

The Formation and Maintenance of Traditionalist Catholicism

A Preliminary Sociological Appraisal of the Society of St. Pius X

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This paper discusses the rise of Traditionalist Catholicism as a movement within contemporary Catholicism. Traditionalist Catholicism is a recent worldwide movement of bishops, priests and laypeople characterized by their attachment to traditional forms of Catholic worship and doctrine, and therefore reject, in varying degrees, the reforms of Vatican II Council in 1962-1965. To date, the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) has been, since 1970, the largest and most organized Traditionalist Catholic organization. Using qualitative and quantitative data generated from sociological research in Our Lady of Victories Church (OLVC) in Quezon City, Metro Manila in the Philippines, this paper investigates the means by which the SSPX espouses its Traditionalist Catholic stance in the Philippine context. The findings show that the SSPX engage with the "Catholic identity" of the Philippines by offering an alternative view of Philippine history that is positively disposed to Catholic interests before and after the Spanish colonial period. In the local context, the SSPX is able to organize a core base of committed members that espouse Traditionalist Catholicism through active recruitment using interpersonal networks. The local presence of the SSPX in the Philippines, however, assumes its place in the larger advocacy of the SSPX for a "return to Tradition" within mainstream Catholicism.

The 'received wisdom' in the sociology of religion is keen on explaining the decline of religious practice in modern societies. This decline is summed up in the classical 'secularization thesis', which remains to be the most pervasive explanation of the crisis of religious belief and practice in the face of modern values. However, as modern values continue to delegitimize the central claims of religious belief and practice in certain parts of the world, the resurgence of religious belief and practice even in supposedly 'secular' societies (Brown, 1981; Gustafson, 1982; Bax, 1985; Dubisch, 1992; Carroll, 1995) challenges the validity of explanations that simply relegate religion to the private sphere. Peter Berger, once sympathetic to the secularization thesis, has observed this resurgence and has modified his earlier affirmative stance to argue that the world is increasingly becoming *deseccularized*: "[t]he world today...is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (Berger, 1999, p. 2).

One limitation of the secularization thesis is its inability to account for the capacity of religious institutions to adapt to modernity. In fact, faith communities have regarded modernity with utmost seriousness, and they have formulated varying responses to issues confronting religious belief and practice in modern life. In some instances, debates about forging a "proper relationship" with modernity have even created tensions within faith communities themselves. Modernizing currents from the West have provoked serious reflections about how modernity itself can be "Islamized" (Kepel, 1994, p. 2), in contrast to secularist currents within Islam that envision far-reaching concessions to modern values. In the Anglican Communion, disputes over issues pertaining to women in the priesthood in 1992, homosexuality in priestly ministry in 2003, and women's ordination to the episcopate in 2010 continue to stir debates, and has sometimes led to "realignment of alliances" between conservative and liberal sections of the Communion. In the Catholic Church, certain moves toward accommodation to modernity have sparked debates, as different

ideological persuasions assert their views about the proper stance between the church and the modern world.

In this paper, I refer to the abovementioned polarizations in faith communities to discuss *Traditionalist Catholicism* and its existence in the Philippines. Traditionalist Catholicism is a world-wide movement in contemporary Catholicism that illustrates the ideological conflicts that have arisen since the aftermath of Vatican II Council held in 1962 to 1965. It envisions to “reform” contemporary Catholicism along conservative lines, bringing it closer to pre-Vatican II theological stances and sacramental practices. However, while it seeks to arrest and reverse the effects of recent changes in mainstream Catholicism, Traditionalist Catholic groups operating in local contexts make sense of situations “on the ground” and respond to them as well. The dynamics of the interaction of such groups with local realities remain an interesting subject matter for research.

In this paper I focus my investigation of the localized responses of the Society of St. Pius X (henceforth SSPX) to religious and social issues in the Philippine context. I concern myself in determining how mechanisms of recruitment, mobilization and solidarity operate in local situations, considering the exigencies of the religious, political and social situations in the Philippines. Furthermore, I investigate the ways by which the SSPX frames its broader goals for a “restoration of Catholic Tradition” with reference to issues in the Philippine context. Lastly, I endeavor to highlight the implications of the local presence of “international” groups in framing the relationship between the exigencies of local conditions and the groups’ transnational aims.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This paper is a result of the research I conducted in Our Lady of Victories Church (henceforth OLVC) in Quezon City in Metro Manila, Philippines. After initial visits to the church as an interested observer,

I decided to conduct sociological research in 2003 after realizing that, while several research endeavors have been undertaken about the charismatic movement, lay-based movements and parish groups, there is dearth of studies about Traditionalist Catholic groups. After obtaining the permission of the Prior, I conducted fieldwork in the church from December 2005 to March 2006 and occasionally went back for follow-up interviews and observations. Prior to the actual fieldwork, I gathered archival data on the life of its founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, on the history of the organization, and on the relationship between the SSPX and the mainstream Catholic Church. While on fieldwork, I positioned myself as a researcher and did not assume the status of a believer. However, I am quite familiar with their religious activities and doctrinal stances insofar as these relate to my own religious background as a Catholic.

