since the Filipinos were already converted to Hispanic Catholicism, they now also adopted its dogmas, and a common moral standard began to be established throughout the colony. The conversion of the Filipinos to Catholicism brought other cultural contributions to the Philippines such as education, agriculture, schools, hospitals, and orphanages. All this would not have happened without the help of the Roman Catholic Church. The authorities of the church were the ones who were involved in the development of the Philippines. According to the Filipino historian, Gregorio Zaide, "The church exercised religious, political and judicial functions. Its religious functions were those pertaining to the propagation and preservation of the Christian religion."²

Since the Spanish friars had the authority all over the Philippines, the church had gained not only power but also wealth. This was when the Filipinos had problems with the Catholic Church. The friars collected money from the Filipinos, and used manual labor to build churches, monasteries and parish houses as a donation to the church. The greed and hypocrisy of the Spanish authorities during this time were thereby experienced by the Filipinos, which caused them to organize an uprising. The Filipino revolution became even more intense when the Spaniards killed the three martyr priests who became famous as GomBurZa. At that moment, feeling ready to confront the oppressive colonizers, the Filipinos formed a revolutionary movement and fought for their freedom.

To sum it up, this brief historical background is intended to see the problems and abuses by the Spaniards when the Christian religion was brought to the Philippines. These problems

and abuses will now be further discussed using Dr. Jose Rizal's criticism of religion and its culture as taught by the Spaniards, leading to the hypocrisy of the Filipinos.

The Religious Thought of Dr. Jose Rizal

Dr. Jose Rizal was an educated Filipino who was a keen observer of the condition of the Filipinos in their country during his time. He saw the problems of the Spanish hegemony in the Philippines – and the main weapon of the Spaniards is religion. Rizal criticizes the abusive power and hypocrisy of the Spanish authorities. Rizal is very critical about religion; his religious thoughts are found in his writings, and perhaps this is his major theme.

Noli Me Tangere is not just a novel, but it is written primarily to expose the ills of the Philippines.³ In the preface of the novel he said that:

The story of human sufferings records a cancer of such malignant character that the slightest contact irritates it and stirs up therein the most acute pains. Now then: whenever in the midst of modern civilizations I wished to evoke thee, either to cherish thy remembrances or to compare thee with other countries, thy beloved image appeared before me with a similar social cancer. For this purpose, I shall try faithfully to reproduce thy condition without fear or favour.⁴

Moreover, Rizal wished the Philippines "health," albeit he leaves the possible remedy to others:

In search of the best treatment, I shall do for thee what the ancients did for their sick: they exposed them on the steps of the temple, in order that every person who had just invoked the Divinity might propose a remedy for them.⁵

Rizal argues that these ills of the country were religious in nature, related to and rooted in the agencies of the church which, during his time, was a significant agency of the clever Spanish

authorities. In February 1890, writing to Vicente Barrantes in reply to a criticism of the novel, Rizal says:

However poor my style may be, it has served my purpose... it has struck the head of the two-faced Goliath which in the Philippines is called friar-rule and evil administration.⁶

The view of Rizal in this novel is descriptive of this religion imposed by the Spaniards as a false religion. He is clearly opposed to the religious practices and beliefs which, he believes, are evil and false. The preface to the novel refers vividly to the ills of the country.

The characters in the novel speak for Rizal's battlecry. The old philosopher Tasio and the boatman Elias are the ones whom Rizal used to state his religious views and show sympathy for his ill country. He clarified his opinion about these characters in a letter to Barrantes:

Yes, Sir, you are right; the *Noli Me Tangere* is a satire and not a panegyric. I confess that I found delight in exposing so many shameful and disgraceful acts, but *by painting their pictures with blood of my heart, my purpose was to correct them, and save other people.* Quioquiap, with whom you, Sir, compare me, has depicted the native customs to insult and despise a whole race, to make fun of them and laugh at their misfortune, generalizing all that is bad and abject without any exception. But I pictured the good and evil things. I portrayed Elias and Tasio, for Eliases and Tasios exist, exist, and exist, though you, Sir, may not like it; however, you and your colleagues, fearing that these few excellent characters whom I portrayed might serve as examples to the wicked and redeem them, shout that the picture is false, poetic, exaggerated, ideal, impossible, unreal, etc., and you admit only the existence of the bad characters so the people may be degraded and humiliated.⁷

It is clear that Rizal speaks through his characters and his views regarding religion are confirmed by the fact that the list of evils that he mentioned in a letter to his friend Hidalgo is

similar to the evils which the character of Elias described in a long conversation with Ibarra, who is the chief character of the novel. As we compare the two, let us first see the letter to Hidalgo; the words of Elias will then follow. In his letter, Rizal said:

