

## CHRISTIANITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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**Abstract:** This paper will discuss in a broad stroke Christianity in the Philippines. According to the 2020 religion census, at least 84% of the population is Christian in their religious affiliation. About 79% belong to the Catholic Church while about 6% belong to Protestant Churches (Wikipedia). Christianity was an external religion introduced and imposed by the Spaniards in the Philippines. As an external religion, it did not completely abrogate the indigenous religion in the mentalities and practices of the Filipinos. Our Christian religion blends with our indigenous religion. The indigenous religion is articulated in our popular religiosity or devotion as we can see in the festivities of the Black Nazarene in Manila City and Santo Niño in Cebu City (Canceran, 2016). Although Christianity has been introduced for centuries, it did not penetrate the mentalities and embed in the practices of Filipinos. Filipinos have been historically Hispanized (1521-1898) and Americanized (1898-1946). In effect, Filipinos have become hybridized identities. The Filipinos have accepted Christianity because it is congruent to the indigenous religion believing in *Bathala*, *Diwata* and *Anito* corresponding to God, Angel and Saint (Canceran, 1994).

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

We start with history since it has an enduring influence on the present and future of Christianity in the Philippines (Schumacher, 1979; Anderson, 1969). Colonization is a disturbance or intervention in the historical formation of people that eventually formed or deformed our society and church (Cosmao, 1985). Although such disturbance or intervention already happened in the distant past, we still must reflect on its consequences and learn from their lessons, lest we repeat the same history. This return to history calls for decolonization. Decolonization frees our minds from captivity and attains the autonomy of our country (Alatas, 2006).

### SPANISH CATHOLICISM

The Church and the Empire represented by the pope and the king were hierarchized and united in the colonization. This hierarchy and unity are based on the relationship between the soul and body. The soul is higher than the body and the body depends on the soul. The pope belongs to the spiritual while the king belongs to the material. The pope precedes the king. But they are linked. The king was a benefactor of the church and the implementor of Christianity. The church in turn provided privilege to the king. This was called the *patronato real*. The Pope divided the world into two parts, one for Spain and other for Portugal. The pope through a papal bull authorized the Spanish king to colonize the new world and lead the Christianization. For the church, the main objective of the colonization was Christianization, and colonization was only justified by that purpose. Thus, Christianity came to the Philippines through colonization (Phelan, 1959).

The Christianization of the new world showed the achievement of Spain as a global power. The Spanish empire achieved their global power by exploring and discovering the world. However, it did not stop in the exploration and discovery of the new world, but continued through eventual conquest and colonization. The Spaniards landed in the Philippine Islands and began the colonization. At the beginning,

the Spaniards were united in Christianization. The colonizers brought both their weapons and religion symbolized by the sword and the cross. Wherever the friars went, soldiers would accompany and protect them (Bernard, 1972).

Having occupied the island, the Spaniards saw the potential economic benefits of the islands. They also needed economic support for their existence and survival. They then exploited both the natural and the human resources of the land. Thus, glory, God and gold coalesced in the colonization. The Spaniards were both material and spiritual conquerors.<sup>1</sup> Here we have the satisfaction of both the soul and the body through religion and wealth. They then exacted and collected taxes from the natives. In exchange, the Spaniards would protect and evangelize the natives. The *encomienda* system was a privilege given to the Spaniards in exchange for their contribution to colonization. These *encomienderos* imposed and collected taxes from the people. Unfortunately, the *encomienderos* failed to deliver these duties to the natives. Instead, they abused their privileges at the expense of the natives. The natives resisted these taxes and abhorred these abuses. Some natives left their houses and settled in the mountains as a refusal to submit to the authority of the Spaniards (Forster, 1956).

In the Synod of Manila, the missionary friars agreed that they would learn the native languages to teach catechism to the natives. This strategy deviated the usual method of Christianization in the case of the Americas. Instead of the Spaniards teaching Spanish to the natives, they would rather learn their native languages and translate the Spanish catechisms into the native languages. The friars would use the native languages in the Christianization of the natives. The friars printed catechism books for the use of the Spaniards in the Christianization of the natives. This method sounded favorable to the natives and seemed to show the benevolence of the Spaniards. However, this impression was not the case. The friars learned the native language in order to have more control over the natives. The Spaniards did not just conquer the lands but also the natives, minds. Generally, the natives then did not learn the Spanish language (Porras, 1990).

#### AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

The Philippines was surrendered by Spain to the US in exchange for an amount. It appeared that the Philippines was owned by Spain and sold to the US. Only the two empires – one falling and the other rising – were representing the country like a seller and a buyer in a market. The Filipinos were non-existent. Unlike the Spanish unity of the church and empire, the American empire was separated from the church. There was a separation of church and state. The American empire occupied the Philippines and governed the people. The Americans were preoccupied with the government of the country and engrossed with the justification of the colonization. Having witnessed the Spanish atrocities, the Filipinos were pursuing their independence from colonization. They learned from the Spanish empire and they envisioned their independence. However, the Americans thought that the Filipinos were still unprepared for independence. Thus, they still needed to be taught or trained by the Americans. Thus, the independence was belated. Just like other colonizers, the Americans invoked the logic of backwardness as a justification for the continued colonization. They deployed or mobilized the binary logic of prepared Americans and unprepared Filipinos. Thus, the Filipinos who owed their preparation from the Americans sacrificed in modernizing or being civilizing by them (Clymer, 1986).

Comparatively, the American empire did not concentrate on religion but on education. They founded public school systems to educate the Filipinos on the American way. They taught English language among the Filipinos. Language is the carrier or expression of culture. Thus, Filipinos were Americanized. Unlike the Spaniards who learned the native languages, the Americans taught their native language to the Filipinos. In a way, the Filipinos were unified by the English language. However, they were also pushed into elitism. Language became the standard or distinction of inclusion. The Americans

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from economic (gold) and religious (God) motives of Spain as a global power (glory), the Spaniards were also in search for the Spice Islands. During those times, spices were a luxury item and status symbol of social distinction (Freedman, 2004).

opened their world to the Filipinos through use of the English language. The natives entered into that world of the Americans not as co-equals but as "little brown Americans." That description included the body in terms of size (little) and in terms of race (brown) people. Thus, Filipinos were contrasted from the Americans as the standard of humanity being tall and white people. Education became an instrument in the colonization of the minds of the Filipinos. In learning the English language, the Filipinos entered into their world and inculcated the superiority of the American civilization. They then developed a colonial mentality of Uncle Sam as the representation of the American people.

The Protestant missionaries immediately went to the Philippines for the mission of evangelization. They took advantage of the American occupation in the country. They taught that the Filipinos were not yet well evangelized; instead, they were taught superstitions. Having that assessment, these missionaries justified their presence in the country. Thus, these missionaries propagated the Christian faith. They were scattered in various parts of the country and established their churches in those areas. Unlike the missionary friars, the protestant missionaries did not limit themselves to religion but also included some public services like medical mission to the Filipinos. They wanted to attract more Filipinos to their faith by offering services to them. Nonetheless, they were unable to recruit more members since the Filipinos were more interested in independence as they were already accustomed to Catholicism (Suarez, 1999).

The protestant missionaries cooperated with the American government by supporting them in the occupation. Although they preached religion and acknowledged their separation from the state, they nonetheless agreed on the colonization of the Philippines. These protestant missionaries were invited to share their views on the American occupation and the Filipino independence, and they were unanimous on the continuity of the American occupation of the country. They followed the same American logic. The Filipinos were still unprepared, and they needed more education to civilize them in the American way. In that logic, they would also justify their presence in the country and continue their mission of evangelization. To appease the Filipinos, the American Empire recruited more Filipinos in the management of the country. The protestant missionaries trained more Filipino preachers into their churches (Apilado, 1999).

Let us now summarize the Spanish and the American empires. In the Spanish empire, the missionary friars were more powerful than their civilian counterparts. The logic then was the hierarchy between the spiritual and the temporal and the primacy of the spiritual over and above the temporal. The spiritual realm belonged to the domain of the church while the temporal belonged to the realm of the State. Thus, the friars claimed ascendancy in the colony. Moreover, they also had bigger numbers than their civilian counterparts. Since they were widely spread all over the islandss, they had direct interaction and control over the natives. In their respective territorial assignments, they exercised tremendous powers over the natives. Their presence was felt by the people in their respective parishes. They then overpowered the civilian authorities in many ways.

In the American empire, the protestant missionaries were separated from their civilian counterparts due to the provision of the separation of the church and state. Although these missionaries were consulted by the civilian government on colonization, they were independent from the state in their mission efforts. They were then subservient to the government and dependent on the policy of the state. They joined the government in the extension of the colonization since they also benefited from that option.

