

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie  
**Band:** 107 (2017)  
**Heft:** 3-4  
  
**Artikel:** History, globalization and catholicity : a view from the Philippines  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-939190>

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# History, Globalization and Catholicity: A View from the Philippines

*Francis A. Gealogo*

## 1. Introduction: Some Autobiographical Reflections

Philippine catholicity has affected the lives of ordinary Filipinos from both the personal and social-structural and systemic levels. The history of catholicity in the country has also defined the contours of socio-religious movements like the Iglesia Filipina Independiente both as a reaction to foreign colonial domination, as a form of indigenous Catholic religious expression of the ordinary Filipinos, and as an institutional expression of a local Filipino church's attempts at continuing its solidarity with the majority of poor peasants and laborers. As a lay member of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and a historian-author, I am therefore both part of this church, and an academic historian who is trying to understand the nature of its historical development.

Allow me to start with some autobiographical perspectives in some of my historical notes. I was born during the year in which the dictator Ferdinand Marcos started his first term as president of the Philippines (1966). I entered grade school in a public school in Cavite City the year when martial law was declared (1972). I entered the university the year after martial law was officially lifted, though the dictatorial powers of the president had not been rescinded (1982). And I graduated with my Bachelor's degree in History the year Marcos was ousted from power (1986), leaving behind him a society wracked by massive poverty, a country heavily burdened by foreign debt, and a people deeply divided socially, economically and politically. I entered the academic workforce the following year, in 1987. Ibon International, the progressive think-tank based in the Philippines, has estimated that the foreign debt incurred from bilateral loans from the governments of the USA, Japan, and the European Union, as well as from multilateral financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank as a result of the regime's adherence to the Structural Adjustment Programs, during the time of Marcos' rule will still be a major feature of the national budget – and hence, a burden to all Filipino taxpayers like me – until 2025, a year before I am due to retire (at age 60, the retirement age

for the private sector in the Philippines). My entire life history therefore has been largely defined by my generation's Marcosian experience.

Indeed, as some are wont and accustomed to call us, I belong to the generation of martial law babies, that unfortunate generation who were already alive but not yet old enough to be personally involved in the First Quarter Storm of 1970 and the Diliman Commune of 1971 which characterized the activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s; who were socialized to sing authoritarian songs praising Hosannas to Marcosian New Society; who started our university education just in time to be engaged in the mass protests against the dictatorship even before the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr in 1983; and who were two months shy of university graduation during the time when we were massed up in EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue – the location after which was named the popular uprising) that eventually ousted the dictator in 1986.

Moreover, being born and raised in San Antonio, Cavite City provided me with early exposure to the realities of authoritarian rule supported by a large imperialist power like the USA. Growing up in a house two blocks away from the former US military naval facility Sangley Point, I initially thought that the 12 midnight and 4 am sirens heralding the start and end of the curfew hours of martial law were normal experiences, that all children of my age had to grow accustomed to. I was usually awoken every 5 am by the booming voices of military men in companies and platoons jogging in the streets outside the military base shouting their chauvinistic chants, as if to remind us that the military was indeed dominant, ascendant and a principal political force in society. Growing up, I often thought it was cool to witness the sight of the military six-by-six trucks full of young recruits from all over the archipelago (some of them barely out of their teens, I now realize) being herded to the military camps for their initial military training. Sometimes, the same military trucks would carry wooden boxes that I would later learn to be coffins, carrying young dead bodies of soldiers killed in the wars against the Moros and the indigenous peoples of Mindanao and Sulu; or against the communists in Panay, Isabela, Samar, Bicol or Kalinga Apayao and elsewhere in the country. This early socialization in the realities of the nature of the authoritarian regime as a lived and living experience was indeed the mark that defined the character of the martial law babies of my generation.

At the same time, growing up as a member of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) in San Antonio parish during those decades not only provided me, by another personal historical accident, with another context

that not only marked my personal experiences while growing up, but also emphasized the contradictions inherent in the experiences of us, the martial law babies.

My parents were married in 1962 by a young Aglipayan priest, Fr. Alberto Ramento (1936–2006), who had been newly appointed parish priest of San Antonio de Padua in Cavite City. All my siblings and I were also baptized by him, and we all grew up under his spiritual guidance.