I have unmasked *hypocrisy* which, under the guise of religion, came to impoverish and to brutalize us; I have distinguished true religion from the false, from *superstition*, from *that which traffics with the holy word to extract money*, to make us believe in sortileges, of which Catholicism would be ashamed if it were aware of them.⁸

In the letter, Rizal mentioned the three religious evils, namely, hypocrisy, superstition, and commercialism in religion. Now, as in the latter, Elias said:

“Do you call faith these *outward forms*? Do you call religion this *traffic in girdles and scapularies*, truth these *miracles and wonderful tales* that we hear daily? Is this the law of Jesus Christ? For this it was hardly necessary that a God should allow Himself to be crucified or that we should be obliged to show external gratitude. *Superstition* existed long before – it was only necessary to systematize it and *raise the price of its merchandise!*”⁹

We can see the similarity of the two texts as they both pertain to the three religious evils. The second and third evils as stated by Rizal in his letter are obviously similar to those stated by Elias. The hypocrisy in Rizal’s letter is clearly the “outward forms” of Elias, which Rizal interprets as the “external practices” of religion, namely, friar orders, rituals, and sacramentals.

These three evils, according to Rizal, all participate in one nature, which consists in the abuses of religion. The major theme of this novel exposes these religious abuses, which Rizal keeps on battling throughout the book. However, with the exception of these abuses of religion, Rizal’s view did not come from his mouth *per se*; rather, his radical views are found

in the mouth of one of the characters in the novel, the “philosopher” Tasio. Similarly, in one of the chapters, Elias describes his radical views as a product of “Free Thought.”¹⁰ There are several assumptions why Rizal put it in this way:¹¹ (1) In some cases Rizal may only be “mirroring” the culture of his time; there were “Free-thinkers” in the Philippines, and their views may be set forth without necessarily identifying himself with them; (2) Rizal’s own views are to be found in the narrative portion of the novel; (3) Rizal may be implying an actual sympathy for the more radical views of Tasio and Elias in view of the fact that both are portrayed as likeable men; (4) Rizal actually believes as do Tasio and Elias but he is protecting himself from criticism by using them as his voice, for admittedly these characters as portrayed are somewhat eccentric, standing outside the church, and they might be expected to express strange views; and, (5) finally, like Ibarra, the chief character of the novel, Rizal may himself have been still making up his mind; therefore, the most unorthodox views are brought in only cautiously through characters who themselves are treated as unorthodox. The final judgment cannot be made on the basis of this novel.¹²

To sum it up, the story of the novel *per se* is about the condemnation of hypocrisy in religion. For Rizal, religion must be true above all else, i.e. true in the sense that it is grounded in reality and is rational. What are irrational are the superstitious beliefs, i.e. the beliefs in magic, or whatever is contrary to scientific knowledge, whatever is not true. Rizal believes that ‘truth’ is attained within the harmony of faith and practice. There is no room for the external practices of religion. What is true is that man must obey his moral behaviour and so the One he worships.

Minor Writings and the Annotations to Morga's *Historical Events of the Philippine Islands*

We all know that Jose Rizal had written two famous novels, namely: *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) and *El Filibusterismo* (Filibusterism), which are also his longest works. In addition, Rizal wrote several articles regarding Spain's occupation in the Philippines. There are six articles of Rizal that are significant for his religious thoughts, namely: "La Vision Fray Rodriguez" (The Vision of Friar Rodriguez), "My Young Countrywomen of Malolos", "Por Telefono" (By Telephone), "Annotations to Morga's 1609 Philippine History", "Filipinas dentro de Cien Anos" (The Philippines a Century Hence), and "La Indolencia de los Filipinos" (The Indolence of the Filipino). These articles, aside from his novels, will be used to explain the religious thought of Rizal in this chapter.