The missionary friars were able to enter into the world of the natives by learning their language. This decision seemed advantageous to the natives since they were not required to learn the Spanish language, and friars seemed to acknowledge the potential of the native language in Christianization. However, the learning of the native language added more power to the friars since they increased their power in control of the minds of the natives. Moreover, learning the native language was not automatic. They cleansed the native language from traces or intrusion of native religion since they considered it as paganism. They replaced pagan terms with Christian words or equivalences. Since the contents of the catechism was composed of both native and Catholic terms, they created a barrier of effective communication. Thus, the natives interpreted their words from their local knowledge. There was then a

sort of hybrid linguistic encounter. This may be the reason why the indigenous religions have remained in the form of popular religiosity or devotion among the Filipinos.<sup>2</sup>

The Americans established the public school system and taught English language to the Filipinos. The Filipinos learned their language and that, in a way, unified the people. The Americans opened their world to the Filipinos by teaching them their language and by learning English. However, such opening of the American world to the Filipinos did not necessarily mean equality between them. The Filipinos remained subordinate to them. They were just accommodated by the Americans. Since English language is a foreign or second language, Filipinos did not comparatively possess the same linguistic performance and competence of native speakers. There remained a gap of communication in their interaction. This gap might have hindered their understanding of their evangelization effort.

Using the categories of Bonaventura de Sausa Santos, the Spaniards established an abysmal relationship with the natives by separating themselves from them. This separation was symbolized by the Intramuros in Manila where the Spaniards belonging to the elite class resided. The Spaniards put up a wall around their city and lived in that secluded place among themselves. In short, the Spaniards created a separate world from the natives. The natives remained outside consigned to a lower class of subhuman people. The Spaniards refused to teach the natives their Spanish language. Rather, they learned the native language so that they could also invade the cognitive world of the natives. Their learning of the native language did not mean that they considered the natives as equal in status or in a respectful attitude. Using again the category made by Santos, the Americans established a non-abysmal relationship to the Filipinos, not by separating them or excluding them, but by relegating them to an inferior or subordinate class. In contrast, by teaching the English language to the Filipinos, the Americans opened their world to the Filipinos by accommodating them into their world. The Filipinos did not achieve equal status or get respect to for their differences. They were included in the world of the Americans by discriminating against them. In both the Spanish and American empires, the Filipinos suffered from racism being labeled as *indio* and small brown Americans. The colonizers and the colonized remained in an asymmetrical relationship in a social hierarchy. In both cases, there was inclusion by exclusion (Spaniards) and marginalization (Americans). For the Spaniards, there was exclusion by division. The Spaniards and the natives belonged to separate worlds while the Americans and the Filipinos belonged to an unequal world (See De Sousa Santos, 2018).

## IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

It is not just history that affects society and church; there are also other factors. We are also influenced by the social transformations around us. These influences come via communication like written publications and movements such as scholarship abroad. Scholars are influenced by their socialization in their studies and from their peers. These are communicated to the communities and pulpits. Some join the groups and movements.

### INFLUENCE OF MARXISM

During the period of martial law, many priests and sisters were exposed to the poverty of the people and they commiserated with them. With the influence of the Vatican II documents, especially the church in the modern world, church people went to the native people and witnessed their joys and their sorrows. They were also influenced by Marxism in understanding poverty. They were infiltrated or taught by the leftists on this matter. Moreover, aside from leftism, these church people were also influenced by liberation theology from Latin America. Liberation theology deployed Marxist theory in understanding

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<sup>2</sup> Although the Spaniards learned some native languages as their foreign languages, they could not possess the linguistic competence and linguistic performance of the native speakers. They would only know the surface structures but not necessarily the deep structures of these foreign languages (Hale, 2010; Chomsky, 2013).

pervasive poverty among the people. Having similar history of colonization and underdevelopment, these priests and sisters joined the leftist movements and some of them went underground (De La Torre, n.d.).

Many priests and sisters were dissatisfied with the government and with its economic policies since these policies were indifferent to the plight of the poor. Coming from traditional politicians and family dynasties, these politicians in the government were motivated by their self-serving interests or class interests forgetting their campaign promises to the people. They were engaged in unchecked graft and corruption. Moreover, the government followed the dictates of some international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that disadvantaged the developing global south through imposition of structural adjustments to the advantage of the global north. Instead of developing the Philippines, they worsened the economic plight of the already poor (Aguilan, 2013).