Sunday masses with Fr. Ramento provided an antidote to the martial law propaganda machinery that we siblings experienced as normal as public elementary and high school students. In his homilies, he would speak about the prevailing poverty of our people, while the then First Lady Imelda Marcos was busy entertaining international celebrities and guests for her notoriously ostentatious parties and gatherings, whether as part of the 1973 Miss Universe contest, the 1976 IMF-WB Summit in Manila, or the 1975 Thrilla in Manila boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

As a young boy, I hardly understood Fr. Ramento's homilies about the revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua and the complicity of the American government in the authoritarian regimes that the revolutionary movements overthrew. He would often talk about the ongoing wars in the Philippines and its historical roots, confusing the young minds of those of us who were being schooled and conditioned to believe that the Philippines had never been to war against the Americans and that the Philippine-American war was not a real historical event; we all thought that the Philippines' most recent war had been against the Japanese (and not against our own people) and that it had ended when the great American General Douglas MacArthur fulfilled his promise to liberate the Philippines with his pronouncement "I shall return!" Beginning the celebration of the mass at Christmas and on New Year's Day, Fr. Ramento would always remind us that we need to celebrate the mass because we are destined to serve the poor among God's people.

To a young boy like me during that time, Fr. Ramento was indeed confusing. In my young mind, I actually thought that he was himself confused. Why did he just not focus on the Bible and its stories as some of my grade school teachers had taught us? My nanay (mother) would often remark, "Anak, aktibista kasi ang simbahan natin, kaya aktibista din ang pari natin!" (Son, our church is an activist church, hence we have an activist priest!).

Fr. Ramento would become bishop of the Diocese of Cavite in 1970, then in 1993 supreme bishop (until 1999) of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. In his various capacities within and outside the church, he would continue the church's long legacy of the social involvement and commitment to the poor and the marginalized: as a human rights activist, a labor union supporter and an advocate of land reform for the peasantry. And yet in many ways, he was simply one ordinary priest among many, continuing a historical trajectory existing since the church's foundation and long known to characterize the church.

## **2. Iglesia Filipina Independiente: History and Social Involvement**

Historically, from its inception, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente has been known as a people's church, advancing the interests of and serving the poor of God's people. The idea of a national church, to be born out of the revolutionary experience of the people, was already in the minds of 19th century Filipino revolutionaries like Apolinario Mabini, Emilio Jacinto, and Andres Bonifacio. At that time, peasant landlessness was a central issue, confronting the majority of the population. In the areas most affected by the revolutionary movement, the Philippine Revolution of 1896 sought to address the problem of the concentration of land ownership in the hands of the very few, particularly the Roman Catholic religious orders. The impetus for the development of these friar haciendas of the 19th century had been largely the result of the incorporation of the local Philippine agrarian, feudal economy into a global system characterized by the emergence of foreign monopoly capital. The feudal relations that were born out of this hacienda system became one of the social basis of the Philippine revolution of 1896. The British, American, French and German merchant houses that settled in the centers of Philippine plantation economy saw in the Philippine feudal structure both a source for agrarian products and promising new markets for their emerging industrial goods.

Fr. Gregorio Aglipay (1860–1940) was part of the underside of this colonial political economy. He had been born into a tobacco farmer family, and was working in the tobacco plantations that formed part of the colonial government monopoly when he first experienced imprisonment at the age of 14 for failing to meet his required quota for the harvest of tobacco leaves. Orphaned at a young age, he was later on supported and sent to school with the financial help given to him by a granduncle, Francisco del Amor. He was ordained as priest in December 1889 and celebrated his first

mass in 1890.<sup>1</sup> Given his exposure to the social realities of Spanish colonialism, which was experiencing a twilight period of its imperial hegemony in the face of the emergence of new rival powers, it is probably unsurprising that he was drawn into the radical movement.

The appointment of Fr. Gregorio Aglipay as military vicar general (1898), and as the only priest delegate to the Philippine revolutionary 1898 Malolos Congress, was one of the highlights of his revolutionary involvement. In 1902, as part of the consolidation of the new workers' federation movement under the socialist labor leader Isabelo de los Reyes, de los Reyes, together with the union members and leaders of the Union Obrera Democratica, founded a church: the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI). It was no surprise that Fr. Gregorio Aglipay was nominated by de los Reyes to head the new church.<sup>2</sup>

This confluence of the movement for religious independence and the advancement of the movement for the emancipation of workers and peasants was integral to the history of the IFI. In their early attempts to develop a theoretical and theological grounding for the new church, both de los Reyes and Aglipay sought to address this confluence. Faced with a new imperialist power, as the USA became the new colonizer of the Philippines, de los Reyes and Bishop Aglipay saw that the IFI had the potential to serve as a possible institutional base for the involvement of the masses in the struggle for independence, and to draw them into the new phase of the struggle, this time against American imperialism.

