Philippine Catholicism as Disruptive Public Religion: A Sociological Analysis of Philippine Catholic Bishops' Statements, 1946 to 2000[1]

Roberto E. N. Rivera, S.J.[2]

This paper examines the issue of church-state separation by looking at the experience of the hierarchical Catholic Church, specifically the cardinals and bishops, in engaging various societal issues. Utilizing the work of religious studies scholars on power distribution and ideological structure in a religious context as well as privatized and deprivatized religion, this study focuses on the experience of Philippine bishops from 1946 to 2000 to address the broader research question of how the role of the Catholic Church in a colonized country affects the Catholic hierarchy's ability to take a progressive stance on political, economic, and social problems once the nation has gained independence. In line with this, the study also examines a number of "themes" relating to the Catholic Church's role in the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. The Philippine case has been chosen over comparable Latin American cases because of the fairly long period of Spanish colonization undergone by the country, its experience with other colonizing powers such as the United States and Japan, as well as its relatively late attainment of political independence in 1946. The paper finds that this protracted period of colonization would have a profound effect on the public pronouncements to be made by the Philippine Catholic episcopate. Content analysis of the Philippine bishops' pastoral statements from the period of 1946 to 2000 show that until the early 1960's, these statements reflected a restorationist agenda of unbridled Church influence in the public domain. Only later would the bishops become more sensitive to the decline of Catholic Church influence and the autonomy of the secular sphere, with the Catholic Church advocating issues relating to social justice and equality as a "deprivatized"

institution. The paper concludes with some remarks on the unique trajectory taken by the Philippine Catholic hierarchy in confronting societal problems.

Key words: Philippines, separation of church and state, religion, bishops, colonialism

INTRODUCTION

The term "disruptive religion" has been introduced into the lexicon of the sociology of religion by Christian Smith (1996), who posits that that religious faith carries within it the seeds for social mobilization, precisely because it is involved in devising meaning systems that help make sense of reality. These meaning systems hinge on divine realities that exhibit a certain dualism in the face of earthly situations. On the one hand, belief in the divine transcends these earthly realities. On the other hand, such transcendent beliefs provide a solid basis for judging the earthly order. Thus, while belief in the divine may lead religious believers to maintain conservative positions, such belief also gives religion the potential for "disruptive collective activism" (Smith 1996: 5-6).

In this age where the separation of church and state is the norm in many countries, the role of religion in social and political movements continues to be highly contentious. This paper examines a specific aspect of this storied history by looking at the experience of the hierarchical Catholic Church; i.e. the cardinals and bishops, in terms of engaging various societal issues and serving as a catalyst for "disruptive collective activism." The broad research question for this work will ask how the role of the Catholic Church in a colonized country affects the Catholic hierarchy's ability, once the nation has gained independence, to take a progressive stance on political, economic, and social problems. In this regard, I shall focus on one case—the experience of the Philippine bishops—to provide an initial and tentative answer to this query.

The paper shall proceed as follows: I will begin by explaining the theoretical framework—based primarily on Weber's (1946) ideas on "religion in the world" and Burns' (1992) conception of power distribution and ideological structure—to be used for this investigation. I will then explain the

rationale for choosing the Philippine bishops' experience, as well as citing briefly the examples of other countries, to keep the case study "comparatively informed." After examining some "themes" relating to the Catholic Church's role in the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, the bulk of the paper will analyze how these themes shaped the public pronouncements made by the Philippine bishops from 1946 to 2000. Utilizing thematic and textual analysis of select statements, I shall chart the development of the Catholic Church's engagement of social and political issues, under the leadership of its prelates. I will conclude with some remarks on the unique trajectory taken by the Philippine Catholic hierarchy in facing problems within the public sphere.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CASE STUDY SELECTION

This section shall deal with theoretical and methodological concerns that will factor into our investigation.

Weber

Within the social sciences, the tension involved in the engagement of religion with the world has been the subject of much speculation. Among the classical sociologists, the ideal-typical description of this tension is provided by Max Weber. He asserts, for instance, that "the tension between brotherly religion and the world has been most obvious in the economic sphere" (1946: 331). Because the rational economy is focused exclusively on the dynamic of the market and the increase of money, it has an "impersonal nature" that makes it less accessible to "any imaginable relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness" (1946: 331). The resolution of this tension takes two paths. One is external in nature, involving the outright rejection of economic goods, as what Weber terms "religious virtuosos" (e.g. monks) are apt to do. The other is the Puritan ethic of "vocation" which "rationally routinized all work in this world into serving God's will and testing one's state of grace" (1946: 332), a thesis Weber fully develops in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