Religious people who were socialized in the Catholic institutions found themselves in a contradictory situation. Having been trained in elite institutions, the priests and sisters were also socialized in an elite class and transformed into an elite group. They lived in elite institutions that formed them into part of the elite class of priests and sisters and exalted them to elevated positions in society. However, knowing the debilitating plight of the poor, they underwent transformation of their lifestyles and opted to align themselves to the marginalized people. Having no other option, they made their individual decision to join the left and protest this injustice. This was not only impelled by the social teachings of the church on the church of the poor or option for the poor, but they experienced this poverty by either coming from poor families themselves or from being exposed to the poverty of the people. While waiting for the transformation of the Catholic institutions, these religious people walked both in the social transformation of their religious identities in line with the church and with the poor and the option for the poor. They needed to unlearn their elite baggage and re-socialized themselves to the plight of the poor (Nadeau, 2002).

Due to ideological differences, the left was polarized. The polarization consisted of three factions: the reaffirmists, the rejectionists, and a third force. The reaffirmists consisted of the loyal members of the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), namely, Joma Sison; the rejectionists consisted of the separationist members of the founder, and the third force consisted mostly of church people who split from the leftist group. The progressive or radical church people formed their own group unlinking themselves from these two groups. These church people continued their work with the poor and struggled with the poor independent from the other groups. Although there was a third force, it did not mean that all the progressive or radical church people joined it. Some stuck to the founder of the party, while some joined the separate group. This division of the left affected church people since that polarization was extended to their congregations, and religious people were ideologically divided among themselves in their alliances. This polarization remains today (Jong, 2016).

#### INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM

Church people were also influenced by feminism and the feminist movement. This brand of feminism came from the west. A debate sparked in the leftist circle on the relationship between class analysis and gender analysis. Some wanted to subsume gender analysis under the umbrella of class analysis while others questioned this subsumption. This subsuming would mean the continuing subordination of women since their concern was secondary. For class analysis believers, class analysis precedes gender analysis since many Filipinos were literally or economically impoverished and needed immediate response and help. When they already met or satisfied their basic needs, then they could attend to gender analysis. Thus, gender analysis was postponed. Some viewed gender analysis as separate from class analysis. In this case, women and mothers belonged to poor families and due to that class belonging, they suffered from poverty. Others argued that gender analysis and class analysis can be done simultaneously and complementarily since there is the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty wherein women and mothers have suffered more from the impact of poverty. In this case, the intersection of gender and class could enrich their analysis of the condition of women and mothers. Religious sisters joined the feminist

movements like General Assembly Binding Women for Reform, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action (GABRIELA) and worked with women and mothers to alleviate their plight in the areas of human trafficking and domestic violence (Roces, 2012).

This feminist movement came or grew from liberation theology. Some members of religious people who embraced liberation theology and feminist theology integrated class analysis and gender analysis. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) espoused liberation theology that attracted scholars from the Philippines. This association is participated in by some religious women who contributed to journals and books on the poverty of women and advocacy for their welfare. They expanded their analyses and included gender in class analyses and deployed these analyses. They criticized both the injustice of poverty and the inequality of women. However, they had to criticize not just the injustice and inequality in society but also in their own backyard, that is, in their own churches and their own associations. In this case, they had to criticize the prevailing unjust and sexist practices within their churches and associations. These women religious also experienced difficulty coming to terms with their own institutions and movements characterized by social hierarchy and gender divisions. Women religious occupied a subordinate status in the institutional church and in the social movement. The men occupied a privileged position for the simple reason that they are male. Their masculinity provided them an unmerited privilege. Women could easily and actively join advocacy groups and protest movements for women's causes such as human trafficking and domestic violence because they could resonate with their subordinate status. They could share in the sufferings with other marginalized groups or sectors (Sanchez, 2022).

#### INFLUENCE OF POSTCOLONIALISM

Postcolonialism came to the Philippines from the west, specifically from the United States (U.S.) and United Kingdom (U.K.). Scholars from western universities embarked on postcolonial discourse initiated and influenced by Edward Said in his Orientalism. Orientalism is a western construction of the non-western other. This construction was produced during the colonial period where the colonizers represented the colonized. The other is subordinate or inferior to the west. Filipino scholars have picked up this orientation and applied it to the Philippine situation. Being a colonized country by Spain and the US, they can immediately identify with postcolonialism (Brazal 2019).

