

Decolonization of the Filipino Church after Vatican II

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The second great paradigm shift in the history of the Catholic Church arrived after Vatican II, which ended the lengthy sway of the Greco-Roman Church and led, as Karl Rahner has written, to “the Church actualizing itself precisely as *a world Church*.” This statement has enormous consequences for the Catholic Church in the Philippines where Vatican II initiated a major paradigm shift. Vatican II decolonized the Latin Spanish church imposed upon the Philippines in the seventeenth century and transformed it into the Catholic Church of the Philippines, that is to say, transformed it into a church deeply rooted in the Filipino soil, language, and culture. Twenty-nine Filipinos chosen by snowball method of selection were interviewed who reported on how they received the teachings of Vatican II on inculturation and equality and were thus decolonized the Catholic Church.

Key Words: decolonization, Filipino, Vatican II, liturgy, interreligious contact

The Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 initiated the second major paradigm shift in the Catholic Church. The first major paradigm shift, according to Karl Rahner, was the transition from a Jewish Christian Church after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. to the initiation of the Greco-Roman Church which flourished for almost 1,900 years in many parts of the world.¹ The second great paradigm shift in the history of the Catholic Church arrived after Vatican II, which ended the lengthy sway of the Greco-Roman Church and led, as Rahner wrote, to “the Church actualizing itself precisely as *a world Church*.”²

This last statement has enormous consequences for the Catholic Church, especially in the Philippines where Vatican II also initiated a major paradigm shift. Twenty-nine Filipinos chosen by snowball method of selection were interviewed on how they received the teachings of Vatican II. They reported that Vatican II decolonized the Latin Spanish church imposed upon the Philippines in the seventeenth century and transformed it into the Catholic Church of the Philippines of the twentieth century, that is to say, transformed it into a church deeply rooted in the Filipino soil, language, and culture. William Kreutz SJ affirmed that Vatican II initiated a paradigm shift in the Philippines transforming it from a Spanish church into a Filipino church.³ The Filipino culture relished forming community, pursuing religious life, and enjoying fiesta celebrations. After Vatican II, a new model of priesthood emerged which saw Filipino priests sharing their leadership with the faithful who in prayer groups such as Couples For Christ (CFC), Bukas Loob sa Diyos (BLD), Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals (BCBP), Marriage Encounter (ME), and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) provided leadership in Bible Study, natural family planning, and caring for the poor. The teaching of Vatican II was received both structurally and popularly by the Filipino Catholics and inculturated into the Philippine Catholic Church.

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Structural Change

The flood of Vatican II theology was structurally embraced in the Philippines by three key events which happened following the Council. The first event was the founding in 1966 of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) at the Ateneo de Manila University to educate clergy and laity on the new direction in which Catholic theology was moving. The second major event was the initiation of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) by the 180 bishops gathered in Manila in 1970 at the visit of Pope Paul VI. The third key event implementing Vatican II when the Filipino bishops in 1991 called the Congress of Philippine Bishops at Manila specifically to receive and implement Vatican II throughout the nation. These three events transformed the structure of Catholicism in the Philippines from a colonial church to an indigenous church.

The popular embrace of Vatican II in the Philippines brought about a spiritual rebirth. The bishops of the Philippines returning from Rome inspired the church to become relevant and sensitive to their own culture. Before the Council, the Filipino laity had been confined to taking care of seniors and the poor. After the Council, the Filipino bishops affirmed the laity in their important function in the church, that they should be active laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, and accept a role in proclaiming the Gospel at home and abroad. After the Council, the laity such as Couples for Christ and the BECs taught the Bible at home and spread the faith in foreign lands.⁴

Filipinos today have a strong sense of music ministry when at home, and also when in Europe and North America. At home they share enthusiasm for the gospel, and abroad they evangelize people who have been severely secularized in the western environment. Rugged individualism in the western world has replaced the communal values of family and religion, but when Filipinos have arrived in these countries to seek work, at the same time they spread their faith and sense of community to support both younger and older Christians in the renewal of their faith.⁵

Administrator Tony Meloto of the Gawad Kalinga Program which built homes and gave them to squatters have contended that Filipinos have sloughed off the colonial past and sought human dignity for themselves. Under the Spanish crown, the clergy and the upper classes were privileged Catholics, while “Indios” were less than equal. Vatican II in its letter *Lumen Gentium* proclaimed equality for all as the people of God, and ended the remnants of religious colonialism.⁶ At the same time, Filipinos emerged as a leaven of fellowship in North America, the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere. In these new lands, Filipinos are good workers and contribute to the stability of the country.⁷

Popular Change

Not only was the church of the Philippines structurally changed after Vatican II, but Filipinos have popularly embraced the teaching and spirit of the Council. Filipino Catholics needed the Church’s services, but unfortunately the clergy are not numerous enough to meet all their needs. Thus, the laity, when clergy were not available, provide Sunday services, and were volunteer catechists to assist in the work of evangelization.

Professor James Kroeger from Loyola School of Theology at Ateneo de Manila University affirmed that the Philippine church has received the teaching and spirit of Vatican II: “There has been a successful integration of clergy and laity in a wide variety of apostolates. This has been particularly true in Mindanao, which in the postwar period, became the new frontier for many immigrants, especially from the central Visayan Islands.” This internal migration of Catholics resulted in many faithful needing Church’s services, but the clergy were not

numerous enough to meet their needs. Thus, the laity were educated to provide Sunday services when necessary, to be volunteer catechists, and to assist in the work of evangelization in a wide variety of ways.

