

500 Years Christianity in the Philippines



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SEDOS BULLETIN 2021

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Printing: Tipografia DON BOSCO

*SEDOS Bulletin is a bi-monthly publication, and is free of charge for SEDOS Members (max. 3).
The yearly subscription is: €30 in Europe, €45 outside Europe.
For further information, advice, or change in subscription,
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The digital version of the articles, and an English translation of some of most of the articles,
can be found on the SEDOS website: www.sedosmission.org .

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Editorial



Dear Readers,

At the beginning of this year 2021, we take the opportunity to celebrate 500 Years of the Roman Catholic Church's presence in the Philippines (1521-2021), with a selection of articles related to the Church and mission in the Philippines. Except for the first one, that SEDOS received from the author, we selected some articles from the different journals we receive at SEDOS, many from our Member Congregations. It is the moment to make these valuable journals better known.

The opening article is by *Fr. James Kroeger* briefly overviews the five centuries of Catholicism in the Philippines, its history from the arrival of the Spaniards, wars, the different presidents and the revolutions it has known, as well as the challenges to a “renewed evangelization” ahead.

The celebration of the 500 years of the Philippine Church cannot fail to recall all those Overseas Filipino Workers, mostly domestic workers, who give life to the churches they attend with their smiling faces, music, food, and above all their Christian faith. They are the modern-day apostles of evangelization. *Santosh Digal* highlights this contribution in the English magazine *World Mission*.

But the Philippine Church has also suffered a lot of injustices on the political level. We take here the example of the present President Duterte. He does not accept any criticism, criticizes the Christian faith, and expels the missionaries who stand up for a just social cause. *Margarida Santos Lopes* has written her article on this topic in the Spanish journal *Além-Mar perspectiva Missionária*.

So, we are taking the occasion to join in the celebration of the different missionary Congregations that are active in the field. Already the last article concluded with a little note on the 30 years of Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, MCCJ, in the Philippines, which they celebrated in 2018.

Then we come to the PIME missionaries (Pontifical Foreign Missionary Institute) who celebrated 50 years in the Philippines in 2018. *Gerolamo Fazzini* gives us a rapid overview of their pastoral contributions as well as their martyrs. The article appeared in their Italian journal, *Mondo e Missione – La Rivista dei Missionari del PIME*.

We add by way of conclusion the *Prayer for the Centennial Celebration CICM* (Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) in 2007. It summarizes the genuine feelings of the missionaries present in the Philippines today very well.

For our last article, we have chosen the document on Church and Ecology in the Philippines that appeared in the French journal of the Spiritans: *Pentecôte sur le monde* in 2016. The ecological problem is still urgent in the Philippines and becomes more and more a recurring issue in the Philippine Church. The Document is made up of different short contributions.

We close with some words about the important role *Radio Veritas Asia* (RVA) has played: “sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles” (EA, 48).

A Happy Celebration to all Philippine Missionaries, to all Missionaries in the Philippines, and to all the Catholic faithful!

A Beautiful Journey of Faith

Five Centuries of Philippine Catholicism

Joyfully celebrating in 2021 half a millennium of Christianity (1521-2021), the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines is a major actor in this Southeast Asian island nation as well as within the wider Asian and Universal Church. While history continually unfolds, this popular overview of the Philippine Church seeks to trace pivotal events through the past centuries. The piece concludes with the year 2015, since this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council (1965-2015) as well as the wonderful pastoral visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines in early 2015. This presentation provides an opportunity to review both the history and the current situation of the largest local Church in Asia. Statistics in 2015 showed that the Philippine population has well exceeded 100 million. The five major religious bodies and their percentage of the local population are: Roman Catholicism (82.9%), Protestantism (5.2%), Islam (4.6%), Iglesia Filipina Independiente (2.6%), and Iglesia ni Cristo (2.3%). The Philippines is the world's third largest local Church (after Brazil and Mexico). Of Asia's 120+ million Catholics over 60% are Filipinos. These brief, yet significant, facts invite deeper exploration of the multi-faceted Philippine Church.

Background

The Philippine archipelago is composed of 7,107 islands and islets, of which the largest are Luzon in the north and Mindanao in the south. In central Philippines there are several medium-sized islands known as the Visayan Islands. Stretching from the southwestern tip of Mindanao toward Borneo is a chain of small islands collectively known as the Sulu Archipelago. The population of southwestern

Mindanao and Sulu is predominantly Muslim.

There is evidence of human settlements in the islands as early as 20,000 BC. The small black people, called Negritos by the Spaniards, were the first to arrive. Later they were driven into the mountainous interior when immigrants belonging to the brown-skinned Malay race reached the islands. Today one finds various hill tribes such as the Aetas and Ifugao of Luzon and the Mansakas, Mandayas, and Bukidnon of Mindanao; many of these peoples still practice their traditional religions. Malay Filipinos occupy the lowlands, constitute the majority of the population, and have become Christian. They form several distinct groups; the Visayan, Tagalog, Ilokano, and Bikolano are among the most numerous.

Arrival of Spaniards

In March 1521 Ferdinand Magellan arrived in search of spices and converts for Charles I (Emperor Charles V); it was his son Prince Philip, later King Philip II, whose name was bestowed on the islands by Villalobos in 1542. Lapulapu, a native chieftain of Cebu, resisted Magellan's claim of Spanish sovereignty, and he was mortally wounded by Lapulapu's spear thrust. In 1565 Miguel Lopez de Legazpi established the first permanent Spanish settlement in Cebu. In 1571 Legazpi moved his headquarters to Manila, making it the capital of the colony. By the end of the century, most of the lowlands were under Spanish rule, except for some southern islands which remained Muslim.

Islam had been introduced in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. It gradually exercised a strong influence and

helped develop a type of sophisticated political organization, semifeudal and predatory, in Mindanao and Sulu and initially in Manila. When the Spaniards encountered Muslims in the Philippines their hostile attitudes based on Muslim-Christian encounters in Europe (the struggle for independence from Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula) colored their outlook and relations; these very negative attitudes were also transmitted to non-Muslim Filipinos.

Systematic Christianization

An organized program of evangelization of the Philippines was begun in 1565 by the Augustinians who accompanied Legazpi's expedition. They were followed by Franciscans (1578), Jesuits (1581), Dominicans (1587), and Augustinian Recollects (1606) from both Spain and Mexico. Manila became a bishopric in 1579 and an archbishopric in 1595.

The Spanish system of the *Patronato Real*, or royal patronage of the Church in the Indies, facilitated the implementation of an evangelization program. Under this arrangement, the Spanish crown gave financial support and protection to the Church in the Philippines while exercising a large measure of control over its activities. Missionaries traveled to the Philippines in the king's ships. While engaged in mission work, they were entitled to a stipend drawn from either the colonial government directly or from the right to tribute in certain territories (*encomiendas*) into which the country was initially divided. The *encomienda* system was gradually abandoned during the seventeenth century after widespread criticism of extortion and other abuses.

On the other hand, the appointment of missionaries to a parish or mission station was subject to the approval of the governor as vice-patron. In fact, it was Philip II himself who determined that each missionary group should have its own section of the country for evangelization purposes. Under this system the Church in turn exerted great influence on government

policy. The early missionaries often sought to protect the natives from the abuses of the conquistadors and *encomenderos*; they had a vigorous leader in Fray Domingo de Salazar, OP, the first bishop of the Philippines. The synod that he summoned in 1582 clarified many difficult problems regarding the conquest, settlement, and administration of the country in accordance with Christian ideals and principles of justice.

The Philippine Church of the sixteenth century certainly took sides, and it was not with the rich and powerful nor with their fellow Spaniards, but with those who were oppressed and victims of injustice. Church historian John Schumacher notes: "Skeptics have often questioned the reality of the rapid conversion of sixteenth-century Filipinos. If one wishes the answer, it is to be found right here, that the Church as a whole took the side of the poor and the oppressed, whether the oppressors were Spaniards or Filipino *principales*."



Mission Methods

The Spanish missionaries in the Philippines employed a variety of approaches to evangelization. The scattered clan villages were gathered together into larger communities (*pueblos, cabeceras*); often this implied radical lifestyle changes and hence could only be accomplished with difficulty

and very gradually. Instruction was given in native languages, as few Filipinos outside the *Intramuros* area of Manila were ever able to read, write, or speak Spanish with any proficiency. In most missions primary schools supplied the new Christian communities with catechists and local officials. Religion was made to permeate society by substituting splendid liturgical and para-liturgical observances (*fiestas*, processions, novenas) for the traditional rites and festivals; many pious associations of prayer and charity were formed and promoted.

Education and Social Services

These tasks were almost exclusively the concern of the Church during the entire period of Spanish rule. Before the end of the sixteenth century, Manila had three hospitals, one for Spaniards, another for natives, and a third for the Chinese. The first two were conducted by Franciscans, the third by the Dominicans. Later (1611) the Hospitallers of Saint John of God came to make hospital work their special field of activity. In 1595 the Jesuits opened a grammar school for Spanish boys that later developed into the University of San Ignacio and had attached to it the residential college of San José, founded in 1601 and today the San José Seminary.

The year 1611 saw the beginnings of the Dominican University of Santo Tomás, which continues today as a vibrant educational center. In 1640 the Dominicans also took charge of the College of San Juan de Letrán, started about a decade earlier by a zealous layman for the education of orphans. Various religious communities of women established themselves in Manila in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; frequently, they undertook the education of girls. Among these sisterhoods, that begun by Ignacia del Espíritu Santo, a Chinese *mestiza*, in 1684 and today known as the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM), deserves special mention as the first locally founded religious institute, specifically for indigenous women.

Financial Support

The considerable funds required for the support of these schools, hospitals, and charitable works came from pious donations and legacies, called *obras pías*; they were often invested in the galleon trade or in large agricultural estates, the so-called friar lands. These operations often tainted the Church as being involved with commercialism. At the same time, the friar lands were leased to tenant cultivators for development and administration, an arrangement that led to frequent conflicts of interest and a deepening resentment of the Church as landlord. This background must be borne in mind for a balanced understanding of the anticlerical reaction that developed in the latter nineteenth century among a people deeply and sincerely Catholic.

Native Clergy

Catholicism had taken permanent root in the Philippines as the religion of the people by the eighteenth century, if not earlier. However, it had one serious weakness: the retarded development of the native clergy. The unsatisfactory results of early experiments in Latin America had made the Spanish missionaries in the Philippines extremely cautious in admitting native candidates to the priesthood. Apparently, only in the late seventeenth century were native Filipinos ordained. A proposal of Gianbattista Sidotti, a member of Cardinal Charles de Tournon's entourage, to erect a regional seminary in Manila for the whole of East Asia was sharply rejected by the crown (1712).

Bishops became increasingly eager for a diocesan clergy completely under their jurisdiction when conflicts over parish appointments continued—conflicts between the bishops and the religious orders on the one hand, and the bishops and the government on the other. Since very few secular priests came to the Philippines from Spain, this meant ordaining large numbers of native men. Archbishop Sancho de Santa Justa y Rufina of Manila (1767-1787) threatened to take away their parishes from

the religious who refused to submit to episcopal visitation; he also ordained natives even when they lacked the necessary aptitude and training. The results proved disastrous, confirming the prevailing opinion that natives, even if admitted to the priesthood, were incapable of assuming its full responsibilities. Some improvement in formation and an increase in vocations occurred after the arrival of the Vincentians (1862), who took charge of diocesan seminaries. Even so, the departure of a large proportion of Spanish clergy after the transfer of sovereignty from Spain to the United States (1898) left over 700 parishes vacant.

Religious Clergy

The privileges of the *Patronato Real* conferred by the Holy See on the Spanish crown were a mixed blessing; they promoted constructive collaboration between the Church and the colonial government, but it also led to friction. The focus of difficulty was the religious parish priest and the extent to which he was subject to episcopal visitation and control. The conflict gave rise to series of crises that began as early as the administration of Bishop Salazar (1581-1594). In 1744 the Holy See ruled that religious parish priests were subject to the jurisdiction of the ordinary in all matters pertaining to their parish duties (*in officio officinando*) and to their religious superiors in their personal conduct.

With the advent of the revolutionary era in Europe and the loss of Spain's American colonies, the terms of the problem in the Philippines changed. It became widely believed in official circles that the presence of the religious in the parishes was a political necessity, not so much because they were religious as because they were Spaniards and could be relied upon to keep the population loyal. This seems to have been one factor behind the thinking related to the royal decree of 1862 transferring the Mindanao missions from the Augustinian Recollects to the newly returned Jesuits (they had been expelled in 1768) and giving the former an

equivalent number of parishes in Manila and Cavite, which were consequently taken away from the native clergy. The result was mounting disaffection among the native priests thus deprived or threatened with removal. Naturally, the Filipino priests assailed the government policy; among their active leaders and spokesmen were Fathers Gómez, Burgos, and Zamora, who were executed by the government for alleged complicity in a mutiny of native garrison troops in Cavite (1872).

The deaths of these Filipino priests gave a powerful impetus to the emergence of Filipino nationalism by sensitizing Filipinos to injustices by the Spanish colonial government. The movement began as an initiative for colonial reforms led by Dr. José Rizal (1862-1896); after Rizal's arrest and execution for treason, it developed into a separatist movement. The ensuing revolution (1896-1898), which was markedly anti-friar, though usually not anticlerical or anti-Catholic, was cut short by the intervention of the United States, which demanded cession of the Philippines at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War.

Separation of Church and State

The change of sovereignty ended the *Patronato* system. The United States' policy of Church-State separation was extended to the Philippines, but interpreted in a manner much less favorable to the Church. Thus, a system of nonsectarian public education was established that failed to take into account that the overwhelming majority of Filipinos were Catholics. In addition, there was the strong influence of hundreds of American public-school teachers, most of whom were Protestants. They were popularly known as the Thomasites; a group of 540 arrived in 1901 aboard the *U.S.S. Thomas* and many others followed. The professed neutralism in religious matters of the state university, founded in 1911, was copied by other privately founded nonsectarian universities, resulting in the undermining of religious belief among the educated class.

Schism

One consequence of the revolutionary upheaval was the formation by Gregorio Aglipay, a Filipino secular priest, of a schismatic church along nationalist lines, the Philippine Independent Church or *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (1902). Initially it drew a considerable following; however, it soon broke up into factions, some of which rapidly deserted Catholicism in doctrine as well as in discipline. The Supreme Court (1906-1907) also restored to the Catholic Church much of the property that had been taken over by the Aglipayans. The largest Trinitarian faction was received into full communion by the Protestant Episcopal Church (United States), established in the Philippines since the beginning of the century.

