Alter Christus: An Interpretative Phenomenology on the Journey Towards Becoming Christ-like

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Abstract - It seems that most people, especially students, at this day and age have been so engrossed with the offers of worldly offers: Technology, Modernization, Commercialism, Social Media, and countless things which seem to feed the hunger for a convenient existence. This research endeavored to unfold the Spiritual realm of people towards the sacred journey towards holiness in imitating Jesus Christ.

Qualitative research particularly Interpretative Phenomenology design was employed in this study. Purposive sampling was employed from which fifteen (15) informants participated. Data were gathered by interviewing the informants. The interview was voice recorded.

Most of the informants were spiritually inclined and for them to become Christ is a life-long journey, a mission and a vocation. This research concludes that every human person can become like Christ or Alter Christus, regardless of belief and disposition.

Keywords: Alter christus, Journey, Christ-like
INTRODUCTION

The search for the essence of our existence is one of the penultimate goals of every human person. We desire to unravel the truth about our very being. Either consciously or subliminally, we are trying to surface the best in us. We have a life-given task to search for our authentic existence. But these things seem to be vague without any reference to something sublime, to something ideal. Hence, we cling to a Higher Being to whom we see perfection – God.

Since people reach the age of reason, he is not only oriented to his culture and environment but as well as to religion. He is taught that there is a higher being that is invisible and worthy to be worshipped. We find God through religion and one of which, with the largest population in the world is Catholicism.

Every Catholic school is expected to embody the teachings of the Catholic faith through Catholic education. As Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan puts it, “The product of a good school is a good student. The product of a Catholic school is another Christ.”

It is clear therefore that, just like other Christians, people in Catholic schools whether Catholic or non-Catholics are invited to become like Christ. Christ Himself made clear this precious invitation when He said, “Come, follow me.” (Matthew 4:19) [3]. This means that one must give himself up, carry his burdens in life, and follow the ideals of Christ as expressed in the Gospel.

If we try to look at this in the greater scheme of things, this invitation to become like Christ is not only an invitation in itself but a challenge. The ideals and teachings of Jesus Christ are indeed very godly. In contrast, we see ourselves as imperfect, vulnerable, and weak especially when confronted with difficult situations. To become another Christ therefore could mean going beyond our human capacity, transcending the limitations of our nature as merely human beings and sometimes going against the characters which we have already established. How is it possible then to be holy as Jesus Christ?

“Be holy as I am holy,” says Peter, quoting the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:15-16) [3]. The one who claims to follow Jesus must be constantly growing in holiness, righteousness, and justice. The disposition of justice and goodness must permeate all other moral attributes, such as joy, conscientiousness, faithfulness, peace, kindness, gentleness.

“But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God – made to be truly good and holy.” (Eph. 4:23-24) [3]

Today, most students in Catholic schools seem not to take heed of the deeper essence of this invitation of Christ. Although Catholic school imposes that prayers are to be said before and after class, regular Eucharistic Celebrations are scheduled, and the holy rosary be prayed everyday on the month of October, these seems to be inadequate in the whole context of spiritual formation. Are these enough to say that people in the Catholic schools reflects the image of Christ? Students in Catholic schools only see Catholicism as mere religious affiliation without any serious impact on their personal lives. Thus, the invitation of Christ is very abstract to them, unattainable and impractical. How then, can they understand and later on respond to the invitation of Christ to become like Him?

Teachers in the Catholic schools on the other hand, are more mature in the realm of religiosity, but one of the essences of this study is to discover more on their spirituality rather than their religious disposition. As teachers, they serve as role models not only in the academe but more on the character and values. Do they reflect Christ as well?

The school administration also plays an important role in this study since their authority upholds the Mission, Vision, and Goals of the school anchored in the Catholic faith. Therefore, this endeavor will also capture their spiritual and religious stand in discovering Christ to themselves and becoming role models also.

In this regard, the researchers sought to find answers to questions pertaining to the invitation and
challenge to become a replica of Christ, as well as to the discovery of the spiritual journey of students, teachers, and administration in a Catholic university, particularly at the Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation in San Carlos City, Pangasinan. Specifically, this interpretive phenomenological study aims to discover how students, teachers, and administration of the Virgen Milagrosa University can reflect and radiate Christ to other people.

Furthermore, the researchers believed that personal accounts will lead to the avenue of the discovery of faith within the context of character-values formation in the school which will later on be manifested as Christ-like values. Findings from this study will hopefully provide enlightenment and encouragement to take the crucial invitation and challenge – to be an ALTER CHRISTUS.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This interpretative phenomenological study endeavored to unfold, understand, and find meaning from lived experiences of students, teachers, and administration of Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation on their journey towards becoming Christ-like.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Explore possible that students, teachers, and administration of Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation can become Christ-Like
2. Explore the essence of becoming an Alter Christus?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research particularly Interpretative Phenomenology design was used as an approach in the pursuit of understanding and finding meaning from the lived experiences of students, teachers, administrators on their journey towards being Christ-like. Qualitative research explores insights and understanding of individual perception on the experiences. Asperas (2005) described that qualitative research becomes more human approach due to the fact that it considers people not as objects but as subjects. It considers people’s stories as valuable because they tell inner journeys, processes, which point to the unfolding of levels of reality seen in their connectedness. In this way, it is more holistic and not as fragmented approach.

According to Streubert and Carpenter in 2011 that phenomenological inquiry requires that the integrated whole be explored, it is a suitable method for the investigation of phenomena particularly on the daily experiences of people in the Catholic universities. A holistic perspective and the study of experience as lived serve as the foundation of phenomenological inquiry [8].

In focus, this study employed Interpretative Phenomenology that dealt with interpreting and understanding (not just describing) lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators in a Catholic university. The focus of phenomenological inquiry, then, is the meaning of people’s experience in regard to a phenomenon (descriptive phenomenology), and how those experiences are interpreted (hermeneutics). It was noted by Polit and Beck in 2014 that an important distinction between descriptive and interpretative phenomenology is that in an interpretative phenomenological study, bracketing does not occur. For Heidegger, it was not possible to bracket one’s being-in-the-world. Hermeneutics presupposes prior understanding on the researcher’s part [9].

In interpretative phenomenology, it is impossible to rid the mind of preconceptions and approach something in a completely blank or neutral way. It is believed instead that researchers use their own experiences to interpret those of others. In addition, she stated that researchers may also use their experiences to guide their research questions. Moreover, the researchers are interpreting
something in which we ourselves exist; therefore we have no detached standpoint [9].

Furthermore, in a phenomenological study such as this pursuit, the main data source was in-depth conversations of me and the informants as full co-participants. The researchers have helped the informants describe their lived experiences on their spiritual journey towards becoming Christ-like without leading the discussion. Through in-depth conversations, the researchers strived to gain entrance into the informants’ world, to have full access to their experiences as lived [6].

With triangulation, conversations were guided by standardized open-ended questions and were accordingly (voice) recorded with supporting field notes of observation of gestures for verbatim data gathering. According to Polit and Beck (2004), triangulation refers to the use of multiple referents to draw conclusions about what constitutes the truth. Multiple triangulations is used employing data and method triangulation comparable to Shenton’s triangulation via data collection and data sources were employed which are further described in the discussions of Research Instrument.

Importantly, this phenomenological approach welcomed leeway and diversity in responses of the informants as they shared lived experiences on spirituality.

Sources of Data

Research Settings

The Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation is the research setting of the study. The Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation is one of the prominent Catholic Universities in Ilocos Region (Region I) and is a privately supported, co-educational Catholic university in San Carlos City, Pangasinan, Philippines. It was founded in 1958 by Dr. Martin Posadas. Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation (VMUF) offers courses in the medical and paramedical fields, in liberal and applied arts, sciences, and technical-vocational courses, secondary, elementary and pre-school courses. In 2005, the University Chapel was completed and consecrated with Archbishop Oscar V. Cruz as the Mass Celebrant, and proclaimed the institution as a Catholic University.