To pursue this study among Filipino Catholics on the reception of Vatican II in the Philippines, the author dialogued with twenty-nine Filipino clergy and laity chosen by snowball selection to be interviewed. The methodology of qualitative analysis was used by in-depth interviews to preserve the input of the interviewees, and with their permission, their names were used. The topics chosen for investigation were Filipino attitudes on (1) Liturgical Change; (2) Bible Study; (3) Interreligious Contact; (4) Church Work; (5) Interface with Secular Culture; (6) Reproductive Health: *Humanae Vitae*.⁸ These points will be dealt with one at a time.

Liturgical Change

The first major shift in the Philippine church which resulted from Vatican II was liturgical change. Professor Kroeger contended that throughout the country, the translation of the Latin liturgy into a variety of Filipino languages helped transform the Catholic liturgy and the Filipino communities. In a word, the Filipinos took ownership of their Catholic liturgy and made it responsive to Filipino sensibilities. Several musicians composed liturgical music, based upon traditional Filipino music. For instance, Fathers Eduardo Hontiveros SJ and Manoling Francisco SJ explored native sources to create Filipino religious songs and hymns. Hontiveros composed four hundred hymns in Tagalog while Sister Narcissa Fernandez FMA composed hymns in Cebuano.⁹

For many the Latin Mass was beautiful but isolating. Cabinet Minister and social worker Corazon Soliman tells us that “the Latin Mass with the priest facing the wall was not meaningful and was an ordeal. The Mass in Latin meant that we as individuals said our own solitary prayers, and the solidarity of our family and community were irrelevant.”¹⁰ In a similar way, William Martirez reported that a recent celebration of the Latin Mass in Iloilo drew a great crowd but it took three hours in time. The people left feeling that it was enough Latin for some time to come.¹¹ On another occasion, Arnaldo Borres attended a Filipino wedding in Latin at Las Vegas and found the ceremony “incomprehensible and frankly boring.”¹²

Archbishop Angel Lagdameo of Jaro (Iloilo) and former president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines confirms this experience whereby at Mass individuals knelt in isolation praying their rosary or saying their private novenas. Parishioner Irene Peralejo describes parish life in the following way: “In the old Latin Mass, we followed blindly and did not understand what was going on.”¹³ According to retired Bishop Francisco Claver, Latin Masses engendered passivity. “It is hard to see the wisdom of making people pray in a language they do not understand. The mystery of encountering God in the Mass is not found in a language one does not understand, but in the mystery of understanding both the Word and the sacrament.” He added that going back to the Latin today is pure antiquarianism. “People in the past babbled in Latin, but today in their own vernacular they pray with intelligence.”¹⁴

About the changes in liturgy, Irene Peralejo commented, “I like the interaction between the altar and the congregation which the changes of Vatican II have brought about. The liturgical interaction between the priest and the people is broadly based and parishioners from all walks of life participate. The parishioners are enthusiastically involved. We now see what the priest is doing.”¹⁵

Corazon Soliman believes that “the changes have made the liturgy more meaningful. Now we feel we are part of the praying community. The change to the vernacular language means a great deal to Filipinos.” When she

was a social worker doing community organization for Bishop Claver and Father J. J. Jesena SJ at Bukidnon in Mindanao, Soliman comments that the Mass was then in the vernacular and formed a praying community to energize the people.” She noticed that the vestments were of traditional Filipino material and design. The stoles revealed the colors of the Philippines and blended together. Color, texture, and the design of the fabric is important for the indigenous peoples. The tabernacle was decorated with an ethnic fabric. The churches were decorated according to the Filipino mentality and were no longer Spanish colonial churches. The gestures at Mass have changed, and according to Soliman, the people at Mass in a small community sit in a circle facing one another, and during the Our Father participants held hands, and then at the sign of peace, families and friends embraced. In Mindanao, native dancing was performed at the entrance and the offertory of the Mass, and traditional music was sung throughout. The new beat of liturgical music was now akin to traditional Filipino rhythms and cadences rather than to western rhythms and European tempo. When the priest faced the people, he interacted with the people and guided their prayer. During the homily, some priests invited people to stand up and give witness.¹⁶

Archbishop Lagdameo stated that after Vatican II, the use of the vernacular gave new meaning to the liturgy and encouraged participation. Individuals left the isolation of their private devotions to participate in the shared music, readings, and communion service and turned the liturgy into communal prayer. The vernacular languages helped parishioners understand what they were praying about. The Charismatic Movement especially inserted Christian enthusiasm into the gestures and songs of the Mass.¹⁷

Liturgy in a Filipino language and culture made sense to Tony Meloto. Whereas Western countries were suffering from a population decrease, a renewed Filipino enthusiasm put Catholic energy into the world. Countries chose to import Filipinos to increase their work force and to augment their population. The Filipinos offer to western countries a rich community life, strong solidarity, and broad connectivity. He says that “When Filipinos sing songs, everyone sings, and we are all closer to God. To be present at Mass demands that all be accepted, respected, and participate in mutual understanding. The sacraments are the source of life for Filipinos, and their liturgy is a love song to God.”¹⁸

Tony Meloto speaking about the priest facing the people said, “Yes, I like to see his eyes. I don’t want his back to me. As Christians, we have to respect the poor and the needy. When the priest is facing the people, he is respecting the people. Jesus at supper with his disciples faced and made contact with them. The priest at the Mass brings presence and solidarity to the people of God.”¹⁹