In the course of the fieldwork, I conducted participant observation of their Sunday and weekday Masses, as well as various activities regularly held by church groups. I also interviewed individual respondents about their religious participation in OLVC. Because of my familiarity with issues in post-Vatican II Catholicism, I was able to formulate very specific questions during the life history interviews. I found that respondents generally had adequate knowledge of these issues, and the interview sessions tended to be dynamic and lively. I also requested permission from the Prior to administer a survey instrument to churchgoers. The instrument aimed at obtaining relevant demographic information, religious participation in OLVC, motives for attending church services in OLVC and beliefs about certain issues.¹ After the permission was granted, I was directed to churchgoers recommended by the church secretary and other members of the community. Due to the limitations of relying on referrals (i.e., snowballing technique), I was able to gather only thirty-four (34) accomplished questionnaires; all of the 34 respondents may be considered as "committed churchgoers", that is, members who have

been attending religious services in OLVC for at least five years and have expressed their adherence to the SSPX's doctrinal stances regarding key theological issues. I did not have access to churchgoers who were still new to the community and have not yet made such doctrinal commitment.

PROBLEMATIZING “TRADITIONALIST CATHOLICISM”

There are three general ideological orientations in post-Vatican II Catholic Church: the *revisionist*, *conservative*, and *traditionalist* orientations. Revisionists (or progressives) desire large-scale accommodations to modern sensibilities; they generally advocate for the revision of the official church teaching on artificial contraception, homosexuality and divorce, among others. The conservatives, in sharp contrast with revisionists, rally support for official church teaching and defend traditional ways of exercising authority in the church. Some conservatives have predilection for traditional forms of worship as indicators of obedience to conservative factions in the church hierarchy. Traditionalists, like conservatives, hold fast to traditional (which means pre-Vatican II) rites and theological stances; unlike conservatives, however, traditionalists assail the church hierarchy for enacting various ecclesiastical reforms inspired by Vatican II Council, which they perceive is the sole, if not the most significant, cause of disarray in contemporary Catholicism. The purpose of Traditionalist Catholicism is to resist the implementation of reforms resulting from the abovementioned Council, with the belief that such reforms have resulted to the “autodemolition” of the Catholic Church in modern society (Lefebvre, 1986, 1987).

Studies on the historical and organizational development of Traditionalist Catholic groups in North America are provided by various authors (Dinges, 1983, 1989, 1991; Vaillancourt & Geoffroy, 1996; Cuneo, 1997; Luebbbers, 2001). Traditionalist opposition to the

reforms of Vatican II Council appeared in the United States as early as 1965, with some priests openly disagreeing with mainstream Catholic authorities over the issue of liturgical reform (Dinges, 1983, 1991). In French-speaking Canada (as well as in France), the term *intégrisme catholique* (Catholic *integrism*) is widely used to refer to the open refusal of certain groups to adapt to the reforms of Vatican II Council in the name of traditional dogmatic stances. However, it has been noted that 'tradition' in Traditionalist Catholic circles mainly refers to the teachings of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), as well as the teachings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Popes, specifically Leo XIII (1878-1903), Pius X (1903-1914), Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958). Traditionalist Catholicism especially emphasizes the anti-modernist vein in these popes' teaching (Ladrière, 1985).

Dinges (1987) offers a sociological assessment of Traditionalist Catholicism by perceiving religious ritual as "symbolic vortex" that reveals various social and cultural realities. He situates Traditionalist dissent within certain structural changes in contemporary Catholicism; these structural changes trigger Traditionalist groups to articulate divergent theological positions and mobilize resources in order to resist modifications in the articulation of doctrine and the conduct of public worship (liturgy). Cuneo (1997) investigates Traditionalist Catholic groups that engage in apocalypticism and highlights divergent organizational formations among these groups, from "audience cults" to "introversionist sects". Luebbers (1999) refers to "Remnant Faithful" groups within Catholicism and argues that the rise of such groups is a symptom of certain fears of "de-traditionalization" of institutional Catholicism as it adapts to modernity. As these fears are further exacerbated by perceived anarchy and chaos in church and society, these groups withdraw from the mainstream of society and adhere to an unflinching dualism between good and evil, theories of conspiracy and anticipation of the End-times.

From a Weberian perspective, Traditionalist Catholicism may be considered as a form of organized “legitimate resistance” to *traditional* authority. Weber (1947 [1922]) explains that the exercise of traditional authority is legitimized either through (a) previously-held principles and standards (invoking “immemorial traditions”); or (b) the ruler’s personal power to enact a rule. Conventional Catholic doctrine states that the task of the church is to preserve the “deposit of faith” through a careful handing down (*traditio*) of authentic doctrine by the Pope and bishops, who are safeguarded from teaching doctrinal error. In this sense, the Catholic Church rests upon a defined form of *traditional authority*. “Legitimate resistance” in this context is not about questioning the reliability of the received tradition, but concerns the *proper interpretation* of that tradition. Contrary to certain claims that tradition is monolithic and unitary, Hill (1973) explains that it is possible for different groups to forward different interpretations of a single tradition. Mainstream and Traditionalist Catholicism often refer to the same “Catholic Tradition”; the dispute, however, centers on the issue of which camp is in actual possession of the legitimate interpretation of that Tradition.