Historical texts such as the *Biblia Filipina*,<sup>3</sup> for example, sought to locate Philippine catholicity in the wider history of universal religious traditions, and in so doing, also located the new church in the wider history and contexts of local religious belief systems. Despite its name, the *Biblia Filipina* was not a bible nor a Filipino translation of the Bible. The book contained a comparative discussion of religious traditions and how these traditions compare with Philippine belief systems. This they did by discussing the various religious traditions found within and outside the Philippines. A critical examination of the *Biblia Filipina* from a socio-historical point of view, indicates/reveals that it was one of the earliest attempts to articulate the legitimacy of indigenous peoples' rights to self-ex-

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<sup>1</sup> *Filipinos in History* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1989), 23–26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gregorio Aglipay, *Biblia filipina. Primera piedra para un Génesis científico expuesto según las rectificaciones de Jesús* (Barcelona: Antonio Virgili, 1908).



pression and self-determination. The book puts into proper historical context the different belief systems of different societies, with an appreciation of both the unique characteristics of these systems, while at the same time considers some common universal themes found in all religions.

The church's tacit recognition of the multiplicity of the lived socio-historical existence of individual ethno-religious communities meant that from the outset it was open to recognition, dialogue, and the celebration of a shared understanding of the need to acknowledge each other's traditions as part of the expression of our solidarity with the different peoples of the world, and especially those located at the margins of history.

The early history of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente also saw it confront the many challenges to its existence. The first major blow was the decision of the colonial Supreme Court in 1906 which required the IFI to return its properties like church buildings and parochial schools to the Roman Catholics. Despite this setback, the church actively opposed the authoritarian character of the new imperial ruler. It was active in opposing the Flag Law of 1907 and the Philippine Commission Act No. 1696, both of which proscribed the public display of flags or any other national symbols. The church directly challenged this by integrating the unfurling of the national flag into the celebration of the mass, and by designing priests' vestments to represent the revolutionary flag.

The early IFI also stood its ground in opposing the newly enacted Sedition Law, which made any opposition to American rule a seditious act punishable by imprisonment or death, even when some of its members became targets of the new law. The Bandolerismo Law, which downgraded anti-imperialist revolutionary involvement legally to mere banditry, was also opposed by the new church, after some of its early members were persecuted, tried and imprisoned, not as revolutionary nationalists, but as bandits and common criminals, stripped of any political legitimacy. Filipino communities were subjected to the brutal wars that the Americans launched, institutionalizing the establishment of concentration camps in communities known for its opposition to American annexation by virtue of the enactment of the Reconcentration Act of 1902, at the height of the Philippine-American War.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a standard discussion of this period in the Philippine-American War, see Teodoro A. Agoncillo/Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia, 5th edn, 1977), 284–302; Renato Constantino, *The Philippines. A Past Revisited* (Manila: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1975), 237–286.

To sum it up: the history of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* was closely connected with the nation's history of anti-colonial struggles. The Philippine Revolution of 1896–1898, as well as the Philippine-American War of 1898–1913 were two of the more significant turning points in the history of the Philippine nation that also paved the way for the establishment of the said church. Moreover, the anti-feudal character of the revolutionary movement against Spain, and the importance of the Philippine labor unions with the history of the church's foundation would emphasize its history of social involvement with the majority of the poor Filipinos. This would be significant in defining the new church's trajectories and future social engagements.

