

The Church: A Catalyst for Change in the Labor Movement

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the involvement of the Church in the Philippine labor movement from the late 19th century up to the contemporary period. It defines the role of the Church as a catalyst for social change as it struggles to maintain its relevance in a changing Philippine society characterized by chronic turbulence and conflict. An attempt is made to analyze the role of the Church particularly in its pursuit of social action which is a process that calls for actualization of Christian ethics and morality through positive and concrete action. A discussion is made on the various stages of the metamorphosis of the Church vis-à-vis the social, political and economic events during the period under study. The paper also shows the various shades of political and moral convictions of Church elements.

INTRODUCTION

From the late 19th century up to contemporary period, the Church had played a significant role in the Philippine labor movement. This paper chronicles the participation and defines the role of the Church in the process of the workers' struggle. The word 'Church' refers to Catholic and non-Catholic clergy, religious and its affiliated lay organizations. It is used as a generic term to refer to all kinds of Christian institutions, sects and denominations.

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This paper synthesizes the various papers presented during the symposium on 'Interfaith Involvement in the Philippine Labor Movement' conducted by UP SOLAIR in October 2001. In addition to the findings presented in the symposium, the author weaves in other secondary materials culled from various sources and draws from her own experience and insights as a community organizer and a staff in various Church-sponsored activities.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The paper analyzes how the Church metamorphosed from an inward-looking to an outward-looking institution, from a reactive to a proactive Church, steeped in social action, sensitive to socio-political-economic problems, and responsive to temporal needs and issues. Along the way, the Church turned biblical and theological messages into doable programs capable of changing the lives of the poor.

The Church has been in pursuit of *social action* in its various stages of development. The concept of *social action* has many facets and dimensions one of which is its use as a tool to examine social, political and economic inequities and structures and to create the necessary conditions for their dismantling. *Social action* as a method is both ideological and experiential in character; it may require widening and deepening involvement in the plight of the laborers, whereby the agents of change are themselves changed in the process of immersion and integration.

Social action is also a process that calls for actualization of Christian ethics and morality through positive and concrete action (Abalajen, 2000). It draws from biblical writings and ideological thinkers.

The paper also examines the various shades of political and moral convictions of Church elements. Some sectors of the Church forayed into dangerous grounds and embraced more radical beliefs to express their sympathy with the working class. Still others played the role of protectors and offered sanctuaries to those who were persecuted, a role that did not sit well with the State. During the Martial Law years, the Church was instrumental in the proliferation of NGOs and other civil society groups.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Church involvement in the labor movement was one of gradual awakening from centuries of resignation and oppression perpetuated by Spanish colonial rule and fostered during the American colonial rule. During the Spanish period, the Catholic Church represented by the Spanish friars both implemented and reinforced the policies of the colonial administration heavy on feudal structures, vast landholdings and oppressive taxation. It was not until the late 19th century when stirrings of discontent inflamed the hearts of the Filipino clergy to stand up against the Church hierarchy. The execution of Fathers Burgos, Gomez and Zamora was the final straw that triggered the upheaval within the Catholic Church. As the Revolution of 1896 was gathering momentum, the Filipino clergy formed a firm alliance with the *Katipunan* and called for the establishment of a Church free from the control of Rome and wholly run and led by Filipinos.

National independence was nipped in the bud by the Americans who came to supplant Spanish rule. The newly established Philippine Republic led by General Emilio Aguinaldo and his army were driven by relentless US military operations to exhaustion and eventual surrender as they retreated and made their final stand in the hinterlands of Cagayan-Isabela. Thereafter, the US colonial government banned all revolutionary activities by issuing laws prohibiting political parties, displaying of the national flag, singing of national anthem and even speaking the native language in schools.

