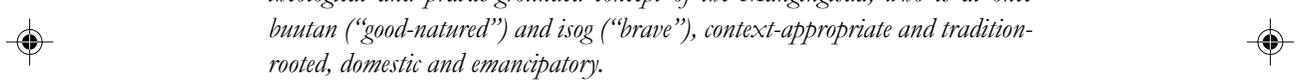




JESUS AS MANGINGISDA IN THE SHALLOW WATERS OF GLOBALIZATION¹

Levy Lara Lanaria

While globalization is a boon to the elite in terms of wealth security and social capability, its neo-liberal model of development has all but left the poor fisherfolk struggling to live a decent standard of living while vulnerable to capability deprivation. Against the backdrop of the post-colonial view of globalization, the essay engages Hesus Mangingisda (“Jesus the Fisherman”) of a Visayan fisherfolk community in mutually enriching conversation with the gospel Jesus of prophetic pedigree. The launching pad is the Christological title accorded by the fisherfolk themselves to Jesus the Christ based on their contrast-experience of kalisod sa panginabuhian (“difficulty in eking out a living”) and gawasnong panginabuhian (“freedom in eking out a living”). The ultimate objective is to evolve a socio-theological and praxis-grounded concept of the Mangingisda, who is at once buantan (“good-natured”) and isog (“brave”), context-appropriate and tradition-rooted, domestic and emancipatory.



RATIONALE

Faith-expressions are cultural in their contextual provenance.² To bring theologizing and theology closer to home of ordinary people’s problems, issues and concerns it must start precisely from within their cultural or sub-cultural world in conversation with other ‘worlds’ as contextual propriety and fidelity to faith-tradition so warrant. Since experiences are heterogeneous and changing across time and cultures then doing contextual theology is a continual enterprise in and for

¹ This paper came out of a doing Christology research conducted by the author in the fishing village of Calero, Liloan, Province of Cebu in November 2012 to March 2013. The formal study was done under the auspices of the University of San Carlos Office of Research for which the author is grateful.

² Stephen Bevans, “Cultural Expressions of our Faith: Church Teachings and Pastoral Responses,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 1 (1985): 1-17.



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every local church. In fact, throughout history “theology . . . has articulated faith in different thought forms, images, and linguistic expressions”³ with the caveat that every conceptual expression “is no more than an inadequate attempt to express analogically the mystery of God and Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:18) in different language games.”⁴ In the Christological front throughout the centuries, “(t)he question ‘Who really was Jesus’ has produced a bewildering variety of answers.”⁵

The way the believers understand Jesus is significantly shaped by their experiences and aspirations for a better life. Roger Haight reaffirms a basic assumption of the principle of inculturation that the basis of Christology is soteriology.⁶ Soteriology, thus, precedes Christology although one presupposes the other. A common example is the Latin America’s theology of liberation which projects Jesus as the Liberator, even political revolutionary. This makes sense in a socio-economic-political context which is marked by structural injustice and widespread poverty (salvation from) and, thus, runs contrary to the collective dreams and aspirations of its inhabitants for a better quality of life (salvation for). The fairly recent book *The Asian Jesus* by the Indian Jesuit Michael Amaladoss projects Jesus in many different ways rooted in blessed contextual diversity, a characteristic of the Asian continent.⁷ A theological library probably has in its shelf another recently published work *The Jesus of Asian Women* by a Protestant female theologian writing from the multi-cultural perspectives of women.⁸ All the Christological titles, whether

³ These are the words of Elizabeth Johnson, a Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University in New York (<http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/johnson-letter-us-bishops-doctrine-committee>, accessed August 23, 2012).

⁴ Georg Evers, “The Magisterium and Asian Theologians,” in *Theology and Magisterium*, ed. Susan A. Ross and Felix Wilfred, *Concilium* 2 (London: SCM Press, 2012), 36.

⁵ J.R. Porter, *The Jesus of History, The Christ of Faith* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 1999), 6.

⁶ Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), xii.

⁷ Michael Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006).

⁸ Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women: Women from the Margins* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2006).

they are found in the Bible or they evolved in post-New Testament times, were drawn from different language contexts here on earth.

Having taken note of the above, I do not mean to imply that a local context is indifferent to the wider world. In this highly globalized era of connectivity or disconnect and accessibility or exclusion – and this will even inexorably heighten – no geographical and temporal space is beyond the reach and influence of globalization for better or for worse. Doing Filipino theology today thus is contextually inadequate unless done within the larger horizon of globalization.

A major assumption of my study is that today's doing local theology project is a beneficiary of the post-colonial advocacy to democratize theorizing and giving-meaning. Post-colonial thought system directs our attention to testify to "inequities in modes of representation between the West and the non-West," thus, "a methodological revisionism that enables a wholesale critique of Western structure of knowledge and power since the Enlightenment."⁹ It can be said that the post-colonial theory bolsters the principle of inculturation in particular or contextual theologizing in general. This is so since the latter offers room for local churches to craft their own theologies grounded in their respective contexts thus breaking free from centuries-old Western hegemony of theological discourse.¹⁰

Given the above backdrop my paper is an attempt to engage the fisherfolk's image of Jesus as *Mangingisda* or *Mananagat* (both translated as "fisherman") in enriching conversation with the Jesus of the gospels.

⁹ Wong Wai Ching, "Postcolonialism," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 169 in 169-170. The post-colonial perspective has found its way in the field of biblical hermeneutics. A groundbreaking work is R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ It is ironic that "Jesus was born, lived, preached and died in Asia. Yet he is often seen as a Westerner. By historical circumstances Christianity spread more toward the West than the East. That area coincided with the extent of the Roman Empire influenced by Greek culture and the Roman political and legal system." Some may view this providential but "this development cannot be used to impose Greco-Roman culture as normative for all Christians everywhere (*Amalodoss, The Asian Jesus*, 1).

INTRODUCING JESUS AS *MANGINGISDA*
 (“FISHERMAN”) BY AND OF THE FISHERFOLK

My paper takes off from a ‘cultural’ Jesus re-imaged by the fisherfolk of a semi-coastal barangay named Calero, which is part of the town of Liloan, Cebu Province in the Visayas. The village is located at the north-eastern part of the province and is situated along the seacoast 57 kilometers from Cebu City.¹¹ The study guided the participants to come up with a Christological title that they deem most appropriate for their cultural-historical situation – a Christ-Savior who would bring them from their actual experience of negativity (their common problems and woes) to the existential-aspirational condition of positivity (the life-giving elements in their experiences and their dreams) for a better life.¹² The fisherfolk agreed on the indigenous title *Mangingisda* (“Fisherman”), its root-word being *isda* (“fish”). The prefix *mangingi-* denotes a condition or a customary activity one engages himself in. A synonym of *Mangingisda* is *Mananagat*. The native word *mananagat* is derived from the root-word *dagat*, literally “sea,” hence in English is rendered as “seafarer” or “seaman.” Both foreign translations include those formally hired as personnel in a commercial boat/ship, domestic/interisland or foreign. In the specific context of the study and in its formal and casual usage, *mananagat* is essentially the same as *mangingisda*, hence employed interchangeably.

¹¹ The research participants are members of a local fishing organization called PaKaMa (*Pakigbisog sa Kabus nga Mananagat*, in English, “Struggle of the Poor Fisherfolk to Assert”).¹¹ PaKaMa was legally established in 2006 with the aim of protecting and promoting the members’ dignity and rights as fisherfolk. The word “struggle” as a contextual rendition of *pakigbisog* implies a conflictive situation and connotes fighting or being socially engaged/involved for a cause.