"La Vision Fray Rodriguez" (The Vision of Friar Rodriguez) was written in London, but then published in Barcelona, Spain in 1889. This article is a satirical treatment of the abuses and false doctrines of the friars. Augustine, who was in the vision of Friar Rodriguez one night, makes suitable criticisms of the different abuses and false doctrines and also makes a number of statements pertaining to the nature of Christianity.¹³ Secondly, "My Young Countrywomen of Malolos" is an "open letter" which was also written in 1889. This second article is about the achievement of the women of the town of Malolos and their courage to create a night-school against the wishes of the friar priests. Rizal encourages the women to continue with what they have started, to guard their freedom and to educate themselves in order to know the truth through the use of their reason – which God gave to every man. Third, "Por Telefono" (By Telephone), was written in

Paris in the same year. This article is about the making of the first telephone connection between Spain and the Philippines so that the people in Spain would be aware of what the friars are doing to the Filipinos. The fourth article is the "Annotations to Morga's 1609 Philippine History." This work is quite different but it shares the same purpose, namely, to awaken the Filipinos to a knowledge of the real condition under which they lived, a situation which could be better understood if they knew the past as well as the present.¹⁴ Antonio de Morga, who was the Spanish governor, published a history of the Philippines entitled *Sucesos de Las Islas Filipinas* (Events of the Philippine Islands). Rizal re-published this in 1890 with annotations.¹⁵ Rizal argues that the pre-Hispanic Filipinos had enjoyed a civilization, and that some of their knowledge and skills were lost because of the Spanish hegemony. Moreover, Rizal said that the first friars had also their faults; their abusive power forced the natives to convert to Christianity. Penultimately, the article "Filipinas dentro de Cien Anos" (The Philippines a Century Hence) was written as a part of a section of the *La Solidaridad* published in the year 1890. This article is about the evils of his own time, the abuses of the Spanish hegemony. Rizal said that a revolution would happen if Spain would remain the same. The last of the six articles is "La Indolencia de los Filipinos" (The Indolence of the Filipinos), which also appeared in the *La Solidaridad*. It explained the indolence of many Filipinos, at the same time serving as an indictment of Spain's colonial system which had caused and encouraged such a shortcoming. Rizal admits the fact of the indolence of the Filipinos.¹⁶

Given this introduction to Rizal's minor writings, we can now consider the religious thought of Rizal, beginning with the evils of the friar, which are, according to him, a form of

religious hypocrisy.¹⁷ Rizal expected that the Christian leaders will be the teachers and the examples of what Christianity means; however, Rizal saw the impurity of these leaders. Moreover, this religious hypocrisy was prevalent not only during Rizal's time, but also among the early missionaries, who had mixed behaviour during the evangelization of the early Filipinos, not to mention that their desires were focused mainly on wealth and hegemony.¹⁸ Rizal wrote about this in his annotations to Morga's history.¹⁹ Given the list of abuses of the friars in the annotations, he further said that the friars disregarded the development and potentialities of the Filipinos, and that, instead of being the teachers of the Filipinos, they discouraged and belittled each Filipino who tried to learn, teaching them things that had no practical value at all.²⁰

For Rizal, the friars disregarded the sacredness of the human person and were thus guilty of both intemperance and laziness. Rizal condemned the ignorance of the friars. He condemned the contemporary Augustinians as those who had not even read the writings of Augustine himself. He accused them of misquoting the Scripture, and of not really understanding the Latin which they quoted. He also criticized the friars for wasting their time on things that cannot be proved – such as the “purgatory.” The preaching of the friars, he said, only wasted the time of the listeners because it failed to preach about the needs of the listeners; it only dealt with negative subjects such as “future punishments” or, “with shoutings and gesticulations,” presented such external matters as “novenas, rosaries, scapularies, images, miracles, candles, belts, etc.”²¹

The reason for the friars not treating their listeners right is because they saw it as a condemnation of their pride and a kind of

disrespect. Rizal said, using Augustine: “Has your haughtiness come to such a pitch that not only do you pretend that you are feared and loved by governors and governed alike, but that you neither recognize nor respect me.”²² Rizal said that the pride of the friar was not only for self-glorification and arrogance in relation to others. Also, his criticism of the friars is that they are untrue and fraudulent, lacking any faith in God. Again, using the mouth of Augustine, Rizal said: “[P]erhaps you doubt his existence and only use his name to promote your ends.” These ends are – the desire for wealth and hegemony.²³ For Rizal, this clearly reveals the friar's hypocrisy – that they preach not for God, but only for their personal gains.²⁴ Rizal is talking about “financial gain.” The friar invents practices, even the “purgatory,” for the people to give money.²⁵