Many nationalist figures continued the fight for independence even under the watchful eye of the Americans. Prominent among them was Isabelo de los Reyes, known popularly as Don Belong, who is considered the Father of the Philippine Labor Movement. In February 2, 1902, Don Belong organized and was elected president of the first national labor union in the country, the *Union Obrera Democratica (UOD)*, during the assembly of associations (gremio) of printers, lithographers, book binders and other peasants and workers (Lim, 2001). The following day, he declared the establishment of the Philippine Independent Church (PIC) and installed Gregorio Aglipay as Supreme Bishop. One year after, PIC otherwise known as *Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI)* was embraced by almost 25% of the population, or about one and a half million members, as claimed by an account given by the *La Iglesia Filipina Independiente Revista Catolica (LIFIRC)* in October 1903 (Ranche, 1999)

IFI's Brief Ascendancy

For quite sometime, *IFI* kept alive the embers of nationalism that was slowly being extinguished by the American administrators. During masses, *IFI's* liturgies were peppered with nationalist symbols and recollections of the revolution. Nationalistic songs were woven within religious hymns. *IFI* members sewed the flag on priest's vestments and had the national anthem played by a band as the Eucharist was raised at the altar (Roxas-Lim, 2001). *IFI* congregations served as sanctuary to the Filipino masses who were alienated from friar-controlled parishes and served to express their faith. *IFI's* teachings extolled the connection between labor and faith as found among the teachings of *Katipunan*. The Decalogue of Andres Bonifacio exalted good work and industry next to the worship of God (Javier, 2001).

Restoring Catholic Church Supremacy under American Colonial Rule

IFI stood little chance to prosper under the American regime. In 1906, the US Supreme Court ordered the Filipinos to return all Church properties to the friar orders and to the Archbishop whose Spanish members were replaced by Americans. The US also guaranteed the continuation of foreign dominated Churches, schools, hospitals even as these institutions were built and paid for by Filipinos through taxation and forced labor. Papal documents issued by Pope Leo XII in 1902 reinstated all Church properties which were formerly under the patronage of the Spanish crown to the Roman Catholic Church under the Archbishop of Manila (Roxas-Lim, 2001).

Meanwhile the *IFI* congregation was slowly marginalized and pushed to the fringes of a colonial society that was witnessing the proliferation of various religious groups and Christian denominations. The Filipinization of the Catholic Church started by *IFI* continued under American colonial tutelage. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church remained a bastion of conservatism and elitism. Notwithstanding Jose Rizal's exposition of Spanish friar oppression in his *Noli* and *El Fili*, the Catholic Church persisted in catering to the elite and upper class, and even maintained the Latin-spoken liturgy up to the late 1960s, continuing the further alienation of the masses.

CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL ACTION

Initial Stages

Social action among Church people became pronounced in the 1960s but the seedbeds were laid even earlier. In the 1920s, American Jesuits replaced the Spanish Jesuits and their looming presence indicated that the Church belonged not only to the past but to the present and future as well. The Society of Jesus instructed the Jesuits in the Philippines to create a center of social action and social studies. Fr. Horacio de la Costa suggested that *social action* should consist of the following: 1) spiritual assistance to laborers and labor leaders; 2) mediation and conciliation with all sincerity, charity and prudence to explain the social doctrine of the Church to management and labor; and 3) promote health social organization and institutions (Abalajen, 2000).

As an organizational expression of *social action*, the Institute of Social Order (ISO) came about in 1947. Organized by the Jesuits, ISO became a training ground for labor leaders who wished to organize trade unions. Among the Jesuit priests, it was Fr. Walter Hogan who proposed cooperation between the capitalists and workers to promote a healthy economy and decent life. However he was also a staunch anti-communist when communism was still an ideological force to contend with. Fr. Hogan befriended the workers, actively took part in union meetings, joined picket lines, attended labor hearings and immersed himself with the life of the workers (Abalajen, 2000).

