

Mary's Song of Praise in Luke 1:46-55
A BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION MODEL FOR DOING
A CONTEMPORARY ILONGGO INTERPRETATION
IN A BILINGUAL SETTING¹

CARLA GAY AGUS ROMARATE

This is an attempt to ask and answer questions arising from the pericope in Luke 1:46-55, its context and the interpreter's context, in order to develop a contemporary Ilonggo interpretation in a bilingual setting. The purpose of this contemporary Ilonggo interpretation is the development of a more relevant translation and hermeneutics for Christian ministry in churches and in the larger community.

The three main questions this study attempted to answer are: a.) What is the original meaning of the pericope? b.) What are the underlying principles and teaching?, and c.) What interpretative direction(s) can be taken on the basis of this pericope? The steps made toward answering these questions involved several support tasks which included an Overview of the Gospel of Luke, Testing the text of Luke 1:46-55 for variant readings, Analysis of the syntax, word meaning and literary device, and Determining the immediate and underlying contexts of the pericope. The last task involves distinguishing between the context which is a vehicle or medium for communication and the message of the pericope.

The results of the analysis of the pericope in Luke 1:46-55 are the following:

1. Original Meaning - Mary praises the Lord for choosing her to be the instrument of His saving act for her people. The main theme is worship related to the sub-themes in the passage which are related to the experience of God's salvation, mercy, deliverance, and hope in the fulfillment of His promises.

¹ Abstract of a thesis submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity at Central Philippine University

2. Underlying Principles/Teachings - The underlying principle/teaching of this pericope is that wholistic experience of liberation or salvation can lead to a meaningful worship of God. Other significant principles/teaching are:
 - 2a. Worship is both personal and corporate. It needs to be rooted in the story and experience of a people in order to be more meaningful and empowering. God is Savior and is worshipped on the basis of His saving and merciful acts in fulfillment of His promises.
 - 2b. Worship must be inclusive of class, gender, and race, without diminishing personal and national identities and integrity.
 - 2c. Women's experience and feminine imagery are necessary components of a worship experience and need to be recovered and recaptured in the music liturgies of Christian churches.
 - 2d. Worship leads to a vision of an inclusive and just community and a full life in Christ.
3. Contemporary Interpretation - The contemporary Ilonggo application or expression of the pericope is presented in the form of a binalaybay based on an interpretation of the pericope and reflections on the significance of the pericope on the contemporary situation, calling for the empowering of the powerless, particularly of Filipino Overseas Contract Workers, especially the women domestic helpers.
4. Implications/Recommendations - The value of this pericope is not only for enriching the underlying principles of Christian worship but also for doing theology, missions, pastoral ministry, and Christian education.

The use of Christian feminist hermeneutics is used in recovering and reconstructing the liberating and inclusive nature of life and ministry of Jesus.

English is necessary as an intermediary language in a bilingual teaching-learning setting. Grammatical analysis shows English verb tenses as having close correspondence to Greek verb tense. This observation points to a potential for further study of English grammar in relation to New Testament Greek.

Hiligaynon-Ilonggo pronouns are more gender-inclusive, while New Testament Greek pronouns reflect a more specific and exclusively male “God-language” consistent with Jewish patriarchy. “God-language” is a phrase commonly used by Christian Feminist Biblical scholars in discussing the problem of an exclusively male language to refer to God. In the Hiligaynon-Ilonggo translation of the pericope the masculine imagery and language in referring to God in the New Testament Greek in relation to the context is retained but is not emphasized because of the non-gender specific Ilonggo pronouns “iya,” “siya,” or “ya” in referring to God.

Contextualization is common to both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the Israelites make use of similar Ancient Near Eastern language and literary style to express a different perspective and faith in God. In the New Testament, the earliest followers of Jesus make use of Old Testament language and imagery to express the message of salvation, adapting the language and culture of the dominant society but at the same time struggling to retain the non-hierarchical view of community life taught by Jesus of Nazareth. The issue of women’s participation in the church and society was not peripheral; it was a major concern in the earliest Christian communities. The contemporary Christian churches will be helped and enriched by a re-evaluation of these concerns in the light of the growing awareness of commitment to the upliftment of women in contemporary churches and society in many parts of the world, including Asia.