This tension in religion's engagement of the world is even more evident in the political sphere, with Weber citing the state's preoccupation with power and its monopoly on "the legitimate use of violence" as "meaningless to any universalist religion of salvation" (1946: 334). Initially, therefore, Weber's assessment of religion's involvement in politics is quite pessimistic. Such involvement is the result of either "the entanglement of religious organizations in power interests and in struggles for power," or for "the use of religious

organizations for the political taming of the masses" and "the need of the powers-that-be for the religious consecration of their legitimacy" (1946: 337-8). Weber, however, envisions the possibility of a rationalized religion developing "organic social ethics" which avoids both the polity's cooptation of religion and religion's utter rejection of matters political. Through organic social ethics, the world is considered "an at least relatively rational cosmos in spite of all its wickedness" and bears "at least traces of the divine plan of salvation" (1946: 339). This opens the possibility of religious involvement in politics, with a rationalized faith confronting the realities of a rationalized social order.

Weber provides the important insight that while certain elements of religion may be diametrically opposed to the economic and political order, the same processes of rationalization which affect society allow religion to confront the world. In its engagement of the world, religion tries to recognize the autonomy of society while responding to the exigencies of the faith. It is a fine balancing act that will be treated time and time again in the contemporary literature on religious mobilization.

Ideology and Power

In his analysis of the Catholic Church's adjustment to the forces of modernization from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century, Burns (1992) utilizes the construct of *ideology* to explain the Catholic Church's stance vis-à-vis the important issues of the day. In Burns' formulation, ideology is not simply a set of beliefs, but rather it is also a "hierarchy of issues enforced through the exercise of power" (1992: 12). In other words, ideology can be conceived of as a structure: people with more power within this ideological structure will be able to control the development of issues on top of their hierarchy of issues. For Burns, therefore, ideology is not static but a dynamic social structure. It includes "understandings and priorities which pattern our social participation," with distributions of power shaping the ideological structure and thus affecting the manner in which individuals, groups, and institutions can participate accordingly (Burns 1992: 13). Burns then proceeds to explain how the ideological structures in Europe shaped the Roman hierarchy and consequently, the manner with which the worldwide Catholic Church was able to confront issues around the world. I shall appropriate Burns' notions of ideology structure and power distribution, and apply it to a more specific context: that of colonization, and its effect on how the Catholic Church hierarchy is able to participate in a post-independence setting in addressing concerns both within and outside its "hierarchy of issues."

In a limited manner I shall also be appropriating what Casanova (1994) would call the current status of the Catholic Church as a "public religion," to describe the current role of the Church in the modern world. With the diminished influence of the Catholic Church and the separation of church and state in numerous countries, the Catholic Church finds itself recognizing the autonomy of the secular world, but intervening during very specific circumstances. These legitimate opportunities for intervention would include defending basic human rights (e.g. against the abuses of absolutist states), to challenge "the absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres [when it disregards] extraneous ethical or moral considerations" (e.g. the arms race), or to defend the "traditional life world" (e.g. anti-abortion issues), and other related situations (Casanova 1994: 57-58). Although Casanova's investigation of this hypothesis has been limited, his description of public religion can help us describe the outcome to be examined in this study.

Choosing the Philippine Case

In considering the "universe of cases" for this study, I have already noted in the introduction how I aim to look at countries which were formerly colonized by Catholic powers, and which after independence had episcopates adopting progressive stances on social, political, and economic issues. Aside from the Philippines, most of the cases here would fall within Latin America, and here Burns (1992) provides a useful delineation. He identifies three paths of church-state relations in the continent from the late nineteenth century. First are countries where even with the separation of church and state, the Catholic Church remained conservative because of its ties with powerful and wealthy elites: he cites Mexico and Venezuela as examples of these. Next are those countries where states continued to be allied with the church, with Catholicism remaining conservative as well, as in Argentina and Colombia. Finally there are those countries where Catholicism experienced some form of alienation from the state and ruling elites, thus leading to an activist Catholic Church, such as Brazil and Chile (Burns 1992: 159).

Thus a full blown comparative study based on similar outcomes would involve comparing the Philippines with countries such as Brazil, Chile, and others fitting the same mold. I maintain, however, that a comparatively informed case study is warranted for the Philippines in this case for the following reasons. First would be the unique situation of the Philippines of having been conquered by not one but two colonial powers – Spain and the United States (as well as the Japanese occupation of World War II). Second

would be the fairly long period of Spanish colonization undergone by the country from 1521 to 1898, nearly four centuries. Finally there is the late granting of independence for the Philippines (1946), unlike its Latin American counterparts which were on the way to nationhood in the early nineteenth century. As will be shown later, this extended period of colonization would have a profound effect on the public pronouncements to be made by the Philippine episcopate. I shall now focus on the Philippines in the next sections, and will return to these comparative considerations at the conclusion.