Being known as one of the prominent Catholic university in the Region, the VMUF continues to uphold its Vision and Mission which is anchored in Catholic education.

Fifteen (15) informants participated in the study, five (5) of whom are from the school administration; five (5) from the teaching staff from random college departments, and five (5) from students also from random college departments.

To protect the confidentiality of informants, they were assigned to a code name based on the famous name of Saints, Biblical characters, and Filipino values.

Informants Teresa, Pedro, Monica, Agatha, and Lorenzo are students from random colleges. Informants Teresa and Pedro allowed for an interview during their vacant periods in the Henyo Corner, a separate study area in the VMUF, one of the newest structures in the campus. The Henyo Corner is walled by iron grills; therefore, it is vulnerable to noise especially from the vehicles inside the campus. But Teresa and Pedro were comfortable in this venue so the interview was done there. There were a small number of students on the venue but nonetheless the researcher made sure that the conversation was as discreet as possible. Teresa was the first informant on the first day of interview. She was the only one to be interviewed on that day and Pedro was interviewed on the second day.

Agatha allowed an interview on the second day in the St. Dominic Parish, specifically in the last bench of the Parish’s chapel after the Mass. The interview venue was expectedly quiet since it is a church and it was done in the early evening hour. Monica allowed an interview during lunchtime on the fourth day in one of the classrooms in their
department. It was quiet there except for a low humming sound from an electric fan which is relatively big. Also, some classmates of her were there at the far end of the room. Discretion on the conversation was safeguarded. Lorenzo was interviewed also on the fourth day in one of the classrooms in their department. The interview was quick since there was an urgent matter on his part, yet the essential questions were answered.

Informants Martha, Mary, Eve, Miriam, and Rachel are from the teaching staff from random college departments. Martha, Eve, and Rachel allowed for an interview in their respective faculty rooms. Mary was interviewed in the Henyo Corner and Miriam, on the other hand, was interviewed in one of the classrooms in their college department. Martha, Eve, and Rachel were interviewed with only little interruptions since only a few faculty members were with them. When Mary was interviewed, there was some distracting noise from vehicles passing by. Yet, the researcher ensured that the device used for voice recording was adaptive to unnecessary noises. Miriam was interviewed in one of the classrooms in their department. There were little interruptions also during the interview with Miriam since she had just given her students’ final exam. Yet, she managed to signal them that an important interview was going on.

Lastly, informants Courtesy, Courage, Kindness, Care, and Charity are from the administration from random departments and offices. All of whom were interviewed in their respective offices except Kindness since he preferred to be interview in a classroom. All of them were interviewed with only little interruptions.

Sampling

This pursuit sought to understand and find meaning from lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators in the Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation (VMUF) in San Carlos City, Pangasinan.

Purposive sampling was used that involved studying cases that met a predetermined criterion of importance. The guiding principle in the selection of the sample for a phenomenological study as this is that all participants must have experienced the phenomenon under study and must be able to articulate what it is like to have lived that experience [6].

Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for informants in this study were:

(For student informants)
1. Regular students who are in their third year of College in the VMUF and they must have spent their first and second year college in the same school.
2. Either male or female
3. Religion must be Roman Catholic
4. With sound mind which will be assessed by the researcher through observation and asking questions which can evaluate their orientation time, place, and person. This includes asking the informant’s name and age, the place where he/she lives, and the approximate time, and date of the interview [6].

(For teacher informants)
1. Must have been five years and above in service in the Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation
2. Must be married
3. Must be female
4. Religion must be Roman Catholic
5. With sound mind which will be assessed by the researcher through observation and asking questions which can evaluate their orientation time, place, and person. This includes asking the informant’s name and age, the place where he/she lives, and the approximate time, and date of the interview [6].

(For administrator informants)
1. Religion must be Roman Catholic
2. Either male or female
3. With sound mind which will be assessed by the researcher through observation and asking
questions which can evaluate their orientation time, place, and person. This includes asking the informant’s name and age, the place where he/she lives, and the approximate time, and date of the interview [6].

Fifteen (15) informants participated in the study, five (5) of whom are from the school administration; five (5) from the teaching staff from random college departments, and five (5) from students also from random college departments. Ten (10) informants provided saturation of data gathered but the researcher sought for another five (5) informants to ensure saturation and richness of data.

There were eleven (11) female and four (4) male informants aged eighteen (18) to sixty (60) years old.

In qualitative studies, sample size should be determined based on informational needs. Hence, a guiding principle in sampling is data saturation – that is, sampling to the point at which no new information is obtained and redundancy is achieved [4].

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Data on the inquiry of understanding and finding meaning from lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators of Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation on the journey towards becoming Christ-like were gathered through triangulation of data collection of self-report approach, observation, and field notes and triangulation of data sources. The primary method of collecting qualitative data is through self-report, that is, by interviewing study participants. According to Hopf, many types of interview exist, from highly structured (research controlled), through semi-structured to highly unstructured (uncontrolled). Structured interviews involve asking each interviewee the same set of standardized questions and in the same order, but this type is not typically used in qualitative research. Thus, qualitative researchers tend to employ interviews that are less structured and which offer interviewees opportunity to expand their answers and give complex accounts of their experiences.

After approval by professors of administrative thesis and ethics review of this research paper from the thesis adviser and upon the approval of the dean of the College of Education, the study proceeded on its data collection phase. Purposive sampling was employed wherein randomly selected students, teachers, and administrators were the informants of this study.

The researchers met with the prospective informants to secure informed consent that contained full disclosure of the intent of the study and its methods for voluntary participation in the study. Informed consent presented discussed in detail the purpose and significance of the study, methods and processes to be employed, the risks and discomforts the study might cause the informant, the right to withdraw from participation at any given time, the benefits, and their right to full confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews were conducted on informants’ availability and most convenient time and place. In this study, all informants were interviewed in a convenient area where untoward interruptions were minimized. Data gathering was continued until no new findings were discovered and saturation of categories was achieved [9].

![Figure 1. Interview with the Informants](image-url)
Data were gathered last October 14-17, 2014 on which lasted 30 to 41 minutes. With triangulation, conversations were guided by standardized open-ended questions and were accordingly (voice) recorded using an iPhone-4s model with supporting field notes of observation of gestures for verbatim data gathering. Multiple triangulation was used in this study employing data and method triangulation comparable to Shenton’s (2004) triangulation via data collection and data sources.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple referents to draw conclusions about what constitutes the truth. The aim of triangulation is to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-method, single-observer, and single-theory studies [1]. It has also been argued that triangulation helps to capture a more complete and contextualized portrait of the phenomenon under study – a goal shared by researchers in all qualitative traditions. Denzin identified four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation.

In this study, method triangulation was used. Method triangulation involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon such as in this study wherein standardized open-ended interview, observation method and field notes of observation were employed. In qualitative studies, researchers often use a rich blend of unstructured data collection methods (e.g., interviews, observations, documents) to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Multiple data collection methods provide an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which an internally consistent picture of the phenomenon emerges.

In summary, the purpose of using triangulation is to provide a basis for convergence on the truth. By using multiple methods and perspectives, the researcher of this study strived to sort out “true” information from “error” information, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

In focus, standardized open-ended interview was employed alongside observation of informants’ non-verbal responses which were taken down on field notes. Informants were asked identical questions, but the questions are worded so that responses are open-ended [2]. The standardized open-ended questions were formulated by the researcher and was refined and approved by the thesis adviser.