¹² The research is indebted to Jose de Mesa’s doing Christology method. See de Mesa, *Following the Way of the Disciples: A Guidebook for Doing Christology in a Cultural Context* (Philippines: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1996); idem, *Why Theology Is Never Far From Home* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2003), 112-195. For an inclusive survey of the various methods of contextual theologizing see Stephen Bevans’ *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Manila: Logos Publications, 2003), 88-102.

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Prior to the re-imagining moment, the fisherfolk summed up their negative experiences as *Kalisod sa Panginabuhian* or “difficulty in eking out a living”. When asked to capsulize their good experiences, dreams and aspirations for the community in one word or phrase, the consensus was

Actual Situation of Negativity	Desired Situation of Positivity	Title Given to Jesus Christ
KALISUD SA PANGINABUHIAN ("Difficulty in Eking Out a Living")	GAWASNONG PANGINABUHIAN ("Freedom in Eking Out a Living")	HESUS ANG MANGINGISDA ("Jesus the Fisherman")

Gawasnong Panginabuhian (“freedom in eking out a living”). *Gawasnong panginabuhian* represents the people’s localized notion of salvation rooted in their shared aspirations. The Christological title *Mangingisda* (“fisherman”) was elected precisely because they belong to a fishing community. Since Jesus Christ identifies himself with what they are or who they are as a community, the fisherfolk hope he could facilitate, so to say, their journey from *kalisud sa panginabuhian* (“difficulty in eking out a living”) to *gawasnong panginabuhian* (“freedom in eking out a living”). Since he saves persons and communities in their actual historical and cultural situation, then for the fisherfolk salvation is an ongoing struggle to journey from the earlier mentioned condition of negativity (“sin”) to the condition of positivity (“grace”).

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Earlier on I brought to the fore the imperative of connecting local theologizing to the wider world of globalization. This is so since globalization is an ‘in-here’ phenomenon sparing no nook and corner on earth. Anthony Giddens has keenly perceived its ubiquitous presence which intrudes even into the personal and familial.¹³ Other signs are there as can be found in villages, near or far, all over the country: mobile phones, computers, laptops, computer café to name some of the more common. Whether we like it or not, globalization is here to stay even if the people do not understand what it is all about.¹⁴

To be sure, globalization is a complex phenomenon and movement which has many faces seen on multiple levels of social life: political, socio-cultural, military, technological, economic, and the environmental. The popular description by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye is helpful: globalization as the increase in networks of interdependence among people at multicontinental distances.¹⁵ The believers and apologists consider it as a world-unifier aimed at promoting the common good of all. It is an international system proffering itself as the only viable alternative available to economic and social life, the way to happiness and the attainment of fuller humanity of mankind.¹⁶ Concretely this is being done by

¹³ Giddens writes: “It is wrong to think of globalisation as just concerning the big systems, like the world financial order. [I]t isn’t only about what is ‘out there’, remote and faraway from the individual. It is an ‘in here’ phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives. The debate about family values, for example, that is going on in many countries might seem far removed from globalizing influences. It isn’t” [Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 30].

¹⁴ In one of my interviews with the fisherfolk, no one understands what globalization is all about while only one or two admitted globalization is *lisud sabton* (“difficult to comprehend”).

¹⁵ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, “Globalization: What’s New? What’s Not? (And So What?),” *Foreign Policy* (Spring, 2000): 104-119.

¹⁶ Tissa Balasuriya, “Globalization,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 91.



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transnationalizing capital and standardizing and homogenizing consumer tastes. Others take a more calculating and cautious approach: globalization has created tension between “lexus” (the system as such) and “olive tree” (culture, geography, tradition, and community) or ideally both depending on peoples’ actual experience of it.¹⁷ Still others view it with distrust and do not find it as a credible global system of effecting equity/equality and justice. Some do not view it as an inevitable or irreversible reality, however they know how powerfully organized TNCs, the wealthy nations, the World Bank/International Monetary Fund/World Trade Organization collusion, with the collaboration of the willing local elite.

Tissa Balasuriya’s critical view of globalization *from the margins* is useful for the present article as it represents a post-colonial assessment of the phenomenon. The theologian-social activist concedes that theoretically globalization is not that bad.¹⁸ But from the lens of the Third World it is commonly identified with “a new development model of a globally integrated economy,” though multi-strand, is directed towards incorporating “all peoples into a single world unit of production, consumption, trade and investment, information flow, and culture.” It imposes itself as “the only viable alternative available to economic and social life.” Just as forthrightly he asserts in no uncertain terms that “[w]hile the system benefits the rich and powerful, it has adverse consequences on the majority poor of the Third World.”¹⁹ He exposes the logic and the actual dynamics of the global system:

The real movers and beneficiaries of the process are in fact the global transnational corporations (TNCs) that control the greater share of the production, trade, finance, transportation, insurance, and communications media in the world. In dire need of foreign investments, the local governments of debtor countries are constrained to offer incentives to the TNCs, which may include guarantees for foreign capital, cheap labor, adequate infrastructures, and

¹⁷ See Thomas L. Freedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

¹⁸ Balasuriya, “Globalization,” 91.

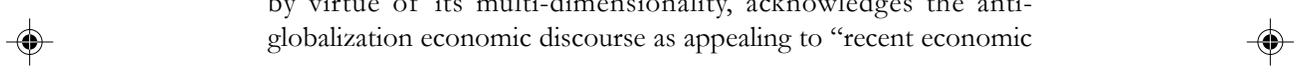
¹⁹ Balasuriya, “Globalization,” 91.



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flexible labor and environmental laws, often at great social cost to the debtor country. In many Third World countries, national planning has been replaced by corporate strategic planning under the aegis of the TNCs, aided by the Washington-based World Bank and IMF.²⁰

Balasuriya echoes the critical view of former colonies in the Third World that globalization is “a form of recolonization that does not require military intervention.” All that the governments of developing countries have to do to maintain the system is to bank on the support of the local elite, who, themselves, are driven by self-interest to survive in power.²¹ The late Sri Lankan theologian’s strong anti-globalization language finds resonance in the fisherfolk’s explicated *kalisud sa panginabubian* (“difficulty in eking out a living”) as they have found themselves pushed, so to say, to the shallow waters of globalization. David Hollenbach, Professor of Theology and director of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, who does not reduce globalization to the simply economic by virtue of its multi-dimensionality, acknowledges the anti-globalization economic discourse as appealing to “recent economic



²⁰ Balasuriya, “Globalization,” 91-92.

²¹ Balasuriya, “Globalization,” 93. R.S. Sugirtharajah explains that today’s globalization “is not something that happened suddenly. Its roots go back to colonial history and it is a legacy of European colonialism and modernity.” He continues: “Recently, the flow has been from West to the rest of the world. Previously it was the other way around. It was Europe which was assimilating Arabic science and technology and Indian mathematics, and consuming goods from China. Like most of the cultural forces of our time, globalization manifests itself in a variety of ways – economically, politically, and culturally – and all of these evolved over several centuries of European imperialism. In some ways, what the present globalization does, following the demise of the old colonialism, is to intensify the power relations in a more acute manner. **The crucial difference between the old colonialism and the current globalization is the unrivaled grip of the United States** on the world economy through military and foreign policies, its financial and mercantile corporations, and its hold on world culture through its massive media outputs – television, film, and publishing” (R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Charting the Aftermath: A review of Postcolonial Criticism,” in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006], 20-21).