Postcolonialism examines the colonial and western representation of the Filipinos. Spain labeled the Filipinos as *indios*. *Indo* was a name for inferior others. The *indio* collectively referred to the natives of the islands. *Indio* was the lowest rank in a social hierarchy. The "pure" Spaniards occupied the superior rank followed by the "impure" mestizos. The Americans used the expression "Little Brown American" in referring to the Filipinos. Filipinos were Americans, but they were little in stature and brown in color. Thus, they were an inferior type of Americans. Both labels *Indio* and Little Brown Americans were racialized representations of the colonized natives or Filipinos (Camacho, 2011). They never equaled the colonizers, but they were always belittled. These labels were not complimentary but subordinate names for the natives or Filipinos. In the case of the *Indio*, the natives were excluded as being subhuman, while in the case of the Little Brown Americans, the Filipinos were marginalized as being inferior (Tupas, 2022).

Basically, postcolonialism examines or analyzes the western or colonial representations of the natives or the Filipinos. The colonizers unilaterally represented the colonized as inferior peoples. It was a representation of the colonized by the colonizers. The colonized were reduced into silence and subservience. That representation is unequally made since it emanated from the colonizers and converted them into their reality and imposed on them the colonized fate. Using Foucault and Lacan, postcolonialism understands this representation as discourse of power that controls the production of knowledge, subjugating the natives and as the western unconsciousness that projects their fear to the colonized. Spivak distinguishes two types of representation, one as a portrait-like picture that represents someone, and two, as a proxy-like politician who represents his/her constituents (Barnett, n. d.).

## CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Catholicism remains the majority religion of the Filipinos, while Protestantism remains a minority religion. Filipinos have been socialized and accustomed to the Catholic religion and our ancestors have handed down and brought up the succeeding generations in this religion. Thus, they still practice this traditional religion despite the atrocities and abuses of the Spaniards. The Protestant religion exists side by side with the Catholic religion, and there are ecumenical dialogues and movements going on between these religions. The Vatican II documents have opened the doors of the Catholic Church to ecumenical as well as interreligious dialogues. Most collaborations have focused on social issues and social justice in the service of the ordinary people. In the past, the Catholic religion has been influential through the leadership of the Catholic Bishops Conference in the Philippines (CBCP) and the Conference of the Major Superiors of the Philippines (CMSP). Comparatively, the CMSP has been more vocal and active in their engagement with social problems and advocacies. But in the present, the influence of Catholic religion has dwindled among the people (World Faiths Development Dialogue, 37).

During the Marcos era, the Catholic leadership was a staunch critic of the administration. Marcos had been accused of gross violation of human rights and unchecked graft and corruption. The Catholic church under the leadership of the late Cardinal Sin joined the opposition headed by widow of the slain Senator Benigno Aquino, Sr., the late Corazon Aquino, in calling the people in unseating and toppling the dictator. People had been mobilized to join the so-called People Power. People went to EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue) demanding the immediate stepping down of Marcos. The snap election that he called to legitimize his administration was believed to have been rigged. The Filipinos called for his immediate resignation from the presidency and installed the new leader, President Corazon "Cory" Aquino (Abinales, 1996).

The Aquino administration was a friend of the Catholic Church. The church reestablished its good relationship with the government under the new administration who restored democracy in the country. Generally, there was a smooth relationship between the church and state during the Aquino government (Youngblood, 1987). In fact, after the demise of the president, there are sectors who are pushing for his sainthood. However, this push died out eventually (Sotelo, 2009).

Under the Estrada administration, the church again joined the opposition in criticizing the president for corruption charges. The President was accused of being a *jueteng* (gambling) beneficiary. The church was against gambling. In the Senate, the senators initiated the investigation of the *jueteng* charges and the impeachment complaints against the sitting President. After a series of senate hearings, majority of the senate members voted for the impeachment against the president. He was eventually ousted from the presidency (Arugay, 2004).

President Estrada was succeeded by the Vice President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. President Arroyo was also a friend of the Catholic church. The church again regained its influence in the government Ruiz Austria, 2004). Some bishops even received some privileges such as the infamous SUV bishops. The Senate invited some bishops to attend the investigation. In the hearings, these bishops admitted their faults and eventually returned these cars. The bishops learned a lesson from that practice. After that experience, they decided to refuse any financial aid from the government (Associated Press, 2011).

