

## **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNIZATION IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Mons. ROLANDO TRIA TIRONA

I believe that the teaching of spiritual theology in the Philippines today is done best through an understanding of our search for a path to modernization. The scientific and technological advances made man master of the universe in ways that were not previously imagined no longer were many areas of existence regarded as outside man's personal responsibility. There developed in consequence what might be called the spirituality of involvement. The Christian came to regard his professional life, his work in organization, commerce, production, and science, if done according to God's will, as a true contribution to the building up of the city of men. It is becoming clear that when Christians love one another and bear together the burden of building the community, God reveals Himself to them as Lord, Redeemer, and Father.

The fundamental problematic of the Philippines is that it is a country of fragmented and largely unarticulated cultures. Fr Horacio de la Costa, an eminent Jesuit historian, once wrote that the majority of the Filipinos share two things: our music and our Christian faith. Some of us might add our family-centeredness and our sense of humor. The culture that also most immediately meets the visitor's eye is an overlay, which is a residue of the Spanish and American colonial past. In this sense, the twenty years of repression under Mr. Ferdinand Marcos and the six-year presidency of Mrs. Corazon Aquino have been most important for our self-understanding as a people.

The years of Mr. Marcos' one-man rule challenged both the American and the Spanish heritage; the Church and Christian faith, which are the main legacy of Spain, belief in democratic processes and a dream of progress through free enterprise, which have been associated with the American period. The Church and the belief in democratic processes, largely supported by the Church, survived the test. The carriers of the

dream of progress, the technocrats and the business community, in large part failed. During this period, Marxism-Leninism, with its promise of greater equality and the victory of the poor and the oppressed, came forward to challenge the above value systems. It became a major force during the Marcos period. In the Aquino period it faced a decision as to how to respond to the people's clear affirmation of faith in God and commitment to democratic processes.

### *Spiritual Theology as Taught in the Philippines*

Spirituality taught in theological schools in the Philippines has certainly undergone immense changes. Prior to Vatican II, seminaries included in their curriculum the subject, "Spiritual Theology," which is then expressed in terms of "Ascetical and Mystical Theology." The BAC series books are well used and in some cases the famous manual by Adolphe Tanquery.

By and large, the emphasis would be on traditional themes like, definition of spiritual theology, formal object, division into ascetical and mystical theology. Questions of prayer, forms of prayer, kinds, difficulties, models, etc. . . The virtues are given great emphasis. Ascetical practices are also dealt with and understood as 'subjugating the evils of the flesh.' Mysticism is also taken into consideration though not as thorough as the ascetical dimension of the spiritual life. In brief, spiritual theology is a transportation of a very European and Roman presentation of this discipline with no reference whatsoever to the local culture much less to local religiosity.

At the advent of greater researches, and fresh impetus after Vatican II, Spiritual Theology assumed a new form. There is a greater emphasis on history of spirituality and especially on models of spirituality as reflected in the lives of great saints or spiritual personages of different ages. Books on various models of spirituality fill up the seminary libraries. However, traditional themes of spiritual theology are not totally neglected nor scraped. The predominance of European-Roman orientation in terms of text books are still very noticeable. The influence of spirituality from the United States would be seen in the advent of prayer meetings and the charismatic movement.

Lately, seminary treatment of Spirituality assumes a wider and more interesting form. Strong emphasis in the history of

spirituality is still present, traditional themes are still taken into consideration. However, there is a greater emphasis in inculturation and investigation of folklore religiosity. Spirituality focuses not only on the theological level but it tackles also the religious culture of the Filipino. National history experiences (Pre-Spanish, Spanish and American periods) seen as contributing to the Filipino culture and mentality, especially religious, is often taken into consideration. What had been the influences of pious practices like, novenas, recitation of the rosary, indulgences, etc., in the Filipino religiosity are part of the study of spirituality.

Again, while the contribution of Spain and the USA are appreciated in the realm of spirituality, greater attempts are made to dig into the Filipino culture and world view in order to appreciate more the wealth and depth of spirituality.

For the first time in the history of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) a pastoral letter dealing with Spirituality written in Filipino, the official language, came out last July 1999. And very noticeable in this pastoral letter is the description of the many traditional religious practices and folklore religiosity of the Filipino. The pastoral letter tries to highlight Filipino values and traditions which are enriched by the Faith, and which in turn also enriches the Faith in terms of its expression.