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developments that have been accompanied by both increased poverty and increased inequality in developing countries. . . .”²²

Balasuriya’s view makes sense as well in a country that has embraced globalization’s neo-liberal model of development with its World Bank-imposed structural program beginning in the early 80s purportedly to strengthen the economy’s capacity to service its massive external debt. A noted Filipino social scientist-intellectual has claimed that “(i)t was during the Aquino (Cory, mine) period that neoliberal economics started its rise to ideological ascendancy.”²³ Economic and political imbalances, however, have not been effectively addressed with bold structural reforms up until the presidency of his son.²⁴

Today it is inadequate to speak about poverty merely in economic terms. Dominador Bombongan contends that the conceptual framework of social exclusion is a more appropriate way to speak of poverty in the context of the interconnected world of neo-liberal globalization.²⁵ The term “social exclusion” was first coined by French theorist Rene Lenoir, who has highlighted the historical disregard of others. He points out that an individual can only be excluded in comparison to other members in society. As the term evolved it expanded to include groups that were prevented from participation in society due to different factors like low income. This is capability deprivation, a situation where the range of choices of those in the periphery of development is severely limited.

Amartya Sen defines “capability” as “the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. [It] is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another...to choose from possible

²² David Hollenbach, “Globalization, Solidarity, and Justice,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 43, no. 1 (2006): 23-24.

²³ Walden Bello, “Neo-liberalism as Hegemonic Ideology in the Philippines: Rise, Apogee, and Crisis,” <http://focusweb.org/node/1534>, accessed October 4, 2014.

²⁴ The redeeming grace to his leadership is his zero record of personal corruption and assigning a good number of morally credible people in the government bureaucracy to help stamp out graft and corruption.

²⁵ Dominador Bombongan, “Social Exclusion: The New Name of Poverty?,” *Hapag* 5, nos. 1-2 (2008): 9 in 9-34. See Jesus’ society’s version of social exclusion in C.S. Song, *Jesus & the Reign of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 114-129.



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livings.”²⁶ Both monetary and capability approaches however, may be reduced to the attitudinal (as characteristic of an individual), or being assessed by some external criteria absent the participation of the poor, or a limited temporal focus on situations and outcomes. The social exclusion approach serves as a corrective of the individualistic and narrow evaluative approach. This “is an approach to poverty that makes the social dimensions of poverty (structural characteristics of society and situations of groups) its central focus. Moreover, it seeks to name the underlying causes and processes (rather than a mere description of material conditions of poverty) that lead to poverty or deprivation.”²⁷

The intertwining of economic poverty and capability deprivation is illustrated in an actual experience of the fisherfolk. In the 1980s a local wealthy businessman was able to construct a port for docking of yachts and small ship maintenance in the southern side of the coastal village of Calero. This threatened further their fishing livelihood. The port owner circumvented the legal procedure mandating community consultation and approval by tricking the fishermen into signing a paper all written in English they never understood, which, later on, turned out to be a proof used by the capitalist to evidence community approval of the privately-owned, profit-oriented project. The signing was preceded by sweet promises of job opportunity for many in their fishing village. So far, only less than 10 percent, maybe around 5 percent, have been hired by the company, according to my key informants. The capitalist did not encounter opposition since, at that time, the fisherfolk were not yet united and organized. Lately the company, I was told by a group of *PaKaMA* (“Pakigbisug sa Kabus na Mananagat,” or “Struggle of the Poor Fisherfolk to Assert”) officers in an interview I had with them sometime in May 2013, has expanded its land area of operations from a few hectares to several hectares of land.

Another capitalist privately-owned company had actually built a small port for the same purpose way back in the 70s in their place

²⁶ Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, 40 cited in Caterina Ruggerin Laderchi, Ruhi Saith and Frances Steward, “Does it matter that we Don’t Agree,” 14 -15 in Bombongan, “Social Exclusion,” 4.

²⁷ Bombongan, “Social Exclusion,” 13.

on a lease-contract with then local government. The project took off but it was not sustained. In the 1990s the Cebu-based company re-applied for a lease for the continued construction and improvement of the port, which is called, Marina Station. By this time the fisherfolk had already organized themselves into *PaKaMa*, and when they got to know of the plan, they made their presence felt and voices heard during the consultation processes. They foresaw their geographical world and wider access to fishing areas will constrict further and their means of livelihood further threatened. Meanwhile the capitalist started fencing quite a portion of the land area along the coast which leads to Marina to secure it since the land is purportedly owned by the company. *PaKaMa* registered complaint but the construction of the fence went on although the residents have still access to the station for family outing but it definitely limits easy access to that portion of the coastal land. Space contestation continues to this day with the fisherfolk given a reprieve thanks to the manifest support of the town's incumbent mayor. The private company has hired guards to assert its presence by checking on the activities being held in the station and very often barring people from getting inside without the prior permission of the management. This despite the fact that a *PaKaMa* officer has been authorized by the LGU (local government unit) to man and take care of the station day in and day out. How long the tug-of-war will continue no one can divine as very often management of marine sanctuaries in the country is vulnerable to changes in political landscape.²⁸ The helplessness of unorganized peoples in making their voices really heard and being able to participate efficiently and effectively in major decisions impacting their community seems to be a validation of what the famous social scientist Amartya Sen refers to as "social exclusion," a term synonymous not just with income deprivation but of capability deprivation as well.²⁹

²⁸ See Enrique G. Oracion, "A Mayor and His Politics for Marine Protected Areas: A Case Study in the Political Anthropology of Environmentalist Discourse," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society* 34 (2006): 338-375.

²⁹ A good example of capability deprivation as evidenced in an urban village is presented and elaborated in Rhoderick Abellanosa, "Poverty's Political Face: The Case of Pasil, Cebu City," *JPAIR Multidisciplinary Journal* 6 (May 2011): 215-231.



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Ronald Munck believes that social exclusion of global scope caused by the neo-liberal model of globalization engenders serious social consequences in terms of place/space of contestation, race, gender, and movement of peoples.³⁰ The place/space represents the site of social exclusion and new forms of inequalities: global cities serving as globalization’s strategic sites and command centers vs. the now-called abandoned poor neighborhoods, the North-rich vs. the South-poor (despite changes in interrelationships) as a neo-colonial reality, and class-in-the-society vs. the now-called underclass or excluded class (class not as a social totality but a result of complex social processes (not just reduced to the economic).

In light of the above, if local churches are serious in inculturating the universal Jesus and making his offer of salvation really concrete in the specificity of the fisherfolk’s day-to-day struggles for a better quality of life (salvation for), theologizing cannot but frame salvation (fisherfolk’s *gawasnong panginabuhian* “freedom in eking out a living”) as a contrast-reality to the elite-bias and exclusionary character of globalization (salvation from).

Based on the shared experiences of the fisherfolk, who is and what kind of Jesus the Savior, Jesus the *Mangingisda* (“fisherman”), then, is this who offers liberation to them in the inevitable interlapping contexts of the local and the global?

HESUS MANGINGISDA, WHO? THE PRESENT INTERFACING WITH THE PAST

From the written record of my conversations with the fisherfolk I draw out two major sub-images or attributes, if one may, of the people’s Jesus: “Christ as one of them, their companion” and the “cosmic Christ.” The first one was explicated by one of the FGD participants who replied to my query why they opted for the title *Mangingisda*. Her answer: *kay si Hesus sama namo, kauban namo* (“because Jesus is like us, he is with us/our companion”). Given the space

³⁰ Ronald Munck, *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformationalist Perspective* cited in Bombongan, “Social Exclusion,” 28-34.

limitation, I shall focus only on the first image or attribute of Jesus: his being companion of the fisherfolk. It will take another article to produce a theological discourse on the cosmic implications of the given Christological title *Mananagat*.

