

FILIPINO PROTESTANT FAITH IN REVOLUTIONARY TIMES:
HISTORICAL ELEMENTS IN AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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1. Introduction

To say “Evangelical” and “social transformation” in the same sentence seems at first like an oxymoron. It is true that Evangelicals are not especially known for their socio-political involvement, at least not in the last 80 years.¹ The limited number of works on social transformation written by Filipino Evangelicals attests to this truth in the Philippines, although several books immediately come to mind to the contrary. Melba Maggay’s *Transforming Society* (1994) and David S. Lim’s *Transforming Communities* (1992)² are obvious examples just from their titles. The Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture (ISACC), founded by Maggay, has also steadily produced articles and booklets on the subject. On the whole, however, deep theological reflection on issues in social transformation remains one of Evangelicalism’s growing edges.

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¹ Let us remind ourselves at the outset that social negligence on the part of evangelicals is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Indeed, evangelicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the vanguard of gospel-inspired social involvement like anti-slavery movements. See David Moberg 1972:28-45.

² Originally a paper presented at the International Conference on Christian Faith and Economics, Lim’s volume is more a booklet than a book, consisting of only 34 pages.

Having said that, however, Evangelicals worldwide have been discovering the richness of an understanding of “mission as transformation.” A recently published compilation by that title brings together much of the Evangelical thinking that has gone on concerning transformation theology (Samuel and Sugden 1999). The book provides biblical, theological, and missiological expressions of transformation that are essential for all Christians seeking to appropriate the gospel of the kingdom responsibly in society.

As indispensable as these foundational expressions are to the task, any study in social transformation must finally be contextual to be relevant; it must take seriously the specifics of a given culture for which social change is planned (Adeney 1987:96-102). With this in mind, what social transformational themes are emerging among Evangelicals in the Philippines? This paper assumes, in spite of limited sources dealing with the subject, that Filipino Protestant theologians are saying something significant about social transformation, and church history is a good place to start an investigation. The aim of this paper is to analyze Filipino Protestant history, using a social ethical lens in order to obtain essential building blocks for the construction of a Filipino evangelical theology of social transformation.

1.1 Preliminary Definitions

Given the diverse use of the terms “social transformation” and “Evangelical” in theological literature, it is important before proceeding to define how they will be used in this study.

Social transformation refers to the collective, political dimension of the church’s mission, which reflects God’s intentions for the world and everyone in it. Socially speaking, God’s intention is, in Jesus Christ, to establish his reign of love, righteousness, justice, and peace amidst fallen human structures, structures that oppress and marginalize people. God’s intentions are both to show compassion upon the oppressed and marginalized—the poor—as well as to challenge social structures to conform to the kingdom (Wheaton ’83 Statement 1999:269-71). Insofar as the church participates in these divine activities, it engages in social transformation ministries.

The social dimension of God’s work is but one of many aspects of God’s intentions. “Salvation is multidimensional,” writes Emerito P. Nacpil, “Its scope includes the personal, the social, the cosmic, and the eternal” (1999:17). Social transformation, therefore, must be regarded integrally with personal, cosmic and eternal transformations.

The other term that needs clarification is "Evangelical." Although it is quite valid to use the term to describe one who believes, and is ruled by, the *euangelion* (the gospel of Jesus Christ), it will not be used in this more "theologically pure" way. Instead, it will be used sociologically as it "has come to mean a certain brand of Christianity that "emphasizes the authority of the Bible...salvation by faith alone...a distinct experience of conversion (being 'born again'), a life of personal piety, moral discipline and social activism, and [an] urgency [for] worldwide missions" (Wickeri et al. 2000:291). Negatively, Evangelicalism is known as a reaction against liberal movements in Christianity that in the eyes of Evangelicals stray from biblical truth as well as embrace theologically questionable political positions.³

Most Filipino Evangelicals today would identify with this sociological description. Referring to Filipino Evangelicals of an earlier era, Lorenzo C. Bautista claims that "they were part of the conservative side in America who were reacting to the modernists and social gospel advocates whom they thought were straying away from orthodoxy" (1996:183). This sociological use of the term can be confusing in the Philippine context, because some ecumenically-oriented Christians still apply the term to themselves as they use it more in the theological sense and as they hearken back to earlier periods in Filipino Protestant history when the term was used over and against the term "Protestant" (Schwenk 1986:9). More will be said on this when we look at the evangelical-ecumenical divide in the Philippines. For now, suffice it to note that those Filipino Christians who identify with the modern sociological definition are those whom this study refers to as Evangelicals.