Fr. Hogan led a group of young Filipinos in organizing the Federation of Free Workers which became the link between ISO and the working class. FFW promoted the material, physical and intellectual well-being of workers through the rights to organization and collective bargaining. Paramount in the teachings of FFW was the centrality of God as the creator of all men hence the essential brotherhood existing between workers and capitalists. By 1952, FFW had gained 38,000 members from 150 establishments all over the country. In the same year, it joined the political arena by supporting the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay (Torres-Yu, 2000).

Fr. Hogan's involvement in labor cause was resented by the Catholic Church hierarchy which restricted him from preaching and talking of social injustice outside the schools operated by the Jesuits.

FFW leaders were banned from conducting classes at the labor management school of the ISO (Abalajen, 2000).

Widening Church Involvement in Social Action

By mid 1950, Church involvement in the labor sector spread via the network of the National Church of Christ of the Philippines-United Church of Christ of the Philippines (NCCP-UCCP). NCCP formed the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) whose activities involved continuing dialogue, consultations and meetings among religious, mission workers, lay leaders and labor unions. UIM organized Labor-Management Education Seminars and Leadership Training Program for Clergy and Laity in Industrial Areas and Agro-Industrial Training for Agro-Industrial Workers. It also conducted "exposure trips" for seminarians and foreign guests in rural and urban settings. These were meant to open the eyes of exposurees to the plight of workers, thus promoting a symbiotic learning process that benefited both the religious and labor sector. The educational component of UIM tackled the root causes of poverty and underlined the theological basis for Christian commitment.

UCCP formed the Committee on Industrial Life (COIL), organized and educated the local union for coconut factory workers in Candelaria, Lucena City and Lusacan, Tiaong, Quezon. In 1957, pastors and seminarians were sent for a one-month exposure program to work in factories and to live with the workers. Between 1959 to 1964, COIL coordinated Protestant and Catholic ministries in industry programs that involved institutions such as the Union Theological Seminary and the Divinity School of Siliman University (Aguilan, 1994). COIL and UIM also conducted Asia-wide conference on industrial evangelism.

The concept used to weld together the spiritual with the temporal needs of the labor sector was 'industrial evangelism.' An Inter-Church Industrial Evangelism Committee was organized by UCCP. Between 1966 to 1967, this committee spearheaded the conduct of industrial evangelism seminars in key cities.

Increasing Militancy

By mid 1960s, major events were taking place which pushed the Church to take a more active role on issues of social justice.

First, was the convening by the Pope of the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 which heralded the revitalized role of the Catholic Church in meeting the challenges of the modern world. Vatican II promoted the unity of Catholics and non-Catholics in the spirit of ecumenism, encouraged the increasing role of lay people in pastoral and apostolic work, and effected broad changes in the liturgy to bring the teachings and gospel of Christ closer to the people. One major change was the use of vernacular language instead of Latin in the celebration of the mass and other sacraments. The progressive block within the Church hierarchy called on Church people to engage in pastoral work among the people.

Second, were the unfolding and convergence of national and international events that challenged the Church to take a stand. In Asia, Latin America and most parts of the world, peoples were standing up against modern colonialism and fighting their own wars of liberation. The United States was losing heavily in the Vietnam War. The oil-rich Arab nations have formed their oil cartel, took charge of their oil wells, precipitating regular increases in the price of oil. The Vietnam War and its aftermath weakened the peso against the dollar, causing inflation and rising prices. In the country, Marcos was in fear of a growing insurgency and student rallies were staged in and out of the campuses. It was a time of social activism that began with students and spread out to the masses. During and after the first quarter storm in 1970, Christian-led and organized elements were demonstrating in the streets against the Marcos Administration .

In 1968, the Philippine Priests, Inc. was established and during its first two congresses, it encouraged the youth, peasants and workers to actively transform society and affirmed the role of peasants and workers as main forces in changing society (Piers and Villegas, 2001).