Traditionalist Catholicism argues for the legitimacy of its interpretation by appealing to an *ad litteram* interpretation of rules, basically in order to assert the “pristine” character of a tradition against alleged attempts to compromise it (see Hill, 1973, 2007). In the case of the Society of St. Pius X, opposition to reform is justified by an appeal to the “unchanging Tradition of the Church” (Lefebvre, 1987; Laisney, 1989), which includes the teaching of previous Popes and ecumenical Councils before Vatican II Council. The mainstream Catholic Church, following Pope John Paul II’s interpretation in the encyclical *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* in 1988, appeals to the “living Tradition of the Church”, which necessarily includes the teaching authority of Vatican II Council and post-Vatican II Popes. This dispute is rooted in differing views regarding the “hermeneutic of continuity” between pre- and post-

Vatican II theological stances: whereas Traditionalist Catholicism insists on interpreting contemporary doctrinal developments in the light of past teachings, mainstream Catholicism insists on understanding past teachings in the light of contemporary doctrinal developments. There is reference to the same “Tradition of the Church” in both instances, but the finer distinction between “unchanging” and “living” splits the two camps to differing theological views.

From the discussions above, two points of synthesis may be made. The first is that, despite being a counter-movement against Vatican II-inspired reforms, Traditionalist Catholicism’s intimate relationship with mainstream Catholicism’s central doctrinal claims does not allow, at this point, a full-blown separation between the two camps. This is partly due to the ability of the mainstream Catholic Church leadership to “absorb dissent”, that is, the ability to enact certain reforms that are acceptable to Traditionalist Catholics and thus give them ample space within the confines of the mainstream church establishment (see Turner & Killian, 1972; Harrison & Maniha, 1978). The debates between Traditionalist and mainstream Catholicism thus remain as intra-ecclesiastical disputes over the proper interpretations of certain doctrines.

The second is that Traditionalist Catholicism’s interaction with the broader realities of local contexts predisposes it to function as a social movement that envisions a restoration of traditional values in society. In this light, various researches on social movements are helpful in understanding aspects of Traditionalist Catholic resistance to modernity. Social movements intend to achieve certain goals that relate to crises in society that need resolution (Demerath, 2008). Traditionalist Catholicism’s aim is to effect a, “return to Tradition” within mainstream Catholicism; as Traditionalist Catholics argue, it is only through forging this path that institutional Catholicism can restore its spiritual élan and become a ferment for renewal in modern society. On the basis of

this goal, Traditionalist Catholicism assumes a form of *collective identity* that is rooted in shared beliefs and feelings of solidarity among members (see Melucci, 1995; Della Porta & Diani, 1999). This collective identity combines a predilection for traditional forms of worship with a militant stance against the modification of Catholic doctrines and sacramental practices. Its firm stance in favor of traditional doctrine and practice enables Traditionalist Catholics to confront the errors of “the world” without being infected by them; moreover, it is believed that their assiduous “fidelity to Tradition” facilitates the return of traditional Catholic values in mainstream society.

THE SOCIETY OF ST. PIUS X (SSPX) AS A TRADITIONALIST CATHOLIC MOVEMENT

The SSPX is by far the most organized and largest Traditionalist Catholic group in post-Vatican II Catholicism. Its inception is, like all Traditionalist Catholic groups, located within significant changes in contemporary Catholicism initiated by the Vatican II Council. Commenced in 1962 as a worldwide gathering of high-ranking Catholic prelates, the council aimed at crafting a pastoral response to address the increasing distance between Catholicism and modern sensibilities. In the course of the deliberations, sharp ideological disagreements arose between those who favored *aggiornamento* (renewal) and those who insisted on the unchangeability of Catholic doctrine. The “European alliance”, consisting of prelates from countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, represented the first camp and pressed for a more positive stance vis-à-vis the modern world. This informal alliance significantly expanded as prelates from non-European countries joined its ranks in subsequent sessions of the council (Wiltgen, 1967). The conservative prelates, in an attempt to block the influence of the liberal majority, organized themselves into a pressure group and labeled their bloc the *International Group of Fathers (Coetus Internationalis Patrum)*. Around 250 prelates in number, the members

of the *Coetus* argued along the lines of traditional interpretations of the church's doctrines and took a guarded, if not pessimistic, view with regard to reform (Wiltgen, 1967).

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of Tulle, France (himself a member of the *Coetus* during the deliberations in Vatican II Council) established the *Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X* (its official name) in 1970 and opened its first seminary in Econe, Switzerland. Ever since its inception, however, the SSPX seminary in Econe is known to be *exclusively* attached to the Traditional Latin Mass and other traditional forms of liturgy and doctrine. When Lefebvre was asked in 1972 to explain why such is the case, he replied that he found it inconceivable to establish a seminary with the "New Mass" (Lefebvre, 1987). Lefebvre's unwillingness to enact Vatican II Council's liturgical reforms made the seminary in Econe open to attack: for instance, some bishops labeled it as a *séminaire sauvage* (wildcat seminary) in 1973 and refused to recommend seminarians to undertake seminary formation there. Moreover, they accused Lefebvre of failing in obedience to Pope Paul VI's directive to implement the newly-published *Order of Mass* in all Latin Catholic communities in 1970. In order to respond to these allegations, Vatican officials arranged an *Apostolic Visitation* (investigation) in the Econe seminary, which was conducted by two apostolic visitors on 11 to 13 November 1974.