Protestant Missions

Protestant denominations sent mission personnel to the Philippines almost as soon as the transfer of sovereignty was effected. In 1901 Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and United Brethren groups, along with societies such as the Christian Missionary Alliance, the YMCA, and the American Bible Society, formed an Evangelical Union to coordinate their activities. A denomination of local origin with an evangelical orientation, the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, was founded in 1914.

Church Response

The normal life of the Catholic Church suffered disastrously during the years following 1898; in several respects it would be decades before a condition approximating "normalcy" would again be reached. From 1898 to 1900 there were almost no resident bishops; diocesan priests remained in very short supply and some had defected to the Aglipayans; seminaries were closed in 1898 and did not reopen until 1904. From 1898 to 1903 the total number of friars decreased over 75% from 1,013 to 246. In a word, the Church was in chaos.

The true beginnings of the reorganization of the Church began with the persistent efforts of Monsignor Guidi through his negotiations

with the American government and the Filipino clergy. Leo XIII, in his apostolic letter *Quae mari sinico* (1902) reorganized the hierarchy, created four new dioceses, and strongly recommended to the Philippine hierarchy the formation of a native clergy. The first official Provincial Council of Manila was convened in 1907 with the goals of reviving the faith of the Filipinos, restoring the local Church, and inspiring in the clergy a spirit of apostolic zeal.

Meanwhile, the severe shortage of priests and religious was met in part by new, non-Spanish missionary congregations of women and men from Europe, Australia, and America. For example, male missionary societies that responded to the pressing needs in the 1905-1941 period are: Irish Redemptorists (1905), Mill Hill Missionaries (1906), Scheut-CICM (1907), Sacred Heart Missionaries and Divine Word Society (1908), LaSalle Brothers (1911), Oblates of Saint Joseph (1915), Maryknoll Missioners (1926), Columban Missioners (1929), Society of Saint Paul (1935), Quebec-PME Society (1937), and Oblates-OMI (1939). Many dedicated female religious came as missionaries to the Philippines, often working in partnership with the societies just mentioned.

By the mid-1920s, the situation was taking a turn for the better; some significant factors in the survival and resurgence of the Church were: the revitalization of Catholic education, growth of Filipino diocesan and religious vocations, a more educated laity, Church involvement in social questions and the labor movement, and the involvement of Catholics in national life. The celebration of the XXXIII International Eucharistic Congress in Manila (1937) focused the attention of the Christian world on the Philippines and deeply inspired thousands of Filipino Catholics.

Second World War

Japanese forces invaded in December 1941. Allied forces under General MacArthur returned in 1944, but severe fighting continued until the Japanese surrender in

August 1945. Manuel Roxas became president of the second independent Republic of the Philippines on July 4, 1946. The war inflicted heavy damage; 257 priests and religious lost their lives, and losses in ecclesiastical property and equipment were estimated at 250 million pesos (U.S.\$ 125 million). Priests, brothers, sisters, and dedicated Catholic women and men exhibited great faith and heroism during the war; many suffered imprisonment.

Organization of Philippine Bishops

The origins of what is known today as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) can be traced back to February 1945 when Apostolic Delegate William Piani, even as the war was still raging, appointed John Hurley, SJ, to take charge of relief work and created the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO). As the very name indicates, the primary purpose of the CWO was to assist in alleviating the immediate suffering and destruction brought on by the war. On July 17, 1945 all the bishops met in Manila for their first meeting after the Japanese Occupation; they requested that the CWO become the official organization of the Hierarchy of the Philippines. In subsequent years, the CWO continued to be largely engaged in relief services and the rehabilitation of Church institutions; it also became the vehicle through which the interests and values of the Church were protected and furthered.

The 1945-1965 period in the life of the local Church in the Philippines is characterized by: quite rapid recovery from the ravages of war, greatly expanded school system at upper levels, involvement of Catholics (laity, sisters, clergy) in social action, and growing Filipinization of Church structures and administration. The First Plenary Council of the Philippines (1953) focused on the "preservation, enrichment, and propagation of Catholic life" and offered Church resources "to renew the social order." The Church became involved in Catholic Action programs with farmers (FFF) and workers (FFW). Guidance from the hierarchy

continued; from 1945-1965 the CWO issued 39 joint pastoral letters and statements on a variety of subjects relevant to Church and civil society. The Philippine bishops sponsored a Marian Congress in Manila (1954) and inaugurated the Pontificio Collegio-Seminario Filippino in Rome (1961). The period saw renewal programs introduced; the Christian Family Movement (CFM) came to the Philippines in the 1950s; the *Cursillos de Cristianidad* introduced in 1963 (and the evangelization seminars for various Church sectorial groups they inspired) ignited a renewed fervor of lay involvement in the Church.

1965: A Pivotal Year

In mid-year, the nation observed a six-day renewal-celebration of the quadricentennial of the beginning of the systematic evangelization of the Philippines (1565-1965). The bishops established the Mission Society of the Philippines, signifying Filipinos' commitment to spread the gift of faith they had received to other lands. Two more events would prove to shape significantly the experience and mission of this local Church. The first was the election of Ferdinand Marcos as president of the Philippines; the second was the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council on December 8, 1965.

Authoritarian Rule

The Philippine constitution, modeled on that of the United States, established a democratic form of government. Ferdinand E. Marcos, first elected president in 1965, declared martial law in 1972 and imposed a form of "constitutional authoritarianism." The martial law period posed new, challenging questions for the Church and nation. Among the more pernicious effects of the two-decade Marcos era (1965-1986) were increased militarization, insurgency, the absence of juridical procedures, the destruction of democratic processes, economic decline, and pervasive fear. The end result, in the words of a Filipino social

scientist, was to place the country “on the trembling edge of a social volcano.”

This period proved a time of testing and growth for the local Church. Prophetic stances were often met by military abuse, imprisonment, and torture, and even deportation for foreign missionaries. The Church evolved a position of “critical collaboration,” cooperating with the regime on programs beneficial to the populace while criticizing government actions judged harmful.

An important 1977 pastoral letter, *The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Good News*, addressed many social problems as well as the divisions within the Church created by various positions taken vis-à-vis martial law (e.g. the absence of a clear stance and the long-delayed response on the part of most members of the hierarchy; the infiltration of Church structures and institutions by left-leaning priests and religious). The pastoral letter sought to enunciate a clear, holistic vision to guide the Church’s mission of integral evangelization:

This is EVANGELIZATION: the proclamation, above all, of SALVATION from sin; the liberation from everything oppressive to man; the DEVELOPMENT of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian; and ultimately, the RENEWAL OF SOCIETY in all its strata through the interplay of the GOSPEL TRUTHS and man’s concrete TOTAL LIFE.... THIS IS OUR TASK. THIS IS OUR MISSION.

President Marcos announced the lifting of martial law on January 17, 1981. It was carefully timed—three days before the inauguration of United States President Ronald Regan, and exactly one month before Pope John Paul II’s scheduled visit to the Philippines. In view of the broad range of authoritarian controls retained by Marcos, the lifting of martial law was recognized by the Filipino people as a purely cosmetic gesture. The papal visit brought two clear messages to Filipinos: a need for dynamic faith in their lives and an emphasis on justice

and peace. Specifically, John Paul II told the president and government leaders: “Even in exceptional situations that may at times arise, one can never justify any violation of the fundamental dignity of the human person or of the basic rights that safeguard this dignity.”

The assassination of Benigno Aquino on August 21, 1983 ushered in a period of national mourning and a widespread clamor for justice and truth. In this highly charged atmosphere, the local Church’s response was crucial. Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila since 1974, cautioned Filipinos: “If we allow his death to fan the flames of violence and division, then he will have died in vain.”

Events moved rapidly in the ensuing years. Filipino consciousness had been awakened; Philippine society had been galvanized. The Church did not remain on the sidelines during this national crisis. In the volatile context that followed the elections of 1986, the Catholic bishops issued a statement declaring that fraud provides no moral legitimacy for any regime. If citizens agreed that the election had been “stolen,” they should oblige the regime to respect their will. The bishops added: “But we insist: Our acting must always be according to the Gospel of Christ, that is, in a peaceful, non-violent way.”

People Power One

An analysis of the story of the “bloodless revolution” of February 1986 and the roles played by church people and Cardinal Sin is instructive. The overthrow of the Marcos regime was “a victory of *moral* values over the sheer physical force on which he had relied” [J. Carroll]. It signaled people’s determination not to shed Filipino blood. The revolution was a “movement for active non-violence which was promoted by Church-related groups” [*ibid.*]. In addition, “the February Revolution was a *political* event, not a social revolution” [*ibid.*]. Basic social issues of wealth and power that plagued the nation for generations remained. Many Filipinos still found themselves

outside the mainstream of national social, political, and economic life.

Aquino Presidency

Corazon C. Aquino, catapulted into office with little experience, served as Philippine president from 1986-1992. Aquino's main contribution was the reestablishment of a democratically functioning government. She began by enacting a temporary "freedom constitution." In May 1986, Aquino appointed a constitutional commission (including Church people) and asked that a new document be produced within three months. This constitution was ratified overwhelmingly by a national referendum in 1987.

Difficult issues faced Aquino: a bankrupt economy, communist insurgents, the status of the United States military bases, coup plotters, natural disasters, a burgeoning population, Islamic separatists, the foreign debt, agrarian reform—the list appeared endless. Yet, she guided the Filipino people to free and fair elections in May 1992 and the orderly transfer of power to President Fidel Ramos (1992-1998), the first Protestant president of the Philippines. Aquino, an "icon of integrity," died on August 1, 2009.

Assessing the Social Situation

The Marcos years (1965-1986) further accentuated the mass poverty that had long been and continues to be the most tragic aspect of Filipino life. Per capita income in 2000 was estimated at \$1,046 per year; nearly 50% of Filipinos were living below the poverty line. The foreign debt in 2000 was \$52.4 billion; in the Marcos years alone, it moved from a manageable \$599 million to \$26 billion. Servicing the domestic and foreign debt was absorbing an average of 40% of the government budget. In 2000 the unemployment rate was 11.8% and under-employment stood at 22%. Filipinos were found in 193 countries of the world; overseas foreign workers numbered 2.96 million; undocumented personnel were 1.91 million; and, there were 2.33 million permanent residents overseas. The total number of

Filipinos overseas stood at 7.2 million—fully 10% of the total population. Locally, graft and corruption remained prevalent—even endemic; environmental degradation continued; the infant mortality rate was high. In stark contrast to the prevalent poverty, there are pockets of great luxury, underlining the gross inequity of income distribution.

In the political system, power, like wealth, remained concentrated in the hands of a few influential politicians, business, and military people. There appeared to be a self-perpetuating social system and political culture. Politicians, for the most part, did not introduce truly transformative social programs into their platforms.

In contemporary Philippines, diverse ideologies, with varying political visions and programs, all promise a better life for the Filipino. There are both non-violent and armed or revolutionary positions. The left is usually identified with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its militant New People's Army (NPA), and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which it dominates. The revolutionary left's protracted struggle has caused destruction; a small group of church workers continues to promote this Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. In southern Philippines, two Islamic political groups continue to be serious threats to peace.

The Philippine local Church, following the lead of Vatican II, seeks to involve itself with the lives and struggles of Filipinos, their "joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties" (cf. GS 1). Recently, Church leaders wrote: "Such are the challenges that the Church has to face in its evangelizing and liberating mission. We have to bring our considerable resources as people of God to bear upon these problems."

The political fortunes of the Filipino people and the consequent social and economic ramifications have helped shape the very identity and perspectives of the local Church. In a word, the *context* has shaped the believing community and has significantly influenced the *content* of its program of evangelization; all these elements are

necessary ingredients for a full appreciation of the vibrant Catholicism present in the Philippines today.



Implementation of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council promoted a major ecclesiological paradigm shift, entailing changes in theologies, values, and orientations. Received by the local Church of the Philippines, it prompted the Filipino bishops to launch a renewed evangelization; the social apostolate was among its emphases. Early efforts centered on the formation and support of unions and cooperatives for farmers, laborers, and fishermen. The bishops issued several pastoral letters on social action, justice, and development. They sponsored a National Rural Development Congress in 1967, the slogan of which, “The Church Goes to the Barrios,” became axiomatic for the Church’s commitment to development and social justice. The bishops established and funded the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) as their means of coordinating the social justice apostolate. The influential Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) was established in 1971. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Church’s vision of human development as integral to evangelization expanded from a

concern for social change to include the need for structural change. It became clear that efforts that had improved the conditions of the farming and working classes could not be sustained without corresponding political leverage. Church involvement in broader social, political, and economic questions became imperative.

Vatican II ecclesiology has taken root in the Philippine Church. Growth has often been difficult and uncertain; it has required deep faith to discern and follow the Spirit’s promptings in the midst of challenging historical circumstances and social conditions. Yet, this journey has resulted in a more mature, vibrant local Church. The presence of strong Base Christian Communities (BECs) provides grass roots structures for spiritual, catechetical, ministerial, and social growth. Important strengths are present in this Church: the inductive and experiential approach of theology; its inculturated social teaching; its spirituality of human development; its renewed ecclesiology / missiology; its concrete service to many Filipinos facing diverse dehumanizing social ills; its engagement in social issues in a non-partisan but active manner; its efforts to promote and practice non-violent approaches to socio-political crises; its commitment to create structures of participation in Church and society. The Church also has its recent witnesses—and martyrs (to mention only a few): Malaybalay diocesan priest Neri Satur (October 14, 1991), Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, OMI (February 4, 1997), Father Rhoel Gallardo, CMF (May 3, 2000), Father Benjamin Inocencio, OMI (December 28, 2000), and Scholastic “Richie” Fernando, SJ (October 17, 1996). Several foreign missionaries, especially those working in Mindanao, have also been murdered over recent decades.

The Philippine bishops have continued, with moderate effectivity, to use pastoral letters to communicate their holistic vision of the Church’s evangelizing mission. In the post-Vatican II era, the CBCP (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, canonically

constituted in 1967) has issued 125+ pastoral letters and statements (1965-2000). Approximately two-thirds of these documents address social, political, and economic matters; Bishop Claver notes that they have generally proven to be quite accurate barometers of Philippine life. This effective tool of evangelization has promoted a basic Christian “faith-realism” and continually needs to be actualized within viable Christian communities.

The local Church retains moral authority and credibility in Philippine society; its witness to justice and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed has established a reservoir of good will and credibility. Yet, as a living organism, she has clear limitations. There were unfortunate divisions in Church leadership, particularly in the mid-1970s; this resulted in missed pastoral opportunities and negative influences on the broader Church membership. Some bishops were hesitant to engage in human development programs and prophetic evangelization—especially during the early years of martial law. Although indigenous clergy and religious continue to increase, that growth rate is below the percentage of population increase; the priest-Catholic ratio is one of the lowest in the world. There is also a glaring inequitable distribution of apostolic personnel within the country; concentrations are usually found in urban areas.