The open-endedness allowed the informants to contribute as much detailed information as they desired and it also allowed the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up. Through this interview technique, researcher obtained all the information required, and gave students, teachers, and administrators the freedom to respond in their own words, provided as much detail as they wished, and offered illustrations and explanations on their lived experience.

The interviews were (voice) recorded for purposes of verbatim recording of data gathered. Also, voice recorder was used during the entire interview to make a detailed description and interpretation of the informants’ emotional tenor and mood [8].

Spoken data was validated by field notes of observation of gestures as non-verbal cues conveyed messages. In collection and interpretation of non-verbal data, gestures were coded during interviews. According to Polit and Beck (2004), an operation known as coding is required to make research data amenable to analysis. In qualitative coding, researchers develop coding categories that represent important themes in the data. In this study on becoming Christ-like, gestures were coded numerically based from the prepared coding by the researcher guided by analyses from the books “How to Read Body Language” by Philip Redhead (2003) and “How to Use Body Language” by Drs. Sharon and Glenn Livingston (2004). Coding and interpretation of gestures for this inquiry on becoming Christ-like is shown at the Appendix.
Polit and Beck (2004) emphasized that qualitative data collectors must be able to create an atmosphere that safely allows for the sharing of experiences and feelings. Respect and authentic caring for informants were critical which the researcher of this study acknowledged.

Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reason that governs such behavior. Thus, data collection requires researcher to spend considerable amount of time with the informants to achieve saturation point which make it very important that researcher needs first to establish rapport and trust with the informants [10]. Hence, some meetings were held three times as initially for establishing rapport and trust and securing of consent, second for data gathering and for validation of data in the third meeting. Some informants permitted an interview on first meeting.

Moreover, study informants were respected for their convictions and beliefs. Researcher ascertained an environment of neutrality and avoided any act or word that might cause discomfort on the part of the informants. Thanksgiving was expressed very after meeting and data collection phase to show heartfelt appreciation to informants for voluntary participation.

**Trustworthiness**

To assure trustworthiness of this study, the researchers sought and adopted Guba’s four criteria in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative studies namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In this study, the researchers have ascertained *credibility* by returning back to research informants who provided some confusing responses to validate transcripts and check for any inconsistencies in their responses. Some meetings were held three times as initially for establishing rapport and trust and securing of consent, second for data gathering and validation of data on the third meeting.

**Transferability** of this study also facilitated its trustworthiness [11]. Purposive sampling was employed in this phenomenological inquiry wherein informants included were students, teachers, and administrators of Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation in San Carlos City, Pangasinan. Students who declined the request to participate were asked for referral to prospective informants who ascertained their qualification for this study. This strategy enabled trustworthy comparison of the findings of this study on other pursuit on becoming Christ-like since informants were accordingly chosen.

To achieve *dependability*, research design and methodology were carefully chosen in the basis of appropriateness of the data gathered to provide pertinent information for this study. Interpretative Phenomenology design was used as an approach in the pursuit of understanding and finding meaning from the lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators on their journey towards being Christ-like. According to Streubert and Carpenter (2011), because phenomenological inquiry requires that the integrated whole be explored, it is a suitable method for the investigation of phenomena particularly on the daily experiences of people in the Catholic universities. A holistic perspective and the study of experience as lived serve as the foundation of phenomenological inquiry. Standardized open-ended interview and observation method with field notes were used for research methodology.

**Confirmability** in qualitative study deals with the objectivity of research. Research design and methodology were carried out accordingly that ensured the study’s findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of students, teachers, and administrators, rather that the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Triangulation through data collection and data sources were potent ways that assured that data gathered were free of the researcher’s bias. Shenton (2004) considers that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researchers admit his or her own predispositions. Hence, taking Interpretative Phenomenology as research design of this study wherein researcher’s
own experiences guided data interpretation, cautious measures were observed as to not supersede the informants’ reality.

To further warrant confirmability of this study, step-by-step course of action was presented in detail. This process is the “audit trail”, which traced the course of the research systematically via the decisions made and procedures described as illustrated.

Data Management and Analysis

Data from (voice) recorded interviews of students, teachers, and administrators were transcribed in verbatim and were simultaneously analyzed with the field notes. The process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis by Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn (2007) was employed in this inquiry.

It is also said in the process that access depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions; indeed, these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved. The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

The employed process involved looking for themes in the first case, connecting the themes, continuing the analysis with other cases and finally writing up in narration and interpretation. The process is discussed in brief detail adopted for this study of understanding and finding meaning from lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators on the journey towards becoming Christ-like.

1. Looking for themes. In the first step of looking for themes in the first case, the transcript was read a number of times; font color was changed to highlight what is interesting and significant about what the informant said. It was important in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account. So the skill at this stage was finding expressions which were high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases but which were still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said on spirituality.

The transformation of initial notes into themes was continued through the whole transcript. Similar themes emerged as going through the transcript and the same theme title was repeated. At this stage, the entire transcript was treated as data, and no attempt was made to omit or select particular passages for special attention.

2. Connecting the Themes. Connecting the themes was the second step in the analysis. The emergent themes were listed on a sheet of paper, and were seen for connections between them. So, in the initial list, the order provided was chronological – it was based on the sequence with which they came up in the transcript. The next stage involved a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as I tried to make sense of the connections between themes which emerged. Some of the themes were clustered together, and some emerged as superordinate concepts.

3. Continuing the Analysis with Other Cases. Third step dealt with continuing the analysis with other cases. I used the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis. I was disciplined in discerning repeating patterns but also acknowledged new issues emerging as she worked through the transcripts. Thus, I respected convergences and divergences in the data – recognized ways is which accounts from informants were similar but also different.

Once each transcript was analyzed through interpretative process, the themes were not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, including the richness of the particular passages that highlighted the themes and how the theme helped illuminate
other aspects of the account, were also taken into action.

4. **Writing up.** Writing up was the final section which was concerned with moving from the final themes to a write up and final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the informant’s experiences. The division between analysis and writing up was, to a certain extent, a false one, with that the analysis was expanded during the writing up phase.

The stage was concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account. Here the analysis became expansive again, as the themes were explained, illustrated and nuanced. The table of themes was the basis for the account of the informants’ responses, which took the form of the narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case. Care was done to distinguish clearly between what the informants said and the analyst’s interpretation or account of it.

Field notes during interview were incorporated in the analysis of (voice) recorded data for validation of responses as non-verbal cues conveyed messages pertinent to interpretation of data. The (voice) recordings were submitted to the university’s Research, Planning and Development Center for time-limited storage and disposal after verification.

**RESULTS**

**Towards Becoming Christ-Like**

Students, teachers, and administrators in Catholic schools and universities experience a different paradigm. Other than having Religion or Theology subjects or having a regular schedule for Mass and other religious activities, there lies something in the background...something bigger yet unseen. This something is the grace of God. Catholic universities are extraordinary, not primarily because it is religiously affiliated but because it teaches Christ. It shows the way of Christ. It celebrates the sacrifice of Christ through the Holy Eucharist.

The informants’ responses revealed glimpses but rich reality of their journey towards Spirituality, which leads to becoming Christ-like. Their account of personal experiences unveiled significant themes clustered as

*New Bethlehem: The Birth of Faith, A Seedbed of Hope: Institutional Evangelization, and Christ Avenue: The Path Towards Becoming Christ-Like*

1. **New Bethlehem: The Birth of Faith**

The Birth of faith begins with a subjective experience of the sacred. Life’s journey is enlightened by faith, and this faith gives light to the realization of God and His infinite goodness. Through this, a person chooses his or her stand in the context of faith, God, and religion.

**Personal Religious Inclinations**

A1. Spirituality over Religiosity

There is a difference between Religiosity and Spirituality. A person is being religious when he regularly fulfills his religion’s practices and traditions. On the other hand, a person is said to be spiritual when he is able to commune with God always through prayers and subjective disposition in faith regardless of his fulfillment of his religion’s practices and traditions.