On 21 November 1974, in a fit of "righteous indignation" over the apostolic visitors' perceived heterodox theological opinions, Lefebvre wrote his famous *Declaration*, in which he accused the mainstream Catholic Church's leadership of departing from authentic doctrine because of its "neo-Modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies (Lefebvre, 1974, cited in Laisney, 1989). As a response to his *Declaration*, Vatican officials suppressed the Society of St. Pius X in 1975 and prohibited Lefebvre from conducting ordinations. However, Lefebvre refused to recognize the validity of the prohibition and continued ordaining

seminarians from Econe. Lefebvre likewise communicated frequently with Vatican officials and with Popes Paul VI and John Paul II on several occasions in order to explain his stand against ongoing reforms in the mainstream Catholic Church.

The standoff between the Society of St. Pius X and the mainstream Catholic Church reached a significant turn on 29 June 1987, when Lefebvre revealed his plan to ordain bishops. Vatican officials discouraged him from doing this, and dialogues between the two camps resulted in the signing of the *Protocol of Accord* on 5 May 1988 between Lefebvre and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who became Pope Benedict XVI in 2005). The *Protocol* spelled out the status of the Society of St. Pius X within mainstream Catholicism and suggested practical ways that aim to address the needs of communities that are strongly attached to pre-Vatican II liturgical rites. It was a carefully-crafted document that sought to end the long-standing dispute between Traditionalist and mainstream Catholicism. However, Lefebvre decided to disregard the terms of this agreement and continued his plan of ordaining bishops; on 29 June 1998 he ordained four SSPX priests to the episcopate in Econe. Two days later, the Congregation for Bishops issued a decree of excommunication for Lefebvre, his co-consecrator De Castro-Mayer from Brazil, and the four newly-ordained bishops, namely: Fellay, from Switzerland; de Galarreta, from Spain; Tissier de Mallerais, from France; and Williamson, from England. The decree explains that episcopal consecration without the required papal mandate constitute a *schismatic act* punishable by *latae sententiae* (automatic) excommunication. The leadership of the Society of St. Pius X, however, argues against this explanation and refuses to accept the validity of this decree.

After 1998, there were various initiatives for dialogue that aimed to restore broken ties between the two camps: one in 2000 (under Pope John Paul II) and another in 2005 (under Pope Benedict XVI). In

an act perceived as a further concession to Traditionalist Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 lifted former restrictions with regard to the use of the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal, the main pre-Vatican II liturgical text used by a majority of those in the Traditionalist Catholic movement. Moreover, the same pontiff remitted the decree of excommunication against the four SSPX bishops in 2009. A theological dialogue between the two camps resumed in 2009 and is ongoing as of this writing, and neither side has spoken publicly about recent developments.

The SSPX initiated missionary work in the Philippines in 1992, when the founding priests established the *Corpus Christi Catholic Chapel* in Quezon City, Metro Manila. Eventually, they were able to purchase a parcel of land in New Manila district in Quezon City, where the *Our Lady of Victories Church (OLVC)* is currently located. The Society of St. Pius X has likewise established its presence in other provinces in the Philippines: Tanay, Rizal in Luzon; Bohol, Cebu, Leyte and Iloilo islands in the Visayas; and Davao, Cagayan de Oro, and South Cotabato in Mindanao. Their presence in most of these areas is confined to the establishment of chapels and Mass centers where an SSPX priest occasionally conducts Traditional Latin Mass; however, they have established residential communities of priests and brothers in Quezon City in Luzon and Iloilo in the Visayas.

The first Filipino SSPX priest was ordained in Our Lady of Victories Church in 1998, and since then a number of Filipinos have been ordained priests. Filipinas have also been received into various Traditionalist religious orders in Europe and the United States; the SSPX Tertiaries (Third Order congregation for women) is likewise well-established in the Philippines with a formation house in Iloilo province. Since 1992, there were also prelates from the mainstream Catholic Church in the Philippines that have openly expressed their sympathies for the Society of St. Pius X; in some cases they left their dioceses or

religious orders in the mainstream Church and transferred their residence to Our Lady of Victories Church as a manifestation of loyalty to the cause of Traditionalist Catholicism. The late Fr. Manuel Piñon, a Dominican priest, advocated for the Tridentine Mass in the greater Manila area during the early part of the 1990s. He conducted Tridentine Masses regularly at a side altar in Santo Domingo Church in Manila before he was advised to discontinue celebrating it in public. Frs. Santiago Hughes (deceased) and Edgardo Suelo, formerly diocesan priests from Antipolo (Rizal province, east of Metro Manila) and San Pablo (Laguna province, south of Metro Manila) transferred to Our Lady of Victories Church after being convinced of the position of the SSPX regarding the present-day “crisis” in the mainstream Catholic Church. Lastly, the late Bishop Salvador Lazo, bishop-emeritus of San Fernando (La Union province, in northern Luzon), made a *Profession of Faith* in 1998 to signify his agreement with the SSPX regarding the “disturbing situation” in mainstream Catholicism. He regularly celebrated Mass in Our Lady of Victories Church until his death in 2001.