I believe this pastoral letter is now an important source for theological reflections and for spirituality. It will certainly serve as a new challenge to further deepen our presentation of spirituality among the seminarians and the laity as well.

### ***Science and Technology and the Dream of Progress***

If there is a value-system associated with science and technology, it is probably that associated with the dream of progress. We speak of the tiger economies of *Asia* and the newly-industrialized countries (NIC's). What drives many of our economic planners is the dream that we are finally on the runway to progress and we may be next in line for takeoff. But if we look at some areas of science and technology (medicine, agriculture, economics) we see that this is an illustration. In terms of medicine and health care, we have a modernized sector: sophisticated hospital, well-trained doctors and nurses.

Heart bypasses and kidney transplants are routine in the specialized centers in Manila. At the same time, the country is not coping with thousands, perhaps millions of Filipinos afflicted with tuberculosis, with epidemic diseases such as malaria and schistosomiasis.

In the field of medicine, agriculture and economics we see that science and technology in the Philippines is contributing to the creation of small, isolated modernized sector, but is not modernizing the country. Can it be otherwise? Can science and the dream of progress uplift the poor majority? Only if it ceases to believe that modernization means creating replicas of the Western world and begins to "inculturate" itself among the people.

The question that comes up then is what value will move the educated scientist and leader to turn away from the temptation of mimicking the West and calling that progress and, instead, going down to his people and building progress with them.

### *Marxism-Leninism*

Marxism-Leninism offers a path to modernization in the Philippines based on a rejection of the dehumanization and injustice created by capitalism and on the promise of a new world of equality and justice, to be ushered in by the people under the leadership of the party. It is a powerful and attractive vision. A substantial number of dedicated Christians find in Marxism the categories and organization for a process of modernization which will be liberating for the poor.

The question before us however is whether Marxism-Leninism offers an Asian or Filipino path to modernization. But, of course, this question is not clear. What is Asian or what is Filipino? However, if what we mean is "does it respect and integrate traditional values?", the answer is probably no. In a society where trust is a linchpin of relationship, what is felt to be manipulation and double-talk on the part of Marxist groups is a frequent source of breakdown of relationships.

What is of greater interest for our discussion is the relationship between Christians and Marxists in the Philippines and the umbrella and acceptability, which Christian leaders and Christian forms have provided Marxism-Leninism. In the opening of the Church to the world that came after Vatican II,

dioceses and religious congregations shifted from more traditional ministries such as regular parish work and schools to social action and apostolates among the poor. In these new ministries, church workers found themselves working side by side with Marxist groups. In this process, the Church has been challenged to be on the side of the poor and to preach the Gospel to the poor. It has learned much from Marxists in terms of commitment to the struggle of the poor and to the building of a better future for them. But it can also be argued that the acceptability of forms of Marxism among many groups came from the legitimization given it by priests and religious sympathetic to it. Thus, many seminars of Marxists analysis began with biblical reflections. Exodus has been a favorite symbol of liberation and the *Magnificat*, of the victory of the oppressed against the powerful. I presume, of course, for those who go on more deeply into dialectical and historical materialism, that the God of history who delivers us in Exodus eventually becomes History itself and the dialectical laws that govern history. And that the victory of the humble in the *Magnificat* becomes the victory of the proletariat in the class struggle. But the question is whether there is not a folk Marxism as well and whether in the Philippines this folk Marxism with its images of Exodus and the *Magnificat* envisions a path of liberation which maybe closer to a renewed Christianity than to Marxism. Of course, one might ask whether this may not be true of a renewed Marxism. But, in the Philippines at least, our form of Marxism-Leninism has not yet gone through its Vatican II and has not shown openness to radical change of its world view or to accommodate with other world views. Nonetheless, its contribution to focusing on a liberating struggle on the side of the poor is fundamental to a genuine "preferential option" for the poor and the oppressed.

### *Christianity*

I shall comment on the role of the Church in the Philippines from two aspects: as a social force and as a more strictly religious reality.

*The Church as a social force.* In the process of social change, the Church has been a conservative force and a force for change. For example during the revolution against Spain in 1896, the

Spanish clergy were against the revolution and for keeping unity with Spain.. But in many places it was the strong supportive role of the native clergy that kept the revolution going.