Rizal said that the practices which the church considered religious have no relevance for true religion. Such practices include: image worship; the use of religious objects such as candles, holy water, incense, rosaries, and scapularies; meaningless use of prayers; working of miracles, making the sign of the cross and kissing the hands of the priest; wasteful giving of money to the church; careless confession; and even such practices so integral to Catholic doctrine as the Mass and the granting of indulgences.²⁶ There are two bases for Rizal's criticism of these practices: first, that many of these practices are merely schemes for making money. And second, that they lack spiritual effectiveness, i.e. there are many so-called “religious” practices that are just externals and have no meaningful relationship to the life of man. There is another criticism which we can consider as a third basis, and this is that the practices of the Roman Catholics are too costly for a poor man to bear; they are expensive except for anyone who is willing to pay for such magical practices so as to cure a disease or bring some fortune, whose

result they are unable to accomplish by any natural means. Thus, the fourth criticism of Rizal is that some religious practices are superstitious.²⁷ He said that many of the external religious practices are wasteful of time, talent, and intelligence.²⁸ Moreover, for him, such practices are one of the main causes of the indolence of the Filipinos.²⁹

Thus, Rizal exposed the abuses of religion which he found present during his day. These abuses, he said, came from two causes: from the friars and from the external religious practices. In these criticisms of Rizal, we can see his religious thoughts; moreover, we can see what is false in the nature of true religion. There are five criteria by which we can know what a true religion is: (1) True religion must be genuine, sincere. The trappings of religion and the name religious must never be allowed to become a false front. (2) True religion has no ulterior motives. It is concerned with the worship of God and with the welfare of men. (3) True religion must conform to the truth of reason. Both one's beliefs and practices should square with the knowledge which may be gained by one's God-given intelligence. (4) The nature of true religion may be observed – in fact, is probably best revealed – not by the use of external forms and rites but rather by purity of intention and deed. (5) True religion is living according to the teachings and example of Jesus. Right-living is the fruit of religion.³⁰ Rizal believes in the life after death.³¹ True religion, then, follows the religion of Jesus, i.e. to have respect for God, hope for life after death, and pure living.³²

Given these religious thoughts of Jose Rizal, we still do not have the evidence that goes with a true religion. In this case, it is also important to discuss the view of Rizal on: the relationship of revelation and reason, the nature and destiny of

man, God, Jesus Christ, the church, eschatology, and ethics.

Relationship of Revelation and Reason

There are only few statements in Rizal's works about the relationship of reason and religion. Also, there is no source pertaining to the religious truth; neither revelation nor reason is the only source of truth. However, every religious doctrine and practice should be tested by reason. Rizal's view uses Augustine:

Know that he does not need the money of the poor, and that to worship him it is not necessary to light candles and burn incense, to say masses or believe blindly what others say, especially when what they say runs counter to reason.³³

We can see here that reason is used as an aid in determining religious truth, for God himself is a God of truth.³⁴ Moreover, God as a God of truth has given man the light of reason in order to know the truth.³⁵ However, Rizal said that our reasons have also its limitations. It is thus erroneous for the friars to say that they know everything about God, and this is the argument of Rizal.

God

Let us now take a look at Rizal's view of God. In "The Vision of Friar Rodriguez," Rizal dealt about the nature and attributes of God. In the article, he said that he allows God to give a long description about himself. This long description is described through the character of Augustine, who said that God had talked to him.³⁶ Following the explanation of what God had said to him, he gave his own view:

Know that there is One God... who will some day call you to account for all your iniquities. Know that he does not need the money of the poor, and that to worship him it is not necessary to light candles and burn incense. He is self-sufficient. God needs no one. He created man,

not for him but for man himself. He is happy for all eternity."³⁷

For Rizal, God is the Creator of all and controls all, for there is nothing that can remain apart from his existence and none that can oppose him. Moreso, Rizal's view of God and His relationship to man is also found in some of his articles, like the "Indolence of the Filipinos." Here he said that man must trust greatly in God, but also that one should do what he can do in order to fix his problems. Rizal's sympathy for the Filipino who has been taught to believe in miracles, trusting in masses and prayers in times of drought, in exorcisms to cure his cattle, and in processions to drive away the locusts - all this leads him to comment:³⁸

It is well, undoubtedly, to trust greatly in God; but it is better to do what one can and not trouble the Creator every moment, even when these appeals redound to the benefit of His ministers. We have noticed that the countries which believe most in miracles are the laziest, just as spoiled children are the most ill-mannered. Whether they believe in miracles to palliate their laziness or they are lazy because they believe in miracles, we cannot say; but the fact is the Filipinos were much less lazy before the word miracle was introduced into their language.³⁹

Authentic relationship produces trust in God and does not cause one to be lazy and believe in miracles. Our purpose is to live – and that is to live with God. We must trust God for He is the Creator.