Bishop Claver has believed that the liturgical changes after Vatican II solicited the participation of the faithful in the common work of the church. Protestants and Catholics worked together to translate the Bible into more than eighty languages. The church approved for liturgical use the first ten most widely spoken Philippine languages, but often priests had to shift to other local languages when they gave their homily. When it was brought to the attention of the bishops that the ten-language policy was forcing people in some areas to pray in the language of their traditional enemies, approval was given in 1974 for the translation into other vernaculars! The principle was then accepted: the language of prayer and preaching should be in the same language in which the parishioners’ pray.²⁰

In the town of Bontoc in Northern Luzon, Bishop Claver said “it was not unknown for Baptists and Anglicans to come to Catholic services which were celebrated in the vernacular language of the place.” When

asked why they shifted to the Catholic parish, they answered that in their own churches the foreign language of English was being used which they did not entirely understand. Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) regularly used the vernacular in their worship and this gave them a strong sense of Catholic identity. The various Christian denominations cooperated in the translation of the Bible into local languages.²¹

Filipino culture has emerged in the liturgy since Vatican II in liturgical hymns and dance. For instance at charismatic services, many hands and arms were raised in the air with music and emotion. Priests who can relate easily with the people were very welcome at Eucharistic services of Couples for Christ. Members of Couples For Christ look for the priest who has eye contact with his parishioners and has some depth to what he says. The prayer groups look for spiritual insight in the homilies and have high expectations of the Sunday homily. Enterprising homilists may ask their congregation questions. When people relate to what the homilist was saying, they can respond by applause.²²

Archbishop Antonio Ledesma of Cagayan de Oro believes that the liturgical changes have drawn the church into Filipino culture and enhanced the community celebration. People can better understand the readings and the responses. English Masses generate a limited response in rural areas, but Mass in a Filipino language brought out a fuller response and greater participation.²³

Filipinos were comfortable with liturgical renewal, and the Filipino psyche respects tradition but also appreciates new things. Professor Kroeger reported a recent experience. He was attending a standing-room-only liturgical concert of the music of Father Hontiveros where the audience filled the large Gesu Church on the Ateneo de Manila University campus. Observing the joyful, enthusiastic participation, he said to himself: "Latin is never coming back! Filipinos are enthusiastic about music and liturgy in their own tongue, and the Jesuit Music Ministry on campus provides a great service which spreads throughout the entire country."²⁴

The new liturgy promoted good relationships between clergy and laity, according to Professor Kroeger. In many parishes during the singing of the Our Father, parishioners spontaneously held hands and at the sign of peace hugged family members. They offered hand shakes to others. For Professor Kroeger, "it would seem strange if the priest did not face the people for whom he celebrates the Mass. The celebrant by his words facilitates the prayer of God's people."²⁵

At the fish plant in Iloilo, Arnaldo Borres spoke to his 400 workers in Ilongo so that they understand him. For them, having the liturgy in their language has a big impact on their lives in that they understand the scripture readings and the Mass prayers. The liturgical changes have been very relevant for them. When Filipinos gathered in faraway places around the world, they bonded together in Catholic liturgy and music. In the homily, the priest related the scriptural reading to the social environment, their family around the world, and God's generosity. The priest facing the people kept the people attentive.²⁶

By way of conclusion on the liturgical changes, Professor Catalino Arévalo stated that after Vatican II the clergy and laity in the Church of the Philippines quickly moved beyond the Latin liturgy of the Spanish past and readily accepted the renewed liturgy of the evolving Filipino church.²⁷ Young people enthusiastically embraced the new liturgy. Perhaps the most creative development took place in the area of church music. Religious songs in Filipino were now sung by Filipino communities all over the world.

Professor Arévalo continued, "When vesting for Masses, most priests today use an alb-chasuble and stole. Filipino designs decorate these stoles." Many churches, built in the last fifty years, have tried to adapt to the

Philippine cultural context. But there has not been a renewal in church architecture and religious art. Filipino Catholics have welcomed the priest being more available and willing to communicate. Father Arevelo concluded that there was a new reality in the Philippines: “The faithful have come to want better and more substantial preaching, and will travel long distances to hear well-prepared homilies. This has been a welcomed development from the recommendations made by the documents of Vatican II.”²⁸

Bible Study

The second major change which Vatican II produced was the new enthusiasm among Catholic Christians for Bible study. Until this time in Tony Meloto’s view, the Bible was not well received by Filipinos. In the past, only the well-educated priest read the Bible and interpreted it. Seeing the weakness in Catholic practice, Protestants saw the regular use of the Bible in the vernacular as a great opportunity to evangelize. Catholic prayer groups, following the instructions of Vatican II, led Catholics in opening up the riches of the Bible and praying over it.²⁹

“Yes,” Corazon Soliman conceded “the Bible is more central now to Catholic lives than it was. Evangelical groups have aggressively promoted Bible study and spurred Catholics to study the Bible themselves.” People of different faiths who fought for justice base their work on Bible teaching. Catholic prayer groups were at the center for the promotion of Bible study, such as Couples For Christ (CFC), Bukas Loob sa Diyos (BLD), and Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals.³⁰

A particular prayer group which has led to the increase in Bible study since Vatican II has been Couples for Christ. Its leaders, Joe and Babylou Tale and Ernie Maipid, affirmed “we reflect on the Bible. We have many conferences on learning about the Bible. At our meetings, we begin with a reading of the Bible and as a group we reflect on the readings. CFC initiated a new Bible study program which began with a basic Bible course for all, and then offered additional courses. In our households, that is cell groups of 5 to 7 couples, we reflect over the Bible weekly. At our *lectio divina* we read the Bible, reflect, and share our insights. Many members keep diaries of their spiritual insights and progress.”³¹