1.2 Methodology

This paper divides into three main sections. The first looks back at the history of Filipino Protestantism with a social ethical eye. To review Protestant beginnings in the Philippines will be the necessary starting point for this section. Then to gain insight on Filipino Protestant responses to various repressive periods in history—namely, during American rule at the turn of the century, Japanese occupation during World War II, and the People Power Revolution of 1986—will provide the substance of the study.

³ Such general descriptions of evangelicalism should not detract from the fact of the theological diversity within Evangelicalism. See Wickeri, et al. 2000:292-93.

The second section bridges the first to the third. Since this study aims to highlight *Evangelical* social ethics, to examine the way in which the ecumenical-evangelical divide occurred in the Philippines is yet another necessary historical piece.

The third section is more constructive as it involves identifying historically informed themes in social transformation for contemporary Filipino Evangelical theology. By way of conclusion, the need to consider the role of foreign missionaries in social transformation in the Philippines deserves brief commentary.

2. The Social Dimension of Filipino Protestantism in Historical Perspective

2.1 Protestant Beginnings in the Context of American Colonization

After 333 years of monopoly on the part of Roman Catholic missions in the Philippines, American Protestant denominations seized an opportunity to make missionary forays into the islands. Believing in the divine providence of Spanish defeat at the hands of American Commodore George Dewey on May 1, 1898, several American Protestant denominations made a valiant attempt to unite their forces for the purpose of taking the gospel to the Filipino people (Sitoy 1989:2-6). The Presbyterians were the first to arrive in 1899, followed shortly in 1900 by Methodists, Baptists, United Brethren, Episcopalians and others (Tuggy 1971:99). The effort at “comity and unity” among the various mission groups was intentional, and it expressed itself early in the formation of the Evangelical Union of the Philippine Islands in 1901 (Sitoy 1989:11).

Although there was not full participation of the mission groups in the Union, it nevertheless exemplified a remarkable missions-driven ecumenism, an effective visible unity that predates the official beginning of the ecumenical movement at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. Historian T. Valentino Sitoy claims that Episcopalian missionary to the Philippines Charles H. Brent, who cooperated with the Union but did not join on the grounds that Catholics were not included, was the one who “ignited the ecumenical spark at...Edinburgh” (1989:17).

Early evangelization efforts as well were impressive. In fact, the first decade of Protestantism in the Philippines continues to be a rich case study in church growth (Tuggy 1971:100-22). The initial evangelistic thrust resulted in astounding response. By 1908, the Methodists reported

16,569 members (Tuggy 1971:106) and the Presbyterians 10,000 (Kwantes 1998:16). Referring to the growth among the Methodists, missionary Homer Stuntz exclaimed in 1904, "Such ripeness for evangelism has never been seen in any Roman Catholic field" (quoted in Tuggy 1971:103).

As euphoric as the first Protestant decade was, however, it was also marred with in-fighting and disagreements regarding territorial divisions, doctrine, "sheep-stealing" and other areas of conflict (Sitoy 1989:23-36). But "in spite of all these difficulties," writes Mariano C. Apilado, "Protestant Christianity was well established in the Philippines by 1907" (1999:105).

If these early achievements in ecumenism and evangelization could be divorced from the travesty of American conquest and colonization occurring at the same time, then the efforts of the early Protestant missionaries might be applauded wholeheartedly. But of course, this is impossible. For like Catholicism's role in the Spanish conquest, Protestantism greatly aided American occupation of the islands by legitimizing it on divine providential grounds. In an 1898 lecture entitled "The Christian Conquest of Asia" Oberlin College President Henry Barrows spoke for the Christian majority when he proclaimed, "God has placed us, like Israel of old, in the centre of the nations...and wherever on pagan shores the voice of the American missionary and teacher is heard, there is fulfilled the manifest destiny of the Christian Republic" (quoted in Anderson 1969:294).

Missionaries also did well to pacify the people. "The presence of a Protestant missionary in any part of the islands," writes Maggay as she quotes a high-ranking government officer of that period, "was worth more than a battalion of soldiers for all purposes of pacification" (1998:5-6). Indeed, "while the American missionaries were relatively benign and had none of the gross corruption which characterized the friar in the late years of Spanish rule, they...were in fact effective instruments of American colonization" (Maggay 1998:5).

In light of the brutality, the injustice, and the squelching of the Filipino independent spirit that characterized the conquest, Protestantism's participation must be judged. To be sure, the missionaries were products of their time and thus propagated the "gospel of Manifest Destiny, [which] had its roots in the concepts of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority [and] of America as the center of civilization" (Anderson 1969:280). But ultimately they are without excuse and are guilty as charged along with the political colonizers of "crimes against

humanity,” crimes that continue to bear consequences for the Filipino people.