Nine of fifteen informants confirmed that they are more spiritual individuals because of their intimacy with God, and that they are less religious. (Question: Do you consider youself Spiritual or Religious?)

Care: “If you say na ang religious ay laging pumupunta sa church, na everyday, no, I’m not. Because I only go to church with my children during Saturday, anticipated Mass. And every Wednesday or everytime na papasok kami ng mga anak ko sa school if it’s not to late we drop by in the chapel...anyway ang chapel natin nandyan naman lagi, ano? And of course pag hindi naman ako nagmamadali, I always
drop by in our chapel. Spiritually oo din kasi everytime that I have my problem I always run to Him [referring to God], seek His help, seek His guidance, and eventually seek His advice, when I seek His advice, humihingi naman ako ng signs. “Ito ba ang dapat gawin?” never na hindi nya ako pinagbigyan sa mga signs... I do not only pray during nighttime. Pag sumasakay ako sa tricycle together with my children, I lead yung, dasal sa kanila dahil kasama ko sila sa tricycle.. sabi nilang ganun “ma, hindi pa tayo nagdasaal. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

Lorenzo: “Siguro ano, spiritual, kasi hindi naman ako laging nakapagsimba pero nagdadasal naman ako. Pag minsan may time din na kwan, buong family namin pumunta sa Manaoag, parang may schedule ganun pero hindi naman lagi, parang pag kwan, Holy Week ganun. Pero sa spiritual ako.” [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

Martha: “Sa spiritual kasi yun nga, hindi rin ako nakaka-attend ng novena, ganun, yung mga rosary pero ano naman pag sa bahay na bago kami matulog, ayun sinasabi ko yung mga anak ko na mag-pray. Tapos ako din may sarili din akong prayer din bago matulog, paggising, ganun, tapos pag may mga gagawin ako na medyo mahirap, ganun lagi rin akong nag-aask ng blessing, ng guidance, ganun. [Informant nods on affirmation of her answers. The ocassional nod is a postive message. It is an indication that one is listening and is interested.]

Kindness: “Nasa spiritual ako. Talagang... nung bata-bata ako medyo, kasi hindi mo iniisip na mamamatay ka na mamaya eh, pero this time tumatanda ka na, narerealize mo kailangan mo talagang kumapit sa [Diyos]. Naprawebe ko yun na prayers napaka powerful. Nagdefense ako sa Masters, biglang, idea, gumaganun [signals that ideas are coming up on head].”

Pedro: “Sa spiritual ako. Kasi kahit na hindi ako...nagisimba kung alam mo naman na sa sarili mo na nag.. may (faith) ka naman kay God at nagdadasal ka... [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

A2. Faith is getting Stronger

(Question: How can you describe your relationship with God?)

Eve: “Ang alam ko mas kwan [strong] ngayon ang relationship ko with God, unlike before, yun nga, nung mga [recent] years, hindi gaano nagsisimba pero nagpib-pray ako. [Informant smiles lightly and sincerely and maintains direct eye contact which signifies truthfulness.]”


Courtesy: “Ang spiritual life ko, may times na hindi ko ginagawa yung mga ginagawa natin, halimbawa minsan, I do not pray the rosary, which I believe very powerful ang effect ng pag-pray ng rosary kaya alam ko din yun. Naaalala ko si Lord kapag may problema ako. Pero may mga years talaga na dahil nasaktan ka, ‘di ba? Parang naging mahina ka. May times na diretretso ako ng nagesperve. Meron yung time na regular kaming nagmass. Pero meron din yung time na hindi. Pero yung aking principle na kung ano yung tama, no matter what it takes, yung ang susundin. [Informant smiles lightly and sincerely and maintains direct eye contact which signifies truthfulness.]”

Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Inspiration

The informants were asked if they consider Jesus Christ as their inspiration in their practical and spiritual life. All the informants answered yes, they do consider Jesus Christ as their inspiration.

In the journey towards becoming Christ-like, this is one of the vital questions to be asked, “Are you inspired by Jesus? By his life? His works and deeds? His amazing love for us?” this serves as one of the
pieces in the backbone of one’s faith in God and will eventually lead to the replicating His Goodness.

B1. Christ, Provider of Comfort to the Suffering

Monica: “Ngayon parang mas naging open na din. Parang kasi kapag problema, syempre kabataan ako parang takot kong i-share sa parents ko yung mga problem ko kaya ang parang malalapitan ko lang talaga maliban sa kaibigan ko, kay Christ kasi parang naicoconfess ko sakanya lahat ng problems ko parang Siya lang talaga yung makakatulong sakin. Para bigyan Niya ako ng kapanatagan ba.. ganun. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

Pedro: “Minsan nakakalimutan ko magdasal... yun nga pag kinakausap ko siya pag may problema ako. Pag Masaya naman nagpasalamat sa kanya. Pero mostly (nagdadasal ako) sa pagrereview kasi hirap na hirap ako, kaming makaklase. Pag nagdadasal ako nainintindihan ko yung mga lessons. Parang yung post ko kanina sa Facebook, ‘ginawa ko na yung dapat kung gawin, Ikaw (Lord) na po yung bahala sakin.’ [Informant looks down and slightly smiles, this portrays that he is reflecting on something good.]

B2. Jesus gives Contentment

Mary: “Ay syempre, sabi nga nila, what made you contented? Yung having God with you makes a person contented. Kasi siya yung magiging guidance mo sa lahat ng gagawin mo eh... if you are with God, nanjan si God sayo, it can make a person contented. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity.]

C1. A manifestation of Spiritual Leadership

The Catholicity of a school will be lifeless without true leadership. Most of the informants professed that the role of the university president and her family has been great and relatively beckons the rest to actively participate in religious activities.

Care: “Ang laki ng role nila Madame President [Dr.Lilia Juan, VMUF] at tsaka ng family nila. Makikita mo kasi sila mismo ang nagle-lead sa religious activities. Pati sa church makikita mo na andoon sila palagi. I have learned so many things from madame president. Number one is to be humble. Napaka humble niya na to. That’s one thing that I admire about the president. Ang nagustuhan ko naman kay Sir (referring to the husband of University President) ay yung pagiging doting father niya. Bihira na ang makikita mong ganyan na father ngayon. That’s what I admire about our two leaders (referring to the university president couple). Tsaka very religious si mam president. Alam mo ba na kapag may nagti-take ng board exam, nagbubuo siya ng Prayer Warriors. Tignan mo naman yung pag accept natin kay mama Mary, everybody have their own contribution, di ba? you don’t need to be called Catholic institutions affect the Character-Values formation of student, teachers, and administrators. Informants were asked if the Catholicity of the University affects the formation of faith.

(Question: Do you think the Catholic-ness of VMUF affects the Character-values formation?)

Mary: “Syempre, syempre importante yun. Unang una sa Vision Mission nakalagay na yan di ba? Yung sa pagstart ng class with a prayer, and then you end up with a prayer. Kasi unang una pag alam nilang you start with a prayer, alam nilang guided sila ni God. (To the University president and her family) the mere fact na nag put up sila ng chapel dito, hindi lang estudyante tsaka faculty ang natutulungan nila to be..para mapalapit kay God, pati yung mga outsiders. [Informant smiles lightly and sincerely and maintains direct eye contact which signifies truthfulness.]

1. A Seedbed of Hope: Institutional Evangelization

Aside from the home and church, one is indoctrinated and evangelized in the school, particularly those of Catholic ones. The Catholic school serves as a seedbed where not only students grow in faith and awareness of God but teachers and administrators too through their leadership and role modeling.

The Impact of A Catholic Institution
para mag-attend ka. We give our best. Tignan mo lahat naman tayo di ba? that’s one. [Informant is directly facing the researcher with open stance. The informant is focused and interested in the conversation.]”