On the use of the Bible, according to Archbishop Ledesma, Filipinos have made a strong beginning but what was needed was spiritual guidance in understanding the scripture. Catholics, who hear the fundamentalist evangelists on TV, are stimulated to seek in its full Catholic meaning an understanding of the Bible. In rural areas, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) meet weekly to pray over next Sunday’s readings. Monthly commentaries were published for the guidance of prayer groups. At BEC meetings, the Bible was shared among the rural poor, whereas in the urban areas Bible study groups were generally among the educated middle class who attend Mass and Bible study.³²

Bishop Claver believed that the BEC members, especially when they were unable to attend Mass, made the Bible the center of their religious life. It is the power of the scripture that draws people together in prayer and worship. On these occasions, Catholics share thoughts and spirituality with one another. They were trained in *lectio divina* to share Bible reading and prayer in a communal way. The BECs were strongest in rural areas among the poor where the people shared Bible reading and prayer as a matter of course. Outside these gatherings, it was common that parishioners read the scripture before meetings.³³

William Martirez in Iloilo conjectured that “More people read the Bible daily since Vatican II. In the past, we had Bibles but nobody read them but today most people own a number of Bibles and read them. The Bible is

now part of daily prayer, [and] prayer groups meet weekly to prepare the Sunday readings.” Charismatic communities such as Couples For Christ meet weekly in large groups, and then, a second time in small groups.³⁴

According to Professor Arévalo the increase in Bible study has been gradual among Filipino Catholics. Basic Ecclesial Communities and trans-parochial charismatic communities have been on the front line fostering this growth. Parish groups also have gradually adopted Bible study and reflection. In many ways, these lay groups actively providing religious leadership in their communities led to the decolonization of the Filipino church. The Catholic Bishops have consistently fostered Bible study and have seen significant progress in the last two decades. Yet it must be said that the increased interest in Bible study in the Philippines revealed an inadequate number of facilitators who can assist people to read these ancient documents in the Christian tradition. Yet the interest in the Bible continually grows among Catholics, and the decolonized church of the Philippines was under constant pressure to produce more clerical and lay facilitators trained in scripture studies to meet the demand.³⁵

Interreligious Contact

“Interreligious contact is not very popular among the parishioners,” states Archbishop Lagdameo, “except for the formal event of Church Unity Octave during the last week in January.” Yet it must be admitted that the clergy were more in touch with interreligious meetings and gatherings than the laity. On the other hand, both the clergy and laity in June 2008 were heavily involved directing action when the severe flood at Iloilo occurred. Mainline Protestant churches were also open to a common effort to help the flood victims, but evangelical Protestants chose to remain separate. In general, it can be said that little happened during ordinary times between Catholics and Muslims. The conclusion arrived at, the archbishop believes, was that the Vatican II ecumenical and interreligious recommendations have not been translated into action in the Philippines.³⁶

Couples For Christ membership, according to Joe and BabyLou Tale, was open to all Christians, but when the low-church Christians attended to their ecumenical gatherings, they wanted to proselytize the Catholic membership rather than share the spirit of Jesus Christ. CFC strongly discouraged evangelization of its members by persons from other denominations. Even though CFC was open to members of other faiths, its own membership were expected to be committed Catholics. Filipinos learned to respect religious differences as many of their families included Protestant members. For example, during the pre-Vatican II church in the Philippines, the Bible was not taught to Catholics, and BabyLou’s grandmother, seeking the Word of God, gave up her Catholic practice to study the Bible as a Jehovah’s Witness. Filipinos who were currently involved in their Catholic faith wanted to understand their faith better by knowing the Bible and appreciated Protestant insights.³⁷

Ecumenical work was more easily done among the main-line Protestant churches such as the Anglicans and Lutherans stated Bishop Claver, but this was not true for fundamentalist Protestant groups which were raised to be anti-Catholic. Yet a common translation of the Bible in various Filipino languages was one permanent sign of a stable ecumenical spirit. Catholics and Protestants came together to publish Bibles in English, Tagalog, Visayan, and other Filipino language editions which were made available at the inexpensive price of 50 pesos. Yet it has to be said that ecumenism was found not so much in ecumenical dialogue as it was in religious people working together for good causes, such as to rid the country of public corruption. The laity liked to quote the slogan: “Doctrine divides; action unites.” In fact, they often found out when they shared common Gospel values there was little difference between the spirituality of Catholics and Protestants. Thus the spiritual solidarity of

Christians, of which John Paul II spoke about, was greatly appreciated as a church precedent.³⁸

Only confident Catholics, Tony Meloto observed, made good ecumenists because they can talk to non-Catholics about family, friendship, and shared projects. They loved God and the church, and they found it easy to love people who were of other religions. The confident person showed respect for others and did not try to evangelize them. For instance, Gawad Kalinga (GK), which built and gave away homes to squatters, employed committed Catholic workers but remained open to receive help from non-Catholics.³⁹ For other community projects, inter-religious groups, including Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, according to Archbishop Ledesma, met periodically in the Philippines. For instance, the Mindanao Week of Peace consisted of Christian-Muslim dialogue and focused on peace building in the community. When tensions arose, the Christian-Muslim dialog groups came out with helpful statements to quiet the tension and cool things down. Isolated armed groups have abducted people, but large scale conflicts between Christians and Muslims no longer occur. Armed conflicts dealt with political issues and not religious issues. After natural disasters, the main religious groups cooperated in an interreligious spirit to resolve the disaster.⁴⁰