Catechesis and Education

Given the large and rapidly expanding population of the Philippines (43 million in 1975 to 75.8 million in 2000 and to 100+ million in 2015), catechesis for Catholics remains a basic area of Church renewal. The catechetical ministry has shown considerable growth in vision, publications, institutes, and personnel. The Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE) has published several works and sponsored a variety of national workshops and congresses. Significant publications include: *The Shape of Religious Education in the Philippines* (1979), *National Catechetical*

Directory for the Philippines (1982-1985), *Filipino Family Growing in the Faith* (1983), *The Catechists’ Basic Formation Program* (1992), *Catholic Faith Catechism* (1989-1993), *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (1997) [Tagalog translation *Katesismo para sa mga Pilipinong Katoliko* (2000)], and the *New Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* (2008). ECCCE used to publish a quarterly catechetical review, *Docete*, which has raised interest in and the quality level of catechesis throughout the country.

Significant catechetical congresses have been sponsored by ECCCE in the 1990s, beginning with the celebration of the National Catechetical Year (1990). Diocesan catechetical institutes have been established in major cities (e.g. Bacolod, Cebu, Davao, Iloilo, Manila, Naga, Vigan, etc.). Other national centers which prepare women and men for their vocation as catechists (e.g. Mother of Life Center, Metro Manila, established in 1967) continue their decades of service. The Philippine Constitution affords opportunities for religious education in public schools; this critical area of the catechetical ministry is limited by inadequate numbers of adequately formed catechists. The local Church is also quite unprepared to meet the new emphasis on ongoing and adult catechesis.

The Philippine Church has made a major commitment to formal education. It operates hundreds of high schools and grade schools as well as over 300 colleges and universities. The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), founded in 1941, continues to represent the interests of Catholic educational institutions and promote religious instruction. Similar activities are the focus of the Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines (ACUP), established in 1973.

A unique and successful form of religious education and renewal has evolved in the Philippine Church with the holding of large national congresses, dedicated to particular themes. Coming from all ecclesiastical circumscriptions, the delegates (often several

thousand) are expected to become trainer-facilitators upon their return home; audio and video tapes as well as printed materials of the congresses are made available. This approach proved particularly effective in the years connected with the Great Jubilee 2000. A partial list includes the following: Marian Year (1985), Eucharistic Year (1987), Bible Year (1989), Catechetical Year (1990), World Youth Day (1995), Eucharistic Congress (1997), two Holy Spirit Congresses (1998), Congress on God the Father (1999), Congress on the Trinity (2000), and the National Mission Congress (2000). The local Church of the Philippines hosted the Fourth World Meeting of Families in January, 2003. Finally, the Church also supports liturgical centers, radio stations, publishing houses, hospitals, and social action centers throughout its 80+ dioceses.

Learning – Teaching – Church

In 1995 the Bishops' Conference (CBCP) celebrated its fiftieth year since beginning in 1945 as the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO). This became an opportunity to review and assess the CBCP's nature, structure, mission, and functions. The CBCP amended its constitution and by-laws; it established the new offices dedicated to media, legal matters, research, bioethics, women, and the Church's cultural heritage. The CBCP now (2020) has 35 departments, commissions, and offices to address the many concerns of this local Church. In addition, the bishops relaunched *The CBCP Monitor* in a new format, initiated a weekly radio program, and established the CBCP Website [<http://www.cbcponline.org>].

Responsive to the call for renewal in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, the CBCP issued a series of exhaustive and in-depth pastoral exhortations, designed to address vital aspects of Philippine life and Christianity. Each document began with a quite thorough and substantive analysis of the carefully chosen topics: Philippine Politics (1997), Philippine Economy (1998), Philippine Culture (1999), and Philippine Spirituality (2000). The bishops concluded the series

with their document: "Missions" and the Church in the Philippines: A Pastoral Letter on the Church's Mission in the New Millennium (July 2000). The CBCP also sponsored the large National Mission Congress, which they saw as the "fitting culminating activity" of the Jubilee Year celebrations and the "first step as a local Church into the Third Millennium."

Additional Ministries

Dialogue and peace-building with a variety of partners remain a continuous commitment of the Philippine Church. She strove to be an instrument of reconciliation during the Marcos years; along with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, she made several overtures to various leftist and armed groups. In their 1990 pastoral letter, *Seek Peace, Pursue It*, the bishops laid out a ten-point "path to peace." The Church also engages in interfaith dialogue with indigenous and Muslim peoples; the Silsilah movement and the pivotal Bishops-Ulama Forum (1996+) have fostered Muslim-Christian harmony in Southern provinces. The annual "Mindanao Week of Peace" was begun in 1999.

The Philippines has an impressive growing body of "local theology," often emerging from local communities discerning the "signs of the times" under the Holy Spirit's lead. Recurrent themes emerge: evangelization and mission, prayer and spirituality, peace-making and reconciliation, dialogue with peoples, cultures, and religious traditions, care for the environment, the Church and public policy. Several important theological, pastoral, catechetical, and mission journals are published; representative journals are: *Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas*, *East Asian Pastoral Review* (ceased in 2016), *Landas*, *Philippiniana Sacra*, *Religious Life Asia*, and *World Mission*. Prominent among Filipino theologians are: C. Arévalo, T. Bacani, F. Claver, A. Co, B. Dianzon, F. Gustilo, D. Huang, A. Lagdameo, L. Legaspi, L. Mercado, O. Quevedo, L. Tagle, and G. Timoner III. Four of these theologians have

been appointed to the International Theological Commission (Arévalo, Tagle, Gustilo, and Timoner).

A definite sign of a vibrant local Church is its mission outreach. In mid-2000 Catholic Filipino missionaries numbered 1,329 women and 206 men from 69 religious congregations serving in some 80 countries. The bishops established the Mission Society of the Philippines (1965). Maryknoll founded the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (1977). Cardinal Sin established the San Lorenzo Mission Institute (1987), whose goal is serving the Chinese; its patron is San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint, canonized on October 17, 1987. Pedro Calungsod, beatified on March 5, 2000 and canonized on October 21, 2012, inspired the successful National Mission Congress 2000. Several lay movements successfully engage in mission outreach (e.g. Knights of Columbus, Couples for Christ, *Gawad Kalinga*, *El Shaddai* movement, *Ligaya ng Panginoon*, and many others).

Continuing Renewal and Commitment

A major local Church milestone was achieved in the 1991 month-long Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II). After three years of intense preparation, a total of 504 participants (including 165 lay faithful) gathered for a comprehensive review and renewal of Christian life in the light of the vision of Vatican II. The Council boldly challenged the local Church to be “a *Community of Disciples, a Church of the Poor*, committed to the mission of *renewed integral evangelization*, toward building up of a new *civilization of life and love* in this land.” A systematic implementation scheme was elaborated in the National Pastoral Plan, *In the State of Mission: Towards a Renewed Integral Evangelization*, approved by the bishops on July 11, 1993.

Ten years later (January 2001) 369 delegates gathered for the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal (NPCCR) and reflected on “how far we as a Church have fulfilled the grand vision and mission proposed by PCP-II and the National

Pastoral Plan.” The evaluation was both sober and hopeful: “The Church in the Philippines has, to our shame, ... remained unchanged in some respects; ... we, as Church, have to confess some responsibility for many of the continuing ills of Philippine society.... We rejoice, however, in the perseverance and increase of many movements of renewal; ... we hear anew God’s call to renewal.” NPCCR recommitted the Church to nine focused pastoral priorities for the first decade of the new millennium; they center on: faith, formation, laity, poor, family, community-building, clergy renewal, youth, ecumenism-dialogue, and *ad gentes* mission. These nine priorities have become the basis for a nine-year “novena” of renewal as the local Church prepares to celebrate the fifth centenary of evangelization of the Philippines (1521-2021). Each year from 2013-2021 is dedicated to catechesis and reflection on a particular theme; weekly reflections are published in *Sambuhay*, the widely distributed Sunday missalette; longer monthly articles appear in the *CBCP Monitor*.

Providentially, the NPCCR, as originally scheduled, took place during the week immediately following the “People Power II” events (January 16-20, 2001) that removed Joseph Estrada from the Philippine presidency after only a little over two years of his six-year term; Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became the fourteenth president and the second woman to hold the highest office in the land. There was muted euphoria; the local Church had played a significant role; the event was described as “the gift of national and moral renewal which God empowered the Filipinos to receive.” The tasks ahead were clear: democratic institutions need strengthening; confidence in government awaits restoration; poverty beckons amelioration; the economy needs rebuilding. The Philippine Church’s commitment to “renewed integral evangelization” took on new depths and urgency.

Recalling the words of Pope John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* where he quoted

Luke 5:4: *Duc in altum* (Put out into the deep), the NPCCR final statement asserts:

The challenge for us, the Church in the Philippines, is to do the same. We are called to put out into the depths of Philippine life and society, to put out into the depths of our life as Church, to put out our nets into the unknown depths of the future. Like Peter, we know the frustration of having caught nothing. But like Peter, we know that the One who directs us is the Lord who has renewed all things by his life, death, and resurrection. And so, we dare to begin again in the task of renewal. May Mary, star of evangelization, be with us in our journey to the new creation we so deeply desire.

Journeying in the Third Millennium

The local Church in the Philippines, as noted earlier, sponsored the successful National Mission Congress in 2000 as a programmatic “first step as a local Church into the Third Millennium.” This perspective continues the implementation of National Pastoral Plan that emerged from the Second Plenary Council: *In the State of Mission: Towards a Renewed Integral Evangelization*. In a word, *missionary evangelization* describes the dynamic, pastoral mission vision of the Philippine Church in its faith journey with the Filipino people.

The bishops’ conference (CBCP) continued catechizing the faithful through its frequent pastoral letters and the statements of the CBCP President. From 2000-2015 inclusive, 141 documents were released (an annual average of about nine). In the period of the third millennium, the CBCP Presidents were: Orlando Quevedo (1999-2003), Fernando Capalla (2003-2005), Angel Lagdameo (2005-2009), Nereo Odchimar (2009-2011), Jose Palma (2011-2013), and Socrates Villegas (2013-2017). In its history, the Philippines has had eight cardinals; their names and year of appointment are: Rufino Santos (1960), Julio Rosales (1969), Jaime Sin (1976), Ricardo Vidal (1985), Jose Sanchez (1991), Gaudencio Rosales (2006), Luis Antonio Tagle (2012), and Orlando

Quevedo (2014). As of this writing (late 2020), there are three living cardinals: G. Rosales, L. A. Tagle, and O. Quevedo; Tagle is still a papal elector. The Philippines has had four papal visits: Paul VI (1970), John Paul II (1981 and 1995), and Francis (2015). Some significant Church events in the first fifteen years of the new millennium can be briefly noted. The division of the huge Manila Archdiocese into six dioceses [Manila, Cubao, Kalookan, Novaliches, Pasig, and Parañaque] was begun in 2002 and completed in 2003. The Church held two highly successful national congresses of the clergy (2004 and 2010). The charity program to assist the poor (*Pondo ng Pinoy*) was established in 2005 by the then-archbishop of Manila, Gaudencio Rosales. There was strong participation from the Philippines in the First Asian Mission Congress, organized by the FABC and held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on October 18-23, 2006. The CBCP issued its second pastoral letter on the environment in 2008, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the 1988 CBCP letter, *what is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* (quoted in Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* no. 41). The Philippine Church hosted the Ninth Plenary FABC Assembly (August 10-16, 2009).

After several years of intense debate in which the Church took an active role, President Benigno Aquino III signed the much-contested Reproductive Health Bill into law on December 21, 2012. The Supreme Court took up various challenges to its constitutionality in 2013. On April 8, 2014, the Court affirmed the bill, but declared eight items (in sections 3, 7, 17, and 23) to be unconstitutional; these were, in fact, the main items to which the Church had serious objections. In this atmosphere CBCP President Villegas promoted renewed collaboration between the Church and the government for the welfare of the Filipino people.

The Philippines was visited by several natural calamities in the years 2012-2015. On December 4, 2012 Typhoon Bopha [local name: Pablo] devastated the provinces of

Davao Oriental and Compostella Valley in Eastern Mindanao. It was on October 15, 2013 that a severe earthquake hit in central Philippines; the island of Bohol was greatly affected. Typhoon Haiyan [local name: Yolanda] struck on November 8, 2013; affecting several provinces, it caused very severe destruction and resulted in the loss of over 7,000 lives. Extreme weather was also experienced in 2014-2015, bringing floods, crop destruction, loss of life, and much suffering. Church and civic resources were stretched to their limits; yet, it was also edifying to witness numerous and widespread examples of heroic generosity, dedication, service, and charity.

Though it is not possible to present a full description and specific data on many other Church events, one must mention in general a wide variety of constructive initiatives, as the Church continued its efforts at missionary evangelization: Congress for Seminary Formators (2009); Taize-sponsored "Pilgrimage of Trust" for youth (2010); annual gatherings of the AMRSP (Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines); vigorous mission promotion by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) that celebrated their eightieth year in the Philippines with a Grand Mission Festival (2012); exemplary faith witness of numerous Filipinos serving in foreign mission and the dedication of expatriate missionaries working in the Philippines; continued defense of the rights of the indigenous [*lumad*] peoples; the local and national efforts to strengthen the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC); catechetical and youth initiatives. Despite its recognized limitations, the local Church of the Philippines struggles to remain faithful to its mission of integral evangelization.

Visit of Pope Francis

Undeniably, the most significant Church event of 2015 was the January 15-19 pastoral visit of Pope Francis; he told the crowds that when he saw the destructive effects of the 2013 typhoon on television, he decided to come to comfort his brothers and sisters. Affectionately nicknamed *Lolo Kiko*

(Grandfather Francis) by the huge crowds, he won their hearts and souls. He emphatically asserted: "The poor are at the center of the Gospel, are at the heart of the Gospel; if we take away the poor from the Gospel, we cannot understand the whole message of Jesus Christ." The most moving part of the papal visit was Pope Francis' presence in Tacloban, the city hardest hit by the 2013 typhoon. Thanking Pope Francis for his pastoral visit, Cardinal Tagle captured the people's sentiments and mission commitment; he said: "Every Filipino wants to go with you—not to Rome—but to the peripheries, to the shanties, to prison cells, to hospitals, to the world of politics, finance, arts, sciences, culture, education and social communications. We will go to these worlds to bring the light of Jesus, Jesus who is the center of your pastoral visit and the cornerstone of the Church."