### **3. Philippine Religiosity Revisited**

Philippine religiosity has often been viewed as a product of the eclectic mixture of indigenous local belief systems, Southeast Asian religiosity, and Western formal Christian theology. From the local traditions, the spiritual world of most Filipinos revolved around the unity of the mundane and the divine, the veneration of the ancestral spirits, and the integration of the forces of nature in spiritual existence. Filipinos interacted with their Southeast Asian neighbors, and integrated Islamic and pre-Islamic institutions to their belief system. Islamic, and, to a lesser extent, Hindu-Buddhist traditions permeated not only Filipino religiosity but also contributed to the development of local conceptions of governance, social structure and societal relations. The almost four hundred years of colonial domination by the West resulted in massive religious conversion to Roman Catholic Christianity by the majority of the lowland population in the archipelago. The experience of more than three hundred years of colonialism under Spain and half a century under the USA made Christianity the dominant religious tradition of the majority of the population. Spanish expansionism and colonial integration gave rise to the predominance of the Filipino Roman Catholic tradition over other religious traditions. However, and notwithstanding the American preference for the separation of the powers of the Church and the State, Protestantism has also emerged as a minority sect within the predominantly Christian population. The exception to this pattern are the indigenous upland communities in most of the major islands, which remained only superficially influenced by Spanish Catholicism and American Protestantism, and the Southern Philippine Islamic communities who fiercely opposed both Spanish colonialism and



American imperialism and challenged the implanting of Catholic and Protestant religious traditions in the Southwestern Philippines.<sup>5</sup>

These multi-layered historical experiences of religious development have created an odd mixture of local indigenous Philippine, Southeast Asian, Asian, and Western religiosity in a dynamic interplay that permeated social, political and cultural institutions. In this sense, Filipino religiosity not only evolved from these various traditions but was also partially responsible for the development of layers of identities displayed uniquely by Filipinos. The long experience of interrelating with various (sometimes conflicting) religious traditions created a condition for the Filipinos in which the boundaries between the mundane and the divine, the religious and the secular, and the theological and the political were often blurred or even indistinguishable in the context of the tradition of holistic regard to existence. The affirmation of religious involvement in secular affairs was one consequence.

This analysis of the history of social and political involvement of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) shows that its approach is not to be understood as an aberration of the universal religious tradition found in/claimed by Roman Catholicism, but a constant reminder of a characteristic Filipino religiosity that also permeates non-religious realms. Some progressive Philippine historians regard the foundation of the IFI as the sole institutional religious outcome of the nationalist revolution against Spanish colonialism.<sup>6</sup> The IFI developed as a class-based, socially-involved, and politically-oriented indigenous Christian tradition consistent with its history and becoming more relevant to the lives of the ordinary masses of Filipinos who constituted the bulk of its members.

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<sup>5</sup> Standard Philippine history textbooks like Agoncillo/Guerrero, *History* (as note 4), recognize the colonial contexts in the development of Philippine communities. For a historical discussion of Christian, Muslim and indigenous peoples in Philippine history, see Samuel K. Tan, *A History of the Philippines* (Manila: Philippine National Historical Society, 1997). For a religious perspective on Philippine history, see Horacio de la Costa SJ, *Readings in Philippine History* (Manila: Bookmark, 1965). See also Onofre D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation* (Quezon City: Aklahi, 1989), 2 vols.

<sup>6</sup> Agoncillo/Guerrero, *History* (as note 4), 265–289.

#### 4. The Philippine Revolution: Religious and Church Issues

Towards the middle of the 19th century, the integration of the Philippine economy into the emerging global capitalist system, following the opening of its major commercial ports, significantly increased agricultural commercialization and encouraged the concentration of land ownership in the hands of the few.<sup>7</sup> In the agricultural areas surrounding the colonial capital of Manila, the Spanish Catholic mendicant orders, popularly known as the friars, were able to consolidate land ownership in ways that resulted in the increased pauperization of the majority of the peasant population.<sup>8</sup> This created the perception that the Spanish Catholic friars were abusive, and also increased resentment towards these religious orders and their economic domination.

The opening of Manila to global commerce also resulted in the introduction of newly-emerging 19th-century liberal ideas into the largely conservative, friar-dominated Filipino society. The Spanish religious “frailocracy”<sup>9</sup> (the term popularized and used by late 19th-century Filipino intellectuals to define the domination of the friar in most aspects of society) was regarded by the proponents of liberalism as a stumbling block to the realization of ideas of freedom, tolerance and equality.<sup>10</sup> New ideas borrowed from the French and later Latin American revolutions, such as

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on the social and economic transformations in the Philippines during the 19th century, see Alfred W. McCoy/Ed C. de Jesus (eds), *Philippine Social History. Global Trade and Local Transformations* (Manila: Ateneo University Press, 1982); Jonathan Fast/Jim Richardson, *Roots of Dependency. Political and Economic Revolution in 19th Century Philippines* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1979) and Benito J. Legarda, Jr., *After the Galleons. Foreign Trade, Economic Change and Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> On the friar lands and the debates that it generated, see Jose Endriga, ‘The Settlement of the Friar Lands. Promise and Performance’, *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* 14 (1970) 397–413 and Rene R. Escalante, *The American Friar Lands Policy. Its Framers, Context and Beneficiaries, 1898–1916* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See Marcelo del Pilar, *Frailocracy in the Philippines* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1996; original in Spanish, 1889). See also idem, *Monastic Supremacy in the Philippines* (Manila: Philippine Historical Association, 1958; original Spanish 1888).