CHURCH AND COLONY

What are the main characteristics of Philippine Catholicism in the years prior to the granting of Philippine independence in 1946? While an exhaustive recounting of Philippine Church history will not be possible here, several dominant "themes" in Philippine Catholicism during this period can be identified. These themes can serve as starting points which will help better explain the transitions made by Philippine Catholicism into a "public religion" and the ideological structure faced by the Catholic episcopate after the nation's sovereignty was granted.

Instrument of conquest

Perhaps the overarching theme of the Catholic faith in the Philippines during the Spanish era is that it was undisputedly instrumental for the Spanish colonization of the islands. In the Philippines, this union was manifested especially in the *Patronato Real*, the arrangement wherein the Pope granted the kings of Spain the right to rule any lands that they have yet to discover, with the corresponding obligation of supporting the material needs of the church in these territories (De La Costa 1965: 31). Eventually, such an arrangement would cause much conflict, especially on the issue of whether the king had any authority on spiritual matters. But in general, the import of the *Patronato Real* was clear. The missionaries would have the support of the Spanish government in the islands, while the missionaries would be the concrete presence of the government, especially on the village level. Such an arrangement would have mixed results (Arcilla, 1984: 31-32). The general populace would benefit from the protection of the clergy especially in the face of abuses of the civil government, most notably in exacting taxes and forced labor under the *encomienda*[3] system. On the other hand, the association of the church with government, as will be explained later, will lead to a hostile attitude toward the Spanish friars as nationalist aspirations

began to inspire the nascent revolutionary movement in the mid-nineteenth century.

One important aspect of this theme is that in the final decades of the Spanish regime, and with liberal governor generals (reflecting government changes in Spain) taking over in the Philippines, the privileges and support enjoyed by the Catholic Church in the islands began to wane. When the Americans took over as the new colonial power at the dawn of the twentieth century, their implementation of the separation of church and state further divested the Catholic Church of its status (De La Costa 1965: 251-252). In addition, the influx of Protestant groups and the emergence of a schismatic Philippine Church—the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*—would usher in a period of strife and dissension for Catholicism from within and without.

Anti-Catholic sentiments and the nationalist movement

 Another important development that would color the disposition of the Catholic Church in the Philippines for years to come would be the increasing anti-Catholic character of the nationalist movement. Many of the luminaries of the Philippine revolutionary movement were adherents of Masonry, and expressed very strong anti-Catholic sentiments. But as Schumacher (1987: 251) points out, Masonry was more of a symptom rather than a cause of the anti-Catholic—and specifically anti-friar (i.e. the Augustinians and Dominicans)—character of dissent against Spain. The causes for the anti-Catholic and anti-friar turn taken by the revolutionary movement are complex. They can be summed up briefly in two important points.

First is the fact that the stirrings of nationalism actually began with elements of the Filipino clergy who were clamoring for equal treatment from their Spanish counterparts and from higher ecclesiastical authorities. Both Spanish church and civil authorities considered the Filipino clergy not only inferior, but also a threat to established rule. Distinguished names such as Frs. Pedro Pelaez, Mariano Gomez, and Jose Burgos would clamor for equal treatment for the native clergy, and eventually for all Filipinos (Schumacher, 1981: 6-15). After a failed mutiny in the Cavite province in 1872, the Spanish authorities took the opportunity to crack down on the dissenting priests. Fr. Burgos, along with Frs. Gomez and Jacinto Zamora were implicated in the failed plot and subsequently executed, while the rest of the leadership of the Filipino clergy were exiled to the Marianas Islands (De La Costa 1965: 179-180).

However, this was not the end of dissent against Spanish rule. Many of these nationalistic Filipino priests had taken under their tutelage idealistic and talented laymen who would eventually form the bulwark of the revolutionary movement. A number of these men would have the opportunity to study in Europe, exposing them to liberal ideas which would further fuel nationalistic aspirations (Arcilla 1984: 85-87). Thus among the new generation of lay leaders there was a brewing resentment against the Spanish friars, especially after the execution of Fr. Burgos and his associates. Many of these leaders would eventually join Masonic lodges, becoming virulently anti-Catholic in their rhetoric altogether.

A second cause of anti-Catholic sentiments in the revolutionary movement ties in with the deterioration of social and economic conditions in the Philippines in the late 19th century. As life became more difficult in the islands, the nationalist clamor increased. The Spanish friars, on the other hand, were quick to dissuade the restive Filipino populace from any opposition. Ironically, therefore, the Spanish friars who were once considered the "kind face of empire" by many Filipinos were now seen as defenders of a corrupt and increasingly hostile regime (Schumacher 1987: 261).

The anti-Catholic tenor of the revolution would persist in the Philippine political scene all through the American occupation, when the American regime implemented the separation of church and state and in the first several decades of the independent Philippine Republic. As late as the 1950s, many leading politicians were affiliated with Masonic lodges, and a manifest Catholic allegiance in the political realm was a major liability for both groups and individuals (Schumacher 1987: 355). It would be some time before Catholicism would again be a force in public governance, and such influence would be very different from what the church had been accustomed to under Spain.