Eucharistic Congresses

The Philippine Church was privileged to have been selected to host the fifty-first International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) in 2016 in Cebu City. This is the second time the country has hosted the IEC; the thirty-third IEC was held in Manila on February 3-7, 1937. The local Church has held five National Eucharistic Congresses: (1) Manila (December 11-15, 1929); (2) Manila (November 28-December 2, 1956); (3) Cebu (April 25-May 3, 1965); (4) Manila (December 4-8, 1987) [1987 was a National Eucharistic Year]; (5) Manila (January 22-26, 1997). A special Archdiocesan Eucharistic Congress was held in Manila on February 8-11, 1962 in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the thirty-third IEC. The local Church fully ascribes to the dictum: The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.

Looking to the Future

The Philippine Church has embarked on a nine-year journey in preparation for the fifth centenary of Christianity in the Islands (1521-2021). In a lengthy pastoral exhortation on the New Evangelization

issued in 2012, the CBCP once again promoted missionary evangelization as a fundamental commitment of the local Church; the scope of the document is impressive; it is a clear roadmap for the coming years. We can be inspired by some brief quotes:

We look forward with gratitude and joy to March 16, 2021, the fifth centenary of the coming of Christianity to our beloved land.... We shall, therefore, embark on a nine-year spiritual journey that will culminate with the great jubilee of 2021. It is a grace-filled event of blessing for the Church.... The mission of all of us who are called to take part in the “New Evangelization” is the Church’s own essential mission, as it was the mission of Jesus Himself also....

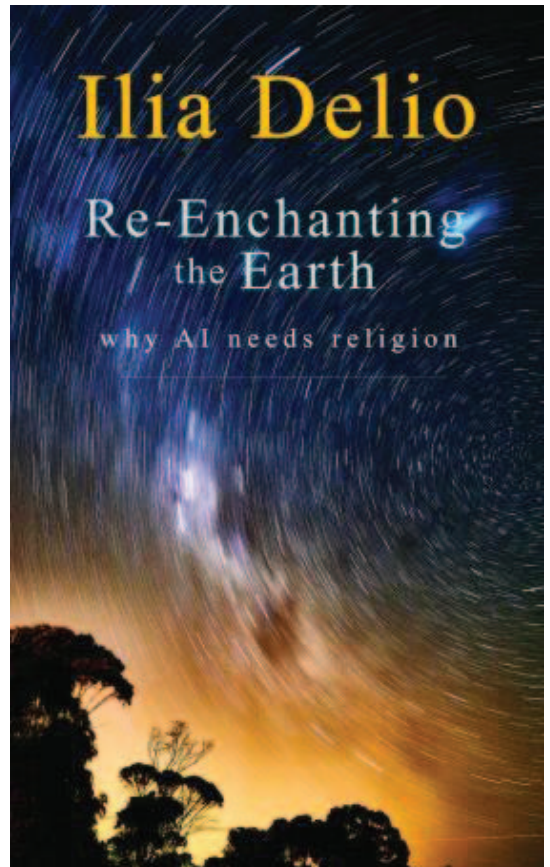
Concern with the New Evangelization has been the overall theme of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) in 1991, of the National Mission Congress for the New Millennium (NMC) held in Cebu in September/October 2000, and of the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal (NPCCR) which the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) sponsored in Manila in 2001.... Thus, we in the Church in the Philippines come to this program of the “New Evangelization” already with considerable prior extensive and intensive study, reflection, deliberation and resolution. In truth, we have been trying to earnestly pursue “renewed evangelization” especially in the last twenty-five years....

We respond to the call of the Spirit for a New Evangelization by focusing on the Nine Pastoral Priorities of the Church in the Philippines as the key themes over a nine-year period [2013: Integral Faith Formation; 2014: Laity; 2015: The Poor; 2016: Eucharist and the Family; 2017: Parish as a Communion of Communities;

2018: Clergy and Religious; 2019: Youth; 2020: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue; 2021: Missio ad gentes]....

Dear Friends, being evangelizers is not a privilege but a commitment that comes from faith...Beloved People of God, we invite you to pray and reflect on what the New Evangelization asks of all of us, from each of us.... In this Year of Faith and throughout the nine-year period of special New Evangelization — and beyond — let us celebrate our faith. Live Christ! Share Christ!

(We are thankful to the author for this contribution to SEDOS Bulletin.)



(Gift from ORBIS BOOKS to SEDOS)

Modern-Day Missionaries to the World

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) take and practice their faith fervently wherever they go or are. That is why the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines appreciates the role of OFWs as modern-day apostles of evangelization in the foreign countries where they work.

Mary Jane Soriano, a 25-year-old college graduate Filipino domestic worker, has been working in Hong Kong for some years. During her stay there, she always made it a point to attend the Sunday Mass in a local church, even if her employer and his family belonged to another religion. Besides Mary's humility, simplicity, hard work, honesty and other human qualities that inevitably impressed her employer is her indomitable Catholic faith and the way she practices it - simple ways to keep her life and faith going: always trusting in God, praying daily, being good and doing good to others.

In due time, the employer and family voluntarily embraced the Catholic faith with their own volition and interest. One reason for this was Mary who practiced her faith in a simple and sublime manner; being a domestic worker inspired them in a non-subtle and non-assuming manner. Mary is one of the millions of OFWs who are spread all over the world.

An OFW is a person of Filipino origin who lives and works outside of the Philippines. The term denotes Filipinos who are abroad indefinitely either as citizens, permanent or temporary residents of a different country and those Filipino citizens who are abroad for a limited, definite period, such as on a work contract or as students.

About 80 percent of the Philippines' 107 million people are Catholic and, unlike many other countries where the faith has waned, the majority still practice their religion with enthusiasm. And OFWs take and practice their faith fervently wherever they go.

About 10 percent of the population of the country are OFWs located in more than 193 countries. Half of them are in the U. S. where more than 85,000 Filipinos continue to migrate every year. That is why the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines deem OFWs as today's apostles of evangelization in the foreign countries where they go to work or migrate.

For Manila Archbishop Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, OFWs play a big role in sharing and proclaiming the "joy of the Gospel" given their sheer number. "Our overseas Filipino migrant workers have become the big missionary presence," says Tagle.



Government data shows that over 10 million Filipinos are living and working overseas in varied professions like medical doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, caregivers, domestic helpers and others.

In Brunei, there are about 20,000 Catholics and 70 percent are Filipinos. Bishop Paul Hinder

of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia has appealed to Filipino bishops to send more Filipinos based in the Middle East to join the vicariate. About 90 percent of Hinder's apostolic vicariate is Filipino. Without the Filipino workers in the Middle East, Bishop Hinder would not have a diocese.

Time to share Faith

OFWs bring their faith to wherever they go. It is this faith that many OFWs and their families turn to prayers for guidance and strength to lessen the impact of separation caused by migration. Spain brought Christianity to the Philippines centuries ago and eventually, it has paved the way to make it Asia's largest Catholic country.

Now, with the West facing emptier pews, it's time for the "heirs" to become missionaries themselves and bring the faith back to Europe and other parts of the world; it is time for Asia to come back to Europe and America in order to "give back the faith."

OFWs are seen as heirs who have received the gift of faith as an inheritance which cannot be used only for oneself but to be shared with others. OFWs share it even with those who have given them the legacy. They have received faith and now it is time to share.

With millions of Filipino migrants all over the world, Archbishop Gilbert Armea Garcera of Lipa, former chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Episcopal Commission on Family and Life, said they have become missionaries, living their faith and setting examples to their host communities and countries. Besides

being the most trustworthy employees, Filipinos abroad actively participate in church activities as they practice their faith deeply, religiously and vigorously.

Filipinos actively take part in church-related activities. They fill empty churches, fill the air with joyous songs praising God. They are

the answer to the prayer of parish priests who have only a few old people left in a parish. They are active in the parish. Many fallen-away Catholics return to the faith of their fathers, led by a child catechized by a Filipina caretaker. A Filipina, taking care of children left alone by parents and keeping up with young kids, shares the essentials of the Faith. The OFWs, who stayed away from churches at home, become fervent Catholics and even become apostles. In Christianizing others, they Christianize themselves.

Their efforts are efficacious, even without training in catechesis. God more than makes up for their shortcomings. God cannot be kept from being with those He loves. He always finds or makes the way. The hand of God is not shortened.

Filipino overseas maids or domestic helpers in Beirut, Lebanon, while walking the dogs of their masters, discovered a shrine of Our

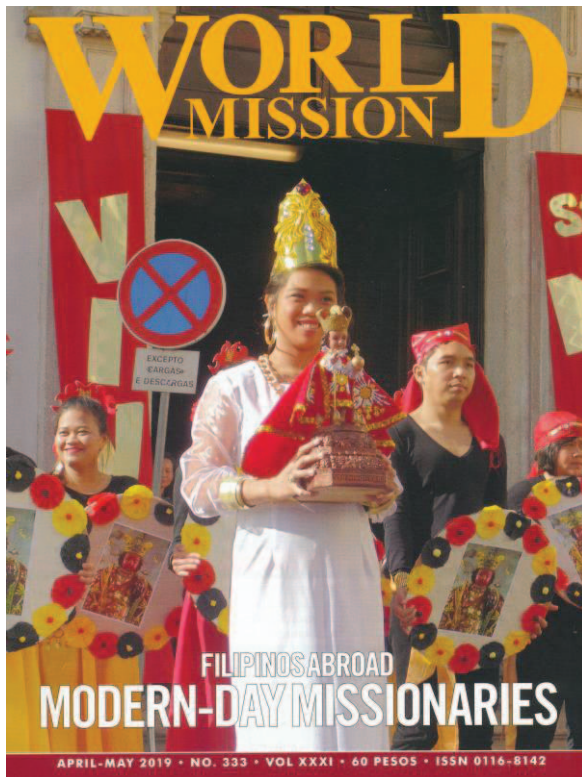
Lady of Lourdes. They made it a frequent place to visit.

The late Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, was able to send many priests to Rome for their annual retreat without spending a penny since the money came from someone who had returned to the church because their children were practicing the faith. They had been catechized by a Filipina maid.

Continued Devotions

In Philadelphia (U.S.A.), the OFWs set

up novenas on Wednesday. Not to Our Lady of Perpetual Help but to some other saint. This shows that they were able to adapt. They carried their practices in the same way that the early Jesuits brought their image of the House of Nazareth to South America through the Atlantic Ocean. In the diocese of



Sacramento, California, they got permission from the bishop to celebrate the *simbang gabi* (predawn Christmas novena Masses celebrated from Dec 16 to 24).

At the peril of losing their lives, Filipino men, women, and others in Muslim countries gather for the celebration of Mass and in sharing communion with those unable to go to the improvised chapels. Without a missioning ceremony, the OFWs are Christianizing a dechristianized Europe and Muslim countries. Just as the early church was spread not only by missionaries but also by slaves, the same task is being achieved by lowly domestics.

These Filipinos who leave their families behind do so not because of incompatibility or misunderstanding but “out of love.” Filipino husbands and wives live separate lives because they love their families which literally means leaving their families behind for overseas employment.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa in Batangas says, however, while the economy benefits from foreign remittances sent back to Manila, the Philippine government should do its best to introduce and create humane and decent jobs to keep Filipino families intact.

Garcera recalls Popes Paul VI and John Paul II during their visits to Manila over ten years apart when they called on Filipinos to be “missionaries to the world.” “That is what’s exactly happening now,” he says. However, bishops say that OFWs as missionaries is “something that we did not plan.”

There have been a lot of efforts to awaken this missionary calling in the Filipino church. In the past 50 years, the church has formed groups like the Filipino Mission Society which is now present in different parts of Asia. It also has the Lay Mission Association. It has lay missionaries also being sent to different parts of the world.

There are also many Filipino priests, as well as other religious men and women, working in different parts of the world.

Sacrifices

The CBCP Episcopal Commission on Migrants says the Church recognizes the sacrifices and services of those working in foreign countries for their loved ones and country. Foreign employers recognize their honesty and deep faith in God. Italian parents, for example, admit their children are safe under the care and hands of Filipinos. The Church is thankful to the OFWs for showing the true face of Filipinos who are God-fearing, hardworking and very patient. They are new missionaries of faith to the world. The Church is praying for them to be safe in their workplaces, to keep away from troubles and harm and to find caring and humane employers. Bishops have urged the government to ease the hardships of OFWs from dehumanizing conditions, unjust labor practices, and other abuses they face in parts of the world.

Filipino workers abroad are a big help to the economy remitting about US\$2.55 billion annually. The remittances are hard-earned money from their blood, sweat and tears and products of their sacrifices and sufferings.

Contribution to the Church’s Mission

Filipino bishops regard overseas workers as “missionaries of the Catholic faith” and appreciate their help in the Church’s mission to spread the Gospel. Former CBCP president Archbishop Angel Lagdameo of Jaro says, “the notion of Filipino diaspora has been redefined” after they were given a clearer picture of the “new situation” of OFWs.

Coming from a predominantly Catholic country, these migrant Filipino workers in search of livelihood are equipped with the disposition and skills of lay missionaries, who will not necessarily preach but live the Gospel of Jesus in the context of cultural and religious pluralism.

They are Filipinos in dialogue with other cultures and religions, which for them is a new way of being active in Church and participating in the mission, beyond adding to the number of churchgoers in the

receiving Churches which have fallen victim to materialism and secularism.

The CBCP has called on the government to focus on programs that would raise job opportunities in the country to prevent the flight of Filipino workers, who “have become part of our social concern.”

“How many of them are made to suffer because they are deprived of employment rights, their salaries or travel documents unjustly withheld? How many of them, mostly women, are abused, assaulted or sexually harassed by employers? How many of them suffer the pain of isolation, alienation, and discrimination? And need we talk about the innumerable cases of broken families and conjugal infidelities?”

asked outgoing Archbishop Emeritus Angel Lagdameo of Jaro as he enumerated the concerns of the Church with the migration of Filipinos.

Positive Aspect

Lagdameo said it is about time to look at the “positive aspect” of the global migration of Filipinos. “Along with our smiling faces, we are offering our Christian faith to the receiving countries or Churches, lived in the context of different cultures and religions. This positive aspect is likewise the new challenge of the Filipino diaspora. It is both a challenge and a concern,” Lagdameo said.

“Two million Filipinos have already made the Middle East their home. Would you believe that 30 percent of the entire population of Malaysia, which is 900,000, are Filipinos?” Lagdameo asked.

“Of the 140,000 in Hong Kong, he said, a majority are Filipino domestic helpers. In

Italy, only one half of the more than one million Filipinos are listed; the same is said of the one million in Japan,” he added.