The main religious activity in OLVC is the Traditional Latin Mass, celebrated twice on weekdays and thrice on Sundays. Eucharistic exposition and benediction, recitation of the rosary and novenas are also held there on a regular basis. The “titular feast” of the church is October 7 (Feast of Our Lady of Victories), which is celebrated there with a Solemn High Mass and procession within the immediate vicinity of the church compound. Like any fully-functional parish, the OLVC has various church groups: some of these groups have counterparts in mainstream Catholic parishes (altar servers, Holy Name Society, Legion of Mary), while others are unique to the church community (Apostles of Mary, Knights of Our Lady, and *Los Cristeros*). The community also organized religious activities in the past, for instance pilgrimages to well known Catholic sites like the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary of Manaoag (Panagasinan) in 1999, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (Manila) in 2000, and the Parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Pagsanjan, Laguna) in 2009. They have also conducted several medical

and socio-civic missions in the neighboring areas and provinces.

The significant majority of members in the church community consist of urban-based Filipinos, although OLVC is administered mostly by foreign SSPX priests for a significant part of its history. In the survey that I conducted with committed members, data shows that churchgoers are fairly young; they tend to be highly educated and are most likely to be professionals. An overwhelming majority of members come from predominantly, if not exclusively, Catholic families. The average length of the respondents' membership in OLVC is 10 years; the greatest influence for the members' introduction to the Traditional Latin Mass is their own family members and relatives. The religious participation of committed members in OLVC is relatively high, committed members usually attending the Traditional Latin Mass more than once a week or once a week. Those who, for some reason, cannot attend Mass in OLVC on a Sunday opt to "sanctify their Sunday" through other personal religious activities; attendance in Masses in mainstream Catholic parishes is *never* an option for committed members.

THEMATIZING RESISTANCE FROM HISTORY: THE SSPX AND THE PHILIPPINES' CATHOLIC PAST

The main goal of the SSPX is to advocate for a "return to Tradition" in mainstream Catholicism by opposing any perceived "injustices against Tradition" perpetrated by post-Vatican II Catholic church officials. While such goal is relevant to any country with a determinable number of Catholic adherents, it is significantly relevant in the case of traditionally "Catholic countries" in Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines in Asia. The establishment of the presence of the SSPX in the Philippines in 1992 has enabled the priests to form a network of priories, churches and Mass centers to re-introduce the Traditional Latin Mass. Besides the formation of Mass centers, however, the SSPX is involved in an "ideological reconceptualization" of the Philippines

in order to establish a stronger base for Traditionalist Catholicism. In this section, I investigate the engagement of the SSPX in formulating a certain image of the Philippines in order to justify the presence of its missionary efforts in the country.

The priests of the SSPX (mostly foreigners) who have been assigned to the Philippines accentuate the vitality of the practice of Catholicism in the country. Fr. Richard Vachon, an SSPX priest who visited OLVC in 1998, states that:

...[the Philippines] still remains very Catholic. The great majority practice it on Sundays. When they meet the priest, they take his hand and bring it to their forehead as a sign of blessing. You see Catholic pictures and statues everywhere. On boulevards and big intersections, they put advertisements like "Families who pray together stay together" and now "Keep Christ in Christmas". On all vehicles, we can see the name of God, Jesus, Mary of Joseph, or a rosary on the mirror, or a holy picture on the dash. They are probably still Catholic because of their devotion to Our Lady, especially to "Our Lady of La Navalle" (sic) who saved them many times from the invasion of the Protestant Dutch by miraculous victories on the sea through the Rosary (in *Communicantes*, 1999, p. 1).

This effusive practice of Catholicism is taken as a cultural landmark of immense value: as opposed to the religious situation in the Western world, where much "fatigue and skepticism and religious indifferentism" are found (Blute, 1995, p. 2), the religious situation in the Philippines is characterized by its vitality. However, it is claimed by SSPX that this vitality is being lost as doctrinal errors slowly erode Catholic sensibilities, partly due to increasing materialism in society but also due to vigorous Protestant proselytizing and the neglect of priests in the mainstream Catholic Church in providing adequate religious instruction. The SSPX sees itself in this situation as the upholder of the country's "Catholic culture" through their advocacy for the Traditional

Latin Mass and “authentic” Catholic doctrine. As Fr. Blute, an SSPX priest, explains, Traditionalist Catholicism is the “‘new leaven’ of the Old Faith” for the Philippines (in *Verbum*, 1995, p. 2).

The SSPX often refers to the Catholic identity of the Philippines, and in the process they revisit issues pertaining to the legitimacy of Spanish colonial rule and the struggle for independence that culminated in the revolution against Spain in 1896. The Spanish colonial enterprise brought Catholicism to the Philippines through the efforts of the religious orders (Phelan, 1959; Sitoy, 1985). However, established Philippine histories highlighted the grave abuse of authority of Spanish colonial officials and friars alike (Agoncillo & Guerrero, 1973; Corpuz, 1989; Constantino, 1978) that led to the outbreak of the revolution in 1896. The *ilustrados* particularly resisted the influence of the friars over the colonial government’s affairs; the friars, in this sense, were deemed as a class that usurped the powers of government to perpetuate its interests. The Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896, as it turns out, was considered by many as a struggle against friar control (Majul, 1967).