The principle of incarnation is grounded upon the gospel truth that Jesus “was in the form of God . . . but emptied himself, taking the form of a human being, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:6-7). By taking on full humanity, Jesus wants to bring humankind back to the fullness of life precisely because this is his mission: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).³¹ A mission that remains to be fulfilled for the fisherfolk whose condition bespeaks of *kalisud sa panginabuhian*, a retrogressed condition foisted upon them by a mammon-driven economic system. Their *dili maka-tawhanong sitwasyon* (de-humanizing situation) brought about by their being excluded from enjoying the sea’s bounty in its fullness for a sufficiently human life cries out to heaven for liberation. The Filipino theologian, Carlos Abesamis has this to say about Jesus: “Jesus the liberator . . . is actually the humanizer. Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God as the proclamation of humanization, a new humanity characterized by ‘total human development, i.e. concerned both for the life of sin/grace and for human dignity, human rights, human sufferings, human life, concern for both the world to come and for this world and its human concerns’.”³²

The struggle for full humanity simply means the struggle by peoples to live fully human lives (*kinabuhing tawhanon*). *Panginabuhian* is literally translated in English as “livelihood.” Its rootword is *bubi*

³¹ Putting the humanity of Jesus on the centerstage of theological discourse is not a negation of his divinity. It is just a matter of epistemological emphasis and methodological option. A writer may opt to shift the spotlight on Jesus’ divinity using a descending approach but that does not deny as well his full humanity. Likewise an academic treatise can be written dealing with the relationship between his divinity and humanity as a doctrinal concern. Arguably Vatican II has provided a major impetus for the production of theological-pastoral writings dealing for the most part with Jesus’ humanity and its ethical implications to the contemporary world.

³² Carlos Abesamis, “Doing Theological Reflections in a Philippine Context,” in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, 112–123 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 122.



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which is “living” or “alive.” When one says *panginabubian* it simply points to an indispensable condition of human living. Life is not *bubi* (alive) without *gawasnong panginabubian* (“freedom in eking out a living”).³³ The utter lack of financial resources as a necessary consequence of considerably less catch compounded by the apparent insensitivity of the government to their plight spills over to other problems as inability to send their children to school especially college, non-availment of the best medical care and attention, even drug use and addiction afflicting in particular the out-of-school youth. With a law which significantly limits their fishing zone and whose formulation they were not consulted they found themselves struggling to eke out their livelihood in the narrow and shallow waters of the globalized world. This is exacerbated by the inability of the government to offer alternative and sustainable means of livelihood to mitigate the adverse impact of the law. This is in stark contrast to the almost unlimited privilege the government gives to capitalist owners of tourist-attractive beaches occupying a considerable portion of the Mactan Island, which is another reason why their fishing world has shrunk and may continue to shrink.³⁴ One does not need to go miles away from Calero.³⁵

³³ Fisherfolk belonging to other municipalities had to figure out livelihood strategies to cope with predicaments they face daily like “the sudden decrease in the price of fish, gradual decline in fish stocks, or a conflict with their financier” Not all strategies proved successful (Koki Seki, “Wherever the Waves Carry Us: Historical Development of a Visayan Fisherfolk’s Livelihood Strategies,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society* 28 [2000]: 133-157).

³⁴ A very serious concern is the banning of fisherfolk to fish in the waters off the coast of privately-owned beaches. Eco-tourism despite its noble objectives to the contrary is taken advantage of by resort owners to deprive the fisherfolk of “*gawasnong panginabubi-an*” (“freedom in eking out a living”). See “Fisherfolk are victims of tourism,” *SunStar Cebu* (March 30, 1998). The Ecumenical Convenors’ Group (ECG), a network of clergy, religious and lay leaders in Cebu rushed to the aid of a group of fisherfolk who were shot at by the guards of a privately-owned resort in Mactan island. In its statement the group criticizes eco-tourism as “a candy-coating name for tourism, and just the same does not spread the supposed benefits to the population, in fact, threaten the sustainable food production of the locals. Ironically, it accelerates the rise of criminality and sexually transmitted disease” (“Fisherfolk Are Victims of Tourism,” *SunStar Cebu* [March 30, 1998]).

³⁵ See “Fish Catch Declining since 1991: Experts,” *SunStar Cebu* (March 6, 2004). Ironically, the recommendations proposed by the experts, to wit, delineation of municipal water boundaries and zoning of coastal areas, however well-

Luke, addressing the sociologically poor, discloses a Jesus who calls them blessed not because they are morally better or more righteous than the rich but because God finds favour with them, on account of which suffering or *kalisud sa panginabuhian* (“difficulty in eking out a living”) not of their own making has no place in His kingdom (Lk 6:21-22). When there is adequate “*panginabuhian*” (“livelihood”) there is common-sense assurance of varied needs to be met: food, clothing, shelter, education, access to best medical care, and the like. This is an earthly foretaste of what fullness of life means as envisioned by Jesus. In Cebuano one thinks of a life of *kabaruhay* (“economic sufficiency”) or *kabayahay* (“comfort and ease”), perhaps a more localized version of de Mesa’s popular *ginhawa* as the theologian’s proposed lowland Filipino concept of salvation.³⁶

It is common knowledge among praxis-oriented theologians that Jesus’ proclamation of the coming of God’s reign/kingdom is a proclamation of liberation or salvation directed primarily to the poor and the oppressed in his society for which he suffered rejection.³⁷ He used the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ (in Luke) or ‘kingdom of heaven’ (in Matthew) as a culturally appropriate way of affirming his Abba’s predilection for them. God’s kingdom is called such precisely because there is only one Ruler/King/Emperor higher than any earthly king and to whom everyone owes absolute allegiance. The King is not just King of everybody, He is King particularly of the beggars, the social outcasts, the sinners, the sick,

declined. With less catch, the poor are the most affected (“Less Fish Catch Takes Its Toll on Poor Families,” *SunStar Cebu* [November 17, 2003]). Despite the growth of the fisheries sector for years, that is until 2003, and its positive contribution to the country’s economy, the fishing livelihood “has failed to uplift the living conditions of ordinary fishermen, who remain the poorest among the poor.” This was the assessment of the Municipal Fisheries Summit on Livelihood, Technology and Market Development at the Golden Peak Hotel in Cebu City held in November 2003 (“Fisherfolk Income Low Despite Rise in Fisheries Sector,” *SunStar Cebu* (November 26, 2003).

³⁶ Jose M. de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture: Studies in Theological Re-rooting*, Maryhill Studies 4 (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1991), 75-101. The Cebuano terms *kabaruhay* (“economic sufficiency”) and *kabayahay* (“comfort,” “ease”) are, as it were, raw cultural resources when it comes to theological discourse.

³⁷ See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2008), 27-36, 55-61 and Lk 4:16-30.



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the prostitutes, the criminals, the poor peasants and fisherfolk and the like, the people whom the self-righteous treat with disdain and contempt. In words and deeds, Jesus gave a concrete expression to the envisaged God's kingdom through his *pagkabuutan* (being good-natured) to the excluded (by the religious authority's interpretation of a religion that gives preferential option to those who have wealth, prestige and power).³⁸

The post-colonial Bible scholar, John Dominic Crossan has introduced a novel English translation of the Greek *basileia tou theou* ("kingdom of God"): "The Companionship of Empowerment."³⁹ O'Murchu explains in behalf of Crossan why "The Companionship for Empowerment" is closer than the generally known "Kingdom of God" to what Jesus stands for and envisions as expressed in his teachings and deeds. For one thing, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, not Greek but the language of the gospels is Greek. He further points out that "the parables, the Sermon on the Mount, and many of the witty, pithy sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were originally spoken in Aramaic. The English words 'Kingdom of God' are a direct translation from the Greek: *basileia tou theou*. Aramaic renders a somewhat different construct based on much more nuanced meanings."⁴⁰ He continues: "The Aramaic word for the kingdom is *malkuta*, formed around the root *kut*, which carries strong connotations of empowerment *power with* rather than *power over*." Here, "(e)mpowerment can be facilitated by a benign patriarchal ruler: empowerment from the top down." O'Murchu asserts that "it seems that even this mediation of empowerment was not acceptable to Jesus. It had to be empowerment *through the process of mutuality*. The pyramid had to become a circle. Gospel empowerment was to be circular, mutual, interactive, mobilizing diverse gifts, interpersonal, and lateral. It was not to be linear in any sense."⁴¹

³⁸ Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 62-88.