In his pioneering work *Pasyon and Revolution*, Ray Lletto argues that the world view and motivation for social change of the peasant revolutionaries was shaped by the book called the *Pasyon*. This book is a narrative of salvation history which centers on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, It is traditionally chanted in private homes by different groups of people during Lent. Together with novenas and other traditional devotions, it has shaped the consciousness of Christian Filipinos. Lletto argues that while the leaders of the revolution, many of whom were educated in Europe, saw the revolution in European categories of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* the peasants saw it as a liberation in *pasyon* terms: suffering with Jesus so that they may enter into victory and triumph with him.<sup>1</sup>

As with the Church in Latin America, the Church in the Philippines became more of a force for change from the late 1960's on. These efforts for change may be divided into three main groupings. The first approach is that of being a prophetic voice. Thus the many pastoral letters of the bishops denouncing violations of human rights, urging citizens to follow their conscience, etc. The second is to support and align with political forces among the poor, notably with the Marxist left. In this approach, there has been much effort to integrate Christian categories with Marxist categories. In some cases, the struggle for integration is real and Christian faith is allowed to retain its autonomy. In may others, Christian faith is instrumentalized, emptied of autonomous content, and reinterpreted in Marxist categories. The third approach is to develop and support social and political organizations for change, which are more explicitly compatible with a Christian orientation.

*The Church as religious reality:* One of the enduring memories for many of us was the experience of the bloodless revolution of 1986 as a process of political change, which was also a profoundly religious experience. For myself, I used to turn to Psalm 44 ("We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds thou didst perform in their days... Yet

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<sup>1</sup> REYNALDO LLETO, "Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910", Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979, pp. 15f.

thou hast cast us off and abased us and hast not gone out with our armies”) to express my feeling of God being so distant from our struggles. In those February days of 1986, there was a feeling of great wonder that God had come to march with us once more. Many of us came to the realization of the power for change in the popular symbols of faith. It was in the rosary that people found strength as they faced the tanks; they struggled to sing the “Our Father” as the soldiers came with tear-gas attacks. They waved rosaries and bibles to soldiers in their appeal for unity and peace. It was in rosaries and hymns and the presence of statues of our Lady that we found strength in the lovely and fearful vigils between midnight and dawn.

The above analysis of our experience of the bloodless revolution of February 1986 may sit uncomfortably with many people. They would prefer a more rational analysis, in terms of political and military forces guided by the CIA, the left or other influential groups. It may be good to recall here the distinction between the “rational” (roughly, what belongs to science) and the “reasonable” (roughly the practical reason operating in other fields). The language of the “reasonable” (as against the “rational”) is the language of signs. It is typical of Western culture to forget the reasonable in front of the rational and that is disastrous for spiritual values in general and faith in particular. The experience of February 1986 certainly awakened us to the world other than the rational and to the power of the language signs.

This experience of February 1986 serves to confirm much of the thesis of Rey Iletto’s *Pasyon and Revolution*. There is an ethos and world view in the majority of Christian Filipinos, shaped by the symbols and practices of popular Christianity, which can be a basis for social change in non-violent ways.<sup>2</sup> During those February days, it was a big surprise to us that the spirit and methods of active non-violence caught hold so easily and so quickly. For, after all, very few had gone through the seminars on active non-violence. But looking back now, it appealed to a deep ethos of suffering with Christ so that one might triumph with Him. An ethos shaped by the Scriptures, by the *pasyon*, the novenas, the reflections on the mysteries of the rosary. It is not so

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<sup>2</sup> JOHN N. SCHUMACHER, S.J., “Recent Perspectives on the Revolution”. *Philippine Studies*, vol. 30 (1982), pp. 465-467.

surprising then that so many resonated with it and accepted it.

More than any other world view, Christianity penetrates all sectors of Philippine society. Traditional practices of devotion (the rosary, novenas, the chanting of the *pasyon*) cut across social classes and geographical barriers. However, there has been a tendency to see Christian practice and values as also divided into a modernized sector and a traditional sector. The first, educated in Vatican II and the Scriptures and possibly different forms of Liberation Theology, would be seen as liberating. The second, caught in traditional devotions, would be seen as conservative and keeping people docile. But Rey lleto's analysis of the impact of the *pasyon* categories as also liberating for the peasants of 1986 during the last years of Spanish Colonial period, and the experience of the power for courage and non-violent change of Jesus and of the Gospels to set us free can shine through the traditional devotions and symbols as well.