Primacy of evangelization and education

One final theme which can help clarify the transitions from pre-colonial to post-independence Catholicism is the primacy of the evangelization and education work of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. The need for Spanish missionaries to evangelize the country in the faith and in the name of God and king is self-evident. What is striking, however, is the simultaneous development of the educational system along with these evangelization efforts. The missionaries first established schools to teach catechism, but quickly they realized this would not be possible without teaching rudimentary reading

and writing skills as well. These catechetical centers therefore became centers of education as well, and throughout the nearly four hundred years of Spanish rule represented the bulwark of educational efforts in the islands. The missionaries, notably the Augustinians, Dominicans, and Jesuits, also established several institutions of higher learning (Arcilla 1984: 34-36; Schumacher 1987: 141-152).

The educational efforts of the church are very important because it was not until 1863 that government established the first normal school to train primary school teachers and mandated that the education of all children in the islands would be obligatory (Arcilla 1984: 77). However, because of the lack of resources government efforts at establishing an education system, the church made up for this slack giving the missionaries an unprecedented influence both as educators and ministers. At the same time, the educational institutions they established, especially the centers for higher learning, would also open the eyes of the Filipinos who attended these schools to progressive ideas. Indeed, some of the leaders of the revolutionary movement such as Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar and others who would later adopt anti-Catholic sentiments received at least part of their education from Catholic schools.

The net result of this integration of evangelization and catechetical efforts is that the Catholic Church in the Philippines would be very protective of this privileged place she had in the educational system in the country. Under the Americans, religious instruction would be removed from public education (Arcilla 1984: 113). The Catholic Church still maintained control of its private educational institutions, but the establishment of a public school system (De La Costa 1965: 253) diminished the Catholic influence in education, which the bishops would try to reclaim after independence.

PHILIPPINE BISHOPS' STATEMENTS

The thematic background on Philippine Catholicism before the declaration of Philippine independence has illustrated the privileged place of the faith under Spanish rule, and its successive decline with the anti-friar stance of the revolutionary movement, along with the separation of church and state later imposed by American rule. Once the Philippines became an independent republic in 1946, how did the church reengage secular society—most especially the state—in its differentiated, secularized form? This section sifts through the pronouncements of the Philippine bishops as a primary source to see how these statements show the progress (or initially, the lack thereof)

made by the Catholic Church in adjusting to a new ideological structure where Catholicism had less power, thus adopting its role as a public religion. This is by no means an exhaustive treatment, since it will focus mainly on statements by the bishops on issues relating to the secular sphere, and excluding doctrinal pronouncements, of which there are many.[4]

1946 to 1965: Testing the waters

This period spanning the declaration of independence from the United States to the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council can be described as a time wherein the Catholic hierarchy confronted issues that revealed some of its aspirations in recovering even partly its preeminent position of power in Philippine society. This was also a period when the hierarchy confronted pressing social issues, mainly by invoking traditional Catholic social doctrine.

Masons and protestants

Perhaps the most striking example of how the Catholic Church during this period seemed to be looking back to its previous dominance of Philippine society was the focus of numerous pronouncements on groups and movements that were perceived as threatening Catholic beliefs or actively proselytizing among Catholic faithful.

The Masons, for instance, were one prime target of this effort. In 1954, the Catholic Welfare Organization[5] in its "Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on Masonry" (14 January 1954) reminded the Catholic faithful that Masonry is inconsistent with the Catholic faith. This in itself is not new as the Catholic Church does ban membership to Masonry among the faithful. However, what is striking here is the timing of the statement, coming as it does at the heels of the government effort to incorporate into the public school curriculum literary materials relating to Jose Rizal's work. Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines, was himself a Mason. Around this period, two statements from the bishops protesting the introduction of materials relating to Rizal into public education highlight the strong anti-Masonic sentiments. In the "Joint Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines on the Book *The Pride of the Malay Race*" (6 January 1950), the bishops charge that this work by Rafael Palma (who questions the accuracy of Rizal's retraction of Masonry) is driven by "Masonic and anti-Catholic elements." In the "Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on the Novels of Dr. Jose Rizal; *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*" (21 April 1956), the bishops maintain that although Rizal's nationalism and patriotism are to be extolled, the

erroneous views on Catholicism which he depicts in his two novels should not be taught.