Active Community Organizing

In 1969, the Urban Industrial Mission took a leap in *social action* by forming the Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organization (PECCO) jointly with the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. PECCO initiated the organization of some 180,000 slum dwellers of Tondo Foreshoreland into a people's organizations called Zone One Tondo Organization or ZOTO

(Racelis, 2000). From working within the confines of factories and industrial sites, Church elements spread out into urban poor communities among the informal sector who made up the greater bulk of the working sector – food vendors, hairdressers, barbers, carpenters, scavengers, waitresses, small shop and store owners.

ZOTO became a training ground for Community Organizing (CO), a synthesis of various approaches, combining local culture, values and social organization with the conceptual framework and methodologies of Saul Alinsky, Paolo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez and Karl Marx (Racelis, 2000). The education program crafted by ZOTO was two-pronged. On the one hand, it sought to expose social realities and linked them to structures of oppression, and on the other, it taught people to respond to their own welfare needs via cooperatives and livelihood programs.

CO work focused on active mobilization of people in fighting for their own issues through a series of well-planned negotiations and dialogue with the government. CO work meant transforming passive people into pro-active constituents relying on their own collective energies and overcoming traditional barriers to participation, thereby gaining access to resources and power. The issue of land ownership was foremost in the ZOTO Agenda. Tondo Foreshore slum dwellers were mobilized to resist relocation and transformation of their territory into a dump site, later called "Smokey Mountain" and demanded on-site upgrading and housing development.

From Urban Mission to Rural Mission

In 1973, NCCP expanded the role of UIM to include the concerns of other sectors such as urban poor, fisher folk, farmers, farm workers and migrant workers. UIM merged with Rural Life and Agricultural Development to form Urban Rural Mission (URM) (Cortes, 2001). An issue taken up by URM was the dislocation of poor families caused by the widespread entry of transnational corporations. URM formation programs called for a six-month immersion of lay and religious leaders in rural communities to effect lasting and more thorough changes.

Another organization spawned by Vatican II was the Rural Missionaries Program which took up the cause of rural peasants. RMP was conceived by AMRSP in 1969 and consisted of immersion/exposure and organizing work. RMP believed that "the struggles

of workers and peasants are intricately linked: both sectors are involved in production, yet both have little control over the means of production and neither, consequently, have control of what is produced" (Fox, 2001).

Effects of Martial Law

In 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law. Overnight, the military engaged in a massive "communist witch hunt" and the religious congregations were not spared from military incursions. In 1972, NCCP-UIM was labeled 'subversive', placed under surveillance and eventually outlawed. In 1974, the military conducted a raid and arrested a number of NCCP-URM leaders including Rev. La Verne Mercado who was NCCP General Secretary and Rev. Harry Daniel, a former executive secretary of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)-UIM (Aguilan, 1994).

In 1976, PECCO ceased to operate; its demise could be traced to the ideological debates and rivalries within the mass movement which spilled over to the social development community. PECCO was split into two, leading to the formation of two separate organizations - the Community Organization of the Philippines Enterprise (COPE) and the Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment or PEACE. The latter organization continued the protestant's program on people's empowerment through the vehicle of people's organizations.

The Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) became major players in the period of Martial Law, defending human rights and setting up institutions featuring grassroots action. The Church became the moral guardian of the State, which was becoming more adversarial to labor. Pope John Paul II emphasized in his 1981 social encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* the primacy of labor over capital, relegating the role of capital as a mere instrument in the hands of those who work. Acting on this papal message, the Church was compelled to raise serious questions on the basic attitudes of businesses in regard to labor unions, collective bargaining, just wages, working conditions and the like.

In the 7th Convention of the National Secretariat for Social Action-Justice and Peace (NASSA-JP), it stated: "most of the labor policies of the martial law government are contrary to workers'

interest citing unjust wage structure, the banning of strikes, one industry-one union policy and the policy of the multinational corporations to take advantage of cheap labor.”