Man and His Destiny

Rizal wrote also on the destiny of man. He said in his writings that man is made in God's image and that God endowed man with intelligence and free will. He elaborated this in his letter to the young women of Malolos:

God has endowed each person with reason and a will of his or her own, and that reason enables

its possessor to distinguish what is just from what is unjust. All of us were born free, unshackled, and nobody has the right to subjugate the will and the spirit of another.⁴⁰

Man is possessed of innate dignity and this must be respected at all times. All men are thus equal, and no one should be stepping into one's dignity. This intelligence endowed by God, according to Rizal, must be used to attain happiness and perfection, not only of the self but for the common good.⁴¹ Furthermore, Rizal said that man's ultimate goal is to raise himself to God. This theological thought of Rizal is understood in this significant passage:

He created intelligence, not to enslave it, but in order that on its wings man may be happy and strive to soar to Him. He needs no one, he created man, not for Him, but for man himself, He did not need nor does he need him: He is happy from Eternity.⁴²

This helps us in determining what Rizal means. He criticized the friars for blinding the obedience of the people and insisting that worship consists of lighting candles, burning incense, saying masses, etc. But Rizal said that God is "self-sufficient," in connection to the passage above. God shares his attributes with man. Thus, said Rizal, man is the true master of his own fate.

Jesus Christ

Rizal considered Jesus Christ as the teacher of "pure religion" or "true doctrine."⁴³ There are two passages regarding his death. First, Christ's death is interpreted to have "sealed and broadcast his teachings."

[A] cross on Calvary and a just man nailed thereon changed the ethics of half the human race. The death of the just sanctified his work and made his teaching unanswerable.⁴⁴

Secondly, Christ had been crucified so that man might not fear death but be sure of resurrection,

but no clear indication is given of how Christ's death effects the removal of man's fear.⁴⁵

The Church

Rizal is opposed to whatever views of the church permit the domination of one's life. This domination means the hegemony of the State for the purpose of controlling the people; moreover, as Rizal would term it, the church seeks a direct totalitarian control over the people. Rizal views the church as an institution which should be free from power motives and political involvements. Moreover, a true church must free itself from its external practices. The criticism of Rizal is mainly focused on the ceremonials of the church – such as the Mass. However, he acknowledged that the Mass is the most important sacrament of the Catholic Church. Thus, it is only the powers and privileges of the priests that are here being challenged. Here are two quotations from the letter to the young women of Malolos:

It is presumptuous for a man to constitute himself into an idol and pretend to know the thoughts of God.⁴⁶

The second one is about Rizal referring to the women he has known in the past who had an "admixture of servility to and full acquiescence in the words or whims of the so-called 'spiritual fathers'." Rizal desires to lay aside the Sacrament of Penance, for repentance is already the primary requirement for the forgiveness of sins.

[E]ven if all the rags on earth were converted into scapularies and all the trees in the forests into rosaries, and even the skins of all the beats were transformed into belts, and sights of the Cross were made all the priests on earth mumbled prayers and sprinkled oceans of holy water, still all this would not purify a rogue or forgive his sin if he himself did not repent.⁴⁷

Rizal argues that repentance is not enough to set over against Penance, but it is dependent upon such devotional practices like the use of the rosary and holy water and the making of the sign of the cross. However, the point is not upon a sacrament but upon the attitude and behaviour of the sinner in contrast to the formal prayers of a priest.⁴⁸

Eschatology

Rizal was against the concept of purgatory. He argued that there are only two places for the soul and there is no third place. Moreover, he opposed the belief of the Roman Catholicism that there are souls not sufficiently guilty to be condemned and not pure enough to enter the Kingdom of God, thus there must be an alternative place for these souls. Rizal said that it is impossible for man to demand mere human perfection.⁴⁹

Ethics

Rizal said that purity, honesty, sincerity, self-control, industry, and respect for the dignity of man are shown not only in doing no harm to others but also in the willingness to help, by evolutionary and revolutionary methods, achieve social change. The important matter is placed upon the life of Jesus as an ethical norm, so that ethical behaviour becomes grounded in one's respect for God.⁵⁰

The Present Religious Culture of the Philippines and its Problems

In the first part of this paper the researcher discussed the history of the Philippine religious culture and its problems as observed and seen by Dr. Jose Rizal. The second part will discuss the outcome of this religious culture from the time of Rizal to the present, together with its problems which are perhaps rooted in the past religious culture of the Filipinos. In this part,

the researcher will use Fr. Jaime Bulatao's *Split-Level Christianity* in order to see the current problems of the Filipino religious culture.