Aside from Masonry and Mason sponsored interests, the bishops during this period also trained their sights on other perceived threats to the church. On 15 August 1954 the bishops issued their "Joint Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy on the YMCA." In pronouncements almost inconceivable in this age of Vatican II religious freedom, the bishops took pains to point out that the professed nonsectarian nature of the Young Men's Christian Association (along with the Young Women's Christian Association) was a form of Protestantism, albeit "one that shows little interests in beliefs." The statement ends with a stern and explicit ban for all Catholics from joining these organizations and using their facilities. Similarly, in the "Statement of the Administrative Council of the Catholic Welfare Organization on Religious Adherence" (18 June 1955), the bishops warn against the Moral Rearmament (MRA) Movement, another non-sectarian organization that professes to proclaim the "absolute dictates of conscience." The bishops counter by stating that Catholics "will find nothing in this movement which is not already contained, far more perfectly, in the doctrines of Jesus Christ as interpreted by the Catholic Church which He founded." Again, these pronouncements have a backward looking and polemic character to them, with no inkling yet of the principle of religious freedom to be introduced by the Second Vatican Council.

Efforts to influence education

Another sphere which the Catholic bishops sought to engage in during this period is the public school system. Much of their efforts centered on attempts to have religious instruction in the Catholic faith as an optional course in the public school curriculum. The Catholic hierarchy's vigorous lobby to have some form of religious instruction integrated into public schooling is strongly evidenced in their "Joint Pastoral Letter on Education" (10 April 1955), which sought to have the constitutional provision calling for such opportunities implemented by the Department of Education, prompting the Department to issue the corresponding regulations soon afterwards. Well into the mid-sixties, the issue was again raised in public, this time with the bishops backing legislation allowing public school teachers themselves to voluntarily teach religion in public schools (the previous Department of Education edict provided only for instructors and catechists supplied by the church). In the "The Philippines for Christ: Time to Launch a New

Evangelization" (8 December 1964) the bishops stressed once again the over-all importance of religious instruction, and in the "Joint Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy on the Religious Instruction Bill" (6 June 1965) they branded those opposing this legislation as "enemies of the church" who had imputed to the hierarchy "the lowest motives and resurrecting the long dead anticlerical shibboleths and fabrications that have been their stock in trade for more than half a century." This time, however, the bishops were less successful in their lobby and the legislation was not passed.

The church also publicly opposed attempts by the Philippine House of Representatives in the late fifties to enact legislation which would prohibit individuals who are not natural born Filipinos from assuming positions as heads of schools, colleges, and universities. Among the reasons given were to avoid communist infiltration in education, and to ensure that nationalism will be inculcated properly in these institutions. The bishops, in their "Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on the Nationalization of Schools" (28 January 1959) raised an outcry against the proposed legislation. They pointed out that the majority of private schools in the country are run by religious orders and congregations, with many of them still having foreign born heads and superiors in these schools. This protest was again raised in the "Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines on Nationalism" (3 December 1959). Subsequently, the bishops were able to block the passage of this particular law.

The attempts of the bishops to regulate the influx of perceived anti-Catholic and Mason-influenced works relating to Rizal have been cited already. All in all, these and the other aforementioned efforts hearkened back to a time when public education was high in what Burns calls the "hierarchy of issues" of the Catholic Church. Once again, this did not bode well for the Catholic Church's dialogue as a public religion with secular society.

Facing social and political realities

One major area of concern which preoccupied the bishops during this period is the various social and political realities that were dominant during the day. Beginning in 1948 with the "Statement of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of the Philippines on the Social Principles" (20 January 1948) and later in extensive pronouncements on justice ("Joint Pastoral Letter of the Hierarchy of the Philippines on the Virtue of Justice" [22 January 1949]; "Social Justice: A Joint Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines" [21 May

1949]) the bishops would set the tenor for successive pronouncements on social issues by relying heavily on social doctrine as enunciated by the various popes in the "social encyclicals" starting with Leo XIII in 1891. In these and subsequent statements, the bishops would enunciate traditional elements of Catholic social teaching such as social justice, the universal purpose of goods, fair labor practices, among others in the face of the deepening "social problem" of poverty and inequality in the country.

Aside from commenting on the general social problem, the bishops would also employ traditional social doctrine in commenting on the conduct of Philippine elections. Starting with the "Joint Statement of the Philippine Catholic Hierarchy on Electoral Right of Catholics" (2 October 1951), the Philippine bishops have constantly stressed the obligation of Catholics as good citizens to vote, stressing that "The norm for judging a man worthy of your support is the true interests of God, of the church and the state." This obligation would be emphasized repeatedly, notably in "Circular Letter of the Administrative Council of the Catholic Welfare Organization on Elections" (1 November 1955), and again in the "Joint Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines on the Eve of the National Elections of 1957" (11 October 1957). In the latter, the bishops also takes pains to reiterate that the Philippine Catholic Church is not out to influence election results through partisan politics.