³⁹ Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom," in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. Marcus Borg (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 42 and idem, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 337 cited in O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*, 30.

⁴⁰ O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*, 30.

⁴¹ O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*, 30-31.

Considering that the Calero fisherfolk never had historical experience with a monarchical structure, the English rendering is much more appealing to their hopes and aspirations. Precisely they elected the Christological title *Mangingisda* since they see Jesus as their *kauban* (“companion”) in their day-to-day struggles and in particular in their fishing expeditions. In the Cebuano dialect, the word “companionship” can be rendered as *panagbing-ubanay*, the root being *uban* (“go with”; “join”; “be with”). *Panagbing-* is compound prefix denoting a condition or reality. *Pagkaginamban*, whose rootword is *gabom* (“power”), is an apt native translation of “empowerment.”⁴² Jesus’ brand of companionship is meant to empower the fisherfolk. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) equates empowerment with that unique gift the Filipino people has given to the world: people power. People power, according to the document of the local church, includes “greater involvement in decision-making, greater equality in both political and economic matters, more democracy, more participation.”⁴³

Jesus’ “companionship of equals” runs contrary to what the word “kingdom” represents: kingship, royal privilege, and royal power *over*.⁴⁴ A contemporary Christian author is equally blunt: “the notion of the ‘Kingdom of God’ was not in fact an endorsement of everything that kingship represented.”⁴⁵ The title given by the Christian Roman Empire, to the Imperial Christ as the *Pantocrator*, the ruler of the universe, is a reversal of what the Kingdom of God stands for, a turn-around from a Jesus who, in fact, shunned kingly titles.⁴⁶ Contemporary biblical scholarship reveals a Jesus who “used

⁴² Someone suggested *pakigbisog* but the word is translatable in English as “struggle,” and merely represents a specific though sustained moment in the process of empowerment.

⁴³ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 20 January-17 February 1991* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1992), n. 326. The document further declares that “(e)mpowering people is thus a prerequisite in the renewal of the country. Without it, our destiny as a people would remain in the hands of the few” (n. 329).

⁴⁴ See Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Society II* (Delhi: ISPKC, 2002), 106-110.

⁴⁵ O’Murchu, *Christianity’s Dangerous Memory*, 29.

⁴⁶ See O’Murchu, *Catching Up with Jesus: A Gospel Story for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 7-16.



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the phrase in a highly equivocal and provocative manner. (He) challenged kingship and all its inherent values; more shocking still he denounced it to the point of ridicule and insignificance Jesus was laying the foundation for ‘an upside-down Kingdom.’⁴⁷ The gospels offer us a reliable faith-testimony about Jesus “not only by cataloguing his actions but by recording his associations” with the powerless, poor, despised and excluded of his society.⁴⁸ Donald Senior notes that the gospels’ account of the Jewish leaders’ hostile reaction to his social mixing with the excluded “emphasizes the singularity of his behaviour.”⁴⁹ Sebastian Kappen identifies meal-fellowship with political contestation: “To inaugurate a new social praxis is to come into collision with the ruling classes; all the more so in pre-capitalist societies where religious and political power tended to fuse into one. Jesus’ meals with social outcasts posed a serious threat to all who in one way or another wielded power in Judaism.”⁵⁰

Given the subversive actions of Jesus, then the culturally accorded title *Hesus nga Mangingisda* (“Jesus the Fisherman”) does not just represent a person who is *buutan* (“good-natured”) companion. He is definitely a prophetic-‘countercultural’ human being who is not afraid to stand up for the poor and the oppressed against any form of imperialism with its ‘power-over’ ideology. In Bisaya, this is being *isog* (“brave”; “daring”; “assertive”). The adjective is aptly used to describe someone who dares assert or put up a fight with another who has power over him/her. Or to dare enter into risky endeavors which angels fear to tread. Such tactlessness and temerity, at times bordering on recklessness, one may say, cost Jesus his life.

Genuine *pagka-buutan* (“being good-natured”) is a cultural virtue that springs from one’s *buot* (“interiority” like the Tagalog “*loob*”) and

⁴⁷ O’Murchu, *Christianity’s Dangerous Memory*, 30. See Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1990); cf. Georges Casalis, “Jesus – Neither Abject Lord nor Heavenly Monarch,” in *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies*, ed. José Miguel Bonino (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 72-76; also Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, 81-104; idem, *Jesus and Society II* (Delhi: ISPKC, 2002), 56-61, 106-110.

⁴⁸ Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, new & rev. ed. (Makati: St. Paul’s, 1992), 63.

⁴⁹ Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, 63 in 47-73.

⁵⁰ Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Society II* (Delhi: ISPKC, 2002), 87 in 83-92.



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is very much treasured. It usually manifests itself in one's actuations and reactions to situations that promote harmony than conflict, humble to a fault, or being *manggibatagon* ("generous" or "kind") in financial or non-financial terms, or *manggiloy-on* ("compassionate"; "merciful"). Even a contemporary Robin Hood is considered *buutan* ("good-natured") by the beneficiaries of his benevolence. *Pagkabuutan* ("being good-natured") is associated as well with honesty and sense of fairness. A candidate in an elective post who refuses to resort to dishonest means is *buutan* ("good-natured"). The virtue has a pious ring in it too. If someone sees you always going to church or engaged in religious activities, in time people will recognize you as *buutan*.

The cherished native value however, has an ambivalent side. *Pagkabuutan* can be identified with indifference to or silence in the face of injustices and human abuses. Unjust situations are tolerated, oppressive conditions countenanced, timidity preferred over social engagement or involvement. The native value stripped of prophetic character resonates with a "safe" docetic Jesus whom devotional literature and art portray as obedient and submissive, one "who sheds at the circumcision for the first his precious blood for our salvation, consoles us in our troubles, inspires us to become innocent infants, and finally pays the price for our sins through his bloody sacrifice."⁵¹ This is a Jesus who "only touches our history from the outside After coming down, he taught his disciples about his true nature (being divine), gave us the proof through his miracles, settled our accounts by 'satisfying' for our sins through his death, returned to the Father, and will come again. By placing Jesus on a divine pedestal, Christians avoided the challenge of a radically new way of being human."⁵² In its more rationalized form, *pagkabuutan* may actually be the externalization of what Paulo Freire refers to as internalized oppression. This does not seem to be the way of Jesus. He is *buutan* ("good-natured") particularly to those in the margins of

⁵¹ Lode Wostyn, *In Search of a Human Jesus and Human Church* (Lode Wostyn: 2010), 58.

⁵² Wostyn, *In Search of a Human Jesus*, 58. The narrowing down by the Christian tradition of Jesus' life and ministry to his crucifixion and death (over-stress on his divinity at the expense of his humanity) is a Greek-Roman version revived by Saint Anselm in the early Middle Ages (Wostyn, *In Search of a Human Jesus*, 67).