2.2 Filipino Protestant Responses to American Rule

In the responses of Filipino Protestants to the crime of American rule lie the seeds of a culturally relevant theological social ethics. There were two kinds of social responses by the people, one affirmative and the other resistant. First, the people generally welcomed and received the social change programs administered by American civil servants and missionaries. Apilado lists education, medical work and union movements as the main social efforts of the American colonizers (1999:77-84). Referring specifically to the work of the missionaries, Bautista notes that “Protestant missions which came to the Philippines almost from the beginning showed sensitivity to the social dimension of evangelization” (1996:182). Maggay goes deeper than what kinds of programs were implemented and suggests three social influences: 1) a democratizing effect or “a movement from rigid class lines to a certain egalitarianism”; 2) redemptive lift or an improvement of living standards because of conversion to Christ and the appropriation of the Protestant work ethic; and 3) an ethical dimension or a moral rigor that encouraged new levels of personal righteousness and integrity (1998:6-7).

Positive responses of the early Protestant converts to these efforts at social progress were due no doubt to the relief it brought from the corruption of life under Spanish rule.⁴ Writes Maggay, “As harbingers of a faith associated with ideas of liberty and equality, the early Protestant missionaries were looked upon as friends of the Revolutionary Movement” (1998:5). So the first Filipino Protestant response to American rule was one of affirmation and acceptance of its social programs.

The second response, however, was disappointment that came as a result of realizing that the Americans were not friends after all to the true aspirations of the Filipino people. The struggle for nationhood resumed, therefore, among Filipino Protestants, this time against American rule in general and imported Protestantism in particular.⁵ At some point,

⁴ Space will not allow for a recounting of the abuses of power of which Spanish friars were found guilty. For an historical account of these, see Majul (1969).

⁵ The struggle for independence, of course, had been going on for quite some time. In fact, historian Renato Constantino asserts correctly that “Filipino resistance to colonial expansion became the unifying thread of Philippine

explains Apilado, "[The people] viewed the American Protestant missionaries as being no different from the Roman Catholic friars: both were foreigners who neglected...to appreciate the Filipinos' aspirations for...freedom" (1999:98).

Filipino nationalism among Protestants was best exemplified in the life of Nicolas Zamora. Grand-nephew of Fr. Jacinto Zamora, one of three priests who were executed for allegedly instigating the Cavite Mutiny in 1872, and son of Paulino Zamora, who was exiled by the Spanish for reading a Bible, Nicolas' calling as a Christian nationalist seemed predestined. Zamora became the first ordained Filipino Protestant clergyman—first as a deacon in 1900 and then as an elder in 1902 in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was also the first pastor of the "First Filipino Church" now the famous Knox Memorial in Manila (Deats 1969:332).

The first of many things, Zamora also led the first major breakaway from American missionary control on nationalistic grounds, forming the *La Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF)* in 1909. Its mission was to bring "Christ to the nation *the Filipino way*" (quoted in Deats 1969:336 [italics mine]). Needless to say, the breakaway created much tension (and in fact, was a result of already existing tension) between Filipino Protestants and American missionaries. In light of earlier Filipino independence movements, both religious and political, the Zamora schism was simply the same struggle for freedom being played out by different characters.

In sum, Filipino Protestants first welcomed and received the social ideals that were wrapped up in the American way of life and the Protestant way of faith. The second response, however, was neither welcoming nor receptive as it resumed the ongoing struggle for national and religious independence from foreign domination. These two historical responses provide the basis for subsequent developments in theological social ethics among Filipino Protestants.

2.3 Filipino Protestant Responses to Japanese Occupation

Another period of oppression—Japan's short occupation from 1941 to 1945—reflected these two responses but in different ways. Despite American colonial rule, the Philippines enjoyed relative peace until December 1941 when Japan's war with America found the Philippines a prime target. Almost simultaneously with the bombing of Pearl Harbor in

history" (cited in Fernandez 1994:10).

Hawaii, the Japanese also bombed US military installations throughout the islands. As in 1898 against the Spanish, Filipinos and Americans once again found themselves allied for battle, this time against Japanese invaders. But, unlike the Spanish-American (and Filipino) War, the Japanese gained victory over American and Filipino forces. By May 1942, all military strategic points were captured including Bataan and Corregidor (Sitoy 1989:87-88). Japan was the new colonizer, the new oppressor of the Filipino people.