Eve: “From the admin to the ano [faculty] during the mass andyan sila Dr. Marili. [Informant smiles lightly and remains focused on the conversation.]”

Charity: “Open sila [University President and VPs] pag dating sa religious [activities]. Kagaya ng ano pag magpapadala (sa Archdiocesan Activities) ng estudyante hindi na sila nagdadalawang isip. Sa faculty naman, prefer nila to have, ano, spiritual development. Yung aming Team building and Leadership program, parang faculty development seminar, yan. [Informant is directly facing the researcher with open stance. The informant is focused and interested in the conversation.]”

C2. Close ties among Students, Teachers, and Administration

Rachel: “In a way, oo din.. kahit hindi mo naman sabihin na totally nakak affect in a positive way, yung mga graduates naming, ano sila..i ba yung pag Virginian ka. Kasi parang very close ang ties ng faculty-student-administration..yung mga ganun… yung tipong pag nakita mo sila madam president..na ka hit na antagal tagal na silang hindi nagkita ng alumni niya..kilala kilala pa rin nila yung mga alumni. Mafeefel ng alumni na ‘hindi ako magkamali ng pinangalingan’ parang hindi ka umalis sa family mo..yun..yun ang nandito sa VMU. Yun ang kaiba (kaibahan). Kaya yung pag may mag transfer na estudyante namin nalulungkot kami kasi parang ‘ay iniwan mo yung pamilyang nagmamahal sayo.’ ito yung second home mo pag nag-aaral ka. [Informant smiles lightly and remains focused on the conversation.]”

Religious Activities: Avenue for Spiritual Enrichment

Every Catholic school upholds the Values and Ideals of the Catholic faith, and with this, religious activities are being implemented so as to enrich the religious and Spiritual realms of students, teachers, and administration.

The informants professed that religious activities in the school helps in the enhancement of the Character-Values formation which takes place in the campus.

(Question: Do you think Religious Activities which are being held in the school contributes to the spiritual formation?)

Monica: “Oo, kasi di [ba] parang yung dito ka, kailangan tuwing kunyari yung [feast ni] St. Dominic ganun, parang mag a-ano [cancel] sila ng klase para lang makapag-pray tayo tas kung darating si bishop talagang isususpend yung klase para lang umattend tayo ng Mass, ganun… katulad nung dumalaw dito si Our Lady of Manaoag di ba talagang kahit madaling araw pumunta yung mga estudante para makapag-vigil lang. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]”

Charity: “Nung una kasi, the students are not attending the Wednesday Mass pero nung nag-start na naging member na ng CEAP [Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines], naging Catholic school na ang VMUF, so natuto na rin yung mga bata na mag rosary every Wednesday. Every Sunday requirement na mag ano [gumawa] sila ng reflection sa Mass. Somehow parang may reminders din sila sa buhay nila upon hearing the scriptures, minsan nakakaiship din sila na “ay kagagaling ko sa simbahan” so namiminimize yung pag-commit nila ng kasalanan. [Informant is directly facing the researcher with open stance. The informant is focused and interested in the conversation.]”

Mary: [When asked if religious activities affect the Character-Values formation of Students] “Syempre..syempre...importante yun. Unang una sa Vision Mission nakalagay na yan di ba? Yung sa pagstart ng class with a prayer, and then you end up with a prayer. Kasi unang una pag alam nilang you start with a prayer, alam nilang guided sila ni God. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she
speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

Care: “Dito kasi sa amin sa school (college department), we discipline our children not to cheat because they should fear God. May corresponding na punishment at talang na-punish yung mga estudyante na nag- cheat...kaya dito sa department namin, iwan mo sila pagbalik mo tahimik pa rin sila.”

“One way of showing that you fear God is, mag umpisa ka, wag kang mag- cheat. At bawal dito sa kanila ang nagsasalita ng bad words lalo na ang mga babae. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

D1. Spiritual Initiative

Teachers and administrators have their own way in leading their respective offices and departments to engage in prayer and other similar spiritual activities such as attending the regular Mass, Vigil, and the like.

Charity: “We pray the Angelus every 8 o’clock, eh dapat 6 [o’clock] pero kasi students, ang first period nila 7:40 so we pray the Angelus in the morning 8 o’clock, then 12 o’clock [noon], and 5 o’clock in the afternoon, we also pray the Three O’lock Prayer kasi we have the address system.[In faculty] Early in the morning we have the prayer I am the one leading sa mga faculty. We read the Reading [Mass readings] for the day, First Reading then Gospel then we have the reflection story and we have God’s Word, so every morning, so before na ang mga teachers pumunta sa klase nila we pray. [Informant gives a closed-lip smile, a gesture of courtesy.]”

Courtesy: “Noon every morning, we start the day with a prayer ditto sa office naming...pero mas maganda sana kung lahat. Kasi yung common set ng heart, ng mind ay okay. [Informant gives a closed-lip smile, a gesture of courtesy.]”

Eye: “Oo, meron din kaming time dito na nagpi-pray tas meron din kaming time na mag-rosary. Kaya meron kaming [points to the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary] sa office may schedule ng rosary. [Informant smiles and looks directly at the researcher.]”

A. Foundations From Theological Studies

One of the Core elements in a Catholic University is the theology subject being taught to students as a way of indoctrinating the faith to God and religion through basic catechism.

E1. A Call to Role Modeling

Almost all of the informants professed their opinions that the approach of teaching theology can still be improved. Some of the informants also encourage those who teach theology to be role models.

Courage: “Sana, those who are teaching theology should give good example. I seldom see them there [chapels] when we have Mass. [Informant maintains direct eye contact, a signal of truthfulness]”

Monica: “Para sakin, hindi naman ganun masyado...pero yung iba naman parang iniform kami parang dun sa about, yung mismong, yung Christ in three divine persons ganun pero parang naipaliwanag naman samin. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful]”

Kindness: “Hopefully yung mga religion teachers natin sila sana ang, I don’t know kung ginagawa nila yun, hindi ko rin alam. Sila dapat ang manguna kasi sila yung nag a-ano [nagtuturo] ng religion they will also set an example, syempre. Kasi ako nung Lector ako, kapag hindi ako nasa labas talagang I see to it na Wednesday nandyan ako kasi may iske-schedule din kami. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]”

E2. A Different Approach in Evangelization

Teresa: “Meron at merong kulang, kasi parang...yang..hindi mo mararamdaman habang tinuturo.. kasi parang more on facts sila eh... more on facts yung tinuturo nung sir naming sa theo and pag sa outside naman [referring to Parish Youth Ministry], more on kung ano yung mga naranasan,
experience-based. Kaya parang, “ahh, ganun pala..” parang ganun yung maramdaman mo. Parang mas nafefeel mo siya. [Informant maintains direct eye contact, a signal of truthfulness.]”

E3: Theology as a Ground for Encouragement

Pedro: “Opo, kasi po yung diniscuss sa theology noon, naalala ko pwede tayong maging..parang..puwede silang maging banal kagaya ni Jesus Christ sa paggagawa ng mabuti like po si (Saint) Pedro Calungsod. [Informant is looking left and up. This is a reassuring sign that he is in deep thought.]

God’s Touch: A miraculous experience of God’s Love

God touches us in many ways. He lets us feel His unconditional love. The informants shared their most touching experiences with God. This, also, is a very significant part of the whole journey.

(Question: When was the time when you felt that God really touched the you, your life?)

Rachel: “Marami, marami. Kasi ang mama ko cancer survivor siya, tsaka mga unexpected blessings sa bahay, sa mga anak ko... God is leading me to people na nagtatulungan sa akin. Every day is a miracle to me. Basta araw-araw may unexpected blessing. Kaya emotional ako kasi basta sa pagdating sa sharing ng experiences ko kay God, hindi mo matatagal. [Informant is on the verge of crying yet she remains focused and composed.]”