Under Martial Law, many cause-oriented groups, political activists and people's organizations were forced to operate underground. Under such dangerous political climate, individuals and groups whose civil liberties were curtailed were forced to seek the protection of the Church or flee for sanctuary. Pastoral centers opened their doors to people who were being hunted or persecuted. It was under the auspices of AMRSP that organizations such as the Task Force Detainees or the Urban Missionaries were able to take flight, despite close scrutiny by the military.

In the mid 1970s, the sugar market crashed and world price plummeted. The sugar workers in the large haciendas of Negros or *Sacadas*, became even more restless, suffering from intolerable working and low wage conditions. AMRSP commissioned an in-depth study of the conditions of the sugar workers. By 1971, the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Bacolod led by Fr. Luis Jalandoni helped organize the sugar workers into a federation to fight for worker's economic rights and to push for land reform of vast sugar lands (Lucero, 2000). AMRSP's involvement was viewed by some sectors in the Catholic Church as too political, an observation shared by the hierarchy in Rome. The more radical elements among the clergy were branded not only as collaborators of the New People's Army but tagged as 'communists.' Red scare spread inside religious orders, forcing the Church to take stock of itself, triggering long and tedious series of dialogues within the Church Hierarchy and the Papal Representative.

The La Tondeña Strike: A Baptism of Fire for the Religious

The first strike under Martial Law dramatized the role of priests and nuns in the struggle for workers' rights. This was the La Toñdena strike of 1975 wherein workers staged a strike against the casualization of 500 permanent workers. There were a handful of nuns, priests and seminarians that stood guard and held vigil as they distributed food and manifestos during the 44-hour strike. Military forces swooped down and arrested some 500 workers. An American priest and two Filipina nuns clung to the buses hauling away the workers (Piers and Villegas, 2001). A few days later, Presidential Decree 823 was issued banning strikes

and prohibiting support to strikers. The La Tondeña Strike was a baptism of fire for some of the religious who supported it.

The religious were also involved in militant strikes, to name a few: Gelmart during its certification election, strikes in the Bataan Export Processing Zone, Solid Mills, Top Form, Foam Tex and Artex. In Rosario, Cavite, the Church created the Worker's Assistance Center in 1996 and a Diocese Labor Center in Imus, Cavite due to increasing workers activity in the Calabarzon area (Piers and Villegas, 2001).

Basic Christian Community Organization: Integrating Conscientization with Community Organizing

Sometime in 1977, NASSA established *BCC-CO* or Basic Christian Community - Community Organization. This was a concept that bore resemblance to the theory and practice of Liberation Theology that was then popular in Latin American countries. The central goal of liberation theology was to make religion and the Churches into active agents of change in Latin America. Church people were urged not only to help and speak for the poor but also to provide tools of organization and a moral vocabulary that made equality both legitimate and possible. Liberation theology emerged as part of a broad effort to rethink the meaning of religious experience and the role that the Catholic Church ought to play in society and politics.

BCC-CO welded the concept of 'conscientization' with community organizing. A key concept in the religious training of *BCC* members, 'conscientization' was defined succinctly as coming to a consciousness of oppression and a commitment to end that oppression." Paolo Freire, the Brazilian educator who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1974, refers to it as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." By developing critical consciousness, individuals recognize the systems of oppression in which they exist, articulate their roles and place in these systems, and develop concrete strategies to empower themselves and others to engage in social action.

The *BCC-CO* approach had taken roots in many rural areas more particularly among workers in the Negros sugar plantations. It was said to provide the Negrenses with a life-support system

that was vastly different from those offered by traditional government structures. It became a vehicle for socio-economic projects initiated by the people themselves and spawned such other associations of fishermen and farmers and cooperatives. However the priests involved became subject to harassment by military forces that began to view their evangelizing work as part of revolutionary struggle.