The behaviour of the people is seen in the presence of society, authority figures, and the occasional breakthrough of one's spontaneous self. As we express it in the Filipino way "*Lumalabas ang katotohanan*" (The truth will out). Moreover, the type of behaviour that the Filipinos have is connected to the story of the history of the Western hegemony into the native tongue of the early Filipinos. To put it in other words, behaviour is conditioned by formal schooling and by home influences, as provided by one's native tongue. There are two sets of behavior that compose what may be termed as "split-level Christianity." The Philippines is a good example of the split-level Christianity for the behaviour of the Filipinos came from two sets of behavior: from the hegemony and Christianization by the West, and from its native tongue.⁵¹

Split-level Christianity means the co-existence of two or more thought and behaviour systems within the same person which are inconsistent with each other. In this case, a split-level person is one who, at one level, professes allegiance to ideas, attitudes and ways of behaving which are mainly borrowed from the Christian West, but who, at another level, holds convictions which are more properly his "own" ways of living and believing which were handed down from his ancestors, which do not always find their way into an explicit philosophical system, but nevertheless now and then flow into action.⁵² There are many examples that can be shown and considered as split-leveling. Here are two examples:

A group of alumni, sixteen years after graduating from a Catholic high school, meet together one evening at a private home for a class reunion. Present at their reunion are two priests, their

former teachers. The evening passes pleasantly, amid fond recollections of school days. At about 10:30 p.m. an offer is made to send the two priests by car back at their school. After the two priests leave, the group transfers to Pasay to a certain nightclub of ill repute. Almost everyone goes along and a number end up with prostitutes. There is much joking about the fact that their wives think them to be "safe" in a class reunion.⁵³

The incident is about the allegiance to the school and to its authority figures. On the other hand, the allegiance to what the culture considers appropriate for men includes the right to do things when they are away from their wives. This second part of the principles is accepted as a part of *talagang ganyan*, which is considered as part of "reality."⁵⁴

Another example is that of a foreign priest stepping into a public bus. A woman makes room for him to seat beside her. Not long after, the nasty comments in their own language circulate on the bus. The priest is not affected, for he did not know the language. The split here is, on the one hand, the external reverence for the priest, and, on the other hand, the negative attitude towards him.

The following second set of principles is reduced to a "human weakness," "*ako'y tao lamang*." However, split-level Christianity is a different phenomenon from human weakness which presupposes an allegiance to only one set of principles, and simultaneously a temptation to diverge from those principles.⁵⁵ Thus, human weakness still engages in a sense of guilt a discomfort on oneself for loss of truthfulness. Yet, there is no sense of guilt in split-leveling, and if there is, it is only minimal. There is a conviction in oneself that there is nothing wrong in the things that have been done, while something is to be shielded from society's gaze so that defecation or urination is not wrong.⁵⁶ There is an example of this fitness in a case

study given by Dr. Jocano regarding the drinking habit of the Christians of Malitbok in the province of Aklan, where they look on drinking as an “adult game,” a thing which adults do after work. Indeed, drinking is necessary for work.

The parishioner said to the pastor that those “vices” may seem, in the case of an educated man, wrong. However, for the people in Malitbog, those “vices” are not vices and not bad as an educated man like the pastor would describe it. Drinking is part of being a grown-up. When they were young, they were prohibited to drink *tuba* or any liquor, for these are the drinks of the adults. But now that they are adults, they do not see a reason why they should not drink it. Practically, it is a part of compensation when it comes to work. Further, he said that if drinking is bad, then it should be prohibited by the government; now that there is no prohibition, then it is not bad. In this case, we can see the conviction that drinking, even though conflicting with the Christian teaching, is somehow right.⁵⁷

We can see that both systems are right. Albeit there is inconsistency, it is not felt keenly. That is why the Christians of Malitbog believes in spirits and *enkantus*, as well as witch doctors who have a special power. In this case, we can see two theological systems existing within one man, and that is the Christian and the pagan.⁵⁸

The conviction of the fitness of each of the two inconsistent thought-behaviour systems therefore is one characteristic of the split-level type of Christianity. Moreover, another characteristic is that this inconsistency per se is either not perceived at all or pushed at the rear portions of consciousness, so it tends to be taken for granted and “forgotten.” The inconsistency thus does not occur, and also there is no feeling of hypocrisy. There is no

particular drive on how to reconcile both systems. It is then left to co-exist without disturbance and guilt.⁵⁹