<sup>10</sup> See the various issues of *La Solidaridad* – the 19th-century journal of Filipino ilustrados (liberals), published 1889–1895 in Spain, that regularly used the term “frailocracy” as the major stumbling block in the application of the liberal project for the

nationalism, the granting of, and respect for basic freedoms, social equality, and representative governance, became rallying cries for the emerging local intelligentsia. This group, composed mostly of university students, local thinkers, writers and artists, sympathized with local Filipino Catholic secular priests, who were not allowed to join the Spanish religious orders. Since the Spanish friars controlled the local parish administration, the Filipino priests were perceived to be at the losing end as well. In contrast, the exclusively Spanish religious orders were viewed as icons of conservatism, due to their unwillingness, or inability, to open the administration of local churches to Filipino priests. This conflict between the local secular priests and the Spanish friars, members of exclusive religious orders, became one of the bases for Philippine nationalist expression in the late 19th century.<sup>11</sup>

With the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896, the religious questions that had centered on the domination of the Spanish friars became one of the key issues amongst the increasingly revolutionary population. Consequently, the program for the secularization of the parishes became also a campaign for the Filipinization of the Roman Catholic clergy.

Thus, when the Filipino secular priests joined the revolutionary cause, their move represented the culmination of a long history of the religious involvement of these priests in the nationalist movement. The execution of the three Filipino priests, Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos and Jacinto Zamora, in 1872, on trumped up charges of sedition and revolutionary involvement, created the condition for nationalist agitation against an increasingly paranoid colonial regime. It was regarded as the martyrdom of Filipino priests for the nationalist cause and it inspired the next generation of Filipino intellectuals to struggle for better conditions and equal treatment.

When Gregorio Aglipay became the military vicar general of the Philippine revolution, it was clear that the politicization of Filipino priests was not only a symbolic inspiration, encouraging for the Filipinos to challenge the domination of the Spanish friar. Rather, the Filipino priests themselves

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Philippines. See *La Solidaridad* (translated by Guadalupe Fores Ganzon; Pasig City: Fundacion Santiago, 1996), 7 vols.

<sup>11</sup> See John N. Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy. The Filipino Clergy and the Nationalist Movement* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1981), 1–32; and also idem, *Readings in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1987), 193–291.

had become personally involved in the war for revolutionary independence and joined the armed revolution. Aglipay joined the revolutionary forces and fought in actual combat on the side of the Filipino nationalists. He became a delegate – and the only priest – to the Malolos Convention of 1898/99, which drafted the first Philippine Constitution and formalized the launching of the independent Republic.<sup>12</sup>

In a manifesto issued on October 22, 1899, Apolinario Mabini, who became one of the key thinkers of the Philippine revolution and was secretary to the revolutionary government of Emilio Aguinaldo,<sup>13</sup> sought to institutionalize the Filipinization program through the establishment of an indigenous Catholic Church. The manifesto also instigated an organizational campaign to reform the church, beginning with the appointment of Filipino priests to positions at all levels of the church hierarchy. As noted above, Gregorio Aglipay was appointed as military vicar general of the Philippine revolutionary government. He called an ecclesiastical assembly of Filipino priests in Paniqui, Tarlac, which met on October 23, 1899 and outlined the organization of the Filipino church. With Aglipay at the helm, there was be no more turning back, and it was only a matter of time until the Philippine Independent Church, known by its Spanish name, the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, was established. However, the conditions of war which engulfed the entire archipelago prevented the full institutionalization of the new church. Unfortunately, the withdrawal of the Spanish forces in the Philippines did not result in the realization of an independent state of affairs for the Filipinos. Instead, Spanish withdrawal marked the arrival of the Americans as the new colonial authority, with a colonial claim to domination over the entire archipelago.

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<sup>12</sup> For some biographical notes on Aglipay and his activities, see Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy* (as note 11), 87–123; Schumacher, *Readings* (as note 11), 317–333. For the reproduction and English translation of early Aglipayan documents and the Jesuit perspective on Aglipayanism, see also Pedro S. Achutegui/Miguel A. Bernad, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1960–72), 4 vols.