AMRSP created the Urban Missionaries in March 1977 where it put in practice the BCC-CO methodology. The initial members of UM were part of the religious contingent that supported the La Tondeña Strike. UM initially had two-fold tasks: 1) to promote and generate support for people's organizations 2) to draw Church personnel to support the struggle of the masses in Metro Manila (Villanueva, 2001). UM developed various programs including labor information centers, income generating projects, primary health care programs, as well as "exposure program" for Church people (Urban Missionaries Report, 2002). The UM way of Community Organizing followed four stages: exposure, immersion, involvement, integration. It required painstaking work of identifying the felt needs of workers and their families, constantly dialoguing, coordinating and collaborating with partner institutions and agencies and sharing reflections regularly to strengthen one's spirituality and consistency of faith conviction with political commitment.

INROADS OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

In 1994-1995, the Philippine government through Senate ratification became a member of the World Trade Organization. The inroads of globalization affected the plight of the working class. Companies had to undergo massive restructuring to cope with the change brought about by the new interconnectedness of the economy. New labor trends emerge such as flexibilization, informalization and casualization.

Perceiving the grave impact of globalization through contractualization, UM decided to address the issue by focusing its efforts and services to the contractual workers. The *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Manggagawang Kontraktwal* or *SNMK* was formed in two communities. UM concentrated in organizing work among contractual workers and expanded their areas of operation in

urban poor communities among them Valenzuela, Quezon City, Taguig and Paranaque (Villanueva, 2001). Among the institutions tapped by UM to educate the workers was SOLAIR which gave valuable seminars on labor entrepreneurship and cooperative formation.

Pastoral Work with Migrant Workers

As early as the 1960s there have been waves of immigration of Filipino workers to all parts of the world. The first wave in the 1960s began with the mass exodus of doctors, nurses and professionals in developed countries such as US and Canada. The second wave in the 1970s saw the flight of skilled and semi skilled workers to the Middle East countries. The third wave in the 1980s and 1990s saw the deployment of ever bigger number of workers among the Asian tiger economies, this time engaging in jobs that were considered dirty, dangerous and degrading. This last wave saw the deplorable feminization of the labor force as more and more Filipino women were recruited to become domestic helpers or lured into the entertainment business, in jobs that are among the lowest or lowliest in society.

The phenomenon of worker migration reflected the rising unemployment and the growing enslavement of migrant workers to foreign labor market. According to Labor Secretary Patricia Sto.Tomas about 2,300 people are leaving everyday for overseas job. On average, 70,000 to 75,000 are leaving every month.

In response to migration, the Church began to develop a pastoral ministry for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). It established pastoral centers, Church ministries, or sanctuaries wherever there are heavy concentration of Filipino workers. Church ministry consists of the spiritual ministry and the welfare ministry. The welfare ministry addresses the immediate and urgent needs of the migrants. The spiritual ministry arises from the Christian imperatives of love, charity and compassion and commitment to strategically lessen the vulnerability of migrant workers.

In 1981, the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers Society (MFMW) was established by the Resource Center for Philippine Concerns (RCPC) through the help of Bishop La Verne Mercado, then General Secretary of NCCP. MFMW focuses its efforts on Crisis Intervention and Prevention through Migrant Empowerment (CIPME). Its

programs and services include 1) pastoral care, social welfare and legal assistance; 2) education, training, organizing and campaigns; and 3) documentation, research and information dissemination (De la Torre, 2001). These are achieved through: para-legal counseling and legal assistance; emergency assistance, refuge for displaced and distressed women migrant workers and pastoral care and prison and hospital visitations. MFMW's crisis intervention aims to empower workers and not create dependency. OFW problems are analyzed not in isolation but as part of the bigger structures that breed exploitation and hence must be reflected and acted upon in the context of the struggle for social justice.

In 1991, the Second Pastoral Council of the Philippine Catholic Church laid down the pastoral policy for migrant's care. It stipulated that the social action of the Church must pay special attention to the problems and concerns of migrants and their families. Local parishes began ministering to migrant workers and designing programs to suit their particular needs. Parishes such as the Lady of the Abandoned in Mandaluyong City and the Parokya ni San Juan Bosco in Tondo Manila conduct regular counseling, bible sharing and prayer sessions, micro enterprise development, para-legal assistance for the migrant workers and their families (Opiniano, 2001).