One constant refrain which weaves through these and more specific pronouncements is the condemnation of Communism. In the already cited documents on the social problem, elections, and also on nationalism, the faithful are constantly alerted to the basic irreconcilability of the faith to Communist tenets. These are tempered, however, by warnings especially in the "Statement of the Administrative Council of the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO) on the Accusations of Being Communists" (6 July 1954) that efforts against Communism should not deteriorate into "witch hunting."

With the exception of pointing out the menace of Communism, the bishops' sociopolitical pronouncements during this period are notable for their lack of specificity in pointing out particular problems, and the relative lack of sophistication in their analysis of societal realities and the formulation of possible solutions. For instance, the main facet of the social problem during these decades is that of agrarian unrest, with the HUKBALAHAP[6] peasant rebellion raging in many rural areas, especially in the Northern Philippines, until the early fifties. Despite this problem, there is no in-depth analysis of

the agrarian problem or advocacy of the obvious solution (agrarian reform) in the bishops' statements. Also, with regard to the electoral exercises, there is no attempt to point out the obvious problem of "turncoatism" that plagued the political parties during this time. Whatever concrete action towards the resolution of the problem was seen as part of Catholic Action, that is, as an undertaking of the Catholic Church primarily in the spiritual realm, as evidenced in the "Preliminary Draft of the Episcopal Statement on Social Action" (1957). Embarrassingly, at times the hierarchy simply contradicted its own teaching, most notably its condemnation of the strike conducted by workers of the pontifical University of Santo Tomas (ref "Statement of the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines on the U.S.T. Strike" [13 March 1956]), despite constant exhortations in other pastoral letters on the respect of workers' rights (Fabros 1988: 66-81).

The lack of specificity mentioned above becomes problematic when placed side by side with the very concrete manner the hierarchy has dealt with perceived threats in the area of evangelization (against Masons and Protestants), and in protecting church interests in education during this period. Whether intentionally or not, the Catholic hierarchy seems to be communicating a restorationist agenda, aspiring for old powers and the privileged place it once held within the ideological structure.

1966 to 1982: Transitions

This second period encompasses the unrest in Philippine society in the late sixties caused by continuing severe poverty and Communist gains and the subsequent declaration of Martial Law by President Ferdinand Marcos. This can also be described as a time of transitions. The hierarchy, flush from the new perspectives gained from the Second Vatican Council, began to take more incisive views of social and political realities. On the other hand, the Philippine Church also struggled with a new reality: a government that was proving to be dictatorial and authoritarian, and the choice of critical collaboration with or opposition to such a government.

A new social analysis

The bishops' "Joint Pastoral Letter of the Philippine Hierarchy on Social Action and Rural Development" (8 January 1967) was a groundbreaking one in that it integrated the new form of "social analysis" popularized by the recently concluded Vatican II council. Utilizing a "signs of the times" methodology in analyzing Philippine society, the hierarchy pinpointed much

more exactly now the area of rural development as the crux of the nation's social ills. Furthermore, the bishops end up advocating solutions apart from those emanating from church groups, organizations, and Catholic action: the organization of rural workers, the formation of cooperatives and credit unions, and the strengthening of government social subsidies and social security measures.

This statement marks a turning of the corner in that from hereon the pastoral letters of what had become the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) would grow in sophistication in the tools of analysis employed and in the solutions prescribed. For instance, in the "Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines on Evangelization and Development" (4 July 1973), the CBCP would have a very indepth analysis of developmental problems in the Philippines not found in previous statements. The same direct manner can be found in pronouncements on various issues. In the press statement "Urgent Appeal for Electoral Reforms" (1971), the CBCP supported the Philippine Commission on Elections in its lobby to have Congress pass several crucial electoral reform bills. In the "Statement on Drug Abuse" (29 January 1972), the bishops lend their voices to give recommendations on the drug menace. On the other hand, in the area of education, the bishops deliver a more toned down message, with their statements "On the Apostolate of Christian Education" (31 January 1976) and "Education for Justice" (14 September 1978) addressed specifically to Catholic schools and educators, not to the public school system.

Dealing with martial law

The main challenge dealt with by the bishops during this period was the declaration of Martial Law by President Marcos on 21 September 1972. By the end of the sixties, poverty in the country had reached all-time lows, prompting a resurgence of the Communist insurgency in the countryside. Student demonstrators had taken to the streets, and unrest was brewing not just in the remote provinces but also in the urban centers. In response, Marcos declared Martial Law, dissolving the legislature and imprisoning key leaders of the political opposition. Marcos then set about implementing his "New Society" program, which promised the establishment of law and order, the alleviation of poverty, the restoration of democratic structures, and once these were in place, the lifting of Martial Law. As it turned out, however, Martial Law would remain in place until 1980, and many of the problems that it promised to alleviate would only take a turn for the worse.