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the social order but his *pagkabuutan* (“being good-natured”) is neither ‘neutral’ nor indifferent to the social injustices of his day.

Jesus in the gospels is not only *buutan*, he is *nakiglambigit* or *nakigbisog* (“socially involved” as in standing up for the rights of the poor and the oppressed of his time) as well. Take away the first six letters of the verb *nakigbisog* and what you have is *isog*, a Cebuano qualifier which in English is rendered as “brave” or “bold” or “daring,” and all that is synonymous to it. Someone does not dare *makigbisog* if he is not *isog*. On the other hand, *pagkaisog* (“being brave”) may degenerate into an intensely strong dislike or hatred or a domineering attitude/behaviour (see Jn 18:10). This is definitely out of Jesus’s character. His selfless and heroic kind of *pagkaisog* is rooted in his *pagkabuutan* (again, *buut* as one’s interiority).

Hesus Mananagat (“Jesus Fisherman”) is a salutary integration of *buutan* (“good-natured”) and *isog* (“brave”).⁵³ His *pagkabuutan* (“being good-natured”) and *pagkaisog* (being brave) are not mutually exclusive; both presuppose and draw nourishment from each other. *Pagkaisog* is the ethical to *pagkabuutan* as *pagkabuutan* is the aesthetic to *pagkaisog*. As the gospels testify his *pagkabuutan* (or “compassion” as Nolan would so emphasize) is consistently demonstrated in his personal decision to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in this time of his society.⁵⁴ Jesus’ *pagkaisog* (“being brave”) spills over his denunciations of what his society represents: love of wealth, love of prestige, love of power, exclusiveness.⁵⁵ The *kaisog* (“bravery”) that he exhibits is not an outcome of a bruised ego or a self-serving desire for recognition or power but an outpouring of his (righteous) indignation at hypocrisy and social discrimination objectified in the social structure of the day and subjectified by those in authority. His *pagkabuutan* (“being good-natured”) is love- or compassion-driven which seeks solidarity with the dispossessed and may rise up

⁵³ Here one is reminded of the popular Filipino legend *Malakas at Maganda* which represents the ideal Filipino, a combination of strength (ethical *malakas*) and beauty (aesthetic *maganda*).

⁵⁴ Nolan claims that Jesus in the economic standards of his time belonged to the middle class. But what is remarkable with him is that he “became an outcast by choice.” (Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 34).

⁵⁵ Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 67-68, 73-74, 83-87.

righteously in anger when people are made to suffer by a de-humanizing social structure.

If love is understood as solidarity, then love is not incompatible with indignation and anger. On the contrary, if one genuinely concerned about people as people and painfully aware of their sufferings, one will necessarily be indignant and angry, sometimes very angry, with those who were ruining themselves and others. . . . He was angry with them for the sake of all the people including themselves. In fact the surest proof that Jesus loved all people was this very pronounced indignation with the enemies of everyone's humanity, their own included.⁵⁶

An eloquent example of this is the behaviour Jesus displayed in the famous episode so-called cleansing in the Temple. He got mad because the moneychangers and merchants were raking in so much profit in the Temple courtyard at the expense of the poor.⁵⁷ His prophetic denunciation is reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah's task as commanded by God to warn worshippers that the practice of worship is inseparable from the practice of justice (Jer 7, 26). "Their use of divine worship to avoid divine justice had turned the Temple into a safehouse, a refuge, a hideaway, a 'den of robbers'" (7:11).⁵⁸

So the *Mananagat* ("fisherman") is not *buutan* ("good-natured") unto himself but his being such is indispensably linked to the welfare of the other and others. He is *isog* ("brave") in situations where *ang mga yanong tao* ("ordinary people") are discriminated upon, or abused,

⁵⁶ Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* 78-79.

⁵⁷ See Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 124-130; cf. Crossan, *God & Empire*, 131-136 where the author re-interprets the famous accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple. Both events are neither 'triumphal' nor about 'cleansing.' The first is "actually an anti-triumphal entry, a calculated alternative to imperial normalcy with a prophetic pedigree going back to an oracle added to the book of Zechariah in the fourth century BCE" (132) while the second "a symbolic destruction of the Temple, and it too had an ancient prophetic pedigree going back to Jeremiah at the end of the seventh century BCE" (133). Both dramatic demonstrations are twin aspects of the same nonviolent protest against any collaboration between religious authority and imperial violence (134).

⁵⁸ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 133.



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where the three Ps of possessions, prestige and power take precedence over only one P (persons; people). Jesus' *kaisog* ("bravery") in other words springs forth from his deep-rooted (or *buot*-rooted) mercy and compassion for the little ones. For this he was not afraid to foment further conflicts and divisions in an otherwise conflictive and divisive situation. Juan Luis Segundo asserts that "if we examine the most original preaching of Jesus, we cannot help but find a conflict not only assumed but sharpened and fomented by him. His statement that the kingdom of God is coming to make the poor happy is not as innocent as it may seem."⁵⁹ Jesus was forthright in saying that "his *mission* prompts him to provoke the most profound and cruel enmities (Mt 10:34-36; also 10:21)."⁶⁰ Segundo, thus, questions the common assumption that the "*enemies* of Jesus are purely and exclusively such as the result of their bad will, of something that has nothing to do with Jesus at all."⁶¹ Using the electromagnetic circuit-process as a model to account for the presence in life of *negentropy* (as ideal; order; integration; life) and *entropy* (as real; disorder; disintegration; death), Segundo points to the introduction of entropy accompanying the time-factor as "something of incalculable importance" in the universe which "operates through *successive activations and deactivations* of energy in circuit."⁶² Likewise Jesus' prophetic criticisms directed towards the powers-that-be, both religious and secular, represent an entropy which ultimately will lead to the change he envisions.

⁵⁹ Juan Luis Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth*, Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today, vol. V (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 89.

⁶⁰ Juan Luis Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth*, Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today, vol. V (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 89.

⁶¹ Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach*, 89.

⁶² Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach*, 71. The circuit-dynamic proceeds this way: "If contact is made at A, then the magnet is activated. If the magnet is activated, then contact A is broken. If contact A is broken, then the magnet is inactivated. If the magnet is inactivated, then contact is made. And so it goes *successively*. We seem to have an apparent contradiction. . . . How do we get out of the contradiction? What enables us to understand the functioning of cause and effect in a circuit? The introduction of the element of *time*. Every real circuit is traversed by energy, and that entails a certain length of time. Thus P and not P, which seem to be contradictory, are in fact *successive or consecutive*" (Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach*, 71 in 67-92). See as well Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1979), 58-59.



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When Jesus boldly moved to Capernaum by the sea his was not a random decision. Crossan offers an interesting explanation on the contextual significance of such a move: it has something to do with Jesus' implicit act of resistance to the imperialist design of the Herods. Herod the Great, the puppet king when Jesus was born, had undertaken big construction projects, namely the port of Casarea on the Mediterranean and the temple of Jerusalem. In Casarea an all-weather infrastructure of ports, roads, and bridges was built, while Herod made an expansion of the Temple. According to Crossan, if one places both projects side by side with each other, both reflected Rome's first order of imperial business and second order of imperial business respectively. The extension of the Temple was a significant move for Romanization-by-urbanization-for-commercialization design of Rome. This was reinforced by the establishment of cities to increase the productivity of the countryside by making good Romans out of local aristocrats.⁶³ The Casarea-Jerusalem-project-in-tandem was actually "a deepening immersion of the Jewish homeland within the program of Rome's imperial system."⁶⁴ Up to this point, however, Galilee was out of the development agenda.