Basic Ecclesial Communities and Community Rebuilding

Beginning in the 1990s, the Catholic hierarchy began absorbing its social ministries through so-called Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). NASSA paved the way for the establishment of BECs by incorporating its National Country Program (NCP) within its framework. NCP has narrowed its development priorities into five thematic concerns, namely: Sustainable Agriculture, Ecology, Women and Children, Agri-development and Rural Enterprise and Indigenous People (NASSA Report).

BECs were widely adopted after the EDSA Revolution of 1986 and the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP11). Originating in Latin America, BECs gained foothold in the Philippines through the efforts of the Maryknoll Missionaries working in the Dioceses of Tagum and Mati. Its early models were liturgical and development oriented. However, unlike BCCs which became entry points of left-leaning priests and clergy in pushing forth their

liberationist theories, BECs had the blessings of the Vatican with forewarnings that they should not become venues for "political polarization or fashionable ideologies ready to exploit their immense human potential" nor they become vehicles for "systematic protest and hypercritical attitude, under the pretext of authenticity and a spirit of collaboration."

Nevertheless, the NCP program of NASSA argued that BECs are potential and effective vehicles for the empowerment of the poor, actively partaking in the process of social transformation and anchored on a broad constituency who are committed and capable of building peace based on justice.

Church Exhortation in the Emerging Globalization

In 1988, CBCP, the official voice of the Catholic Church hierarchy, released a document entitled Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Economy which outlined the Church's position and thrust in the light of the global economic scenario. The document reiterated one of the important decrees of the second Plenary Council stating the task of social action to "set up special programs to address such crucial issues as peace and economy, agrarian and industrialization concerns, the exploitation of women and minors and overseas workers, children and youth, and intensify the organization of the grassroots people or empowerment and self-reliance through cooperatives and livelihood programs and projects" (cbcponline.net/documents). The Pastoral letter took a critical look at the Philippine economy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Over a century ago, the Catholic Church was denounced by Filipino nationalists as the oppressor of the poor and the epitome of conservatism and elitism, a far cry from its professed present-day role as catalyst, fiscalizer, protector of the poor and defender of human rights.

We have seen how the Church evolved from an inward looking to an outward looking institution, from a reactive to a proactive Church, immersed in *social action*, sensitive to socio-political-economic issues, and responsive to material needs. The road to this metamorphosis had been traversed in the light of the many