In interfaith relations, Professor Kroeger observed that Filipino believers have the tolerant attitude of “to live and let live.” An exception was the Iglesia ni Cristo, a large Protestant group, who were sharply anti-Catholic and for them ecumenism was not a value. However in the Philippines, the promotion of interreligious relations with Muslims and Buddhists was, in fact, important to work for harmony among the people.⁴¹

Ecumenism in the Philippines, in the view of William Martirez, consisted mainly in tolerance among Catholics and Protestants. At his business, the Catholic and Protestant employees worked together selling micro-insurance, and at daily prayer both Protestants and Catholics took turns to lead the gathering. Daily prayer began the work day in a large room and lasted for an hour. A video communication of inspirational prayer occurred once weekly between the offices in Iloilo and Cebu. Micro-insurance provided loans and spiritual inspiration to its subscribers of all faiths. It was hoped that they will transform their lives according to Christian values and adopt these values to their daily lives.⁴²

Arnaldo Borres of Iloilo stressed that “We don’t dwell on differences, but on our common belief. Aglipayans come often to the Catholic Church for Mass and Communion. As Protestants they do not believe in images, whereas Catholics like them. It is important for Catholics to stress their common belief in the Three Persons of God. Protestants do not like the Catholic devotion to Mother Mary, but Catholics explain that as we give respect to our own mother, we give respect to the mother of Jesus.”⁴³

Irene Peralejo believed at her ballet school that “We have non-Catholic teachers and thirty percent of the students are born-again Christians, and we pray together. Among Christian students there is a respectful tolerance.”⁴⁴ Some born-again Christians come to the Catholic Mass and maybe are in the process of transformation.

Professor Ar évalo concluded that after Vatican II there was considerable ecumenical activity in the Greater Manila area and in some of the larger cities. Much of this was due to the leadership of Bishop Cornelius De Wit, MHM, and the Cardinal Bea Institute for Ecumenism. Yet the ecumenical activity and the good communication between the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant churches in recent decades had ebbed because of the growth of born-again groups in the country. The evangelicals were aggressive, targeting university students, sports figures (especially basketball players), movie-stars, and also grass-roots groups. They have had

considerable success.⁴⁵

Interreligious dialogue, especially among Catholics and Muslims Professor Arévalo affirmed, has been of great importance for the Philippines. Much progress has taken place, and outstanding leaders came to the fore, such as the late Bishop Bienvenido Tuddud, Fr. Sebastian dell’Ambra, and the Silsilah Center. Currently interreligious dialogue was on a plateau, but the irenic attitudes on all sides give hope for the future of the Philippines.⁴⁶

Church Work

Tony Meloto expressed his concern for the implementation of the social gospel in the Philippines when he said: “The thrust of the Catholic Church today should be its social teaching: land for the landless, homes for the homeless, and food for the hungry.” He believed Catholics must work to welcome and save the poor from their distress, or for what the people of other religious faiths will do for us.⁴⁷

Adding to this, Arnaldo Borres suggested that priests cannot do everything and thus the laity in their own way must support the work of the Church. His fish company put aside a portion of its income to fund worthy causes such as a nearby retreat house and supporting catechists working in the inner city. Other Filipino companies followed this policy. Company executives who pray found it hard to ignore the call to help their neighbors. Supporting worthy causes increased the value of a community. Many companies accepted the suggestion of the Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals to offer one percent of their income to charity. The Filipino population was growing yearly, but as Arnaldo Borres pointed out, the fish plant still employs only the same number of 400 workers as it did many years ago. He is concerned that there will not be enough jobs for the growing population in Iloilo, Cebu, and other Filipino cities.⁴⁸

Private companies such as the ballet school of Irene Peralejo donated periodically to an orphanage for children and home for senior priests. Senior residences were new in the Philippines and now looked upon as a better idea because they provided medical support, a variety of activities for seniors, and were a healthy alternative to household incarceration.⁴⁹

William Martinez’s brother and mother were involved in church work by teaching catechism. His ten siblings were also active in church work. William rallied ex-seminarians to continue their commitment to serve the Filipino community in social services. He raised funds to support current seminarians in their education and to assist senior priests in their retirement. He was involved with the feeding program of his parish, and other families provided a food bank for the needy. He and friends collect funds for student scholarships. But mainly, Martinez worked selling micro-insurance in southeast Asia for agriculturalists and small business people. The program was to insure small businesses, but also it hoped to change the values of those needing help to better understand the business world, financial literacy, and the value of saving. The emphasis was to provide opportunities for the poor to protect themselves so as not to be swept into greater poverty. Those who accepted funding became part of a business community which met weekly to learn the necessary technology, be inspired by the Bible, and share their experiences with their peers.⁵⁰

Corazon Soliman stressed the importance of the Couples For Christ initiating the Gawad Kalinga program of building 700,000 homes in 7000 regions of the country in 7 years. It was established to care for street kids, their families, and to provide them with homes. Father Bienvenido Nebres SJ, former president of Ateneo de

Manila University, formed an institute at the university to train volunteers for GK. CFC also has a day care system and a program to feed children. The similar diocesan program called Caritas also feeds children. Cardinal Rosales founded *Pondong Pinoy* (“Breadcrumbs for the Poor”) asking all Filipinos to contribute 25 centavos, or a quarter of a peso daily to feed others. He believed that many small donations raise consciousness and are better for the nation than large corporate donations which absolved the average person from helping. In fact, government donations match funds which are donated from the private sector. Corazon Aquino once headed a micro-finance firm called Pinoy Micro Enterprise which provided small loans to enterprising women.⁵¹