<sup>13</sup> See *The Letters of Apolinario Mabini* (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1965), 215–16 and Cesar Adib Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1960), 293–365. See also Agoncillo/Guerrero, *History* (as note 4), 268.

## 5. The Struggle Against American Imperialism

The arrival of the Americans created new conditions that necessitated the adoption of new political strategies for Filipino nationalists, including the Filipino priests. Confronting a new Western power meant that the war for revolutionary independence would continue for a much longer period than anticipated, and that formal institutional expressions of independence, including the formalization of the existence of an independent government, and an independent church would be postponed for an unforeseen period.

Meanwhile, a radical Filipino propagandist based in Spain, Isabelo de los Reyes,<sup>14</sup> became involved in the movement for the establishment of an independent Philippines. He returned to the Philippines in early 1901, and together with a group of early Filipino socialists, he tried to enter the political arena, organizing trade union members into labor coalitions and campaigning for the institutionalization of a new church. The movement now clearly marked a turning point, with the involvement of labor leaders becoming more explicit in the establishment of the Church, and the new situation brought by the withdrawal of Spanish colonial authorities and the beginning of American colonial occupation of the archipelago. The new church had to contend with the Americans and their annexationist policy at the turn of the 20th century.

On February 2, 1901, de los Reyes helped to form the Union Obrera Democratica, the first Filipino labor coalition. On August 3, 1902, de los Reyes delivered an impassioned anti-friar and anti-American speech to a crowd of union members. His speech was enthusiastically received, and in response came a proposal for the establishment of a new church. This proposal was approved, and through the approval of the trade union members and the actuation of the emerging socialist anti-American intellectuals, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente was born. In September 1902, only weeks after its formal inauguration, Aglipay was consecrated by the founding members of the Church as the Supreme Bishop of the new church, and the complete severance of ties with the Roman Catholic Church was implemented.<sup>15</sup>

The events leading to the formal founding of the church were indicative of the signs of the times. The working classes of the early American

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<sup>14</sup> See William Henry Scott, 'A Minority Reaction to American Imperialism: Isabelo de los Reyes', in: idem, *Cracks in the Parchment Curtains and Other Essays in Philippine History* (Quezon City: New Day, 1985), 285–300.

<sup>15</sup> Agoncillo/Guerrero, *History* (as note 4), 268–271.



colonial period had been enthused by the radical ideas of early Filipino socialists. They joined early revolutionaries in the formation of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente as an independent church from Rome. The convergence of the interests of religious independents, nationalists, early socialists, and trade unionists was realized with the formation of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. This socially- and politically-involved church was formed to address not only religious issues, but also social and political questions.

The emergence of the new church was not without its own birth pains. The first challenge which confronted the church was the numerous applications for affiliation by new members, at a time when the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Spanish colonial forces had led to a severe shortage of local priests. Moreover, religious institutions and theological schools remained in the hands of the Roman Catholics. This led to a scarcity in the number of new Filipino priests being recruited to the new church,<sup>16</sup> and the IFI priests found themselves overwhelmed with the demands of giving spiritual services to its rapidly growing flock.

However, the most challenging situation was experienced when the Supreme Court of the American colonial government in the Philippines ruled that the church buildings and other real estate properties occupied by the IFI since the revolution should revert to the ownership of the Roman Catholic Church. Lobbying by the American members of the Roman Catholic clergy was successful not least because they occupied significant posts in the Philippine Roman Catholic church hierarchy. This eviction order forced the new church to start from scratch and make do with religious services being held in huts and bamboo structures; in contrast with the centuries-old church buildings reverted to the ownership of the Roman Catholic Church.

This judgement supported and reiterated the popular image and representation of the church as a poor church of the poor people. It was not unusual to see religious services being offered by the IFI for people who had been excluded by the Roman Catholic Church due to their inability to pay the fees it collected. The IFI charged very low fees as payments for religious ceremonies like marriages and funerals, or none at all.

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<sup>16</sup> On the problems of the new church, see the discussions on Achutegui/Bernad, *Religious Revolution* (as note 12); on the demographic dimension of conversion, see Daniel Doeppers, 'Changing Patterns of Aglipayan Adherence, 1918–1970', *Philippine Studies* 25 (1977) 265–277.