Through all this, the clear stance of the Catholic Church through the hierarchy was, as Hanson (1987: 254) points out, a restrained one, approving Marcos' measures while decrying potential abuses, and thus implying critical collaboration. Beginning with the "Statement of the CBCP Administrative Council on Martial Law" (26 September 1972), the bishops would take this guarded stance of affirming the reasons given for declaring Martial Law while cautioning against human rights violations.

The same attitude will be evident in other statements by the Catholic hierarchy during the Martial Law period, especially during various plebiscites called by the Marcos administration (in 1973, 1975, and 1976) to consult the populace on the continuation of Martial Law. For these plebiscites, the bishops basically exhorted all citizens to offer their critical participation. The same encouragement towards critical participation was given by the bishops during the 1978 election for members of the legislature even as many leading candidates who ran for this election were imprisoned or in exile. While the bishops were not exactly supporting Martial Law overtly, it is evident that the Catholic hierarchy was not yet ready to confront the Marcos regime for its authoritarian conduct, the abuses of which would become clear once Marcos was ousted in 1986. This stance of critical collaboration was not shared by other members of the Catholic Church, however, with not a few priests and religious adopting the Communist cause (Fabros 1988: 175-176) or other less contentious forms of dissent.[7] It would take the tumultuous events of the early eighties to galvanize the hierarchy and the rest of the Catholic Church against the Marcos regime.

1983 to 2000: Public religion

The beginning of the end for the Marcos regime started in 1983, with the assassination of ex-senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., the leading opposition leader. Aquino was shot upon his arrival from exile in the United States, and his death brought to a boil the opposition against Marcos and the military abuses, corruption, and economic hardships that were associated with his regime. Bowing to popular pressure, Marcos called "snap" presidential elections in 1986, running against Aquino's widow, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino. Marcos was declared winner despite allegations of massive cheating, leading to a civil disobedience campaign and a failed military coup attempt. In the peaceful "People Power" uprising that followed, Corazon Aquino was swept into power and Marcos forced into exile in Hawaii (ref Mercado 1987).

With these developments the stage was set for the Catholic Church to take on fully its role as public religion. The period starting from 1983 up to this writing has perhaps been the most productive time in the CBCP's history. During this period, the bishops have exercised their pastoral and teaching authority on a wide range of issues in behalf of a public religion, cognizant of its limited powers within the secular sphere.

Assessing the snap elections

After the assassination of Benigno Aquino, a number of CBCP statements became more and more critical of the Marcos administration, which the bishops scored for suppressing basic freedoms. The most ringing condemnation of the Marcos regime came, however, after the presidential elections of 1986. Confronted with evidence of massive electoral cheating, the bishops issued their now famous "Post Election Statement" (13 February 1986). In this statement, the bishops declared the elections invalid because of many irregularities, and declared in no uncertain terms that "a government that assumes or retains power through fraudulent means has no moral basis." This statement contributed immensely to the impetus leading to the ousting of Marcos.[8] And although the CBCP was unable to convene once again by the time the People Power revolution broke out, individual prelates (led by Archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin) called on all Catholics to mobilize in support of the peaceful revolution.

The precedent has thus been set for the Philippine Catholic Church as a public religion confronting authoritarianism. The bishops would take on the same public role once again, most notably in 1997 with their "Pastoral Statement on Charter Change" (20 March 1997). Here the bishops condemn attempts made by President Fidel Ramos to pursue amendments to the Constitution which could have extended his term. The bishops also mobilized the faithful against this charter change initiative, leading to some of the biggest demonstrations since the 1986 peaceful revolution.

On politics, economy, and culture

There have also been numerous occasions in which the bishops have taken on the public role of commenting on what Casanova has termed the lawful autonomy of institutions or systems in the secular sphere, questioning their moral basis (Casanova 1994: 57). This is in continuity with the approach ushered in by Vatican II, which entails a systematic analysis of the "signs of the times."

The most notable example of these are the pastoral exhortations on Philippine society issued by the bishops in preparation for the celebration of the Christianity's jubilee year 2000. From 1997 to 1999, the bishops issued annual letters, first on politics, next on the economy, and finally on culture. These pastoral exhortations on Philippine politics, economy, and culture were truly epic in scope, written after much consultation and research, and representing the most detailed and exhaustive pastoral analysis yet of Philippine societal ills. These exhortations were issued not so much to espouse a particular economic or political program, but to emphasize the importance of justice, equity, and other values in the economic, political, and cultural order – an acknowledgement, again, of Catholicism's new role within the prevailing ideological structure.