“These few examples are only a portion of the migrant Filipinos we find present from America to Asia, from Africa to Oceania, from Russia to Australia and also from Jordan to Saipan,” Lagdameo said.

Social Costs

Amaryllis Torres, a professor at the College of Social Work and Community Development of the University of the Philippines and social scientist, says there are many flip sides to Filipino migrant workers. Due to the OFWs phenomenon, there are

many “social costs”– children grow up without their parents’ physical presence and guidance; instead they are taken care of by grandparents or other relatives, posing many challenges for children.

Another aspect is when one of the parents is away, there are

reports of illicit relations.

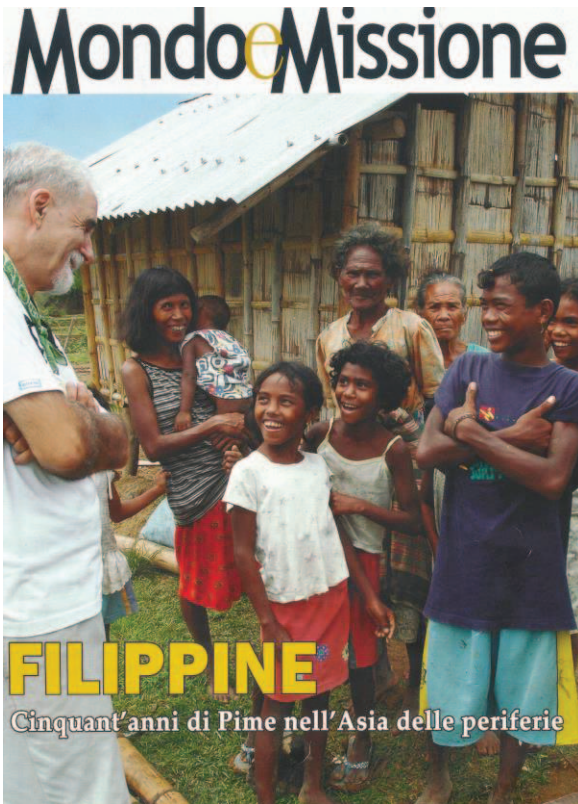
“How to balance the economic factor with social cost is the big challenge for the country and church,” Torres said. According to observers, about 5,000 Filipinos leave the country daily in search of employment overseas. “It is a dream that there would be a day when no Filipino would ever leave the country in search of a job abroad for the sake of the family,” she said.

Ref: (World Mission, April -May 2019 No. 333 Vol. xxxi, pp. 14 – 19)



50 Anni di PIME

In mezzo secolo di presenza nel Paese asiatico, l'Istituto ha dovuto affrontare molte situazioni difficili, oltre al martirio di tre sacerdoti, Ma le sfide della missione continuano lungo nuove linee di frontiera.



Nell'immaginario collettivo le Filippine sono un Paese cattolico; anzi, le statistiche lo additano come il più cattolico dell'Asia (l'85% della popolazione è battezzata). Rappresentano anche il Paese da cui provengono molte badanti, dolci e sorridenti, tant'è che "filippina" è diventato sinonimo di collaboratrice domestica. L'equazione, dunque, vorrebbe che si trattasse di un Paese "facile" dal punto di vista missionario.

La verità è che le Filippine sono sì un Paese a larghissima maggioranza cattolico, ma nel Sud esiste una presenza musulmana consistente, tentata da un crescente fondamentalismo. Quanto al sorriso, se abbonda sui volti dei filippini non è certo

perché il loro possa definirsi un Paese tranquillo. Il ritorno alla vita democratica data dal 1986, con la caduta del dittatore Ferdinand Marcos, grazie a quella che venne chiamata la "Rivoluzione dei rosari". Tuttavia, anche oggi, a più di trent'anni di distanza, dopo una serie di figure politiche tutt'altro che memorabili (dall'ex attore Joseph Estrada al pugile Manny Pacquiao), le Filippine si stanno di nuovo misurando con un altro personaggio inquietante: il presidente-padrone Rodrigo Duterte.

La stessa storia del Pime in questo Paese - giunta quest'anno al giro di boa del mezzo secolo - conferma che quel contesto non è per nulla semplice e, anzi, è missionario da tutti i punti di vista: lo attesta il fatto che, nei cinquant'anni trascorsi, l'Istituto ha visto sacerdoti espulsi, vocazioni in crisi e, soprattutto, il martirio di ben tre preti nell'arco di un trentennio: Tullio Favali (1985), Salvatore Carzedda (1992) e Fausto Tentorio (2011).

La missione Pime nelle Filippine è certamente interessante (e fors'anche paradigmatica dell'avventura missionaria *ad gentes*) se la si legge come una serie continua di tentativi, condotti dall'Istituto nel suo insieme e dai singoli membri, di rispondere alle circostanze in modo da essere il più possibile aderenti agli appelli della storia. In ultima istanza, un esercizio costante, personale e comunitario, di discernimento della volontà di Dio. Un esercizio tutt'altro che semplice: tra tutte le missioni del Pime, è forse una di quelle che ha conosciuto il maggior numero di insuccessi, di "cambiamenti di strategia", in ragione di una situazione complessa e fluida al tempo stesso, segnata da vari fattori problematici, in cima ai quali stanno la spinosa questione dell'autonomia politica di Mindanao (storicamente l'area dove il Pime ha lavorato e lavora con maggiore presenza

di uomini), il progressivo irrigidimento in senso fondamentalista dell'islam locale e la lotta, che continua da mezzo secolo, tra i "ribelli" di sinistra del *New People's Army* (Npa) e il governo centrale di Manila.

Difficile contare il numero esatto dei missionari Pime che, in terra filippina, sono stati rapiti (come nel caso di Luciano Benedetti nel 1998 e di Giancarlo Bossi - *foto d'apertura* - nel 2007) oppure minacciati di morte o, ancora, costretti a cambiare residenza per un tempo più o meno lungo. Dal momento, però, che l'esperienza del fallimento e della docilità a una storia che solo Dio può davvero governare è parte integrante della vicenda missionaria in quanto tale, possiamo affermare che la storia del Pime nelle Filippine risulta bella e appassionante, ancorché complessa, proprio se letta con gli occhi della fede.

Oggi i missionari impegnati nel Paese sono 16, più della metà dei quali sopra i 60 anni di età. La presenza dell'Istituto si concentra in due aree: Manila e dintorni e Mindanao, la grande isola a Sud, dove il Pime è attivo prevalentemente in area rurale. A Manila, la parrocchia di Paranaque, intitolata a Maria Regina degli apostoli, è guidata da padre Gianni Sandalo; dal primo settembre, gli subentra padre Simone Caelli, che sin qui ha ricoperto vari incarichi, nella formazione e nella pastorale. Nella stessa parrocchia opera padre Sundeep Pulidindi, indiano, arrivato da pochi mesi nel Paese, e ancora impegnato nello studio della lingua *tagalog*. Nella casa regionale della capitale risiedono, collaborando con la parrocchia, i padri Gianni Re, superiore regionale per due mandati (2009-2017) e Sandro Brambilla, a lungo attivo in Mindanao. Da un paio d'anni, poi, padre Giuseppe Carrara ha iniziato a lavorare nella diocesi di Imus, a sud di quella di Manila-Paranaque, dove ormai si sta espandendo la capitale.

Se ci spostiamo nell'area di Mindanao, padre Sebastiano D'Ambra è impegnato nel dialogo interreligioso, con il "Silsilah" a Zamboanga. Padre Nevio Viganò è stato per lunghi anni parroco di Sinunuc (nei pressi di

Zamboanga), avendo come assistente il bengalese padre Biplob Lazarus Mollick, che prenderà il suo posto tra qualche mese. Anche il superiore regionale, padre Fernando Milani, risiede a Zamboanga, con impegni pastorali in seminario e nelle parrocchie vicine.

Nella diocesi di Ipil (confinante con quella di Zamboanga) il Pime opera a Sampoli, con i padri brasiliani Emerson Gazetta e Paulo Cezar Dos Santos, il quale però è stato richiesto dal vescovo per iniziare una nuova presenza alla periferia della città di Ipil.

A Lakewood sono attivi i padri Stefano Mosca e Ilario Trebbiani. Sempre a Mindanao, ma geograficamente distante dalle località appena citate, nella diocesi di Kidapawan, risiede padre Peter Geremia, che lavora da sempre tra i tribali e con i detenuti. Nel corso degli ultimi decenni alcuni missionari del Pime hanno lavorato anche in altre aree, come la diocesi di Antique e il vicariato di Mindoro Occidentale, nel tentativo di trovare alternative al delicatissimo contesto di Mindanao, dove sono rimasti gli unici europei presenti (gli oblati di Maria Immacolata e i clarettiani, infatti, hanno pressoché solo personale locale). Ma tali presenze non si sono consolidate nel tempo. Lungo i cinquantanni di storia Pime nelle Filippine, comunque, al di là delle diverse situazioni contingenti, è possibile rintracciare un filo rosso costante che si dipana in tre direzioni. La prima è l'attività pastorale che, rispondendo alle richieste della Chiesa locale, ha sempre cercato di prediligere le situazioni più povere e le comunità più isolate geograficamente. A ciò si è affiancato un impegno nel dialogo con l'islam, soprattutto ma non esclusivamente - basti citare il lungo e silenzioso lavoro di padre Vincenzo Bruno - attraverso l'esperienza ben nota ai lettori di *Mondo e Missione* del "Silsilah". Infine, ma non meno importante, la dedizione alla causa dei tribali, la lotta in difesa dei loro diritti e delle loro terre. In una parola: in un Paese cattolico per tradizione antica, che oggi conta circa seimila preti diocesani, il Pime ha

sempre cercato (e tuttora cerca) di collocarsi in quei contesti di frontiera che tipicamente gli si addicono, in quanto istituto missionario *ad gentes*.

È stato così fin dall'inizio, a partire dal fatidico 1968, quando i primi "pimini" sono sbarcati nelle Filippine. Rifiutata la direzione del seminario minore di San Pablo (incarico considerato poco "missionario"), hanno assunto la conduzione della parrocchia di Santa Cruz nonché l'impegno nel distretto

missionario di Siocon, nella diocesi di Dipolog e, di lì a poco, l'impegno a Tondo (Manila).

Anche se l'impegno pastorale richiesto

all'Istituto era per tanti versi simile a quello tipico dei preti diocesani, il Pime ha cercato di svilupparlo con tratti autenticamente missionari e con uno spirito innovativo. I missionari, infatti, hanno portato un contributo che, al netto di errori e tensioni, è stato determinante perché la Chiesa filippina assorbisse la lezione del Vaticano II e la incarnasse, in un contesto segnato da una radicata devozione popolare a volte prigioniera dell'esteriorità. Come ha scritto anche padre Piero Gheddo, «la storia ha dimostrato che la linea scelta dal Pime nelle Filippine, sia al Nord (Tondo e Santa Cruz) che al Sud, ha avuto il grande merito di svegliare una Chiesa ancora tradizionalista, compresi vescovi, sacerdoti e religiosi» (*crf* pp. 10-11).

Ma come c'è finito il Pime nelle Filippine? L'interesse dell'Istituto per questo Paese nasce per iniziativa di un sacerdote canossiano di Cremona, missionario nell'isola di Samar, padre Angelo Saverio Zanesi. Nel 1966, aveva sollecitato il superiore generale mons. Aristide Pirovano a inviare dei missionari nelle Filippine, visto che nello stesso periodo molti padri venivano espulsi dalla Birmania. Pirovano, nel

gennaio 1967 mentre è in viaggio a Hong Kong, visita le Filippine e l'anno dopo comunica al nunzio, mons. Carmine Rocco, la disponibilità del Pime ad accettare le proposte di impegno missionario. I primi ad arrivare il 6 dicembre 1968 sono i padri Pietro Bonaldo (già missionario a Hong Kong, capo missione), Egidio Biffi (già missionario in Birmania), Pio Signò (espulso dalla Cina), Joseph Vancio (statunitense) e frate Giovanni Arici.



Conclusasi traumaticamente la prima esperienza a Manila, negli anni successivi l'Istituto concentra la propria presenza a Mindanao:

Siocon, Sibuco e Sirawai (con i padri Biffi, Di Guardo e Biancat) sono le prime destinazioni dei membri Pime. A partire dagli anni Ottanta, prende il via anche il lavoro in diocesi di Kidapawan, a Tulunan, Columbio e nell'Arakan Valley.

Nel 1981 comincia l'attività missionaria in quella che allora era la prelatura di Ipil (oggi diocesi). Le prime parrocchie sono quelle di Kumalarang e Siay. In questa zona, nel corso degli anni, l'Istituto ha fondato tre nuove parrocchie: Lakewood, Payao e Sampoli. Nel 1984 decolla l'esperienza del movimento "Silsilah", che, oltre al fondatore, vedrà la presenza e la collaborazione di padre Salvatore Carzedda e, per alcuni anni, di padre Paolo Nicelli.

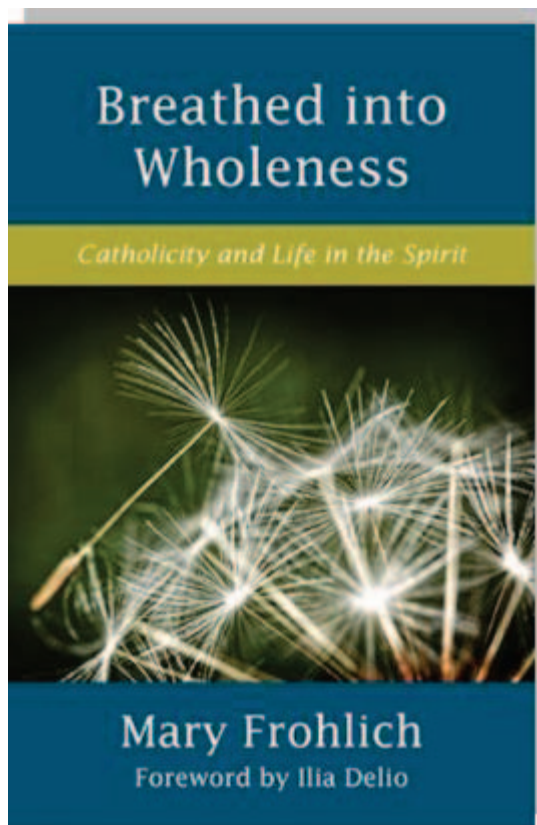
A metà degli anni Ottanta, il Pime si misura con nuove sfide, su tutte quella della realtà urbana in una metropoli come Manila. L'esigenza di avere un "punto di appoggio" nella capitale, nei pressi dell'aeroporto, offre ai missionari la possibilità di aprire una presenza a Paranaque, parrocchia urbana di Manila: i pionieri sono i padri Giulio Mariani e Gianni Sandalo nel 1985. Di lì ad alcuni anni, sempre in tema di nuove sfide, tocca a padre Marco Brioschi, che aveva

lavorato a Taiwan con i migranti, provare a farsi carico di un'emergenza sociale (quasi il 10% della popolazione filippina lavora all'estero) verso la quale la Chiesa cattolica locale ha manifestato un'attenzione via via crescente.

