

PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES AND POLITICAL ACTION

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In terms of economic issues, the state-church struggle of the Marcos years was a conflict over developmental policy. Marcos pushed for a combination of bureaucratic and free market approaches. The clergy critics tended to advocate the direction of commerce to domestic needs rather than the export markets and to sponsor the organization of peasants and workers to demand better wages or market shares.

Many of the clergy were essentially outside of this struggle. Among the uninvolved were the Protestant churchpeople not affiliated with the National Council of Churches. The Pentecostal branch of these churches, small at the time, appears to be rapidly growing in number and influence. Its teachings are similar to animistic beliefs found in Folk Catholicism and Folk Protestantism. It has a right wing slant which could be a major factor in future state-church relations.

Some of the most dramatic events during the Marcos regime occurred in the struggle of church and state. Dissenting church people met brutal repression, sometimes to the point of martyrdom. Although the struggle was intense, it did not involve all the clergy, some of whom were either indifferent to, or actually supportive of, the Marcos regime. While the state-church struggle appears to have ended with the overthrow of Marcos, at least in its violent form, there is always the possibility that it may be renewed. If this happens, one of the parties involved will be a "Religious Right" consisting of Pentecostals whose basic beliefs are quite compatible with Philippine tradi-

tion. But before speculating on the future, let us briefly analyze the nature of state-church conflict in the recent past.

Robert Youngblood's book, *Marcos Against the Churches* (1990) is concerned mainly with the conflict between the Marcos Regime and the church activists influenced by Liberation Theology. By and large, the dissident churchpeople were those who rejected Marcos' reliance on bureaucratic authoritarianism and classical economics. In the analysis of Justin Green (1992), churchpeople instead favored power for the poor with a "small is beautiful" economy, higher wages, land reform and a return to import substitution.

Youngblood admits, however, that the church activists comprised only a minority of the clergy. Conservative and moderate bishops were a majority in the Catholic hierarchy and opposed Marcos only when institutional church interests were involved.

This paper is primarily concerned with Protestants. The officers of the major denominations belonging to the National Council of Churches of the Philippines (NCCP) were often critical of martial law policies and administration. The extent to which the majority of Protestant laymen, or even pastors, supported the views of the NCCP is impossible to estimate, but there is another category of Protestants whose views are fairly clear. These are the non-ecumenical churches, many of them quite small, but which make up the vast majority of the 1,000 groups which were registered in the Securities and Exchange Commission listing of religious organizations between 1980 and 1987 (*AsiaWeek*, October 1988, p. 44).

Given that the great majority of Filipinos are Roman Catholic, sometimes estimated at 82 per cent, one may well ask why Filipino Protestant views are even worth considering. It is true that Protestant mission activity had only limited success and established churches which claim no more than three per cent of the population. While the claim is often made that Protestants have been disproportionately successful in Philippine society — the current President, Fidel Ramos, is a Protestant — the main reason for considering Protestant opinion important is a shift in the composition and tactics of Protestant churches in the country.

Mass Communication Techniques

One type of shift is seen in the use of modern mass communication techniques which may bring a religious message to many not enrolled in a Protestant church. Consider the following description of one aspect of the religious scene in modern Manila:

“The map of Metropolitan Manila is dotted with tokens of a social and religious phenomena — the charismatic renewal. Billboards, bumper stickers and posters are omnipresent bearing messages ranging from the mundane to the apocalyptic...New structures are put up to supply the great demand for places of worship. Old buildings like a former night club where lewd shows were performed were redecorated and made into charismatic fellowship centers...a cursory look at the week's television programs would reveal that they have also invaded the airwaves... Suddenly, religious sects mushroomed: Assemblies of God, Churches of God, The Apostolic Church of God of the Whole Gospel, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormon church. Aggressively they proselytized the Filipinos, luring them to 'new faith'.” (Nicolas, Jr. and de Leon 1989)

Changing Nature of Mission Personnel

The change in the Protestant approach is manifested in the type of missionary personnel now going to the Philippines. In 1986, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 1,931 non-Roman Catholic missionaries,

not counting those working with the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints (Dayton and Siewar 1989). Of these, only 63 were from the main-line denominations which sent missionaries in the early 1900s. The rest were from fundamentalist churches or para-church groups (the terms are not mutually exclusive).

In contrast, the early missionaries were mostly from the main-line churches: Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, American Baptists, Episcopalians, and Disciples of Christ. Two groups not considered main-line, The Christian Missionary Alliance and the Seventh Day Adventists, also sent missionaries but they composed only a small per cent of the total. Although the current missionaries from the main-line churches are often influenced by Liberation Theology, their predecessors took a different turn. As Clymer (1986) describes them: "...The missionary often thought of himself as an

"advance agent of civilization who spoke out against such remnants of barbarism as slavery, polygamy, and cannibalism and who taught the Horatio Alger virtues of honesty, sobriety, thriftiness, purity and industriousness."