Prayer groups such as Couples For Christ, the Tales and Ernie Maipid confirmed they are busy with many social ministries for the needy. CFC was concerned with the health care for the poor, teaching pre-school children, Christian programs for soldiers, and Christian Life Program for government office workers. CFC members on the parish level assisted in these ministries.⁵²

Parishes have many outreach programs, according to Professor James Kroeger. The volunteer catechist movement was strong, and in some parishes the volunteers numbered between 60 or 70 catechists. People liked to be catechists, volunteered easily, and accepted the training program readily. Parish volunteers and members of various mandated organizations were proud to wear their particular uniform. Volunteers visited government assisted homes for seniors which are becoming more common in the Philippines.⁵³

Following the Vatican II vision of involvement with the world as revealed in *Gaudium et Spes*, Professor Kroeger argued that each diocese in the country founded a Social Action Center (SAC). The centers were active in social justice, involved in credit unions and cooperatives, teaching family life ministry, and gave assistance to the various indigenous mountain people. They served as centers for social justice and human rights protection. They became centers of engagement with the social reality, giving witness by associating with the poor and the indigenous peoples. Social Action Centers often found themselves suspect by the Marcos regime (1972-1986), but social engagement in the Philippine Church was a pivotal fruit of conciliar renewal.⁵⁴

The Social Action Commission according to Archbishop Lagdameo guided the parishes in looking after the poor. The Pius XII Pastoral Center in his archdiocese of Iloilo linked with the parish councils to feed the needy and teach catechetics. Most parishes sponsored a discount pharmacy. The Social Action Commission looked to social justice issues by monitoring corporation bids for government contracts on community projects and recorded the size of the awards handed out.⁵⁵

Archbishop Ledesma describes how the BEC formed volunteers for the work of the church. The meetings began with Bible sharing, and the members were trained to be ministries of the family life. They have had some success teaching natural family planning. The parishioners volunteered to teach catechism. The archbishop pointed out that permanent deacons, which were not common in the Philippines, would be a genuine help to preach at numerous funerals and officiate at the many weddings. Feeding the poor could be better organized, but the focus of the church was justly on sustainable agriculture for poor farmers which offered economic hope for a nation with many rural people.⁵⁶

Professor Arévalo commented that Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales’ *Pondong Pinoy* has enabled parishes to provide meals for thousands of poor undernourished children. Also Ambassador Howard Q. Dee founded the Assisi Development Foundation more than 30 years ago to provide clean water to hundreds of poor communities, provide scholarships on various levels of education, and create housing communities. For the poor in Mindanao,

the Foundation has promoted catechetical instruction, insertion of street-children in refugee-homes, schooling, and work-programs for the unemployed women of poor families. Filipino Catholics initiated other business organizations to enable others to find work and create their own business initiatives. Basic Ecclesial Communities multiplied in Mindanao to foster new ways of community by drawing the laity to participate in church life and deepen their Christian commitment.⁵⁷ With these many ministries throughout the Philippines, Filipino church workers and volunteers created a solid foundation for a deeply inspired Christian life to look after the needy, the seniors, and the orphans.

Interface with Secular Culture

Relating to secular culture, Corazon Soliman asserted that “the church does interrelate easily with the secular culture, and yes, artists do participate in the design of church construction and the decoration of churches at festival time. Artists, actors, and musicians are heavily involved in Filipino religious theatre, such as at Christmas time in *Misa de Gallo* and *Midnight Masses*, during the public processions in Lent celebrating of the Passion of the Lord, the Flagellation on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, and during Easter season when Mary meets Jesus.”⁵⁸

Artists in the Philippines, according to Archbishop Ledesma, connected on a regular basis with bishops and their local pastors. There was little conflict with artists as they were part of the church and supported the church’s mission in their work. Most significant was the contribution the church makes to education by operating quality schools and universities. Church-related centers existed in appropriate regions to animate cooperatives and credit unions.⁵⁹ Bishop Claver affirmed the view that the artistic community was part of the Filipino religious culture, and Basic Ecclesial Communities included artists, musicians, and actors. Cooperatives and credit unions were part of their ministry.⁶⁰

Couples For Christ, according to the Tales, organized ministries which extended from the “Womb to the Tomb.” For families, they organized “Kids for Christ,” for the unmarried “Singles for Christ,” for the university students, “Youth for Christ,” for adults, they organize “Handmaids of the Lord” and “Servants of the Lord.” Member volunteers visited schools and homes and have created their own songs.⁶¹

Professor Kroeger believed that youth groups in the parishes were active in a variety of ways such as faith-discovery seminars and dramas for the liturgical seasons. A catechetical institute, the Mother of Life Center founded at Manila in 1967, was a direct response to Vatican II and has drawn catechists from around the country. As a priest instructor at the catechetical institute and aware of the dramatic capabilities of Filipinos, Professor Kroeger used a creative approach for the final exam in ecclesiology. Each class presented a drama on how the Church was the People of God and how community were the disciples of Jesus. The Catholic Church was one of the principal patrons of artistic work and has a heavy investment in education, health care, publishing, and social development in the Philippines.⁶²