Ripercorrendo il mezzo secolo di missione del Pime nelle Filippine, non si possono dimenticare due importanti iniziative nel campo della formazione: l'attivazione, a Zamboanga, dal 1992 al 2011, del centro "Euntes", apprezzato luogo di formazione

missionaria per le Chiese d'Asia, presso il quale hanno operato soprattutto i padri Corba, Bruni e Mariani, e il seminario internazionale, aperto a Tagaytay, nei pressi di Manila, chiuso definitivamente nel 2013.

(Ref.: *Mondo e Missione – La Rivista dei Missionari del PIME*, Agosto-Settembre 2018, pp. 6-9)



(Gift from ORBIS BOOKS to SEDOS)

Duterte Contra Deus

O Catolicismo chegou às Filipinas em 1520 com Fernão de Magãlhaes. Quase 500 anos depois, a Igreja que ajudou a derrubar Ferdinand Marcos enfrenta dois grandes desafios: como combater outro ditador e manter a glória do passado numa sociedade «mais evangelizada do que catequizada»?

Patricia Fox, superiora regional da congregação Irmãs de Nossa Senhora de Sião, dedicou vinte e sete dos seus 72 anos à defesa dos pobres e oprimidos nas Filipinas. Acusada de «envolvimento em actividades políticas ilegais», foi detida no dia 16 de Abril. A 3 de Novembro, foi expulsa do país, onde não mais poderá regressar como missionária. Ao chegar a Melbourne, depois de perder uma dura batalha judicial, a freira australiana denunciou o «reino de tirania» do presidente Rodrigo Duterte.

«Não têm o direito de me criticar», disse Duterte, que ordenou a deportação de Patricia Fox, indignado com a presença dela num protesto contra o assassinio de agricultores, mas sobretudo por ter participado numa missão de inquérito as execuções extrajudiciais por ele ordenadas quando era presidente da câmara de Davao, na ilha de Mindanau, no Sul.



A provação de Patricia Fox e a de outros membros da Igreja Católica (três sacerdotes foram mortos a tiro, em Abril e Junho deste ano, e em Dezembro de 2017) revelam bem os riscos que uma das mais influentes instituições filipinas enfrenta desde que Duterte conquistou a chefia do Estado nas eleições de Maio de 2016, mantendo uma popularidade de quase 80 % apesar dos seus milhares de mortos.

O presidente, que renegou o Catolicismo e se terá aproximado de uma seita local, Iglesia ni Cristo, orgulhase da sua linguagem obscena e ofensiva. «O vosso Deus não é o meu Deus, porque o vosso Deus é estúpido», proclamou.

Um vingança política?

Duterte justifica os ataques ao clero e à Igreja com abusos sexuais de que terá sido vítima por parte do padre americano Mark Falvey, quando frequentava o liceu Ateneo de Davao. Em 2007, a ordem dos Jesuítas, a que Falvey pertencia, pagou 16 milhões de dólares a nove pessoas, depois de provado que o reverendo as molestou quando eram crianças, na Califórnia, para onde foi transferido e morreu em 1975.

«Como advogado e procurador, Duterte poderia ter processado o abusador», diz-nos, por correio electrónico, o missionário comboniano filipino Edgardo Alfonso Vizcarra. «Não acredito que a animosidade em relato à Igreja se deva apenas a um ressentimento pessoal. É também uma questão política. Porque ele sabe que a Igreja Católica é a única instituição religiosa verdadeiramente crítica. Ele sabe que numerosos fiéis ouvirão a Igreja se esta vier a apelar a uma acção de massas contra o modo como Rodrigo Duterte governa.»

«Uma colaboração vigilante não é suficiente para responder às provocações e à arrogância» do presidente, afirma o padre filipino,

encorajando mais expressões de crítica. «Só orações não bastam. A Igreja deve fazer mais de modo a despertar os fiéis para o que se passa no país.»

É por a Igreja «criticar a estratégia da guerra às drogas» que Duterte a hostiliza, refere, por seu turno, o padre português Antonio Carlos Ferreira, director da revista comboniana *World Mission*, publicada em Manila. «Porque não uma guerra á corrupção e à pobreza? Porqué fazer da guerra às drogas urna matanza á margem da lei de pessoas a quem não foi dado o direito de se defender ou apresentar a sua versão dos factos?»

Sob a ditadura de Marcos, várias comunidades eclesíásticas foram atacadas por forças militares, os seus líderes religiosos encarcerados e até morios. Em 1986, a Igreja filipina, dirigida pelo carismático cardeal Jaime Sin (1928- -2005), foi uma peça-chave na revolução popular que acabou com vinte e um anos de um regime plutocrático e cruel. Três décadas depois, como é que a hierarquia e os fiéis católicos lidam com um autocrata cujas políticas são contrariás á doutrina cristã?

País secular e católico

Explicamos primeiro o Catolicismo filipino. Em 1520, ano serviço da coroa espanhola, o português Fernão de Magalhães convenceu o rei da ilha de Cebu, Rajá Humabon, e a sua mulher a converterem-se ao Cristianismo. O navegador que deu a volta ao mundo ofereceu-lhes urna imagem do Menino Jesus e desde 1565 que a mais antiga relíquia das Filipinas está em exposição permanente na Basílica Menor del Santo Niño de Cebú, uma devoção tão arraigada como a do Nazareno Negro ou a tradição da crucificação na Quaresma.

«Oitenta por cento dos Filipinos são católicos e não apenas graças aos esforços dos missionários espanhóis», que continuaram as suas expedições apesar de Magalhães ter sido morto por um chefe rebelde na ilha de Mactan em 1521, salienta, em entrevista á *Além-Mar*, Jayeel Comelio, sociólogo de religiões na Universidade Ateneo de Manila.

«O Catolicismo tomou-se urna religião tão local que as Filipinas têm sido caracterizadas como uma nação católica, mas o que distingue o Catolicismo filipino é mesmo a sua religiosidade», adianta o autor de *Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines*. «Esta é uma das sociedades mais religiosas do mundo. O Catolicismo tornou-se também o identificador da nação e, para isso, foi crucial o papel que desempenhou para a restaurado da democracia em 1986. A Igreja era a antítese do regime autoritário de Marcos.»



«De um ponto de vista institucional», analisa Jayeel Cornelio, «a Igreja é totalmente una, mas de uma perspectiva sociológica, é claramente diversa, a expressão da fé moldada por condições socioeconómicas, geográficas, culturais e políticas. Ao reconhecer o carácter secular do Estado, a Igreja, através do clero e dos leigos, entrou na esfera pública como defensora, por exemplo, dos mais pobres. Influenciadas pelo Concílio Vaticano II de 1961, freirás filipinas começaram a envolver-se em protestos dos marginalizados, incluindo mulheres trabalhadoras, apesar das proibições durante a lei marcial [imposta por Marcos de 1972 a 1981]. Noutros casos, a Igreja tem sido triunfalista, com uma voz privilegiada e maioritariamente masculina.»

A Igreja filipina, afirma o académico em Manila, «enfrenta um dilema democrático perene: vê-se a si própria com substancial influência sobre quem legisla e sobre quem vota, ainda que esta influência esteja a diminuir, como ficou demonstrado em 2012, na aprovação da Lei para a Saúde Reprodutiva. A forte oposição da Conferencia Episcopal [ao planeamento familiar e métodos contraceptivos] não teve eco entre a população.»



Apesar das «tensões, divisões e vulnerabilidades», os templos continuam a encher-se aos domingos porque, diz Cornelio, «é preciso distinguir entre a Igreja Católica, como instituição pública, e o Catolicismo, como religião.»

«A filiação católica», sublinha Cornelio, «permanece robusta [apesar de uma crise de vocações e de menos praticantes nas cidades, sobretudo entre os jovens, segundo o padre António Carlos]. A ascensão das mega-igrejas evangélicas e de outros grupos religiosos não parece afectar estatisticamente o número de católicos, mas a paisagem religiosa está a tornarse competitiva. O Catolicismo romano não avançará se apenas se concentrar no seu passado glorioso. Terá de estar mais próximo das comunidades.»

Devoção e consciência

A opinião do comboniano Edgardo Alfonso Vizcarra não difere muito da do compatriota Cornelio. Nas Filipinas, um dos dois únicos

países de maioria cristã na Ásia (o outro é Timor-Leste), «o Catolicismo é urna fé que evangelizou a maioria do povo, mas não o catequizou inteiramente para formar uma consciência católica plena», comenta. «Não há sequer o que possamos chamar de voz e mentalidade de voto católicos como um todo. Somos profundamente religiosos, mas só em termos de devoção e piedade.»

«Os católicos filipinos já não se limitam a sentar-se nos bancos da igreja aos domingos. A maioria procura mais. E uma maneira de procurar a renovação religiosa é ir ao encontro deles, criando um fórum onde pastores e fiéis se reúnam e debatam temas que interessem á juventude, à família, à sociedade. Temos de ouvir. A Igreja é acusada de, por vezes, não ouvir os seus fiéis.»

«A Igreja tem de desistir da tendência de “sacramentalizar” tudo», aconselha o padre Edgardo. «Coloca demasiada ênfase nos ritos e rituais. É preciso que a Igreja responda às necessidades dos pobres não apenas na sua pobreza material, mas dando-lhes poder de desenvolvimento. Finalmente, como o Papa Francisco recomenda, o clero tem de ir para as periferias. Como pastores, temos de estar onde está o rebanho e não na sacristia.»

(**Ref:** *Além-Mar perspectiva Missionária*, Nº686, Año LXII, Dezembro 2018, pp. 23 – 27)



Prayer for the CICM Philippines Centennial Celebration

Gracious, and faithful God, source of all vocations, you have called us to be your missionaries. You have journeyed with us from the beginning, and you continue to be present as we walk and hope for the future.

As we celebrate **100 years of missionary presence** in the Philippines, **we gratefully remember...**

- Our first 9 missionaries who arrived in 1907 and all those who followed them, with their pioneering spirit and commitment to do mission;
- Our bishops and our people who warmly welcomed us as their brothers and gave us the opportunity to serve;
- And our Christian communities that emerged through the faith and work of our confreres and lay collaborators.
- Our educators and catechists who dedicated their lives to the evangelization and formation of the youth;
- The gift of vocation of our diocesan clergy and Filipino missionaries nurtured by the examples and support of our confreres;
- our lay leaders and benefactors whose generous service and support are visible in our churches, schools, hospitals, and other social services;
- And all those who have gone ahead of us and whose spirit of love and service remains in our hearts.

For all these, **we thank you, Lord.**

As we retrace our past filled with your blessings, we acknowledge our failures and mistakes, we ask pardon from you and from our people:

- For the times we caused them pain and sadness,
- For the times we failed to appreciate the cultures and traditions of people,
- For the times we were not worthy of your call as your servants.

For all these, **we humbly ask you have mercy on us, Lord.**

As you have journeyed with us in the past 100 years, we look at the years to come with hope. **Send us your Spirit to revitalize us** in our mission:

- Revitalize our community spirit that we may become more "one heart and one soul".
- Revitalize our creative spirits in doing your mission in our schools, parishes, frontier situations, and wherever we are present.
- Revitalize our vision to help build the local church toward a communion of communities and to involve ourselves in the social concerns of our people and our country.

As we look back to the past and celebrate the present, may we continue to keep alive the flame of the missionary spirit of the Church in the Philippines.

With the inspiration of our founder, Father Theophile verbist and through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for all these we pray in Jesus' name.
AMEN

Laudato Si in the Philippines

1. Lien Entre Les Humains et la Nature

La planète pleure et perd le nord. Les humains aussi. L'exploitation effrénée des ressources naturelles, la pollution de l'air et l'écart grandissant entre les riches et les pauvres provoquent un déséquilibre social et environnemental. Si nous ne prenons pas soin de la planète aujourd'hui, les prochaines générations risquent de ne plus pouvoir respirer normalement. Laudato si' a lancé l'alerte. Regard sur sa réception aux Philippines.

Selon le système indigène Philippin de croyances, le monde naturel est à la fois la demeure des humains et des esprits. Bathala, le dieu suprême des Tagalogs (l'une des principales ethnies des Philippines), est traditionnellement symbolisé par le soleil. Parmi les autres dieux et déesses : la lune, les étoiles, les arbres, les rochers, les montagnes, les arbustes, ainsi que des phénomènes tels que le vent, le tonnerre et le feu. Dans certaines régions, divers animaux sont considérés comme sacrés, tels les serpents et les crocodiles. En zone rurale, des coutumes anciennes restent vivaces : demander pardon aux arbres avant de se soulager ou d'avoir à les couper, implorer les excuses des esprits de la forêt lorsque l'on passe par là.

Appelés à prendre soin de la terre

Aux Philippines, la venue de la modernité a impliqué un passage d'une croyance traditionnelle fondée sur l'interdépendance globale dans la nature à une conception erronée selon laquelle l'humanité est « aux commandes » de la nature et quelle est autorisée à s'en servir à sa guise. Bien des difficultés viennent d'un malentendu à propos de ce qui est écrit dans le livre de la Genèse.

«Dieu les bénit et leur dit: soyez féconds et prolifiques, remplissez la terre et dominez-la. Soumettez les poissons de la mer, les



oiseaux du ciel et toute bête qui remue sur la terre» (Gn 1, 28).

Sean McDonah - prêtre irlandais qui a travaillé plus de vingt ans sur l'île de Mindanao (Philippines) – a été témoin des ravages de la déforestation pour les gens et sur leur environnement. Publié en 1986, son livre, *Prendre soin de la terre*, met en cause les pratiques écologiquement perverses et dangereuses, montrant que le premier chapitre de la Genèse invite non pas à « dominer » la création mais à en « prendre soin. »

Désastres naturels en augmentation

Ce qui est clair c'est que, bien avant l'encyclique historique du pape François *Laudato si'*, il existait déjà aux Philippines une grave préoccupation et un débat était né autour d'une perte d'harmonie entre l'humanité et le reste de la nature. Rien de surprenant à cela vu que l'archipel se trouve le long de ce qu'on appelle la ceinture de feu du Pacifique et que, dans ces dix dernières années, il a subi une nette diminution du nombre d'espèces vivantes, des changements dans la biodiversité, une montée du niveau de l'océan ainsi qu'un accroissement des typhons, en intensité et en nombre, jusqu'à atteindre presque vingt par an. Cela rend le pays extrêmement vulnérable aux désastres naturels. Dans les dernières années, le pays a

essuyé presque la moitié des plus puissants typhons de son histoire. Selon le ministère des Sciences et de la Technologie, ils ne feront que croître avec le temps, à la fois en intensité et en fréquence. La commission des

Philippines sur le changement climatique affirme que c'est là l'un des effets les plus visibles du changement climatique dans le pays.