The political involvement of the IFI did not end once it had successfully established itself as an independent church. Aglipay constantly reminded the Americans of the church's position that the Philippines should be granted absolute, complete, immediate and unconditional independence. The enactment of the Sedition Act, the Brigandage Act, and the Flag Law – which outlawed the display of the national flag, the singing of the national anthem and even the speaking of the word “independence” – were all subverted by the new church in church services in which clergy wore liturgical vestments fashioned in the design of the outlawed flag and in which the forbidden national anthem was sung.

The height of the politicization of Aglipay and his followers was achieved when, in order to challenge members of the American-supported elite, such as Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmena, whom Aglipay and his supporters described as the new oligarchs, Aglipay ran as presidential candidate in the 1935 elections for the newly-established Commonwealth government.<sup>17</sup> He predictably lost the election to Quezon, but he had established his reputation of making a serious political contribution to the realization of Philippine independence. A significant number of his supporters later joined the Socialist and Communist parties, or the peasant and labor unions, or supported the radical intelligentsia in forming the Popular Front.

One interesting feature of the 1935 campaign was the radical orientation of the campaign platform. Among its major points were the recognition of farmers' and workers' rights, land redistribution, nationalist industrialization, absolute Filipino control of the economy as government policy, a total control of national wealth and patrimony by the local population, and cultural nationalism through the use of Tagalog as the national language. All these were founded on the premise that political independence from the USA would be achieved.

The Popular Front was not only a party coalition that challenged the elite dominated political structure of the 1930s; it was also a reaction to the growing influence of fascism in Philippine politics before the Second World War. Unfortunately for the IFI, the period before the onset of the Japanese occupation and the Great Pacific War also witnessed the demise of its two most prominent leaders. Isabelo de los Reyes died on October 10, 1938, and Gregorio Aglipay died on September 1, 1940. They left

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<sup>17</sup> Notes on the 1935 elections and the involvement of Aglipay, see Agoncillo/Guerrero, *History* (as note 4), 416–422.

the church to a new generation of leaders who would lead the church into – and in – the post-war era.

## **6. Reflections on IFI History and Social Involvement**

Throughout this period, the IFI remained founded in its nationalist conviction. Founded by an assembly of workers organized as a federation of unions in the Philippines, the IFI was, and still is, a poor people's church. As an institution, it prioritized the rights and welfare of the workers and peasants, and understood the lived experiences of the people's struggles to be a central aspect in the church's involvement in society. The struggle for a just and peaceful society, the assertion of the rights of nations to self-determination, the invocation of the centrality of human rights in the pursuit of social justice: these were thus core principles that determined the IFI's engagement with the world, and its location in the people's struggles in this world.

Thus, the IFI as a church, and Bishop Gregorio Aglipay as its supreme bishop, would be involved in various campaigns of workers and peasants that sought to combat American imperialism in the Philippines, which was sustained through the support of local feudal oligarchs. This church's identification with the poor and the marginalized would characterize Bishop Aglipay's engagements in society and politics. He would be a constant feature in the struggles of union workers for just wages and the peasants' yearning to own the land that they and their ancestors had been tilling for centuries.

Bishop Aglipay confronted the structures of American imperialism and found comfort in his solidarity with the poor peasants and workers. As mentioned above, he even aligned himself with the radical left, up to the point of running for the presidency in the 1935 election of the Commonwealth, supported by socialist and communist groups, labor unions and peasant associations. However, the social issues of direct colonial occupation which shaped the Philippines at the time of Bishop Aglipay – peasant landlessness, unfair labor practices, the displacement of indigenous peoples to make way for logging and mining activities, the oppression of women – would continue to characterize Philippine reality up to the time of Bishop Ramento and beyond. In the late 20th century, Bishop Ramento stood in the tradition of Bishop Aglipay through his involvement in the people's struggles that characterized his own historical context.

The structures of globalization as a system have permeated Philippine society in various ways. The primacy of profit over people, of corporate capital over public welfare, and of commercial gain over public interest have continued to characterize our condition since the supposed granting of formal independence in the immediate post-war era after 1946. Privatization, liberalization, rationalization and deregulation have resulted in corporate takeover of everyday life in the Philippines. These are the realities with which the Iglesia Filipina Independiente continues to contend as it redefines its role and mission in the face of increasing penetration of global corporate interests into the local communities. As the church reaffirms its adherence to the national democratic interests of the masses, it has come to understand its living mission as being part of the struggle for human emancipation from the ill effects of globalization. This is entirely consistent with its assertion of that it incarnates a catholicity rooted in the social realities of its people. Solidarity with the poor among God's people means not only expressing Church support to the people's struggle, but taking an active part in it. This is why, when peasant communities are being displaced as a result of further corporatization of agrarian production, massive land conversion, and the emphasis on the production of cash crops to cater to the needs of the global market, the IFI stands with the poor peasants in the struggle for a genuine agrarian reform and peasant emancipation.