According to Archbishop Lagdameo, the religious congregations which run Catholic schools made contact on a regular basis in the educational spheres with the secular cultures. Missionaries brought credit unions to Asia after World War II and formed the first National Federation in Asia. Catholics were heavily involved in credit unions and cooperatives, and SAC operated credit unions and cooperatives. St Francis Xavier University of Cagayan de Oro hosted a international conference for the SE Asian Development Association in December 2004

to utilize cooperatives and credit unions to improve agricultural development.⁶³

Arnaldo Borres pointed out that students from Ateneo de Manila University were educated to know what it is like to live as squatters and eat a meager diet. This was an eye-opener for students coming from comfortable backgrounds. Arnaldo Borres as part of his company's outreach hired an architect to design a glass chapel for the retreat house nearby the fish plant in Iloilo. The design was environmentally friendly and the glass walls revealed the trees, plants, and lawns outside the chapel for all to enjoy. Church people were continually interfacing, he believed, with secular society for mutual exchange.⁶⁴

In contrast to the optimistic views above, Tony Meloto believed that church culture is confined to the parishes and has little influence in the broader community, but even so he admitted that prayer groups have brought the church into the neighborhoods, schools, and businesses.⁶⁵ According to Professor Arévalo, the church in the Philippines continued to have a presence and influence in most aspects of the nation's culture in education and universities, political life, the arts, press, media, especially in television and movies. Yet it must be admitted that many programs and shows were imported from the United States. The Hollywood values presented in these shows have wide distribution in the Philippines and were readily embraced by the young. Much damage to the Catholic faith and Filipino mores was done by this exposure. Despite the limited view of the media, the Filipino church continued to reach out to the secular world through contact with professionals, many of which remain practicing Catholics. Having sloughed off European influences to create a Filipino Catholic Church, Filipino Catholics opted for their own religious culture.⁶⁶

Reproductive Health: Humanae Vitae

Joe and BabyLou Tale related that the Couples For Christ were close to families, and they contended that most young people were ill-informed about the Catholic teaching on family planning. Thus the young did not hesitate to use the most convenient contraceptive method to achieve their goals. In fact, the public and Catholic schools provided little information on sexuality, natural family planning, and contraceptives. The young got most information from the advertisements of pharmaceutical companies on how to purchase a suitable method of birth control.⁶⁷

Corazon Suliman believed that Filipinos were very concerned about conjugal love and responsible parenthood, but they did not know about Natural Family Planning. The problem was that when sexual intercourse occurs can pregnancy be avoided? The result was that many couples in the Philippines have children which they do not plan for and were not able to support. Suliman affirmed that the information gap was wide between Filipino couples and NFP. For instance, to avoid pregnancy, rural women were inclined to eat root vegetables believing they may prevent pregnancy, or try other untested homespun methods. Many ended an unwanted pregnancy by going to traditional healers or doctors. The church in the Philippines theoretically promoted Natural Family Planning, but in many cases because of disagreement, it has failed to publicize NFP.⁶⁸ According to Archbishop Ledesma, Filipinos were concerned about conjugal love and responsible parenthood, but government surveys showed that less than 1% use natural family planning, 30% of Filipinos use contraceptives, and 50% have no plan.⁶⁹

The Filipino bishops, according to Bishop Claver, felt they had a clear policy on Natural Family Planning but there was strong disagreement about the use of NFP, that is, whether it was genuinely natural. The

disagreement came over whether contraceptives were used to supplement NFP. The Church has been advocating NFP for the past forty years to replace artificial contraceptives but its use by Filipinos was very slow to catch on. Dioceses were criticized for not publicizing the family life program in a more vigorous way.⁷⁰

The president of the Filipino bishops Archbishop Lagdameo believed that Filipinos agree with the encyclical in principal but in practice are reluctant to follow it. Filipino families and society did not talk about sexuality, and thus, priests were reluctant to talk about *Humanae Vitae*. In the archdiocese of Jaro (Iloilo), the Commission on Family Life promoted Natural Family Planning. Seminars were held to inform people of its usefulness, and conventions were arranged to train key Catholic couples to provide information to those who were interested. Diocesan and national commissions talked about how to encourage Catholic people to embrace NFP. What would help are women doctors who can share their own experience on the health and family benefits from NFP. The archdiocese of Jaro has gathered pastoral assemblies to talk about Vatican II and its reception. When Lagdameo was bishop of Cebu, then Domangetti, and finally Jaro, he conducted synods on the reception of Vatican II as recommended by the Philippine bishops in 1991.⁷¹

Professor Kroeger pointed out the importance of the family in Filipino culture. Based on the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, the Catholic bishops supported the Filipino family, and charismatic prayer groups teach couples responsible parenthood. The prayer groups have helped many Filipino couples to plan for their future, but many Filipino families still believed in letting things happen as they happened.⁷²

Bishop Claver said that the love of children was a salient Filipino trait, but the sense of the common good in the Philippines was weak. The value of the family is stressed overwhelmingly to the point that the temptation existed to overlook basic honesty to gain economic advantage for one's family.⁷³ In Filipino society, the family comes first before the priorities of the nation.

William Martirez stressed that Filipinos agreed with the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and were life-giving. Europeans who formerly colonized the Philippines were now faced in their home countries with decreasing populations and need of young people. Filipinos as people of faith migrated to these countries and provided the need for young workers who can bear children.⁷⁴

To keep Filipinos healthy, health-care workers in the *barangays* (regions) looked after Filipino needs which means that artificial contraceptives were readily available. Again, when men working abroad sent money home and then returned, they felt they had the right to be repaid by a warm welcome and sexual contact. On such occasions, Natural Family Planning does not fit in with the expectations of the Filipino male ego. Also incest in families can occur in certain parts of the country. Yet overall, the size of the Filipino family was decreasing, and it was now accepted that five children were a large family and even smaller families were in fashion.⁷⁵