2. Une Initiative Novatrice

Le 29 janvier 1988, la Conférence épiscopale catholique des Philippines publiait une lettre pastorale novatrice intitulée: «Qu'est-ce qui arrive à notre beau pays?» C'était la première lettre pastorale d'évêques catholiques jamais écrite sur l'environnement.

Dans son exhortation apostolique *Evangelii gaudium* (EG) - la joie de l'Évangile - le pape François en cite des passages. Il écrit notamment : *«Je fais mienne la belle et prophétique plainte exprimée, il y a plusieurs années par les évêques des Philippines. Une incroyable variété d'insectes vivaient dans la forêt et ceux-ci étaient engagés dans toutes sortes de tâches propres [...]. Les oiseaux volaient dans l'air, leurs brillantes plumes et leurs différents chants ajoutaient leurs couleurs et leurs mélodies à la verdure des bois [...]. Dieu a voulu cette terre pour nous, ses créatures particulières, non pas pour que nous la détruisions et la transformions en sol désertique»* (EG 215).

Presque trente ans après, *Laudato si'* est la première encyclique pontificale sur l'environnement ; et, une fois encore, le pape cite la lettre pastorale de la Conférence épiscopale des Philippines. À propos de la destruction des océans, François relaie l'appel des évêques philippins : *«Qui a*

transformé le merveilleux monde marin en cimetières sous-marins dépourvus de vie et de couleurs?» (LS 41). À la question : *«Comment, aux Philippines, réagit-on à Laudato si'?»* la réponse ne se fait pas attendre. Dans l'ensemble, la communauté catholique est envahie d'un regain d'enthousiasme, mais elle attend que cela porte des fruits.



3. «Nous sommes gérants, pas propriétaires»

Laudato si' a été publié le 24 mai 2015 et c'est le 20 juillet que les évêques Philippines ont rendu publique une déclaration sur le changement climatique intitulée : *«Gérants, pas propriétaires.»* Il y est dit notamment : *«L'encyclique du pape François, Laudato si' [...] engage vivement catholiques et chrétiens*

à se passionner pour l'environnement ; [...] pour les chrétiens, c'est une obligation de se préoccuper de l'écologie et du changement climatique, comme une conséquence directe de la notion morale de gérance, d'intendance et une implication de la charité chrétienne. [...] Laudato si' nous enseigne

que le fond du problème du changement climatique est la justice. [...] Nous ne pouvons plus parler de développement durable indépendamment de la solidarité entre générations. [...] Le monde est un cadeau que nous avons reçu et nous devons le partager avec les autres. [...] Nous ne sommes pas propriétaires de la terre. Nous en sommes les gérants, les intendants. [...] La Conférence épiscopale des Philippines n'a pas manqué à sa responsabilité d'instruire les fidèles en matière d'environnement. Nous sommes honorés que le Saint-Père cite l'une de nos lettres dans *Laudato si'*»



Les évêques terminent leur déclaration par ces mots : «*Nous, vos évêques, nous nous engageons à organiser colloques et conférences sur ces questions. [...] Dans ce domaine, il est de la responsabilité morale de tous de s'informer. Mais on peut et l'on doit, de façon plus directe et immédiate, passer à l'action. [...] Extraction minière,*

incinération et décharge par enfouissement : ce sont là des réalités préoccupantes de chez nous qui viennent immédiatement à l'esprit. En cela, un plaidoyer des communautés ecclésiales, au nom du bien commun, doit tâcher d'exercer une influence sur les décideurs politiques et se traduire également en agir collectif. [J Quand se fait entendre un cri de détresse, y répondre n'est pas une option facultative. C'est une obligation. »

Modifier nos pratiques

De fait, en divers points de l'archipel, colloques et conférences ont déjà eu lieu et continuent à être organisés sur *Laudato si'*. Dans les jours qui ont suivi la publication de l'encyclique pontificale, le cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, archevêque de Manille, a invité avec instance à une « *révision courageuse* » des politiques et des modes de vie. Il a appelé les gens à « *étudier, enrichir, discuter et méditer les divers points de l'encyclique* », tout en lançant l'invitation « *aux non-chrétiens, aux familles, aux éducateurs, aux politiciens, aux gens d'affaires, aux experts des sciences et des technologies digitales, aux médias, aux groupes de consommateurs, aux ONG et associations civiles d'étudier l'encyclique et ses diverses propositions.*»

Le cardinal Tagle et toute la Conférence épiscopale ont insisté sur le fait que l'enseignement de *Laudato si'* n'est pas d'ordre scientifique mais moral.

Dans un message à la confédération Caritas, le cardinal Tagle explique : «*Dans Laudato si', le pape François nous engage à remplacer la consommation par un sens du sacrifice, la cupidité par la générosité et le gaspillage par un esprit de partage. Il nous faut savoir donner et non pas simplement abandonner. Nous sommes appelés à nous affranchir de tout ce qui en nous est pesant, négatif et de l'ordre du gaspillage pour entrer en dialogue avec notre famille commune.*

4. Des Voix Venues D'Ailleurs

Les catholiques Philippines ne sont pas les seuls à souscrire à Laudato si' et à encourager sa mise en application. Il y a aussi des musulmans et des représentants du gouvernement.

Sinsuat Lidasan - directeur général de l'institut Al Qalam pour les identités et le dialogue avec l'islam en Asie du Sud-Est, de l'université Ateneo de Davao dans l'île méridionale de Mindanao - fait remarquer que *Laudato si'* «ouvre à des personnes de croyances religieuses différentes un champ commun de collaboration». Lidasan établit un lien entre « l'écologie intégrale » proposée par le Saint-Père, au chapitre IV de son encyclique, et le principe islamique de la responsabilité humaine à l'égard de l'environnement impliqué dans la notion de *khilafah*.

Il explique que *khilafah* «est un terme intraduisible évoquant les notions d'intendance, d'administration en vue de développer et de gérer des ressources pour le compte du propriétaire réel». Et, comme Dieu seul est le «réel propriétaire» du monde, nous devons administrer la terre d'une manière qui rende gloire à Dieu. Selon lui, ce principe est ancré dans la loi islamique et nous engage à une gestion appropriée de nos ressources, à prendre soin de notre planète comme étant notre maison commune. Lidasan conclut son article en proclamant que *Laudato si'* «doit être accueilli positivement et adopté par les gens

de toutes croyances et même par les non-croyants».

De manière générale, la presse laïque des Philippines a chaleureusement accueilli *Laudato si'* et s'est montrée ouverte à la plupart des points soulevés. Comme le fait remarquer Yeb M. Saño, ancien commissaire pour l'étude du changement climatique : «*La crise du changement climatique est l'enjeu déterminant de notre génération, et nous serons jugés par les générations futures en fonction de notre manière d'y répondre [...] et de leur léguer un monde attentionné, juste, sûr et pacifique.*» Relevant une foule de dysfonctionnements, il redit ce sur quoi continuent d'insister nombre de Philippins, que «*le changement climatique est une question éthique plus qu'environnementale et, plus important encore, spirituelle.*»

Saño semble faire allusion ici à ce que le catéchisme pour les catholiques philippins nomme un « athéisme pratique », c'est-à-dire le fait que, toute meublée quelle puisse être de rituels et traditions catholiques, la vie quotidienne est en fait menée sans claire référence ni relation à Dieu. Ce n'est pas ici l'encyclique qui paraît suspecte, mais plutôt l'Eglise. Saño affirme : «*Il est en définitive primordial que nos leaders spirituels nous guident face à la rapide détérioration de l'environnement [...] si nous voulons être conséquents avec notre admiration sans bornes pour François, nous ne pouvons pas nous contenter de porter des T-shirts à son effigie. Il nous faut prendre en compte son appel au changement.*»

5. Nécessité de Cohérence

On parle avec fierté des Philippines comme étant «le seul pays chrétien d'Asie» avec plus de 86 % de la population se disant catholique, il en est aussi régulièrement question comme de l'un des pays les plus corrompus d'Asie, avec plus d'un quart de sa population vivant au-dessous du seuil de pauvreté. Les vastes bidonvilles surpeuplés, qui se tassent en bordure des riches

lotissements privés des élites du pays, en sont une silencieuse démonstration. La position de l'Eglise sur la limitation des naissances est souvent mise en cause quand il est question de pauvreté. Or, l'encyclique signale le problème de la surpopulation comme une entrave permanente à la lutte contre la pauvreté rampante dont souffrent les Philippins. Tout en adhérant aux

principes de *Laudato si'*, Maria Isabel Ongpin - auteure de plusieurs articles dans *Manilla Times* - fait preuve d'une certaine réserve à l'égard de l'Église et de sa hiérarchie locale. Elle écrit: «Comme dit le pape, la façon dont certains parmi nous regardent ce qu'il advient de notre environnement, s'attendant à ce que cela se règle tout seul, relève d'une «joyeuse insouciance». Ainsi la position de l'Église catholique sur la population, pour qui le problème va se régler de lui-même, relève elle aussi d'une



joyeuse insouciance. » Elle poursuit : «Dans ces contrées et avec le genre de hiérarchie ecclésiastique à laquelle nous avons affaire, cela va être une question d'interprétation

dépendant de la mentalité des évêques. Je conseille vivement à chacun de lire *Laudato si'* et d'y réfléchir par soi-même.»

6. Questions Aux Politiques

Les idéaux de *Laudato si'* mettent en cause les modes de vie de tous ceux qui se réclament de l'Église dont émane l'encyclique. Parmi eux, la classe politique. Le questionnement et l'appel ne sont pas minces. Pour cette raison peut-être, certains Philippins ont noté que la publication de *Laudato si'* est tombée à un moment tout à fait opportun, juste avant les élections de 2016. Il a constitué un défi et un guide pour tous les candidats désireux de conduire le pays dans le sens d'une amélioration de l'harmonie et de la qualité de vie.

Ernesto M. Pernia est professeur émérite d'économie à l'Université des Philippines et ancien économiste en chef de la banque asiatique de développement. En réfléchissant sur son expérience urbaine dans les villes des pays voisins non chrétiens, il pose une question dérangeante: «Pourquoi les autorités des secteurs tant publics que privés des Philippines – un pays catholique – ne

pourraient-elles pas au moins être presque aussi rationnelles et se préoccuper des gens et de la nature? L'étonnant est que ces officiels visitent souvent (et en sont sûrement impressionnés) des villes d'Asie qui sont bien mieux gérées, sans parler de celles de l'Occident. Derrière la nonchalance et l'insouciance de nos officiels à l'égard du peuple et de l'environnement, faut-il voir un intérêt personnel égoïste et une insatiable cupidité? Les non-catholiques feraient-ils preuve de plus de considération, d'humanité et d'attention reconnaissante à l'égard de la nature?» Il commente les propos du pape François sur les maladies de la vie urbaine et son idée que « nous ne pouvons pas avoir de nature sans humanité ni d'humanité sans nature».

7. Prière Et Action

L'esprit de *Laudato si'* se manifeste clairement en bien des aspects de la vie actuelle de l'Église des Philippines.

Des ateliers, colloques et séminaires sur *Laudato si'* se sont poursuivis ici et là dans l'archipel. Certains se sont tenus dans des lieux d'enseignement supérieur où des intervenants ont transmis leurs compétences en diverses disciplines académiques. D'autres ont été le fait de groupes ecclésiaux locaux dont les membres partageaient les expériences et attentes personnelles. D'autres encore ont permis la rencontre entre gens de différentes traditions religieuses et couches sociales. On a perçu un renouveau, à la lumière de *Laudato si'*, du sentiment qu'il y a urgence à se préoccuper les uns des autres et de toute la création, à redécouvrir nos liens réciproques.

Péchés contre l'écologie

Le cardinal Tagle a fait paraître une prière dans un esprit de solidarité et d'ouverture - à réciter à genoux après avoir communiqué - pour demander la pluie. La prière reflète une compréhension et un esprit nouveaux. On y

trouve, entre autres, ces paroles: «*Ó Dieu miséricordieux, pardon pour nos péchés écologiques, en ayant contribué à ce phénomène néfaste ; pardon pour, notre indifférence aux plaintes et aux souffrances de notre mère Terre ; pardon pour notre gaspillage, pour notre mépris des dons précieux de la création que tu nous as donnés. Nous promettons, en suivant l'Évangile de la création, de nous repentir de nos péchés et, en tout ce que nous faisons, d'être attentifs à ta création et d'en prendre soin. Donne-nous la force et la sagesse d'être de bons intendants de ta création et de protéger l'environnement contre les abus et l'exploitation. En ce temps où la crise est à notre porte, Seigneur aide-nous à aller plus loin dans le partage, le service et l'amour...*»

L'impact véritable de *Laudato si'* ne se mesurera pas seulement au degré de ferveur avec lequel nous allons réciter à genoux la prière pour la pluie, mais aussi à notre comportement lorsque, nous étant relevés, nous irons à nos occupations du jour.

8. Missionnaires du Rosaire Pour la Planète

Rencontre avec un groupe de femmes qui prient le rosaire toutes les semaines à Dugny, au Blanc-Mesnil (93) en France. Elles aiment s'appeler «missionnaires du rosaire pour la planète» et parlent de son avenir avec conviction.

Pourquoi avez-vous choisi le texte de Laudato si' pour inspirer votre prière?

Au moment de la Cop21, nous nous sommes dit qu'il y a des petites actions que nous pouvons faire à notre niveau pour la santé de la planète et de l'humanité. Ces actions peuvent remettre sur le droit chemin ceux qui détruisent notre planète par la pollution et par la surexploitation des ressources. Ayant entre les mains le texte de *Laudato si'* où le pape François nous appelle à faire quelque chose pour la maison commune,

nous avons décidé de lancer la prière du chapelet en nous disant peut-être que cela jouera un rôle de conversion en commençant par ceux qui se trouvent autour de nous.

Êtes-vous inquiètes pour la planète ?

Nous sommes inquiètes pour la planète parce que nous pensons que si notre manière d'agir aujourd'hui ne change pas, la prochaine génération est en danger.

Quel lien faites-vous entre Laudato si' et la prière du rosaire ?