Japanese rule was calculated and efficient, brutal and cruel. The army took over American strongholds and mauled Filipino communities with little regard for life and property, and the new government ruled with an iron fist. By far, the incident that most painfully evokes the memory of suffering under Japanese rule for both Filipinos and Americans is the infamous Bataan Death March in April 1942. As prisoners of war, 70,000 Filipinos and 11,000 American military personnel were forced at gunpoint to march 133 kilometers in nine days without food, water or rest. Only about 54,000 reached the final destination, which was Camp O'Donnell-turned-concentration camp in Tarlac Province. And due to the horrible conditions of the camp, as well as to continued Japanese cruelty, many more Filipinos and Americans perished. According to Guillermo and Win, only about 4,000 prisoners survived (1997:74). Sam Grashio, an American survivor of the March, describes it today as “a macabre litany of heat, dust, starvation, thirst, flies, filth, stench, murder, torture, corpses and wholesale brutality that numbs the memory” (quoted in Karnow 1989:304). Filipinos (and Americans) suffered greatly under the short but brutal wartime occupation of the Japanese.

How did Filipino Protestants respond to the crime of Japanese rule? Similar to their responses to American rule, there was a level of cooperation as well as of resistance. For the purposes of control and propaganda, the new government desired to unite the Protestant churches, and many churches cooperated. As a result, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the Philippines was formed in October 1942, and a year later a unified Protestant church calling itself the Evangelical Church in the Philippines was declared (Sitoy 1989:98-104). To be sure, many churches cooperated partly because they felt they had no choice and partly because they believed—or wanted to believe—in the professed altruistic motives of the Japanese. Fear and naiveté then played their respective parts in convincing Filipino Protestants to cooperate with the new government.

Cooperation, however, was also due to the Filipino Protestants' strong desire for church union long before the Japanese arrived. So when the Japanese expressed their desire to create one indigenous, missionary-free Protestant body in the country, many leading Filipino Protestants, Enrique Sobrepena chief among them, welcomed the idea (Sitoy 1989:101-102). Sobrepena was the appointed president of the wartime Union.

Not all cooperated, however; in fact, many Protestants resisted Japanese advances. This resistance expressed itself in various forms. First, there was the outright refusal of some to sign a pledge that promised complete allegiance to the Japanese government. Sitoy records that "seven leading American or British missionaries and one Filipino minister, Santiago Crispulo, pastor of the Fellowship Central Baptist Church, refused to sign" (1989:97).

A second form of resistance was the refusal of many churches to join the Union. Whether it was due to the spirit of nationalism or simply to human pride, "a great deal of resistance was directed against this wartime union" (Sitoy 1989:105). Surprisingly, however, given the well-documented ways of Japanese brutality, the government did not apply more coercion upon the uncooperative churches (Sitoy 1989:106).

Yet another form of resistance was Protestant participation in guerrilla warfare. Several stories of American missionaries like that of Roy Bell who organized subversive forces to thwart Japanese operations in Negros (Mills 1994) and Mary Boyd Stagg in Manila, who gave assistance to guerrillas in the city (Webb 1997), confirm the presence of Filipino Protestants in the resistance. In the case of the Bell story, many participants were students or faculty of Silliman University, a major Protestant educational institution in Dumaguete City (Mills 1994:127-30). Mary Stagg, pastor of the large Cosmopolitan Church in Manila, acted on behalf of, and in conjunction with, many of her church members who were active in the resistance.

Like the Filipino Protestant responses to American rule at the turn of the century, cooperation and resistance also characterized their responses to Japanese rule. One other significant response must be noted, not so much during the war but immediately afterward. Richard L. Deats writes that re-building both church and nation became a defining point for post-war Protestantism (1967:108, 113-15). From the ruins of war, the church became increasingly more proactive in social concerns ranging from disaster relief to the "support of progressive economic and social legislation" (1967:114).

2.4 Filipino Protestant Participation in the People's Power Revolution

One last revolutionary period needs to be reviewed—namely, the People Power Revolution of 1986. The Marcos era was a particularly painful time for Filipinos, for the oppressor was not an outsider but one of their own. From a prison cell, Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr. penned, “Our foreign colonizers—Spaniards, Americans, Japanese—committed acts of barbarism on our people in the course of their occupations. But they were foreigners. Today...[a domestic despot has] surpassed the foreigners in their inhumanity” (1988:91-92). To quote Aquino seems appropriate here since it was the events surrounding his incarceration and martyrdom at the hands of President Ferdinand E. Marcos that catalyzed the 1986 Revolution.