*Christian Spiritual values as a Filipino path to progress:* Those arguing for science and technology as the key to progress would insist that unless we improve productivity and become industrially more competitive we cannot move forward. And this is true. With Marxism-Leninism, we must change the structure of social relationships and the ownership and control of the means of production. And with Christian religious values, we need justice and integrity of heart. Thus, the contending paths may be seen as simply emphasizing different aspects of the task. In the 1970's when we were trying to understand the social problem and the causes of the problem we tended to emphasize the economic and the political. But as we turned to the question of moving people to become involved in the solution: to care, to be committed, to be courageous, we found ourselves struggling more and more with the question of culture and values. For most Filipinos we found motivation and courage in our Christian faith.

Indeed, Christianity can guide us through modernization and serve to hold the nation together in the process. But not the universal Christianity in theology texts or catechisms. Rather the starting point has to be the Christianity which has been Asianized or Filipinized, whose world view and value-system appear in the *pasyon*, the novenas, the many devotions and practices that have shaped the consciousness of the majority of the Filipinos. Among its characteristics are its emphasis on "loob", inner integrity, integrity of spirit. As with sister Asian



cultures, there is very high value on inner harmony and on harmony of relationships. This inner integrity and harmony is maintained through prayer and a virtuous life, restored when lost, through repentance and penance. A second major characteristic is “damay”, an emphasis on “suffering with”. Good Friday as the holiest of days for the Filipinos and the most revered statue is the Black Nazarene of Quiapo. It was pointed out above that the peasants in the 1986 Philippine-Spanish revolution saw “kalayaan” or liberation in these terms: suffering with Christ, so as to rise in triumph with Him. It is the same sense of liberation and victory coming out of suffering that gave meaning and strength to the many who sat before the tanks in the bloodless revolution of February 1986.<sup>3</sup>

Of course these values can be both conservative and modernizing. The emphasis on “loob”, the inner life, can mean a personalistic, otherworldly piety. The ethos of “suffering with” or “damay” can mean passivity and a religiosity, which is an opiate. But we can already see that Christianity is liberating, when it truly becomes open to the world. In part, this has to be an openness to the challenge of Marxism and of science and technology.

*Openness to the challenge of Marxism:* Roger Garaudy in *Parole d'Homme* phrases the challenge this way: “The problem of the relationship between faith and socialism is a problem of mutual enrichment; the faith bringing to socialism the transcendent and the prophetic dimension, preventing socialism from closing itself in self-sufficiency and opening it to a future of unending renewal; socialism bring to the faith its historical and militant dimension preventing faith from avoiding the world of human struggle and obliging it to incarnate its promise and its hope so as not to be an opiate but a leaven<sup>4</sup>”. The encounter with Marxism has been going on for over 30 years and has been changing Filipino Christianity, immersing it into history and a growing militancy on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

*Openness to science and technology:* Less obvious to Filipino Christianity is the challenge of science and technology. It is

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<sup>3</sup> ALBERT ALEJO, “Hermeneutika ng Loob”: Isang Landeas ng Pag-unawa sa Pakikisangkot”, M.A. Thesis, Ateneo de Manila, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> ROGER GARAUDY, “Parole d'Homme”. Robert Laffont, Paris 1975, p. 254.

actually the challenge of materiality, of working with earth and sea and sky and all matter and making within them a home. Making earth and sea productive so we can live and eat. Building roads and communication systems, so we can communicate and dialogue. Overcoming disease, droughts and other threats. It is the challenge of materiality. Marxism and Leninism speaks of the primacy of matter, but it actually emphasizes the primacy of social relationships. In the Philippines, it has a tendency to be "voluntarist" and does not give enough emphasis to the scientific task of coping with materiality. Christian leaders, too, place the burden of social change almost exclusively on values. There is a need then for dialogue and openness between Christianity and science and technology. I would see this dialogue beginning with the roles of the outer and the inner world in the process of modernization. The outer world of control of natural forces and of technological development, which is the domain of science and technology. The inner world of inner integrity and harmony, of grace and sufferings, which is part of the ethos of Filipino Christianity.