It will take the son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas to set into motion in Galilee the process of Romanization by urbanization for commercialization in a "forcible" manner.⁶⁵ Antipas was driven by burning ambition to succeed his father, Herod the Great, to become King of the Jews. A smart strategy to realize his dream was to increase the tax base in Galilee so that he could get Rome's royal promotion. He could not afford to "squeeze more taxation from his peasant-farmers without risking resistance or even revolt. But having learned, as it were, how to multiply loaves in the valleys around Sepphoris, he would now learn how to multiply fishes in the waters around Tiberias."⁶⁶ The envisaged "multiplication of fishes" in the imperial territory must have led to the impoverishment of fish-catch by ordinary peasant-fishers who used to enjoy the abundance of the

⁶³ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 99-101.

⁶⁴ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 101.

⁶⁵ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 101.

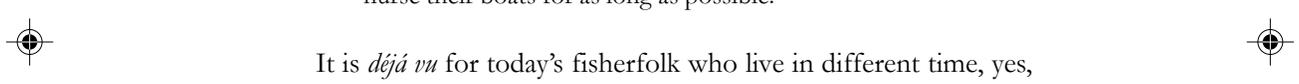
⁶⁶ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 103.



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lake before Antipas appeared in the scene. Crossan punctuates his commentary on the Roman control of the waters dear to the people with an account of an archaeological discovery of a sunk ‘Galilee boat’ lying on the Sea of Galilee’s northwest corner in the mud opposite Magdala. The author uses this “not as a historical proof but as dramatic symbol of Jesus’s focus on the Sea of Galilee under Herod Antipas in the later 20s.”⁶⁷ The large boat is emblematic of the adverse consequence Antipas’s Romanization by urbanization for commercialization wrought on the ordinary peasant-fishers. Crossan poignantly describes their pathetic condition:

They could no longer cast their nets freely from the shore. They could no longer own a boat or beach a catch from the shore. They probably had to sell what they caught to Antipas’s factories, which dried or salted fish and made that execrable fish sauce called *garum*. The boat vividly symbolizes the harder times in the 20s when excellent artisans had to work with very inadequate resources and nurse their boats for as long as possible.⁶⁸



It is *déjà vu* for today’s fisherfolk who live in different time, yes, but their condition of *kalisud sa panginabuhian* (“difficulty in eking out a living”) is not perchance so different in intensity from the beleaguered peasant-fishers of Jesus’ society. Crossan quotes Shelley Wachsmann, author of the 1995 book *The Sea of Galilee Boat: An Extraordinary 2,000-Year-Old Discovery*: “The Galilee at this time was economically depressed; the timbers used in the boat’s construction are perhaps a physical expression of (the) overall economic situation.”⁶⁹ This was the imperial context in which Jesus opted to spend “his time on and beside the lake because it was precisely and specifically by the shores of the Sea of Galilee that “*the radicality of Israel’s God confronted the normalcy of Rome’s civilization under Herod Antipas in the 20s of the first century CE.*”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 121.

⁶⁸ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 122.

⁶⁹ Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat*, 358 in Crossan, *God and Empire*, 122.

⁷⁰ Crossan, *God & Empire*, 122-123, italics in the original.

If Jesus of Nazareth-turned-lakeside citizen was opposed to the imperial design of the Roman Empire, who is he today with the small fisherfolk vis-a-vis the hegemonic westernization of the globalized world? Using the powerfully iconic ‘meal fellowship’ of the gospels, will he spend more time dining with those who represent, as it were, the post-colonial version of the Roman imperialism or will it give him more satisfaction to share meals with the poor fisherfolk? The gospels’ eloquent testimony gives us a decisive clue. Partaking of meal in the Companionship of Empowerment is inclusive, thus, a powerful criticism against the wealthy who are wallowing in extravagance while the poor can only enjoy the crumbs which fall from the master’s table (Mt 15:27).⁷¹ Jesus’ eating with the crumb-takers is a tangible expression of God’s solidarity with them and constitutes “a partial anticipation of the New Humanity in which all the children of God will gather around to sit at table with him in total love and self-giving.”⁷² This is “open common table (commensality),” which has a prophetic significance in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth at the core of which is the Reign or Kingdom of God.⁷³ More sharply open commensality symbolizes and embodies “radical egalitarianism, of an absolute equality of people that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of any hierarchy among them.”⁷⁴ For the cause

⁷¹ Filipino Catholics have actually a “strong food culture and . . . penchant for the image of the Last Supper.” Culture and religion must partner to resist “the present economic and political system of the country (which) caters for globalization in total disregard for the values of sharing that is inherent to Filipinos, specifically a sharing between rich and poor that can be translated into policies which will assure that all, not just some, have food to eat at table” (Ma. Marilou Ibita, “Dining with Jesus in the Third Gospel: Celebrating Eucharist in the Third Word,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42 (2005): 25).

⁷² Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977), 101.

⁷³ Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Christianity’s Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012), 94 in 94-110; cf. C.S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 24-29.

⁷⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (HarperSanFrancisco: HarperCollins), 71. The author argues that a hierarchy-less egalitarianism is neither simply of contemporary democracy or an anachronistic retrojection of the past (see *Ibid.*, 71-74). The gospel-based egalitarianism is founded on the personal worth of every human being regardless of his/her social status as stressed by Jesus.

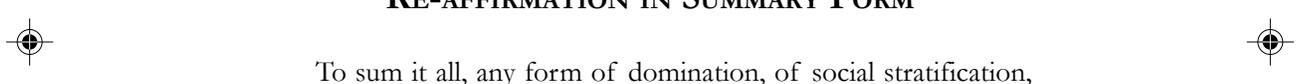


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of commensality Jesus would not mind being called “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinner” (Matt. 11:19; Mark 2:15-17).

Jesus’ table fellowship is an emphatic demonstration of where his heart lies. The seemingly innocuous meals (he could dine with the rich) turned out to be “a serious threat to all who in one way or another wielded power in Judaism.”⁷⁵ To cut the story short, the very insecure power holders plotted to get rid of him, the Companion of Empowerment. So they made the empowerer the scapegoat. Jesus paid the price, and the authorities had him tortured and crucified on the cross, that “form of Roman execution not for common criminals, or even outrageous ones, but for *subversives* who were perceived as posing a serious threat to the establishment!”⁷⁶ Still his *pagkabuntan* (“being good-natured”) was with him till the very end of his earthly life: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

RE-AFFIRMATION IN SUMMARY FORM



To sum it all, any form of domination, of social stratification, of inequality is anathema to Jesus’ vision of Kingdom of God/heaven or Companionship of Empowerment. Jesus’ Jewish society was not spared from a system of domination propped up by a theological rationalization that places those above within and those

He proclaimed the good news that God is “Our Father,” hence all human beings are brothers and sisters to whom God is present (Tissa Balasuriya, *Jesus Christ and Human Liberation*, Quest Series 48 [Colombia, Sri Lanka: A Centre for Society and Religion Publications, 1981], 32 in 31-36).

⁷⁵ Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Society II* (Delhi: ISPKC, 2002), 87 in 83-92.