Care: “...my brother was diagnosed of a lung cancer, tignan mo, God is good...stage 4, but my brother is a cancer survivor...[Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

Miriam: “Nung time na umaattend ako sa mga preaching yun din yung time na hindi rin ako maintindihan ng parents ko, palagi ako sa pagdaling sa sharing ng experiences ko kay God, hindi mo matatagal. [Informant is on the verge of crying yet she remains focused and composed.]”

An Indelible Fingerprint of Christ

If Catholic Universities produce Christ-like beings, then it must have something that non-Catholic colleges and universities don’t have. Informants were asked if there is or are certain trademarks that we possess that make us unique since we are in a Catholic university, and also if we have any difference with non-Catholic schools.

G1. Courtesy and Respect

Courtesy: “Oo naman. Malaking pagkakabisa. Sa ano na lang natin..sa pagmamano, pagble-bless..isa yun sa mga practices natin, ano? At tsaka pag may Mass talagang nandun yung respect ng bawat isa...yan yung time na nagkakaroon ng bonding..yung..nagbubuklod yung mga tao dito. [Informant gives a closed-lip smile, signalling a gesture of courtesy.]”

Martha: “Meron, magaling daw sila masayahin. [these are feedback from institutions where VMUF students spend their OJT] [Informant maintains direct eye contact, a signal of truthfulness.]”

G2. An Atmosphere of Belongingness

Mary: “Kung makikita mo mga faculty dito magkakakilala, di ba? Sa ibang school, parang wala ka lang, pero dito, maski na estudante parang pag naka i.d. at uniform ka (teachers), “good morning mam.” Gamun sila kapit hindi kakilala. Sa mga faculty naman, yun ang maganda kasay, ah...halos lahat ng faculty dito magkakakilala. Dito madaling lapitan ang administrator. Yung hindi ka mahihiyang lapitan [sila]. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

Rachel: “Oo. meron tayong unique na trademark.. yung hindi mo matatagal yung closeness ng students, faculty, staff..yang ganun.. talagang maaano mo na “uy, VMU yan” pero pag ibang school parang..ang taas taas ng ere nila. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]”
Care: “Of course, my God, we are considered as one big family...yung dito yung makikita mo an gating environment na sila madame president, kino-consider ka nila na kapamilya. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

The Value of Spirituality

Courage: “Okay, the difference is that... I came from [A certain university] that is not a Catholic school and it is a private school but not a Catholic school. [This is] A private school but it adopts the Catholic education. The difference here is when we have mass in [a certain university] very few students [attending the mass]. But here, it is different. There is an active participation by the students, there, very few. Also, personnel... you can also personnel attending mass, more. In [a certain university] you seldom see the president [attending Mass]. That’s the difference. So I can see the difference, the value of spirituality. Also, here students, when they come to the office they are cordial. I can see the difference in attitude. It helps in some way. But we need more to inculcate values to our students. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.”

2. Christ Avenue: The Path towards becoming Christ-like

Life is a journey and the journey towards becoming Christ-like is not an easy path. The imitation of Christ itself is a challenge and most importantly a vocation.

Manifestations of Being Christ-like

What is it to be Christ-like? How can a student, teacher, and administrator can become Christ-like? Informants were asked how a person can imitate Christ.

Teresa: “Siguro, isa na dun yung kung paano mo intindihin yung kapwa mo. Kung paano mo titiginan kung..kasi ano eh ngayon more on tayo sa discrimination; more on tayo sa pangamalata sa kapwa, parang ganun. Ang ano kasi.. ang ano ni Christ, hindi siya ganun. Tinigtinan niya tayo pantay-pantay. Tapos, tumulong ka...kunwari sa financial problem, hindi naman porket nakakaranas ka nang hirap, hindi mo na kakayamin pang tumulong pa sa kapwa mo. Kasi yung pagtulong, hindi naman talaga siya sa pera,pwede ka naming tumulong in different ways. Tapos, pagmamahal or pag care sa kapwa mo. Kasi lahat naman nagi-start sa pagmamahal at pag-care sa kapwa mo...yang pagtulong at pag-intindi, to follow na lang yan pag may pagmamahal ka sa kanila. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

H1. Christ-like Students

Courage: “By the way how they [students] relate one’s self to the other. Like for example, you can see students helping one another, you can help student[ in an] act of charity, kindness. You can see also by their actuation and words and the way they also conduct themselves in class; and how the way they also, their attitude outwardly. Yan, so these are the signs that will manifest what is internal spirituality. It is internal but can be expressed externally.”

H2. Christ-like Teachers

Courage: “And also by the personnel, they give good example. We advice our personnel up-front to be student-oriented. Yung, you’re ready to serve our students with charity, hindi yung kwan, they act very bossy, ‘no? It should be with humility...by giving good example.”

Christ-Like Beings: Possible

A person can be Christ-like. This is possible according to all the informants of this study. Although some of them may have doubts that is because they think about being perfect. Yet, in their answers lie the keys how this journey is possible:

i1. A Personal Vocation, Conviction, and Initiative

Teresa: “Oo naman.. lahat naman tayo may possibility na maging katulad ni Christ.. it’s just on how or kung paano natin gustong gawin yun. Parang
ganun yung point of view ko. Parang hindi mo naman sasabihin, hindi ka naman pwedeng ma-bbigay ng specific characteristic na “dapat yung ganyan (characteristics) meron ka kasi ganyan si Christ. Meron naman kasing within you, merong talagang nandya-yyan sa pujo mo na katulad ng kay Christ. Parang nasay na sayo na kung paano mo siya i-enhance or palalabasin. [Looks directly in the eyes of the researcher as she speaks without staring. It symbolizes confidence and sincerity].”

Monica: “Oo, possible, kasi di ba parang pag nakikita nila na masyado kang religious, tuing twelve, mag-stop ka para mag-pray ng angelus, ganun. Yung makikita talaga nila na ginagawa mo yung part mo as a Christian same-share ka nang mga parang sa Bible, babasahan mo ng Bible yung mga kakilala mo, parang dun mo makikita na Christ-like siya sa ginagawa niya. Di ba sabi nga nila, “Share the Word of Christ”. parang ganun yung ginagawa nila. [Informant is sitting in general, with uncrossed legs which indicates an open attitude]."

Mary: “Yes, yes. Oo. sabi nga ni Lord na, “come and follow me.” Pero depende na rin yun… kasi sabi nga nila, tao lang tayo na nagkakasala. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]”

i.2 “…there am I in the midst of them.” [Matthew 18:20]

Courtesy: “Nothing is impossible. Kasi when you believe, it will happen. Ahh..in my simple ways, syempre hindi naman ganun ka-ano [kadali] kaya lang mas maganda sana kung..kung… may oneness. And ang anong ko lang, sa council (deans and department heads) din, magkakaroon din nang ganung oneness.. pero it’s possible. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful].”

i.3 “Come, follow Me.” [Matthew 4: 19]

Agatha: “Ah, oo kasi, ah..di ba sabi nga ni Lord na, “come and follow me.” Pero depende na rin yun…

i.4. Christ in the Modern World

Rachel: “Oo, ka-hit ganito na ang panahon natin na mabibilinan ng a high-tech na..may mga tao pa rin na ganun (Christ-like)…basta…[Informant slightly smiles and is interested in the topic].”