In contrast to this, the SSPX defends the evangelical zeal of Spanish friars and their contributions not only to spread Catholicism in the Philippines, but also to promote civilized culture and education. Arguing in favor of the Spanish friars, they refer to certain statements made by church leaders that praised their heroic efforts. In 2001 and 2002, the SSPX District of Asia Newsletter published its “Dossier on the Philippines”, which provides documentation on the religious situation of the Philippines after the Spanish colonial period. In that collection, they published an article published at the *American Ecclesiastical Review* in 1926 by Michael J. O’Doherty, the former Archbishop of Manila, in which he praised the “zeal of the priests of Spain”, and that any mistake on their part is “traceable...to their zeal and generosity than to any less noble motive”. Similarly, the SSPX

published a text of the radio message of Pope Pius XII to the participants of the Marian Congress held in Manila in 1954. In that radio message, the Pope referred to the “apostolic and colonizing impulse of missionary Spain” that led to a peaceful conquest of the islands and a “fusion of races” between Spanish and local population.

In defending the cause of colonial Catholicism in the Philippines, the SSPX attributes the criticism of Spanish friars as part of an orchestrated plot to attack the Church and discredit its reputation. In that version of events, criticisms directed against the Spanish friars during the latter part of the 19th century do not necessarily proceed from a desire for reforms, but from an anticlerical mentality that traces its origins from Freemasonry (Salvador, 2002), a view that is shared by priest-scholars outside the SSPX as well (e.g. Fernandez, 1988; Schumacher, 1973). According to this explanation, the majority of *ilustrados* were themselves members of Masonic lodges, for which reason they expressed clear anticlerical sentiments in their writings. The Freemasons established lodges in Manila at the latter part of Spanish colonial rule to recruit members among the local population. It is claimed that the main task of Freemasonry at this period is to agitate the removal of friars from strategic positions in Philippine public life in order to advance liberal ideas (Fernandez, 1988).

Because of the ‘inherent links’ between Freemasonry, anticlericalism and calls for reform, the SSPX espouses the view that the revolt against Spanish colonialism stood on shaky doctrinal and moral grounds. As certain ideas concerning freedom of worship and freedom of expression were condemned by Pope Pius XI’s *Syllabus of Errors*, the Spanish friars bitterly opposed calls for reform in the Philippines because it is believed that it will pave the way toward liberalism and indifferentism to religion, which in turn will destroy the Catholic foundations of Philippine society (Salvador, 2002). Consequently, as the Philippine Revolution in 1896 is founded upon such ideas, the

struggle for independence serves as an 'excuse' for introducing liberalist and secularist tendencies in government and in public life. Because such principles are inconsistent with Catholic doctrine, the Philippine Revolution in 1896 is believed to be inspired by Freemasonry and leads to conclusions that serve the interest of that organization.

The SSPX directly engages this Philippine 'Masonic Revolution' by appealing to a 'counter-revolution' toward God through a return to Catholic values. As an 'antidote' to perceived "anti-God" and "anti-Church" ideas of the 1896 Revolution, the SSPX espouses the doctrine of the Social Kingship of Christ, perceived as a "revolution toward God" that initiates the return of Catholic values in Philippine society. This is the reason why, according to a resident SSPX priest, the OLVC's façade resembles the façade of Barasoain Church (Parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel) in Malolos, Bulacan. While Barasoain Church is the site of the adoption of the secularist Constitution that legitimized the "Masonic Revolution", the OLVC is the site of the repudiation of secularism and reinstatement of Catholic values. In this sense, the architectural edifice of OLVC reflects specific theological principles that are consistent with the claims of Traditionalist Catholicism (see Hill, 2007, pp. 30-31).

TRADITIONALIST CATHOLICISM AS A COUNTER-RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In the Asian region, the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) was able to establish a sizeable following in the Philippines and in the southern part of India: in both areas, the SSPX has two priories (established communities) that cater to a network of churches and Mass centers. In the Philippines, the SSPX has established an extensive network of chapels and Mass centers in all the major regions in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The role of these priories, chapels and Mass centers is crucial for articulating Traditionalist dissent because it introduces the SSPX to a

broader set of local conditions in the Philippines. Furthermore, the presence of local-born SSPX priests and those that have “come to Tradition” in recent years also contributes significantly to the success of this endeavor. The local-born priests’ intimate knowledge of situations in their respective local contexts provides material with which they articulate Traditionalist Catholic criticisms of mainstream Catholicism and proposals for alternative courses of action.

In the international scene, Lefebvre accused the mainstream Catholic Church of forming a “new religion” that disregarded the historical patrimony of Catholic Tradition to accommodate to the modern world (Lefebvre, 1986). His uncompromising stances leading to the episcopal consecration of four SSPX priests in 1998 is not significantly different from activist responses in other religiously based social movements that take unpopular courses of action out of obedience to a higher standard (e.g., divine will) as opposed to unjust human regulations or laws (Williams, 2003). In the Philippine context, this uncompromising stance translates to their open advocacy of the Traditional Latin Mass and pre-Vatican II articulations of Catholic doctrine; any moves on the part of mainstream Catholic officials to restrict them in this endeavor is perceived as an “injustice against Tradition”. Churchgoers in OLVC recall how Jaime Cardinal Sin, former Archbishop of Manila, and Dominican superiors in Santo Domingo Church in Manila revoked the permission earlier given to the late Fr. Manuel Piñon to celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass. This act is perceived as an attempt by authorities in the mainstream Catholic Church to keep the Traditional Latin Mass away from the rest of the Catholic faithful. Likewise, SSPX priests consider Cardinal Sin’s pastoral letter in 1992 reiterating the “irregular” canonical status of the SSPX vis-à-vis the mainstream Catholic Church as an attack against the “restoration of Tradition”. In that pastoral letter, Cardinal Sin maintained the view that the SSPX is a schismatic organization and that SSPX priests are excommunicated; furthermore, he discouraged

the Catholic faithful from attending Masses in OLVC.