⁷⁶ O’Murchu, *Christianity’s Dangerous Memory*, 31. Hellwig writes: “The tragedy of Jesus begins . . . long before his arrest, trial and execution. It begins when his listeners . . . balk at the simple totality of the leap of faith which his teaching on the Reign of God demands. It does not seem to be the case that he was misunderstood, but rather that he was understood too clearly. The implications of his teaching were revolutionary in a more radical sense than even the courageous revolutionaries of this time were prepared to follow” (Hellwig, *Jesus: The Compassion of God*, 86). Cf. Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 113-123; see also “The Meaning of the Death of Jesus” chapter 6 of Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology of Our Time* (Maryknoll, New York: 1978), 100-120.

below outside the orbit of divine favour. The same religious ideology justified and sustained the colonial design and projects of the Roman Empire with the emperor being the embodiment of divine ruler-of-the-universe.⁷⁷

As soon as Jesus set out to begin his public ministry he promptly gave notice that the news he preached would be probably bad to those who lord it over and good for those who are being lorded over (Lk 4:16-30). He boldly introduced a radical and unsettling vision that would bring about reversal of everything that mammon and wealth signify. The gospels testify: the beatitudes, Jesus' social mixing with the outcasts and sinners, his resistance to an interpretation of Mosaic law that places the law (indeed favourable to the religious interpreters) over well-being of persons, his peculiarly compassionate ways to those in the margins, his opposition to imperial designs and projects, his meal fellowship of empowerment with them, and many more.

Social, economic and political structures abetted by the neo-liberal model of development stand in prophetic judgment before Jesus' full humanity and his Companionship of Empowerment as they obviate the emancipatory process towards humanization and living life in its fullness.⁷⁸ The post-colonial view of globalization as a contemporary form of imperialism that is biased for the moneyed and the powerful finds validation in the contrast-phenomenon of widespread poverty and inequality. The Calero fisherfolk belong to the countless multitude of the poor who have been having a tough time making both ends meet. The promise and lure of the neoliberal-driven development for a much better world has not only not trickled down to them but has rendered them incapable of enjoying the bounty of the sea in its abundance.

Hesus Mananagat ("Jesus Fisherman") assures the fisherfolk of his companionship in their collective struggles towards *gawasnong panginabubian* ("freedom in eking out a living"): "Blessed are you who are poor, for I am your companion for empowerment" (cf. Lk 6:20). The beatitude is not a sure-fire declaration that tomorrow

⁷⁷ See Crossan, *God & Empire*, 104-106.

⁷⁸ See Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 63.



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all will be well for the fisherfolk. For one thing the attainment of full humanity directed towards the fullness of life calls for conversion “regardless of socioeconomic condition.”⁷⁹

Fully human people must be full of mercy, like those depicted in Matthew’s beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12), and full of love for others that is expressed in tangible acts of service (Luke 6:35; 17:32-33; Matt. 7:21; 5:43-48; 6:14; Mark 10:42-45). From this demand to love mercifully, even the poor are not exempt. For they become human only as they decide to work for the humanization of others: “The poor also, no less than the rich, have to put the reign of God before everything else. . . .No radical change, personal or social, is possible so long as the enslaved love their own fetters. The Kingdom of God will belong to the poor only if they are also poor in spirit; i.e., open to the future.” The ideal of the new humanity is that the oppressed, awakened to their new situation, will throw off the shackles of internalized cultural norms and work for liberation through organized struggle.⁸⁰

Given the poor fisherfolk’s vulnerability to the sin of pride, like any other, at the expense of the others⁸¹ and incapacity, if left alone, to empower themselves within a system that marginalizes, even excludes, the local church plays an indispensably pastoral role in accompanying (*ubanan*) the fisherfolk in their difficult journey ‘to the

⁷⁹ Pope-Levison and Levison, *Jesus and Global Contexts*, 64.

⁸⁰ Pope-Levison and Levison, *Jesus and Global Contexts*, 64-65. The authors took footnote of Felix Wilfred’s description of three types of awakening by the oppressed in India: first is awareness of their rights to have access to the basic necessities of life; second, awareness concerning equality; and third, awareness that they are masters of their own destiny (Wilfred, “The Liberations Process in India and the Church’ Participation,” *Indian Theological Studies* 25 [1988]: 304 cited in Pope-Levison and Levison, *Jesus and Global Contexts*, 84 footnote 47). See also Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, 62-63, 92 as likewise earlier cited by the authors.

⁸¹ After four months of biblical formation sessions with the fisherfolk I learned of the deep-seated conflict between a Catholic councilman who, himself, has organized a bible-formation group and a Catholic couple, both high-ranking officers of PaKaMa which remains unresolved as of this writing. On account of this a unified program for faith-formation cannot yet be realized much as I and my fellow bible formators desire.

deeper waters where fish abound'. As the risen Lord promises that he will be with his disciples (church) till the end of time (Mt 28:20), the *Mangingisda nga nakigbisog* ("fisherman who is socially engaged") certainly wills that the local church must accompany the poor fisherfolk. The Eucharistic meal, the inclusive table fellowship shared, must be experienced by the poor as a truly meaningful sacramental celebration of their being one and *magkauban* ("companion") (cf. Jn 21:1-14).

CONCLUSION

Transporting or contextualizing Jesus the carpenter's-son-turned-Savior now to today's fisherfolk's times, he who is all-to-all-yet-One-for-each, universal yet local, ceases to be an ancient time-bound, culture-bound citizen and as the incarnated Christ becomes the fisherfolk's fellow *mangingisda* or *mananagat*.⁸² This is the people's version of the incarnate God, Emmanuel God-with-us. Like any typical Filipino Catholic the fisherfolk believe in divine Transcendence but He is not just up there aloof and distant. He came down from his divine pedestal and entered history and became like them. The *Mangingisda* is God-Immanence, fully human in the culture and the here-and-now of the poor fisherfolk.⁸³

⁸² Historically Jesus the *Mangingisda* for the Calero fisherfolk did not belong to a fishing family, much less he was a fisherman. The gospels are very clear on this: he was the son of a carpenter. However, the adult Jesus did make his home in Capernaum, a busy town on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee (Mt 9:1; 17:24-25) on one of the trade routes between Damascus and the Mediterranean. Matthew underlines Jesus' move to "Capernaum by the sea" with the quotation (Mt 4:14-16) from Isa 9:1-2. The first disciples, themselves fishermen, whom Jesus called by the Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16) were, in fact, fishermen by profession (and sub-culture): Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. The document of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (hereafter referred to as PCP II) deemed it significant to point this out in a sub-section entitled "A Mission of Preference for the Poor:" "He chose poor fishermen to be his first followers" (*Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 20 January-17 February 1991* [Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 1992], n. 48).

⁸³ Monika Hellwig has pointed out that today's Christological question is "how to express the relation of Jesus to the transcendent God in fidelity to the tradition and in a way that can make sense to the contemporary believer" (Hellwig,

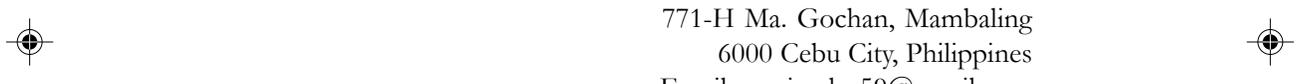


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My paper is, at best, an initial-fragmentary attempt to theologize on the contemporary *Hesus Mananagat* in conjunction with the biblical Jesus Christ (in whom and through whom God saves) within, as it were, the concentric circles of the local and the global. The cosmic character of *Hesus Mangingisda* or *Mananagat* is another point of reference for an equally focused theological reflection, and this can be done in a future work. The underpinning hermeneutical principle of contextual theologizing in Christology is that a more relevant Jesus who offers universal salvation is particularized or localized from the interfacing of the faith-claims of the early Christians and of today's believers grounded on their respective historical and cultural contexts.

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Jesus: The Compassion of God, Theology and Life Series 9 [Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1983], 109). A little later she stresses the value of the Christological discourse in terms of its fidelity “to the service of Christian life, prayer and action in the world, making it possible to discern what is truly redemptive in a changing historical situation” (Ibid., 117).