*Openness to all sectors of society.* As emphasized in the beginning, the Philippines remains a nation of fragmented and unarticulated cultures. The sense I have is that Christianity offers the best cultural matrix for us to articulate a common consciousness and culture. But this Christianity would have to be open to all sectors of society. Openness to the poor and oppressed has begun with the greater efforts at inculturation. Dialogue will have to be pursued more vigorously with our Muslim brothers and sisters, with non-Christians and among Christians of different denominations. The trust of this openness and dialogue will be to forge a shared culture and a shared value-system which will be the basis for guiding the country towards modernization.

*How will it happen?* How can this culture and values guide us and hold us together and how assure openness and dialogue? As in the Scriptures, there have to be prophets and priests to interpret the signs of the times in their light. When many friends started complaining that Mr. Marcos was gone, the terms of office of Mrs. Corazon Aquino and Mr. Fidel Ramos were over, but things were as bad as ever. I reminded them that after Exodus did not come the Promised Land. It has helped, to understand where we are, to be reminded that we may have to go through our forty years of wandering in the desert: to struggle

with one another, with our leaders, with our God, and emerge from our fragmented past as a free and united people. Ultimately the path to modernization has to be a path chosen and accepted by people. History tells us that this path is not achieved without struggle with themselves and their weaknesses, their struggle with their leaders and with their God. In this struggle, it is the task and burden of leaders to interpret and give meaning to a people's life, to struggle to forge unity out of continuing tendencies to fragment, to work towards a common consciousness and direction. A common consciousness and direction which will ultimately be their people's path into the future.

### *Addenda*

1. Spirituality taught in theological schools in the Philippines has certainly undergone immense changes. Prior to Vatican II, seminaries include in their curriculum the subject "Spiritual Theology" which is then expressed in terms of "Ascetical and Mystical Theology." The BAC series books are well used and in some cases the famous Tanquery manual.
2. By and large the emphasis would be on the traditional themes like, definition of spiritual theology, formal object, division into ascetical and mystical. Questions of prayer, forms of prayer, kinds, difficulties, models etc...The virtues are given great emphasis. Ascetical practices are also dealt with and understood as 'subjugating the evils of the flesh.' Mysticism is also taken into consideration though not as thorough as the ascetical dimension of spiritual life. In brief, spiritual theology is a transportation of a very European and Roman presentation of this discipline with no reference whatsoever to the local culture much less to local religiosity.
3. At the advent of greater researches, and fresh impetus after Vatican II, Spiritual theology assumed a new form. There is greater emphasis on history of spirituality and especially on models of spirituality as reflected in the lives of great Saints or spiritual personages of different ages. Books on various models of spirituality fill up the seminary libraries. However, traditional themes of spiritual theology are not totally neglected nor scraped. The predominance of European-Roman orientation in terms of text books are still

very noticeable. The influence of spirituality from the United States would be seen in the advent of Prayer Meetings and the charismatic movement.

4. Lately, seminary treatment of Spirituality assumes a wider and more interesting form. Strong emphasis in the history of spirituality is still present, traditional themes are still taken into consideration. However, there is a greater emphasis in inculturation and investigation of folklore religiosity. Spirituality focuses not only on the theological level but it tackles also the religious culture of the Filipino. National history experiences (Pre-Spanish, Spanish and American periods) seen as contributing to the Filipino culture and mentality, especially religious, is often taken into consideration. What had been the influences of pious practices like, novenas, recitation of the rosary, indulgences, etc in the Filipino religiosity are part of the study of spirituality.
5. Again, while the contribution of Spain and USA are appreciated in the realm of spirituality, greater attempts are made to dig into the Filipino culture and world view in order to appreciate more the wealth and depth of spirituality.
6. It may interest you to know that for the first time in the history of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) a pastoral letter dealing with Spirituality written in Pilipino, the official language, came out last July 1999. And very noticeable in this pastoral letter is the description of the many traditional religious practices and folklore religiosity of the Filipino. The pastoral letter tries to highlight Filipino values and traditions which are enriched by the Faith, and which in turn also enriches the Faith in terms of its expression.
7. I believe this pastoral letter is now an important source for theological reflections and for spirituality. It will certainly serve as a new challenge to further deepen our presentation of spirituality among the seminarians and the laity as well.
8. With this addenda, I hope you can understand the emphasis on the history, culture, traditions of the Filipino as described in the paper.