CONCLUSION

Looking then at the influence of the Philippines' colonial past on the episcopate's confrontation of various societal issues, it is evident that the long period of conquest under Spain, and later under the Americans made the Philippine bishops reckon for many years with its lost power and with concerns (e.g. education, evangelization) high in its hierarchy of issues. Only in the seventies, with the onset of the Marcos regime, would the bishops become increasingly focused on the abuses of an authoritarian regime, although even this would be gradual in its unfolding. While one may argue that the slow but eventual "conscientization" of the Philippine hierarchy received much impetus because of the forces of change unleashed within the Catholic Church by the Second Vatican Council, it is clear from the content of the bishops' pronouncements from the mid-forties to the late sixties that a restorationist agenda was at work.

How does the trajectory followed by the Philippine bishops' compare with the experience of other formerly colonized countries where the Catholic episcopacy would eventually adopt progressive and activist stance. Hanson (1987: 253-254) notes that in Brazil, Chile, and the Philippines, the onset of authoritarianism in the sixties and seventies was met with reserved judgments by the hierarchy which would lend some moral legitimacy to what would later be harsh and abusive regimes. What this case study of the Philippines has shown, however, is that the "delay" in confronting authoritarianism can at least be partly attributable to vested interests in a colonial past. Whether the same can be said of Brazil, Chile, and other nations with similar experiences is a fruitful area of inquiry. In both Brazil and Chile, for example,

the *Patronato Real* (*Padroado* in the case of Brazil) was passed on from Spain to the new sovereign state upon independence, and initially at least there was none of the anticlerical rhetoric experienced in the Philippines. Only later when religious freedom would be a political issue (in Chile) and Rome would assert its power (over the Brazilian Catholic Church) would state-church conflicts erupt (LCCS 1998). What effect these conflicts had on the pronouncements of local Catholic hierarchies in the intervening period – from the assault on traditional Church authority to the onset of authoritarian regimes in the latter half of the twentieth century, can be the subject of future research.

More than forty years ago, Carroll (1969) described the Catholic Church in the Philippines as working in an "unfinished society." Similarly, the transformation of Philippine Catholicism is an unfinished process. In 2001 for instance, the bishops took up the cudgels once again, publicly condemning the corrupt leadership of President Joseph Estrada, leading to his ousting in a second peaceful revolution and the swearing in of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. As with 1986, it was a concerted effort, with the Catholic Church joining forces with the judiciary, the military, people's and non-government organizations, as well as other religious denominations. Through these and other events within the arena of civil society, the character of Philippine Catholicism as a public religion serving as a wellspring of disruptive activism within a changed ideological structure will continue to be formed.

POSTSCRIPT

The ideas for this article were consolidated under the shadow of the passing of a great Philippine bishop and anthropologist, Francisco F. Claver, S.J. (1929-2010). As the acknowledged author of the "Post-Election Statement of 1986" cited above, Bishop Claver played a crucial role in the Philippine Church's engagement of social and political realities. As both scholar and leader, his words and deeds spoke to the highest ideals of justice, development, and peace. His life is a testament to how the social sciences are ultimately at the service of societal transformation. To him, this work is humbly dedicated.

NOTES

1   This paper was first publicly presented at the North Central Sociological Association convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, 23 March 2006.

2   The author would like to acknowledge Dr. Kevin Christiano (Universtity of Notre Dame) and Dr. David Yamane (Wake Forest University) for their invaluable comments and suggestions for this paper.

3   An administrative unit for the purpose of exacting tribute, under the supervision of the encomendero, who in turn has to protect the people and support missionaries under his jurisdiction (ref Constantino, 1975: 43-44).

4   In referring to the various Philippine bishops' documents, the title and exact date of issuance of the statement will be provided whenever possible. The complete set of Philippine bishops' statements from 1945 to 2000 can be found in http://www.cbcponline.org/documents. A more limited collection of recent Philippine bishops' statements is in Josol's Responses to the Signs of the Times (1991).

5   This was the designation of the official organization of the hierarchy at that time. In 1968, there would be modifications in the bishops' organization, giving rise to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

6   Known as "Huks" for short, the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon or People's Anti-Japanese Army was a guerilla group active during World War II. After the war they refused to disband, carrying on the struggle in search of redress for peasant agrarian grievances. Coming under the influence of Communism, they would be defeated in 1952, but would be resurgent again in the late sixties (de la Costa, 1965: 291-294; Fabros, 1988: 125).

7   In an interesting study, Barry focuses on how many Filipino female religious in this Martial Law period adopted a unique "religious language" culled from both political education and psycho-spiritual inputs, allowing them to emerge from their traditional "docile" mode to become among the most outspoken critics of the Marcos regime (1996: 264-303).

8   Hanson (1987: 331) notes how First Lady Imelda Marcos herself implored the two leading Philippine prelates, Ricardo Cardinal Vidal and Jaime Cardinal Sin to prevent the release of the letter, but to no avail. Jaime Cardinal Sin was an especially forceful leader during this crisis, enjoying as Hanson points out the personal trust of Pope John Paul II and saving the United States from "an immediate diplomatic debacle" (1987: 340).

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