Mutual feelings of sympathy and antipathy that characterize committed members of social movements (see Sherkat, 2003) are very much apparent among churchgoers in OLVC: they manifest feelings of *sympathy* for the SSPX and *antipathy* to perceived errors in the mainstream Catholic Church. In the face of “injustices against Tradition”, churchgoers strengthen their resolve to distance themselves from the mainstream Catholic Church and to commit themselves to the theological cause of Traditionalist Catholicism. During interviews, respondents mention the beginnings of their refusal to attend Masses in mainstream Catholic churches (which they label as *Novus Ordo* Masses) when they were scandalized by various “liturgical abuses”. They eventually refused participation in these Masses because such act would imply their approval of doctrinal errors that underlie such liturgical abuses. Respondents regard the Traditional Latin Mass as the “true Mass”, “the Mass of all time”, and “the Mass of the saints”; consequently, they regard the *Novus Ordo* Mass as a “modern Mass”, a diminution of the spiritual treasures of the Traditional Latin Mass and a “man-centered Mass” (as opposed to the “God-centered” Traditional Latin Mass).

Both interview and survey data indicate the strong interpersonal dimensions of recruiting committed churchgoers and members. Most of the members knew about OLVC from referrals by family members, relatives and colleagues who are already attending religious services there; very few had encountered the SSPX through “non-human agents” like internet materials or newspaper articles. In like manner, a number of committed members in OLVC are *young adults* who have recently finished formal education and are relatively new in their professions. In contrast with certain views among contemporary Catholics that Traditionalist Catholicism only attracts the elderly (since they grew up with the Traditional Latin Mass), the data suggests that

younger generations may also be drawn to Traditionalist Catholicism, especially those who are looking for more “solemn” and “doctrinally sound” Catholic religious services.

The degree of religious commitment of churchgoers is exemplified through their continuous and exclusive religious participation in OLVC. There is a fairly high level of religious participation among committed members; other religious activities (e.g. benediction of the Sacrament, recitation of the Rosary, stations of the Cross) are also generally well-attended there. Continuous contact with other like-minded members is accomplished through participation in church-based groups and various outreach activities organized by OLVC. Again, the interpersonal dimensions (as opposed to the purely personal dimensions) of practicing Traditionalist Catholicism are clearly perceivable here.

In their campaign for a “return to Tradition”, the SSPX considers a number of factors that indicate success. On the micro, personal level, one indicator of success is the number of local SSPX priests, religious brothers and nuns, and oblates. Despite the unavailability of statistical figures, it appears that India and the Philippines have the most number of Traditionalist clerics, nuns, and oblates in the Asian region. They are recruited from among SSPX priories and Mass centers, and have been active in the Traditional Latin Mass long before they decide to enter priesthood and religious life. Another indicator of success is the “conversion” of clerics from the mainstream Church to Traditionalist Catholicism. To date, there is one bishop and two priests in the Philippines who have crossed over from their respective posts in the mainstream Catholic Church to OLVC. There was also a documented case of five Dominican nuns who have left their convent in 1999 after being convinced of Traditionalist Catholicism’s claims.

Since their foundation in the Philippines in 1992, the SSPX has been advocating for the “consecration” of the Philippines to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The last “consecration” of the entire

country was done by President Ramon Magsaysay in the Marian Congress in Manila in 1954. In that consecration, the President especially asked to be delivered from the “advance of communism” (*Manila Times* 12.6.1954; cited in SSPX’s *Newsletter for the District of Asia* 1997) This rite of consecration is a fairly simple ritual by which the head says a prayer in behalf of all his or her constituents. Through personal contacts, the SSPX has successfully facilitated the consecration of certain government offices, *barangays* and towns to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This is especially the case for localities where there is an established SSPX priory or Mass center. The consecrations are deemed by the SSPX as indicators of success, and hence they continue to work vigorously in campaigning for more consecrations, though no consecration of the entire Philippines has occurred as of this writing.

On the macro, structural level, the SSPX considers key events in contemporary Catholicism as indicators of growing interest in Catholic Tradition. The recent *motu proprio* (instruction) by Pope Benedict XVI making the Traditional Latin Mass more accessible in the Catholic world is hailed as a milestone step on the part of the mainstream Church to “veer closer to Tradition”. Likewise, the recent remission of the penalty of excommunication for the four SSPX bishops ordained by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1988 is seen as a positive step toward reconciliation. As of this writing, a panel of theologians from the SSPX and Rome are engaged in doctrinal dialogues over the contentious points that separate the two camps. Both sides share a similar opinion that the contentious issues that separate the SSPX from the mainstream Catholic Church are *doctrinal* in nature. In the local situation, the SSPX perceives a shift of attitudes by some Filipino bishops regarding Traditionalist Catholicism. While a good number are still opposed to the SSPX as an organization, committed members allude to some “friendly bishops” in the mainstream Catholic Church that do not oppose the foundation of SSPX Mass centers in their respective dioceses. In some areas in the Philippines (as elsewhere in Asia), the SSPX priests are in speaking terms with mainstream Catholic bishops.