Pedro: “Parang yung post ko kanina sa Facebook, “ginawa ko na yung dapat kung gawin, Ikaw (Lord) na po yung bahala sakin. [Informant looks down, smiling].”

i.5. Character of Christ over Status

Martha: “Possible sir, kasi sa akin importante yung attitude kayaya yung pinagbahawakan nilang degree o diploma. Yung attitude pa rin, kung paano sila..yung pakikipag kawaida. Yun ang importante sakih eh kahit na matalino ka o grumaduate ka as Magna Cum laude kung hindi mo naman ini-emulate yung ginatagawa ni Jesus, wala din. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful].”

Values That One Possess which are Christ-like

We are created by God in His own image and likeness. This entails that inherently, we have God-like values which are indelible and lasting. The informants expressed that indeed, they believe that God is in them through the values and characters that they possess which are Christ-like.

j.1. Loving and Helping One’s Neighbor

Charity: “Siguro yung loving service. Christ was the first ones to show na love Niya tayo, so gusto Niya ganun din yung gagawin natin sa kapwa tao natin, so love. Yung mga estudyante kasi pag nakita nilang love mo sila, parang, they would love din. [Informant maintains direct eye contact and smiles, and indication of truthfulness and interest].”

Teresa: “Dati pahugso bugso din ako, ngayon iniisip ko muna siyang mabuti kung paano ko iv-view yung
isang situation or ang isang tao...tas siguro pagkicare din sa kapwa ko. Kasi pag may nakikita ako na tao na nangangailangan ng tulong, kunwari matanda, nandun ako to help them. Hindi ako nahihiyang tumulong kahtin hindi ko kakilala. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

Becoming Christ: One Becomes Christ-like by...

The informants, in their life’s daily journey have experienced being Christ to others in many different way. Their lived experiences proved that indeed, apart from them, everyone can possibly become Christ-like.

k1. Helping Others

Pedro: “May naitulong ako dun sa isang tao na..parang ang tamad tamad niya kasi parati. So ngayon, igina-guide ko naman siya tapos yung mga hindi niya naiintindihan tinuturo ko sa kanya. Kasi lagi niyang na-fail yung mga subjects..tapos nung ginayd ko sya, first time na hindi siya kasama sa mga magreremedial...nakapasa siya. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

k2. Loving and Helping the Poor

Teresa: “Siguro sa tuwing tumutulong ako sa kapwa ko. Minsan nasa community ako, kumakain kami ng burger, tapos may lumapit sa aking bata tas hininhiingi yung..kinakain ko..then binigay ko sakanya, parang.. everytime na ganun, everytime na may humihingi saking bata, bigay lang ako ng bigay..ng food. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

Mary: “Yung sigurong ano sa pagtulong sa mga batang may kapansanan. Nag start yan 3 years ago. Gusto ko pa rin, kung ano man, madiretso ko yung pagtulong sa kanila. [When asked where this took place]: dito sa San Carlos, nag-conduct kami ng survey and lumalabas na maraming batang may kapansanan dito [San Carlos]. Everytime na nangangailangan sila, go. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance, an indication of interest and attention.]

Eve: “Nagco-community extension kami. Tatlo na yung barangay pero usually nasa [barangay] Supo kami. Nagfeeding [program] o kaya gift-giving during December. [When asked if how do the students respond during the community extensions]: “ay Masaya din sila kapag nakakatulong sila kaya kung minsan nagpapamigay kami ng mga used clothes, mga noodles, mga ganyan, lalo na pag may mga victims ng calamity kasi usually ang Supo nababaha. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance, an indication of interest and attention.]

k3. Forgiving others as we have been forgiven

Courtesy: “Ako yung taong madaling mag forgive at tsaka..kasi kahtahutuhan mo na ako akin ahhhh. Talagang I have learned to forgive. At ganyan si Jesus Christ. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance, an indication of interest and attention.]

k4. A Heroic Sacrifice

Monica: “Oo, meron. Nung second year kasi ako parang naging president ako ng second year na ano tapos kailangan naming umattend ng, yung vigil, andito kasi si Our Lady of Manaoag nun tas parang kailangan 4 ng madaling araw nandito na. so ako kahtahutuhan ako nun, kasi parang may pinuntahan kami ng mga kaibigan ko ng gabi gumiising ako ng ngadaling araw para lang makapunta dito sa school para maka gumiising.. [Informant looks left while he answers. It is an indication that he is in deep thought and is a sign that words are truthful.]

Willingness to be Formed

One must be willing to submit himself/herself to God. One must be willing to be formed, molded, and shaped, into the image and likeness of Christ. The informants were asked if they are willing to be formed by the institution to become Christ-like, regardless of their age and status.
All the informants professed that, indeed, they are willing to be formed in the Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation to become Christ-like.

L1. Suggestions for Retreat and Recollection

Courtesy: “Integrate palagi sa lesson (ang values)… dapat magcoconduct ng regular recollection, retreat..dahil kailangan yan ng mga bata…mas maganda yung..you go out also. [Informant maintains direct eye contact.]”

Agatha: “Oo basta ang gagawin Vmu magkaroon ng recollection o seminars. Magiging effective yun pag isasapuso ng mga estudyante. [Informant tilts her head to ones side. It is a signal of interest.]”

Martha: “Sa akin, ano, parang kulang. Kasi parang sa akin, gusto kong magkaroon ng parang part nung subject, parang retreat or ano…recollection. Kasi yung mgaestudyante ko yun yung sina sabi ko sakanila. [Informant smiles and maintains direct eye contact signaling focus and interest on the topic.]”

The Journey towards becoming Christ-like

Finally, the informants were asked if they see themselves as Christ-like in the future.

m1. Responding to Call of becoming Christ-like

Care: “If, by chance, ganun ang mangyayari I will take the challenge. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance, an indication of interest and attention.]”

Courtesy: “Marami pa akong dapat gawin ksi ang pagiging kristyano mahirap.. gusto ko di ba? After all yun naman ang ating purpose sa buhay. Pagyayamanin ko na lang yung kung anong meron ako. Through time naman malalaman mo pag andyan na yung pagkakataon. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance, an indication of interest and attention.]”

m2. Christ is realized through Service

Monica: “Hindi pa, kasi parang kunyari sa church kapag nakikipag-Mass ako, parang gusto ko din yung magse-serve. Kasi dati nung elementary ako nagsacristan din ako. Parang kahit puro lalaki yung kasama ko nagsacristan pa rin ako. Parang gusto ko na mag-lector ako, ganun. Pagdating din ng, siguro pag matanda na ako, ganun sa mga tita ko kung sakaling mabigyan ako ng chance. [Informant directly faces the researcher with open stance. This is an indication of interest and attention.]”

DISCUSSION

Most Christians, especially Roman Catholics have so many views and opinions about the term *Alter Christus*. At the onset of the interview some of the informants, when asked if it is possible that ordinary lay people or common people can become like Christ, were skeptical. One of the reasons that I see behind this skepticism is that most people see the concept of an *Alter Christus* as a perfect being, or one who can perform miracles such as curing the sick, resuscitating the dead, or even turning water into wine. Most of the informants have this point of view; that to be Christ-like means also dying on the cross, experiencing torments, and eventually dying literally for the sake of others. But this is certainly not the case when Msgr. Villegas stated: “The product of a Catholic school is another Christ.”

“We are called a holy people, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9).

According to Fr. Simon Catatista, MMHC (2014), a lay/common person can be another Jesus in his or her own little way. To be an alter Christus must be the dream of every Catholic by virtue of baptism. Though, by thought this might be impossible, but there were people who were able to achieve or realize this like the saints and the Virgin Mary, so there’s hope that people can also achieve this.

The possibility of becoming Christ-like was expressed by the informants. In their perspective, a person becomes Christ-like when he or she is able to help and love other people especially the poor, forgive those who have wronged them, and one who can heroically sacrifice.

Significantly, before the end of the interview, the informants withdrew to their prior skepticism
about the possibility of becoming Christ-like. All of them agreed that indeed, becoming Christ-like is possible. They were asked also if they see themselves as Christ-like in the future. All of them positively affirmed to this but according to them the process is not that easy.