When President Benigno Aquino, Jr. ascended to the presidency, he endorsed the reproductive rights bill (RH Bill). This move antagonized the church hierarchy since they opposed the bill because it contradicts the moral teaching of the church on artificial contraception. The bishops considered the bill contradictory to the doctrine which only allows the natural method and not the artificial method of contraception. In the survey, a majority of the Filipinos approved the reproductive rights. Even other religions supported it. The Catholic church received its backlash. People did not listen to the Catholic hierarchy. Rather, they acted based on their consciences (Zialcita, 2019).

During the time of the Duterte administration, the Catholic church was openly antagonized by the president. The Catholic church criticized the war on drug policy of the president. In spite of that open opposition, Duterte still received a consistently high trust rating and approval of his notorious war on drug

policy. The Catholic church joined with the other human rights advocates such as the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in denouncing that policy. Most victims of that policy belonged to the poor sectors of society. The Catholic church opposed the war on drug since it contradicts the commandment of God: You shall not kill. Only God can give life and take that away. President Duterte enforced its policy and disregarded the criticisms (Willis 2018).

With the election of the team party of Bongbong Marcos, the namesake of the late dictator, and Sara Duterte, the daughter of the anti-drug leader, the Catholic church was generally silent. Perhaps, church people are still observing the movements of the new leadership using the strategy of wait and see. Although in the past we have seen the conflict between the church and Marcos and the church and Duterte, we cannot also attribute the same relationship with their son and daughter. During the national election campaign, some church people were openly declaring their support to the candidacy of the opposition party, namely, Leni Robredo and Kiko Pangilinan under the Liberal Party. Some church people were criticizing the clergy for that open campaigning to their congregations. Perhaps, it is still early to assess their leadership. Although there are already criticisms lodged against them (De Guzman, 2022).

In these instances, we see the ebb and flow of the influence of the church hierarchy or clergy in the government and in society. This fluctuation does not only mean the temporality of the power of the church but, also, it also manifests its instability. Although the church is seen as a trustworthy institution, it cannot automatically command agreement or assent to its doctrine or position in some issues besetting the people. The people can make their own choices or form their own positions even if contrary to the official stand of the hierarchy or clergy. The hierarchy or clergy can no longer impose its doctrine or position on the people. Some Church members may still belong to the Catholic Church, but they do not just believe the church doctrine or hierarchy.

This is the thesis of secularism. Secularism is no longer referring exclusively to the traditional sense of privatization or decline of religion but the empowerment of people to make their independent decisions and choices that affect their lives. The people have become secular in their views in the sense that they provide themselves with their own space in decision-making and empower themselves in forming their views on some issues. The people know their situation and trust their experience. They no longer depend on or consult the clergy for guidance and enlightenment. Not only because the priests are inaccessible, but the priests are human like them who also struggle on some hurdles in their lives. The sexual scandals in the church are a case in point. Priests also commit sins or crimes just like anybody else. They are not exempted.

The church is just one among the many institutions in our society. It cannot claim priority or ascendancy with the rest. It must relate to other institutions like the government, the media, the market and the family. It can no longer impose its doctrine and expect obedience from other institutions. Institutions have separate rules. Although the church may still enjoy the trust of the people, it cannot always expect submission to its authority. Some members may belong to the church, but they do not believe the doctrine. They attend the Sunday masses, but they question the homilies of the priests. They do not just believe but they engage. For example, in the Reproductive Rights Law, the church hierarchy opposed the bill then, but it lost in the votes. The bill was finally approved into law.

## PROSPECTS

Christianity in the Philippines should be studied in its historical contexts. We factor in the history of the Spanish empire and the U.S. empire that introduced Christianity into the country, first Catholicism and then Protestantism. They have conditioned or influenced our brand of Christianity (Hispanic and American). Moreover, we also factor in the movements in society and in the church. These movements on the ground have entered or infiltrated church people, mostly as individual members in their congregation or diocese. Social events influence the church and clergy. Moreover, church documents have also influenced church people. These documents were received differently by the church, both lay people and consecrated people who are sympathetic to the marginalized sectors in society and aligned with the papal

pronouncements. They are determined to continue the ongoing transformations in society and in the church.