CONCLUSION: TRADITIONALIST CATHOLICISM, LOCAL AND GLOBAL

As global society tends toward increasing complexity and differentiation, the challenge for faith communities is to be able to articulate a specific stance in order to make sense of events that lead to greater global connectivity, whatever its outcomes may be. This predicament requires the crafting of solutions that straddle between maintaining a “coherent worldview”, on the one hand, “and steadied social engagement while acknowledging the pluralism of the modern world”, on the other hand (Hefner, 1998, p. 98). In this sense, Traditionalist Catholicism, insofar as it is a sustained response to religious modernization, is not to be regarded as anachronistic and “backward”; indeed, such types of religious groups are themselves responses to modernity (Giddens, 1991). Understanding Traditionalist Catholicism requires that it be located within the larger structures of its inception. In a broader context, Traditionalist Catholic dissent reflects the “exigencies of diversification” as contemporary Catholicism attempts to integrate itself firmly in the modern world. The polarization between Traditionalist and mainstream Catholicism reflects different ways by which the ‘predicament of adaptation to modernity’ is resolved: either by an acceptance and active engagement with pluralism or by the renunciation of this pluralism to take comfort in the purity of a “remnant faithful” (Hefner, 1998).

Traditionalist opposition to Vatican II Council occurred quite early in the United States (Dinges, 1991) and in much of the Western world, whereas it came in much later in the Philippines. The adjustment of the Philippine Catholic Church to Vatican II Council reforms has seen fewer, if any, disputes over interpretations of doctrine. The radicalized political situation of the Marcos dictatorship has even made post-Vatican II Catholicism a welcome development for a significant sector of the Philippine Catholic Church, enabling Catholics to actively

participate in social transformation and to engage with the exigencies of state power (Barry, 1998; Youngblood, 1990). On the other side of the terrain, the SSPX engages with different aspects of the religious situation in the Philippines in framing its traditionalist dissent. As noted by Buechler (2000), social movements relate to local structures as sites of resistance and change, which allows them to thematize particular problems and solutions that apply to the local context. The SSPX articulates an alternative version of the role of Catholicism in the Philippines' past in ways that exemplify the positive legacies of Catholicism (especially pre-Vatican II Catholicism), and in the process they assert the necessity of Traditionalist Catholicism in assuring the maintenance and preservation of the 'Catholic identity' of the Philippines.

Organizationally, the SSPX was able to create a base of committed members by tapping local contacts and networks. Again, Buechler (2000) argues that social movements, in interacting with local conditions, ultimately rely on processes that operate "through the capillaries of local structures" (p. 149), like recruitment, mobilization, solidarity and organization. Committed members certainly feel a certain "peace of mind" after having found the "true Catholic faith", but by committing to the Traditionalist Catholic cause, they work to further the missionary work of SSPX by recruiting their immediate associates, or participating in activities that promote Traditionalist Catholicism. The successful recruitment of committed members from the ranks of young adults is specifically important, because they ensure the advancement of the Traditionalist Catholic cause. As demonstrated by the data, vocations to the priestly and religious life in the SSPX are recruited from among this age bracket, thus continually replenishing religious personnel. Committed members from the professional and entrepreneur class also provide the necessary financial support for the organization to expand its missionary outreach in the Philippines.

As a “transnational movement”, the SSPX advocates for a “return to Tradition” mainly at the global level. The SSPX seeks for the “conversion” of Rome itself, which is the center of authority in the Catholic world. It must be emphasized at this point that the dispute between mainstream and Traditionalist Catholicism is translocal in character; because of the global nature of contemporary Catholicism and the magnitude of the scope of Vatican II Council reforms, Traditionalist Catholic advocacy for a “return to Tradition” confronts issues and problems in the contemporary church on a global scale. In this context, the “Traditionalist Catholic story in the Philippines” (where the SSPX assumes a prominent position) becomes part of the larger narrative of perceived “autodemolition of the Church” in modern society (Lefebvre, 1986). The status of the Philippines as a “Catholic country” especially makes it a prominent case example of perceived destructive effects of Vatican II-inspired reform. As SSPX takes upon itself to “save Catholicism” in the Philippines through the Traditional Latin Mass and traditional doctrine, it also utilizes the Philippine case in arguing in favor of their claims that are resistive of the accommodating stance that characterizes contemporary Catholicism.

As of this writing, the theological dialogues between Rome and the SSPX are still ongoing. The future of the relationship between mainstream and Traditionalist Catholicism hangs in a balance: while mainstream Catholicism has recently shown readiness to accommodate to certain claims made by Traditionalist Catholics, the willingness to accommodate to mainstream Catholic views on the part of the SSPX (which includes the acceptance of Vatican II Council’s reforms) still remains to be seen. Such accommodation and acceptance entails a significant change in the collective identity of the SSPX and challenges certain doctrinal articulations and distinctions they have made throughout the course of its history. Whether the SSPX will eventually revise its collective identity to overcome these deeply-ingrained articulations of doctrine is itself open to further investigation;

how long this process will actually take if ever such move is undertaken remains as a valid departure for future inquiry.

Note

1 The survey instrument that I used for church members was revised after considering the objections of the Prior about aspects regarding Part F of the questionnaire that contains statements about "Personal Values, Attitudes, Beliefs and Opinions". The original questionnaire was turned down by the Prior because it contained 15 (out of 20) statements that "are not open to personal opinion" because "the Church already has an official stand on these matters".

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