However, there are special cases in this case, in which the unconscious becomes conscious. This pertains to the educated class, who are aware of inconsistency between the philosophical system and the actuality of life. However, they use their superior awareness to manipulate their environment. These are the politicians, who used to be seen at churches receiving communion, while at the same time they force businessmen to give money to them in order for their business not to be ruined. This is a kind of hypocrisy among the Filipino leaders.⁶⁰

There are also some cases where inconsistency remains unconscious or semi-conscious, and the only possible upset is when the authority should “discover” the existence of the split. If this happens, there will be an arousing of *hiya* or shame, so that this catastrophe must be avoided at all costs. A need to keep the authority figure at a distance is the third characteristic of the split-level, accordingly.⁶¹

This *hiya* or shame is a kind of defense mechanism of an individual in removing the self as far as possible from the person in authority. It is because one might be blamed and criticized for doing the other level and this is thus equivalent to hypocrisy. Most of the time, authority figures are avoided by others. The best example is that of the two priests who were sent home early by their former students in order for them to be able to go to a night club. More so, the drinkers in Malitbog try to restrain the pastor from interfering in their lives. In the account of Dr. Jocano, the people in Malitbog show the difference the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. They prefer Roman Catholicism because the Protestant church has

many church activities that demand so much time; moreover, they have many restrictions and they cannot keep up. On the other hand, Roman Catholicism does not have many restrictions. The Catholic priest lets you alone and gives you freedom to do what you like. He does not visit his people often and teach the do's and don'ts. This is unlike the pastor who keeps on visiting the people's houses and calls your attention to whatever you do. In this account, one can see the difference between the Catholic church and the Protestant church, and one chooses the former because the priest is at a distance from the people – especially to those who loves drinking *tuba*.⁶²

This distance-making is preferred by one who is afraid to be embarrassed by the authority such as the priest or pastor for his/her split-leveling. However, the priests also distance themselves from the people, for the purpose of ascetic and moral “reasons.” Distance is the socially accepted thing, and is the actual social effect whether the conscious reason is “reverence for priests,” “self-protection,” “prayer,” or anything else.⁶³

Given this situation and study of the split-levels, it is important to know the source of its content. There are two sources of the splitting of the levels. The first source is the Christian part whose rules and beliefs are picked up from schools and church, conceptualized and verbalized from various languages, and learned through the catechism or from books. Another source is the environment which dictates the rules, beliefs, attitudes and actions which are picked up at home and the street. This is not verbalized, but it acts as a sort of unspoken philosophy, continually flowing into action when the forces who restrain are removed. That is why in Malitbog, people believe that drinking is an adult game and they drink when

work is done in the evening, and also as long as the priest is at a distance from them.

There is a reason why the two levels are not felt and remain unconscious. It is because of the nature of the first level, which is the Christian part, which is too ideal. It works merely in the realm of symbols, and not in actuality. Thus, one has the feeling of unrealism. One example is that of the priest who has fixed teachings in his mind and he utters the same when having a ceremony because it is a matter of obligation, and not because of the condition of things. If one side remains on the level of concept, then the problem is not felt, and it will remain unconscious. Another reason for remaining unconscious is that the culture lacks role models and examples. Without these role models society takes the split for granted. It will thus remain unconscious if we take this split for granted and if we do not have role models who will actualize the teachings that are too ideal.⁶⁴

The two levels are separate because their settings are not the same. The first level is the behaviour learned in the school setting and on the other level is the behaviour learned in a street and home setting. If these two settings remain different, then the responses will be according to their own setting. In other words, the setting of the Christian authority is different from the setting of the home and street. The main cause of this split-level is the distance. The responses of two different levels become the split-level of an individual because the distance between the first level, namely, the authority figure setting, and the home and street setting do not respond to each other.⁶⁵

There are two distances that make the Christian authority apart from the masses and that is the reason why split-level happens to an individual. The first distance is the intellectual distance. The priest is brought up to a conceptual system

of philosophy and theology that came from the 13th century Europe. He is thus inclined to concepts like God, Being etc. But he has lost contact with the modern arts and empirical sciences. Clerics have also learned the foreign languages necessary for their vocabulary. However, these languages and concepts are far away from the understanding of the masses who do not get what they are teaching. Another distance of the church authorities is their emotional distance due to their isolation from their family. They lack emotional experiences to identify with non-relatives and successfully “take their role”, and that is why he has to maintain emotional distance from them. These two distances are responsible for this phenomenon as in the example given above of the behaviour shown towards the priest on a bus. The foreign priest is unconscious of the behaviour of the people inside the bus. The culture which the priest has rejected in turn rejects him.⁶⁶ From the culture setting, the priest is foreign and is thus not one of the people inside the bus. He is not a member of the “*kami*.” Thus the attitude towards him is ambivalence; one must please him and placate him and at the same time one must find some way to be oneself, to express one’s real drives and needs. One puts him at a distance so that one can lead his life freely without interference.⁶⁷