Changes must come from below and not from above. Those from above should only support and accompany those from below. There are more people from below who could bring about changes in society and in the church. The Pope has been encouraging the youths to make a noise and get involved in the church. Unfortunately, the youths are not getting the message of the pope and are afraid to make noises. They are more preoccupied with social media. They spend more time and express themselves in social media. The ordinary people are also preoccupied with their struggles for survival. They need to work and earn their living for their daily needs. In this case, the middle class people like religious priests and sisters can initiate the education and conscientization of these marginalized sectors. This move is risky since people are being red-tagged if you oppose the government.

We cannot expect a total or grand transformation. But we can do bits and pieces of changes here and there. These changes may face some resistances, oppositions and indifference from the traditional or conservative camps but committed Christians have to sustain their actions and continue their endeavors. The minority can influence the majority by their commitment and persistence. Before liberation theology was a taboo in the institutional church. Now it has become acceptable. That small group or individual initiatives can expand by their witnessing. People will be convinced of the legitimacy of their movement or initiative. This is prophetic. We do not expect to have automatic acceptance and immediate transformation. Prophets testified and suffered for their commitment in building the Reign of God on earth.

Church people need to engage with other groups. Those marginalized groups such as the young and the poor – are potential members since they are the affected and marginalized people in society and in the church. These people desire change that would eventually include them. They resist this exclusion and marginalization. They want to be active participants and partners in changing our society and church. However, they are not consulted and tapped so they remain marginalized and excluded. Changes come from them. It will not just be an inclusion as accommodation or assimilation but a partnership and cooperation. We are equal since baptism is the basis, not ordination.

We can also connect with our Protestant brothers and sisters. They have been active in the area of social justice and social transformation. The Catholic people can join them. In fact, there are already existing cooperation between Protestants and Catholics. In that case, we expand our group and membership and strengthen these initiatives and collaborations. Catholics have been talking about ecumenical and interreligious dialogues. These dialogues are encouraged by Catholic documents. However, they should not remain as documents and in academics. They should be translated into action and movement. If the initiatives gain more members and expand the movements, then churches can influence and demand more changes in the process. We need to dialogue with all people who are interested in social transformation.

Most intellectual influences on the Catholic church come from the west such as US and UK. Without being critical on the consequences of these influences, Filipino scholars reproduce western representations or discourses. Liberation theologians were influenced by the political theology in the Europe, specifically in Germany like Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltman. Moreover, Marxist theory came also from the west since Karl Marx lived in England and reflected on the impacts of industrial revolution to the workers. In this case, the western influence still operates in our institutions. Filipino scholars have not yet explored the full potentials of non-western sources and scholars. They have to link with the Global South and explore the decolonial scholarship and the indigenous people as sources of new production of knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

The church as an institution or organization is not a monolith, but is fragmented by theological beliefs, political affinities and religious concerns. There are those who belong to the traditional or conservative camp, those who identify with the liberal and open camp, and those who belong to the progressive and

radical camp. Although they profess their faith in the Trinitarian God, they view that God through different lenses. There are those who identify with scholastic theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, postcolonial theology and decolonial theology. These differences create spaces for alliances and movements and adjustments. With the leadership of Pope Francis, we are beginning to see some transformations taking place in the Catholic church. The pendulum swings to the liberal persuasion. In this persuasion, liberation theology, feminism and postcolonialism find their place in the church. In various occasions, Pope Francis has supported the marginalized sectors like the poor, women, queers and indigenous peoples. He encourages the church to be demasculinized, to engage into dialogue with women, queers, Marxists or communists, to bless same sex unions and irregular couples. These gestures indicate some changes in the direction of the church toward inclusivity and solidarity.

However, these transformations have been initiated from above from the , and the marginalized sectors from below welcome this development. The middle leadership of the local clergy has a significant role in linking the papacy to the marginalized sectors in their respective countries, dioceses and parishes. This middle leadership needs to cascade these pronouncements to the congregations and firm up these pronouncements in specific programs on the ground. If the middle leadership of the local clergy supports the pope, then it would greatly facilitate the push for transformation in the church. The grassroots or the ordinary people are crucial to this transformation process. They are not just the majority that compose the church, but they are the actors in this transformation. We do not expect an automatic or fast change in the church. There will be a number of individuals or small groups of religious men and women (priests and sisters) who will pursue that path of transformation. But as usual, they will be in the minority and will be marginal in the church. Documents need to be translated into action. There will be more changes in the church as we move forward toward this synodal church. The church is on the move toward changes.

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