Most of the earlier missionaries had at least an undergraduate degree and were often involved in medical or educational activities. Theologically, they ranged from liberal to fundamentalist, while the pressure for cooperation with other churches made it difficult for them to hold to rigid sectarian views.

One reason for the relative decline in the number of missionaries from

main-line churches is that Filipinos are now recognized as prepared to operate medical and educational enterprises while theologically-educated Filipino clergy minister to the churches.

Such considerations do not greatly affect the groups now sending out substantial numbers of missionaries. While most educational and medical work and even churches may be left to Filipino sponsorship, there are always millions of "unreached" who have never heard the Gospel presented in its "proper" form. In addition, there are other millions whose life view has been affected by Marxian or neo-Marxian propaganda. Some wealthy American industrialists contributed generously to conservative missions in the belief that they were an antidote for Communist learnings (Brock 1989).

Conservative Reaction

The existence of poverty is too obvious for any church to ignore and conservative churches try to counter this by relief efforts and by the attempt to develop habits of industry, sobriety and frugality which are deemed to enhance individual competitive position.

While such an approach to social problems seems pathetically inadequate to the adherents of Liberation Theology, it makes sense to many of the target audience. From personal experience and observation, some Filipinos are aware that many of their neighbors lack the character traits associated with social mobility. Landlords and middlemen may be the major enemy to those influenced by Liberation Theology, but to the peasants, the New People's Army (NPA), the armed forces of the Communist

Party of the Philippines) is often seen as a threat. A communist is frequently seen as a disruptive force while the capitalist, either Filipino or foreign, is one who brings jobs and opportunity.

Skepticism about a left-wing approach to Filipino problems is at least part of the explanation of the vigorous resistance of some Christians to the NPA. On occasion, conservative religious groups have been organized into paramilitary forces offering armed resistance to NPA penetration (Formileza 1989). On two occasions, church resistance so infuriated the NPA that they murdered a Protestant pastor in front of his church (*Philippine Panorama*, July 16, 1985).

However, the more frequent reaction has been simply apolitical, to deny that Christians should necessarily be involved in any kind of political activity (Elwood 1992). Since such a stance rules out the support of radical movements, it may be considered an implicit acceptance of the *status quo*. Before accepting this judgment though, one should realize that it implies that political schemes are the main source of social change which itself, is also a doubtful assumption.

Conservative religious teaching may directly counter the socialistic themes of Liberation Theology or it may bring a different emphasis which denies that such ideology is a major Christian concern. In either case, it offers a barrier to left-wing ideology which justifies considering churches promoting such thinking as part of a "Religious Right."

Pentecostal Churches as a Third Force

The thousand Protestant religious groups in the Philippines embrace a variety of beliefs and structures which defy easy classification. Several of the most rapidly growing though, might be described as "Pentecostal." The name, taken from the festival of Pentecost, refers to the New Testament story of a gathering of early Christians where each person heard the Gospel preached in his own language. The Pentecostalists stress emotional expression which they see as a visitation of the Holy Spirit. They are best known for the practice of speaking in strange tongues which supposedly bear little relationship to any known language. They also stress "faith healing."

Such churches, which claim to establish easy and frequent contact with a spirit world, seem to tap types of beliefs somewhat similar to Folk-Catholicism or Folk-Protestantism (Bulatao 1984; Jocano 1967). These labels refer to those who may be members of Christian Churches, but continue to believe in the spirits which allegedly have haunted the Philippine countryside since the beginning of time. Neither Catholicism nor the mainline Protestant churches have been able to either accommodate or to exterminate this type of belief.

Catholicism provides saints which may substitute for minor spirits and feast days which may replace pagan rituals, but what Cullen (1973) says of the Bukidnons is probably also true of many other Filipinos:

"...the average Bukidnon Catholic (there are exceptions of course) tends to be animist by religion, affiliated with the Catholic Church to the extent that he has taken from the Church and adapted to his own thinking certain beliefs and ceremonies...By and large the Catholic ritual does not seem to attract the Bukidnon, partly because the underlying doctrine is not considered relevant to his immediate needs" (p. 4).

Likewise, Elwood (1967) writes of the similarity between the Pentecostal teachings and "folk" religion:

"Inasmuch as belief in the availability of spirit power for healing is a value orientation in traditional Philippine society, together with dependence on the village shaman, there is a natural point of contact between this American denomination (Church of the Four Square Gospel) and Philippine culture" (p. 73).