Arnaldo Borres believed that Filipinos appreciate *Humanae Vitae* which encouraged faithful love and responsible parenthood. Arnaldo said that "our workers, after months of fishing at sea away from their wives and family, return to their families for only a short time before going out to sea again. During this respite from their labors, the men expect to have a good meal, a few drinks, and have intercourse with their wives. Their wives may look forward to the sexual contact but are torn by the fear of becoming pregnant again. The wives know they cannot refuse their husbands after a long time apart."⁷⁶

Couples For Christ believed that many Filipino Catholics by going to church and carrying out their devotions felt they had fulfilled their responsibility to God. Then once they left the church and went into the

world, they followed their own rules and did what they wanted to do. They did not bother to seek church teachings for Christian wisdom. BabyLou's parents were part of the Catholic Family Movement and taught their children the Christian truths of respect for self and for others. In a similar fashion, the Catholics of the Philippines today need to teach their children the basics of Catholic life: the Mass, Christian morality, and Christian social thought.⁷⁷ Tony Meloto asserted that educated Filipinos might know of *Humanae Vitae* and understand what it teaches, but the poor live close to the soil because poverty has brutalized and dehumanized them. Thus it was difficult to introduce NFP to the poor and uneducated. The simple truth was that when women were attractive and fertile and men intoxicated and sexually aggressive physical relationships happened. Meloto suggested that Pro-Life people should stop protesting and start teaching NFP. Also many men in the Philippines were unemployed and lost their self respect and desire to be a productive member of society, and thus, become predatory, abusive, and incestuous.⁷⁸

Professor Arévalo was aware that currently a reproductive health bill was before the Philippine Congress which the Catholic Church opposed. The bishops believe it represented the pro-choice culture of contraception and abortion, and opposed it. Yet some sectors of the Catholic population supported the bill. The lay faculty of Ateneo de Manila University have written a letter to support the bill as good for the health care of women. But, despite strong opposition from Church authority, the pro-choice mentality in the last two decades has gained ground in the Philippines. Poverty, overpopulation, increasing unemployment, and the break-up of family life motivated people to oppose the pro-life positions of the Catholic Church.⁷⁹

In general, even though family life in the last few decades remained strong, Professor Arévalo believes many influences have weakened it. Many families were limiting the size of their family to several children. At the same time, millions of young Filipinos have gone overseas to seek jobs and the freedom of western mores. Internal migration from rural communities to urban areas has broken up families, disrupted society, and left rural parishes unattended except by the seniors.⁸⁰ The comfort of traditional Filipino society was being fractured by the absence of Filipino family members. Filipinos with the inspiration of Catholic teaching were renewing their Filipino culture and forming their own norms for the future.

Conclusion

Has the Catholic Church of the Philippines changed since Vatican II? Those interviewed said that the Church of the Philippines has changed dramatically and was still changing. The council document, *Lumen Gentium*, asserted that all people were created equal as the people of God, and this equality must be played out in liturgical drama, Bible study, interreligious contacts, church work, interface with the secular world, and in the sexual intimacy of married couples. From a liturgy which was in a foreign tongue and largely incomprehensible, the Council recommended vernacular languages to transform liturgy in which Filipinos could participate in song, gesture, and community. The priest, now facing the congregation during the Mass, connected directly with the people in prayer and in the scripture-based homily. After Vatican II as the appendages of the Spanish colonial church fell away, Filipino culture became the driving force behind the Philippine Catholic Church.

Catholic prayer groups in both urban and rural areas have taken the lead to guide Catholics in praying over the Bible. Although slow to catch on, Bible study has become the center for the prayer life of Catholics. The Protestant-Catholic translation of the Bible into various Filipino languages was the highpoint of Christian

ecumenism. Catholic prayer groups and clergy along with the Protestant establishment were open to the ecumenical dialog in the times of annual gatherings, natural disasters, and communal tensions.⁸¹

Working to save the needy was an opportunity for the Catholic laity in the Philippines. The Brotherhood of Christian Business and Professionals made the point that Filipino businesses gave a portion of their income to help the suffering poor. The laity taught catechism and social justice in the schools, collected funds for educational programs, and worked for more productive agriculture in the rural areas. Members of prayer groups built homes for the squatters, fed the hungry, provided health care, and lobbied for pharmaceutical products at discount prices. BECs and prayer groups renewed evangelization and taught Natural Family Planning for the health of Filipino families. They also worked to provide clean drinking water for all.

The Filipino Church interrelated with those preoccupied with the arts and media. The Catholic Church of the Philippines contributed high-quality education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels for the Filipino youth, while at the same time it also interacted with their parents. Prayer groups organized meetings among the youth, single adults, married couples, and seniors. BECs operated cooperatives and credit unions.

Filipinos have high regard for the family and the spiritual message of *Humanae Vitae*, but many were uninformed about church teachings on human reproduction. A large number of Filipinos living in the shanty towns were poorly educated and did not understand Natural Family Planning. Prayer groups took the initiative to teach Natural Family Planning and stressed its medical and spiritual benefits.

Filipinos interviewed stated that they had received the teachings of Vatican II on inculturation and equality and were thus able to decolonize the European trappings from the church. In the final analysis Filipinos welcomed the teachings of Vatican II which allowed them to interact with liturgy in Filipino languages, utilize the laity to lead Bible study, lower tensions among religious denominations, employed laity to teach Christian doctrine, interfaced with the secular world, and finally, affirmed Filipino family values on reproductive health. Filipino Catholics embraced the teaching of Vatican II which enabled them to slough off colonial church practices of the past and espouse the vitality of Filipino church life with an enthusiasm firmly rooted in Filipino soil, language, and culture.

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