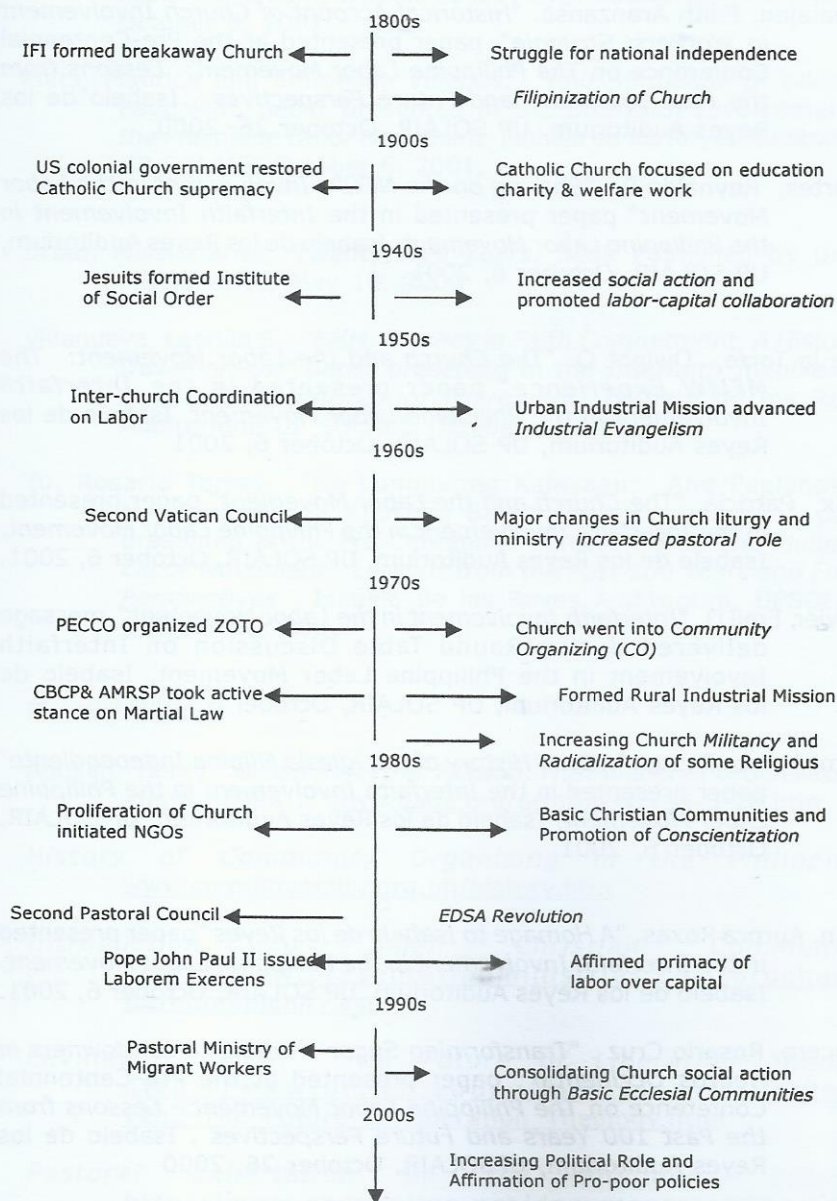
changes and turmoils that swept the local and global arena. Much of the steps taken by the Church were adaptations to and modifications of ideological and philosophical trends and practices from around the world. Ideas such as Industrial Evangelism, Community Organizing, Conscientization, Basic Christian Communities were carried home by clerics and nuns from European and American countries. The impetus was also brought about by changes initiated by the Vatican as conveyed by the Second Vatican Council and by latter day Popes, such as Pope John Paul II in his comprehensive discourse on the primacy of labor over capital known as *Laborem Exercens*. Vatican Council II was propelled by the imperatives of the modern times and its injunction for the religious to go out and integrate with the poor. Vatican II also radically changed the notion of the Church from that which was defined as exclusively comprising of the religious orders and congregations, to one which included the entire flock of the laity and faithful.

As Church elements began to leave the confines of their monasteries to mingle with the poor, they were transformed by the realities they came to face. Some sectors of the Church ventured into dangerous grounds and embraced more radical beliefs to express their sympathy with the working class. Still others played the role of protectors and offered sanctuaries to those who were persecuted, a role that did not sit well with the State. During the Martial Law years, the Church was instrumental in the proliferation of NGOs and civil society. Church funding from abroad were channeled to grassroots organizations rather than to government institutions.

In the 1990s, the Church institutionalized small Christian communities not only as vehicles for evangelizing but also as vehicles to push through socio-economic programs that the government has failed to address. Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) became the end channels on which the Church poured its resources to benefit the poor and needy. However further research has to be done to prove the success of these schemes.

After the EDSA Revolution of 1986, the Church has clearly demonstrated its power to create a dent in the political landscape thru direct political action or thru moral persuasion. Church groups and charismatic religious leaders exert a significant influence in the political arena by fielding or endorsing their candidates. This intermingling of politics and spirituality however remains tenuous, one which may weaken or strengthen the Church in the future.

**TIMELINE: Significant Dates of Church Involvement
in the Labor Movement**



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