References to miraculous healing are frequent in the New Testament. Religious liberals explain such references either as a misunderstanding of natural phenomena or as the result of psychological factors, while fundamentalists insist that the biblical stories are literally correct.

The argument between liberals and fundamentalists is more a matter of historical interpretation than of contemporary practice. Neither group really believes that divine intervention is an easily accessible form of medical therapy. Thus, one who believes that illness is the work of evil demons and

recovery the gift of benevolent spirits, finds the teachings of most churches largely irrelevant. On the other hand, the appeal of a church which professes to be able to overcome evil spirits and to manipulate good ones is obvious.

Paul Pomerville (1985), a mission spokesman for the Assemblies of God, writes in a similar vein:

"An 'inordinate' silence on the Holy Spirit is part of the Protestant mission heritage. The Pentecostal movement addresses that silence in a significant way" (p. 23).

In the Philippines, the largest Pentecostal churches are the Assemblies of God and the Church of the Four Square Gospel. In 1987, the Assemblies of God reported 97 missionaries (which again constitute half as many as those reported by all the main-line churches active in the early part of the century), but the Pentecostal influence spreads beyond these churches.

Some Pentecostals minimize the importance of church membership and disdain denominational labels. The charismatic movement, which utilizes many Pentecostal practices, affects many members of other churches including the Roman Catholic. Elwood speaks of this kind of influence among the faculty of Silliman University, a traditionally liberal Protestant school which seems a most unlikely place for any kind of Pentecostal activity:

"There is of late, however, a growing number of independent charismatic groups that have no connection with historical Pentecostalism. Dumaquete has many of these and they are very attractive to younger Filipinos

because they use contemporary music in worship and stress verse-by-verse Bible study...They are all more or less 'Pentecostal' in that they stress the experience of the Holy Spirit as a 'second blessing' and practice an enthusiastic, Pentecostal style of worship, but they shun denominationalism and claim to be non-denominational" (Elwood 1992).

Van Dusen as cited in Pomerville (1985), spoke of Pentecostalism as a "Third Force" in missions, different from either Catholicism or historic Protestantism. Although its strength in the Philippines is difficult to estimate, it is congruent with major themes in Philippine culture. Conceivably, it could become as strong in the Philippines as it is in South America and in some other countries, where its constituency may be as large as that of Roman Catholicism.

In the 1980s, Liberation Theology was probably the most popular ideological influence in either Catholic or Protestant social thinking. Currently, the retreat of both Communism and Socialism and the increased respect for the power of a market economy diminish the plausibility of Liberation Theology. Conversely, the conservative clergy, sometimes supported by American businessmen, appear less as the kept clients of a foreign plutocracy and more like prophets of a viable economic society.

But to stereotype the Pentecostalists as apolitical is an over simplification. Describing their political impact, the dean of the School of Theology of Central Philippine University writes that:

"...their primary concern is the spiritual transformation of man... from this the transformation of society will follow. This approach is different from the approach of the political Left in that it is not political activist and radical and revolutionary...Direct involvement is mainly on a personal basis. On social issues such as the crusade against drug abuse, illegal or legal gambling, prostitution, rebellion or subversion, these groups have been known to sponsor prayer rallies in public places. They have supported civic and governmental programs related to rehabilitation of victims of natural calamities. They are also strong in their prison ministry" (Gumban letter, August 14, 1992).

The strong puritanical emphasis of the Pentecostals as seen in the shunning of drugs, gambling, and prostitution is certainly an indication of the value system associated with the Protestant Ethic. If, as is generally assumed, this type of conduct tends to favor social mobility, it would be a factor reinforcing resistance to movements based on a collectivist approach.

Neither the critics nor the supporters of Liberation Theology have regarded the Pentecostalists as having significant influence. In the future though, this very other-worldly brand of Christianity may be the dominant force in religious social action.

The early missionaries are gone and similar missionaries no longer come in any great number. However, more missionaries than ever before are at work in the Philippines. Most are sent by Fun-

damentalist Protestants, but a significant number, different either from liberals or the traditional fundamentalists, represent a Pentecostal thrust. Both Roman Catholics and main-line Protestants now face the competition of religious forces which may integrate with Philippine society without having a pejorative "folk" label applied to them.

During the Marcos Martial Law period, the most socially significant Christian influence came from Roman Catholics of either a radical or a conservative persuasion and Protestants who either shared the radical Catholic view or reacted vigorously against it.

If state-church conflicts erupt in the future, it will be modified by the presence of a numerically strong Pentecostalist group, who, as far as left-wing political action is concerned, are quite literally "not of this world."

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