Le rosaire autour du texte du pape François nourrit notre réflexion, notre foi, notre prière, et change notre regard sur l'environnement. Le rosaire nous transforme. En priant le rosaire nous mettons tout, y compris notre planète, entre les mains de la Vierge Marie, en toute confiance.

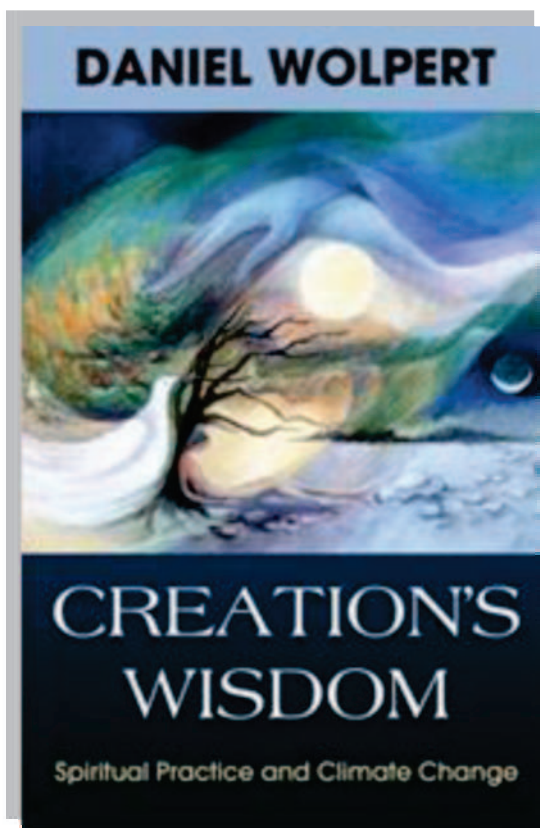
9. Mutuellement Reliés – *Une chanson pour la nature*

*Terre, mer, ciel sont reliés.
Animaux, plantes, humains sont reliés.
Tous les êtres sont reliés.
En dépendance réciproque, tous.*

Rien d'étonnant à ce que le chanteur-compositeur philippin Joey Ayala (photo ci-dessous) ait repris une telle symbolique traditionnelle locale dans sa chanson populaire écrite en 1991 *Magkaugnay* (Mutuellement reliés). En 2002, le P. Franciscain Prisco A. Cajés donne à l'interdépendance entre tous les éléments de la création – telle qu'elle est perçue dans la foi traditionnelle philippine et dans la

théologie catholique – le statut d'une question théologique clé et la propose comme base pour une théologie philippine et chrétienne de la nature. Pour Cajés et tant d'autres, la crise écologique, ou qu'elle soit, a sa source dans la perte du lien réciproque entre les humains et le reste du monde naturel. Voici la chanson en langue locale :

*Lupa, laot, langit ay magkaugnay
Hayop, halaman, tao ay magkaugnay
Ang lahat ng bagay ay makaugnay
Magkaugnay ang lahat*
(**Ref.: *Pentecôte sur le monde*, Dossier,
N° 888 Juillet-Août 2016, pp. 12-22**)



(Gift from ORBIS BOOKS to SEDOS)

James H. Kroeger, MM

Radio Veritas Asia

Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) has reached a significant milestone; it is now celebrating its golden anniversary of service to Asia's peoples (1969-2019). Various titles can capture the identity and mission of RVA; it is appropriately described as "the missionary of Asia," "the Asian voice of Christianity" or "the Catholic voice of Asia." RVA's own vision statement describes this apostolic initiative as the "voice of the Church that is realizing the mission of crossing borders and sharing Christ through Gospel values to the people of Asia."

Voice of Popes

Two "saint-popes" (Paul VI and John Paul II) have spoken of the pivotal mission of RVA and also have personally visited its center in Manila. Paul VI sent the following message on April 11, 1969 when RVA was inaugurated; he spoke of Radio Veritas as "giving to the truth a new and powerful voice in a continental area of increasing significance in world affairs."

On November 29, 1970, during his Manila stop on his ten-day Asian journey, Pope Paul VI visited the RVA premises. He personally offered his "encouragement for an ever more enlightened, generous and fruitful activity.... It is our fervent wish that through it [RVA] there may reach you the echo of the teachings of Christ, to raise your hearts to the God of love and truth. We hope that it will knit among you, its listeners, bonds of evangelical love ... [so that] you may together undertake the construction of a more just and more united society."

Twenty-five years later, on January 14, 1995, during special ceremonies marking its silver jubilee, Pope John Paul II praised RVA for its quarter-century service and challenged it to find an "ever more effective way of sustaining and informing the faith of those who already believe in Christ, and of proclaiming him and his Kingdom to those who do not yet know him." For RVA, "the future can only mean greater commitment to evangelization as the Third Millennium of the Redemption approaches."

Furthermore, John Paul II said that this "voice of Asian Christianity" is a "powerful expression of the co-responsibility of the bishops of Asia" in

fulfilling the "Church's missionary mandate." Through its diversity of programs, RVA "contributes to the human development of countless individuals and families." It also provides consolation and strength "to the Church of Silence and to all those Christians who have suffered and continue to suffer for their fidelity" to their faith and to the Church.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), John Paul II said: "I echo the Synod Fathers' commendation of *Radio Veritas Asia*, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelization through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission ... [as] an important means of sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and of spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles" (EA 48).

Milestones of RVA History

Pope Pius XII first had the idea of a Church radio station for Asians to address the needs of Catholics in the region. On December 10, 1958 (still in the pre-Vatican II era) at a meeting in Manila, the Conference of Southeast Asian Bishops decided to establish, operate, and maintain a Catholic radio station to serve as an instrument of evangelization and information. Radio Veritas studios were formally inaugurated on April 11, 1969. RVA relied on shortwave radio technology to reach audiences in the Asia-Pacific, the Indian subcontinent, and mainland China; it also reached many Filipino overseas workers in the Middle East. Financial support from the German Church aid agencies *Missio* and *Misereor* as well as the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has been substantial; this is complemented with assistance from various local Churches throughout Asia.

In addition to the encouragement given by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II (already noted), other significant milestones in the history of RVA include its brave coverage of the assassination of former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino on August 21, 1983; RVA was the only radio station

to broadcast the slain senator's funeral procession in Manila. Then, on February 22, 1986, through Radio Veritas Cardinal Sin called the Filipino populace to show support and converge on EDSA; this resulted in the four-day bloodless revolution now known as the "People Power Revolution." In the same year, RVA received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award (popularly called "Asia's Nobel Peace Prize") for "its role in using truth to depose an oppressive and corrupt regime and restore Filipino faith in the electoral process." In 1991, Radio Veritas separated into two entities: the "Asia-wide" branch and the "domestic" segment that serves the Philippine public; both continue their effective operations today.

Vision of Missionary Evangelization

An official statement of RVA for its silver anniversary captures well its vision of evangelization: "Radio Veritas Asia seeks to reaffirm and strengthen its commitment in proclaiming to peoples and cultures the message of the Gospel." It strives to be "a stimulus of authentic human values and an instrument of salvation in Jesus Christ." One may validly assert that RVA fulfills Pope Paul VI's succinct description of evangelization: "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 18). Another expression of this same vision is to see mission as "integral evangelization," addressing all dimensions of the human person and society, including the political, economic, cultural, educational, social, and religious aspects of a truly human life.

Thus, as RVA broadcasts in about twenty languages, it provides a wide diversity of programs, fostering the growth of Asia's local Churches and their role in dialogue with religions and cultures. It also airs news and programs on health, community development, science and technology, women and youth empowerment, family issues, and historical perspectives. Readings from the sacred texts of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam are broadcast. In addition, there are programs on Christian liturgy and catechesis, as well as features about significant Asian personalities who have contributed to integral human development and liberation in the Asian context. Truly, RVA seeks to bring Gospel values into all dimensions of life of Asia's diverse peoples.

RVA also seeks to integrate the paradigm of evangelization promoted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The FABC vision of the Asian Church's mission is captured in its "triple dialogue" formula, initially enunciated in the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974. It envisions genuinely Asian local Churches "in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people." In FABC V (1990) the vision was reaffirmed: "Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions." FABC X (2012) noted: "We thank the Lord for a challenging vision of Church in Asia." In a word, this *operative paradigm* of holistic evangelization [the "triple dialogue" approach] is the *interpretive key* to understanding and appreciating the dynamic local Churches in Asia today. And, RVA has consistently fostered this "Asian" vision of being Church in today's contemporary societies.

Conclusion

As RVA observes its golden jubilee of service to the vast Asian continent, our hearts overflow with gratitude for what has been accomplished. Yet, all realize that missionary evangelization is never a static reality. Change, renewal, transformation, and discernment are constants in the Church's evangelizing mission; one never finishes reading the "signs of the times" and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (cf. GS 4). Certainly, with the Lord's abundant graciousness, RVA's mission in the coming fifty years will prove most fruitful—as has the past half century. Following Pope Francis' insights, one can add one new title to describe RVA: "Asia's Dynamic, Joyful Missionary-Disciple"!



Fr. James Kroeger with Cardinal Tagle

SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR**ONLINE (from Rome)****3 May - 7 May 2021*****Living Green Mission***

| TIME | MONDAY, 3/5/2021 Opening Session |
|----------------------|---|
| 03:00 - 03:15 | Opening Prayer |
| 03:15 - 03:30 | Opening Address: Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, SEDOS President (EN) |
| 03:30 - 04:15 | OPENING SPEECH: Fr. Joshtram Kureethadam, SDB <i>The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si' (EN)</i> <i>Dicastery for Integral Human Development, Rome</i> |
| 04:15 - 04:30 | <i>Coffee / Tea Break (video)</i> |
| 04:30 - 05:15 | Special Talk: Jane Mellett <i>The Call to Ecological Conversion (EN)</i> <i>Laudato Si' Officer, Trocaire, Maynooth, Ireland</i> |
| | |
| TIME | TUESDAY, 4/5/2021 Education Aspect |
| 09:00 - 09:15 | Prayer in Portuguese / Orientation – Moderator: Kathleen Storms |
| 09:15 - 10:45 | Fr. Petero Matairatu, SM <i>Practices and Principles of Tutu Rural Training Project (EN)</i> <i>Director of Marist Rural Training Centre, Taveuni Island, Fiji</i> |
| 10:45 - 11:15 | <i>Coffee / Tea Break</i> |
| 11:15 - 12:45 | Sr. Helen Grealy, RC, and Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ <i>Loving Sister Earth (EN)</i> <i>Loving Sister Earth Movement, Ireland</i> |
| 15:00 - 16:00 | Discussion in small groups (optional) |
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| TIME | WEDNESDAY, 5/5/2021 Sustainability Aspect |
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| 09:00 - 09:15 | Prayer in Spanish / Orientation – Moderator: Peter Baekelmans |
| 09:15 - 10:45 | Prof. Yvan Brakel <i>Take the lead in the carbon accountability and sustainability (FR)</i> Catholic University Louvain, <i>Engineering Faculty</i> , Belgium |
| 10:45 - 11:15 | <i>Coffee / Tea Break</i> |
| 11:15 - 12:30 | Fr. Richie Gomez, MSC <i>Sustainable living and agriculture for indigenous peoples (EN)</i> <i>Ecological Education Center</i> in Butuan, Mindanao, the Philippines |
| 15:00 - 16.00 | Discussion in small groups (optional) |
| | |
| TIME | THURSDAY, 6/5/2021 Spirituality Aspect |
| 09:00 - 09:15 | Prayer in English / Orientation – Moderator: Chris Chaplin |
| 09:15 - 10:45 | Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ <i>What hope for a Small Blue Planet? (EN)</i> <i>Loving Sister Earth Movement</i> , Ireland |
| 10:45 - 11:15 | <i>Coffee / Tea Break</i> |
| 11:15 - 12:45 | Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR <i>Deep Relationality: Living in Communion (EN)</i> <i>JPIC desk of USG/UISG</i> , Rome, Italy |
| 15:00 - 16.00 | Discussion in small groups (optional) |
| | |
| TIME | FRIDAY, 7/5/2021 Closing Session |
| 09:30 - 09:15 | Prayer in French / Orientation – Moderator: Peter Baekelmans |
| 09:15 - 10:00 | Special Talk: Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM <i>Sowing Seeds for the Future (EN)</i> <i>JPIC desk of USG/UISG</i> , Rome, Italy |
| 10:00 - 10:30 | <i>Coffee / Tea Break</i> |
| 10:30 - 11:15 | CLOSING SPEECH: Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies <i>In the aftermath of the Synod on Panamazonia (SP)</i> <i>Dicastery of Integral Human Development</i> , Rome |
| 11:15 - 11:30 | CLOSING ADDRESS (EN) Fr. Tesfaye T. Gebresilasie, MCCJ, SEDOS President |

SEDOS Spring Session 2021

Islam and Mission

Friday, 19 March 2021
Webinar (from Rome)

PROGRAM

09.30 – 10.00: INTRODUCTION

Fr. Markus Solo, SVD (Indonesia, English)
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican

10.00 – 11.00: Fr. John Mallare, CICM (the Philippines, English)

Doctor in Arabic and Islamic studies, Manila.
The Concept of Mission in Islam (Da'wa)

11.30 – 12.30: Dr. Aan Rukmana (Indonesia, English)

Professor at Paramadina University, Jakarta.
How do Muslims view Catholic Mission?

14.00 – 14.45: Fr. Victor Edwin, SJ (India, English)

Director of Vidyajyoti Institute, Department of Islamic Studies, Delhi.
How can Muslims and Christians work together for peace?

15.00 – 16.00: PANEL SESSION (each speaker has 20 minutes)
Joys and challenges in the dialogue with Islam

Sr. Jeanne Kombe, ICM (Congo, French)

Sister living among Muslims in Podor, Senegal.
How do Muslims perceive your mission among Muslims?

Fr. Thomas Hendrikus, CICM (Indonesia, English)

Priest working for dialogue with Muslims in the Diocese of Antwerp.
How do Christians perceive your efforts to dialogue with Muslims?

Bro. Zafar Daud, FSC (Pakistan, English)

Director of St. Albert's National Catechists' Training Center, Khuspur, Pakistan.
The Role of Catechists in the dialogue with Muslims in Pakistan

16.00 – 16.30: Panel discussion with questions from the floor arising from the talks

16.30 – 17.00: CLOSING REMARKS

Fr. Diego Sarrió Cucarella, M.Afr. (Spain, English)
President of PISAI, Rome, Italy

Simultaneous Translations: English/Italian/Spanish/French

Participation fee: 10 Euro (Students can register for free)

Register here: <https://forms.gle/aCCPqixPAGYtMnAN8>

or write to: redacsed@sedosmission.org