Accordingly, informants shared their lived experiences on the journey towards becoming Christ-like in rich details. The informants’ discussions of their journey on becoming Christ-like have unveiled areas of familiar truths as well as unknown realities. Their forthright revelations shed light to the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Their distinct and dynamic accounts directed the researcher to the discovery of truths embedded into the complex fabric of becoming Christ-like in the school setting. Significant themes emerged that described the informants’ concept of becoming Christ-like. The key themes are identified as New Bethlehem: The Birth of Faith, A Seedbed of Hope: Institutional Evangelization, and Christ Avenue: the Path towards becoming Christ-like.

The first theme New Bethlehem: the Birth of Faith was noted from students’, teachers’, and administrators’ lived experiences as they discussed the foundations of their faith in spirituality and religiosity. It was apparent in their responses that their faith was a manifestation of their Spirituality over Religiosity, and was inspired by Jesus Christ; that Jesus gives Contentment, and that their faith is getting stronger as the journey gets tough.

Most of the informants were spiritually inclined. Most of them are not able to carry out the Catholic Sunday obligation and attending to other sacraments like Confession. Yet, beyond these shortcomings, they see to it that they pray; that they stay faithful to God by being good citizens. Moreover, they have affirmed that Jesus Christ is their ultimate inspiration both in practical and spiritual life. This is an implication that they see Jesus as a true model of perfection and goodness.

Remarkably, one of the informants said that for her, Jesus gives contentment and all of them professed that their faith was getting stronger. This was a consistent answer. Also, one of the most interesting facts in the first theme is that no informant has experienced being faithful to God before and later on become unfaithful. All informants see their faith in God as an ascending spiral which gradually reaches the close-to-perfection point.

The second theme, A Seedbed of Hope: Institutional Evangelization that emerged from the informants portrays the role of the Catholic university in the mission of evangelization. The role of the Catholic school in indoctrinating the faith is very essential, more so that students in this day and age would believe more in the teachings of their teachers than that of their parents’.

According to Msgr. Socrates Villegas, DD (2014), the call of Pope Francis for Christians to return to the Joy of the Gospel and to “go forth” into the complex world to share with it this joy belongs to the context in which this reflection on our Philippine Catholic universities is necessary.

According to the informants, the religious activities which are held in their institution (Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation) affect the character-values formation of the students. Having the regular Mass schedule and occasional visit of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary were an impact on the spiritual upbringing not only of the students but as well as to teachers and administrators.

Under the subtheme The Impact of a Catholic institution, the informants reaffirmed that one of the reasons why the institutions’ religious programs are alive is because the university president herself and her family are pious Catholics. The informants have been witnesses to the spiritual leadership of the university president, her spouse, and the whole family in the carrying out of religious activities.

Also under this subtheme, most of the informants felt in their lived experience that VMUF is like a family where almost all of the teaching and non-teaching staff knows each other. Also, teachers and deans were the ones to take initiative in spiritual activities like praying with the faculty members
before they go to their respective classes in the morning.

Moreover, one of the most interesting subthemes is the Foundation from Theological studies. According to most informants, there is an unsatisfactory approach of teaching theology in the institution. Some informants even challenged those who teach theology to be role models of what they teach. Remarkably, one informant said that he seldom see theology instructors attending and participating in the religious activities being held inside the campus.

The third theme that emerged from the informants’ lived accounts is the Christ Avenue: the Path towards Becoming Christ-like which elucidates the roadmap of the journey towards becoming Christ-like. The transformation of a person from being merely religious to spiritual; from being skeptical to enlightened are just some of the manifestations that a person in faith is not headed towards the worse but to the path of perfection and ultimate goodness. The birth of faith is the genesis of every soul. The informants’ accounts of faith were tremendous exposé of the mystery of faith in God. The explicit shared stories and testimonials of the informants were seemingly enough to conclude the richness and vastness of life’s journey towards holiness.

The subtheme Manifestation of being Christ-like exposes the lived experiences and the accounts of the informants in the paradigm of actual and substantial experience of being Christ-like. Informants were asked if there was any time and situation where they think they have imitated Christ and the answers were tremendously practical and attainable by any common person. This, however, does not categorize these acts as merely shallow or natural but this is to contextualize that even small good acts can become a foundation and later on a manifestation of a Christ-like value.

The actual experiences of the informants are extraordinary in a sense that little good ways are not interpreted in an equally little value; instead, these little good ways are seen as significant leaps to becoming Christ-like. So much so that some of them conclude that the journey towards becoming Christ-like is understood as a Vocation and a fruit of personal conviction and initiative.

Lastly, the informants have had a clear concept on how to become Christ-like. Their concept, true enough, are just a part and parcel of the whole context of the ultimate realization of Alter Christus, yet this conceptualization is a sign that informants understand the essence and practical values of a Christ-like being. On the informants’ accounts, a person is another Christ when he or she is able to help other people, help the poor, forgive others, becoming a hero in little ways, and through service to God and fellowmen.

CONCLUSION

The Alter Christus must be the dream and goal of every Christian. Alter Christus is self-realization or self-actualization anchored in faith and love of God. The goal of the human person is to achieve and realize his or her own Authentic Existence. The questions and inquiries about the purpose and essence of life seem unending. And on the other side, millions of probable answers are raised and tested. But what seem to be lasting is living a life filled with love from and for God and fellowmen. These realities gave entrance to another real realm of our world. That this world is temporal and after death, another life comes, this time eternal.

An Alter Christus is possible. Being an Alter Christus does not mean having supernatural god-like power like making the blind see, or the crippled walk, or raising a dead person to life and turning water into wine. In the simplest way, a person who sincerely helps other people especially the poor is being an Alter Christus; a person who forgives the person who wronged him and her is being an Alter Christus. Everyone can all be Alter Christus in their own little way regardless of religion, ethnicity, and status in life.

The journey towards becoming Christ-like starts with one’s self. A person can become good only if he or she is being good to himself or herself. One cannot give what he does not have. This journey towards becoming Christ-like is a fruit of a healthy and faithful personal relationship with God.
To become Christ-like, one has to be with others. A Christ-like person cannot be disengaged in a community. An isolated person cannot be Christ-like because to be Christ-like is to love other people, friends and enemies alike. Christ would not be in the world of animals, He is in the world of people. To be Christ-like is to cherish life with other people.

The Alter Christus is the ultimate journey of a Christian, of the people who follow Christ. Followers of Christ do not just follow Him but imitate Him. When you follow someone, you do what he does, you say what he says, and you act as He acts. This is the true essence of an Alter Christus, one that has the courage to do something good at all times, at all costs, just like Jesus Christ.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking findings and conclusion in deliberate consideration, this study developed recommendations as follows:

1. Since the concept of an Alter Christus is very abstract to most students, teachers, and some administrators, they must be enriched with sufficient knowledge about the possibility of becoming Christ-like in Catholic education such as in the discipline of theology, religion, and in the infusion of values in the curriculum.

2. Since there is a lack of confidence, strong conviction, and initiative to be Christ-like on the part of students, Catholic schools, particularly the Virgen Milagrosa University Foundation, should instill confidence in pupils and teachers to be public witnesses for the faith.

3. Teachers, especially those who teach Theology subjects must be confident witnesses and models of faith.

4. Since students are fond of outings and field trips, it can also be helpful that religious seminars, retreats, and recollections should be organized through the initiative of every college departments not only for graduating students but also to non-graduating.

5. Since there is a regular schedule for Eucharistic celebration, encouragement to Catholic students to attend will be of great help in their spiritual upbringing. Let God’s presence in his Word and the Eucharist transform students, teachers, and administrators from within.

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