In this case, there is a homeostatic balance in the society which keeps the split-level going. In this case, keeping a distance from the Christian authority tends to bring about the failure of Christianity to pervade the masses. On the other hand, the failure of Christianity to pervade the masses results in the pushing away of the Christian authority. In other words, the authority pushes away the “sinful” masses away from him, and in turn the masses push away the authority and so remain sinful or pagan. There is a gap between this pagan mutual pushing

away of each other, a gap which reflects in the social area the split-level which is found in the individual.⁶⁸

The problem with this distance and split-leveling has to do with the method of instruction of the authority. The distance is between the teacher and the students. The teacher is brought up on a foreign, abstract set of concepts, and thus he lacks experiential knowledge. The problem is that he uses these abstract concepts in experienced reality, and he encourages his students to learn these by memorizing. Moreover, since the students have not experienced these concepts in their own culture, the concepts for them degenerate into mere words, to be memorized in order just to please the teacher. In addition, because the teachers distance themselves from their students, they do not experience their students’ culture and that they have difficulty in translating the concepts into terms that could be meaningful to their students. They cannot therefore hold dialogue with them; they can only impose their authority.⁶⁹

Thus, split-levels appear in the mind of the student, whose concepts and words are interesting but lacking in that explosive power which is a driving force of one’s own culture. Thus, it becomes possible to hold certain truths in the abstract, and at the same time think and do things that are inconsistent with these abstract principles.⁷⁰ An example is when the students have learned in class that bribery is wrong, then after class pay the policeman a bill to be let off a speeding charge. Thus, what is needed is some inner process of growth by which a man can reject principles which he really believes to be stupid or on the other hand subject his thinking and behaviour to principles which he really sees to be valid.⁷¹

Split-leveling can be seen in the way Filipinos learn to handle the two opposing pressures of two different values. This remains unconscious because of the educational system which rarely forces the individual to think out his two systems. The problem is that the teachers only want fixed answers and get back what they expect from him.⁷²

In summary, the researcher has discussed the history of the Philippine religious culture, together with its culture and its problems. With the religious thought of Dr. Jose Rizal, the researcher was able to discuss the problems of hypocrisy and the abuses of the Spanish religious authority. After which, the researcher then proceed to discussing the present problems of the Philippine religious culture. The researcher was able to discuss the problems of the Philippine religious culture starting from its root up to the present situation.

¹ Richard Deats, *Nationalism and Christianity in the Philippines* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press), 2002.

² Ibid., p.19

³ Eugene Hessel, *The Religious Thought of Jose Rizal* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983), p.10.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 14.

¹³ Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵ Moreover, the explanation is found in the prologue. See Austin Craig, *Rizal's Life and Minor Writings*, (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1947), p. 310.

¹⁶ Rizal said: "We must confess that indolence does actually and positively exist... only that, instead of holding it to be the cause of the backwardness and the trouble, we regard it as the effect of the trouble and the

backwardness, by fostering the development of a lamentable predisposition."

¹⁷ In the character of Rizal's Augustine in "The Vision of Friar Rodriguez," he applied these words of Christ to the friars: "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁹ See "Annotations to Morga's History" in Craig, p. 321.

²⁰ See "The Indolence of the Filipino" in Craig p. 298, for further explanations about the destruction of self-esteem of the Filipinos that made the people inactive and, thus, did not develop themselves.

²¹ Ibid., p. 92.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 93.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See "The Indolence of the Filipino" in Craig, p. 350, for the explanation of Rizal.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

³¹ As he said, using Augustine, in "The Vision of Friar Rodriguez", "Here is the summary of Christian faith: to hope for a true life after death."

³² Ibid., p. 99.

³³ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁴ "God, too, will help us scatter the mist of ignorance since he is God of truth."

³⁵ "He wants us to use and let shine the light of reason with which he has so mercifully endowed us."

³⁶ This is a long description and thus a long quote. See Juan Collas, *Rizal's Unknown Writings* (Manila, 1953) in the section of "The Vision of Friar Rodriguez," p. 18.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 106.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 2.

- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid. p. 3
- 55 Ibid. p. 5
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid. p. 6.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid., p. 7.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid., p. 8.
- 63 Ibid., p. 9.
- 64 Ibid. p. 10
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid. p. 13
- 70 Ibid.
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