Increasingly, globalization in the Philippines has come to mean the unrestricted flow not only of capital and goods within and outside the country, but also, and more importantly, the flow of working class people as global migrant workers, commodified as export earners for the cash-strapped neocolonial economy. The IFI has therefore seen the need to establish a ministry to migrant workers, seeking to contend with the global forces that reduced people into goods and commodities to be transported, exported and exchanged for profit and capital gain.

When globalization led to the opening of indigenous peoples' ancestral lands and domains for the further extraction of wealth, mines and natural resources, resulting in massive internal displacement, militarization and the homogenization of culture, the IFI understood its commitment to the message of the Gospel to mean that it must be one with God's people in their struggle for life and light, through the preservation and defense of the ancestral domains of indigenous communities.

In its more than a century of existence, the IFI has been grounded in both its local and universal context as a people's church. As a church ad-

hering to universal catholic beliefs, it has sought to build relations with other progressive churches, seeing these relationships as an avenue towards the establishing of global solidarity in the pursuit of faith, with the aim of realizing the full fruition of humanity for social liberation. The basis of this solidarity has always been the local contexts of the church's engagement in Philippine social realities. The IFI sees its role as the institutional expression of the Church's historic mission to be one with the poor and to be part of their liberation.

In a seminal history book on the Philippine revolution, *Pasyon and Revolution* (which adopted the IFI's *Birhen ng Balintawak*<sup>18</sup> as its iconic cover), Filipino historian Reynaldo Ileto explored Philippine history not from the perspective of the mainstream, of those holding hegemonic power emanating from the centers of authority, but from below.<sup>19</sup>

Ileto is right: we need to look at our own history from below, from the margins, from the peripheries, for only then can we properly locate our historical, institutional, religious, even theological meaning, sense and significance as a church and as a people. Away from the center, the peripheries and the margins have greater potential to realize more completely the essence and relevance to the meaning of catholicity in the age of globalization.

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<sup>18</sup> The *Birhen ng Balintawak* (the Virgin Mary of Balintawak) served as the Marian representation of Aglipayan religiosity. The Virgin Mother was depicted as being dressed in traditional Filipino clothes (called Balintawak), and is standing beside the Holy Child, also dressed in traditional Filipino wear. The Holy Child was also depicted as holding a bolo (local machete) – long considered as a symbolic weapon of choice by Filipino revolutionaries. Moreover, Balintawak was also the name of the district north of Manila where the first battle cry for the start of the Philippine revolution was held.

<sup>19</sup> Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution. Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1979).

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### *Zusammenfassung*

Die parallel verlaufenen Lebensläufe von zwei obersten Bischöfen der Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), Gregorio Aglipay (1860–1940) und Alberto Ramen-to (1936–2006), spiegeln wider, wie sich die Kirche auf soziale und politische Fragen eingelassen hat. Der vorliegende Artikel setzt die persönlichen Überlegungen des Autors in Beziehung zu aktuellen Fragen, indem er auf den Gegensatz in der philippinischen Gesellschaft aufmerksam macht, der zwischen der indigenen Katholizität der Iglesia Filipina Independiente und den Auswirkungen der Globalisierung auf die örtlichen Verhältnisse besteht. Historisch betrachtet, schuf das Sich-Einlassen der IFI auf nationale Fragen die Möglichkeit zu einer philippinisch-katholischen Religiosität und konnte so den wirtschaftlichen, politischen und sozialen Sorgen der philippinischen Nation begegnen und sich ihnen stellen. Das Leben der zwei obersten Bischöfe legte zugleich aber auch die Sehnsucht der Kirche offen, das Leben der an den Rand Gedrängten und der Armen zu heben – ein zentrales Thema in der Entwicklung der IFI als Kirche der Armen auf den Philippinen.

### *Key Words – Schlüsselwörter*

Iglesia Filipina Independiente – Philippine Revolution – Globalization and Catholicity in the Philippines – Church Involvement in Social Issues