Imprisoned for seven and half years for allegedly sympathizing with Communists and later charged with subversion, murder and illegal possession of weapons, Ninoy Aquino became for Filipinos the political symbol of suffering during the Martial Law years from 1972 to 1981. Before the declaration of Martial Law, Aquino voiced strong, relentless opposition to Marcos policies as the country went from bad to worse. Inflation rose to unprecedented heights, corruption in government reached new levels, and the poor abounded in their poverty while Marcos and his cronies wallowed in wealth. In this context, Aquino increasingly became the voice for the masses.⁶ The radical student demonstrations on university campuses, as well as the re-formation of the indigenous Communist New People's Army, were some of the more visible forms of resistance. But they reflected a growing “populist movement embracing workers, peasants, middle-class intellectuals, clergy and moderate students” (Shabecoff 1987:158). The Senator continued publicly to criticize Marcos, thus becoming one of Marcos' arch political enemies. Consequently, the day after Martial Law was declared on September 22, 1972, Aquino was arrested along with other political dissidents and thousands of others. The Martial Law years proved terrifying for anyone suspected of anti-government activity. “Amnesty International found

⁶ Karnow adds an interesting twist to Aquino's motives in opposing Marcos. He quotes Aquino as saying, “I'm going to attack Marcos again and again, and goad him into denouncing me as much as possible in retaliation. That's the only way I can keep my name in print” (1989:396). I note this because, although Aquino was right in exposing the corruption and ineptness of much of Marcos' administration, he was also a politician with personal aspirations. In other words, Aquino was not a saint!

widespread abuses of human rights, including systematic use of torture against political prisoners" (Schirmer & Shalom 1987:164).

Aquino remained in prison until 1980 when Marcos allowed him to go to the United States to receive heart surgery. Marcos' primary motive, according to Stanley Karnow, was political; allowing Aquino to receive the best medical treatment in the USA would "get rid of him while appearing altruistic" (1989:400). The Aquinos stayed in America, settling in Newton, MA for what Mrs. Aquino called "the three happiest years of our life" (quoted in Karnow 1989:400). Aquino's conscience, however, continued to haunt him concerning the state of affairs in their homeland. He once again resumed his open criticism of Marcos in the American media and eventually "evoked General MacArthur's famous motto, 'I shall return'" (Karnow 1989:400).

Upon stepping off the plane at the Manila International Airport on August 21, 1983, however, he was shot dead before setting foot on Philippine soil.⁷ Less than three years later from February 22 to 26, 1986, a mass revolt that has come to be known as the People Power Revolution toppled the seemingly invincible twenty-year old dictatorship. Aquino's assassination proved to be the catalyst for ousting a corrupt ruler while at the same time transforming Ninoy's quiet, shy, reluctant wife Corazon "Cory" Aquino into *President Corazon "Cory" Aquino*. In the minds of many Filipinos (and non-Filipinos), the People Power Revolution of 1986 was nothing less than the direct intervention of almighty God.

The participation of the Catholic Church in the Revolution could not help but be overt as Cory herself was (and is) a deeply committed Catholic. Cardinal Jaime Sin also played no small part as he encouraged Cory to run against Marcos in the 1986 Snap Elections, as well as solicited the support of the Catholic masses via Radio Veritas for Marcos defectors Enrile and Ramos (Mercado 1986:48, 105-106). But how did Filipino *Protestants* participate? "It is not generally known," writes Richard L. Schwenk, "that a significant percentage of the leaders and barricaders in the peaceful revolt were Protestant-Evangelical Christians, even though they represent just over ten percent of the national population" (1986:2).

There are at least five ways in which Filipino Protestants participated in the February Revolution. First, they helped prepare the way for those four powerful days in February. Although it had undeniable elements of the divine to it, the Revolution, Petz Guerrero rightly observes, "was

⁷ The name of the airport was changed to the Ninoy Aquino International Airport to commemorate his death.

[also]...the result of a continuous, protracted, long process of awareness—building and organizing work among our people” (quoted in Schwenk 1986:36). As was observed after World War II, Filipino Protestants increasingly began to see building and re-building the nation as part of their Christian responsibility. When it was time to decry economic instability, injustice and human rights abuses in the Marcos era, Protestants were ready. Shortly after Martial Law was declared, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) created and commissioned the Human Rights Desk (HRD), which let the government know that there was a systematic checking of violations of human rights by a people of faith. As a result of this kind of work, many Protestants were arrested and tortured by the Marcos regime (Schwenk 1986:37).

Second, official statements from the various Protestant councils and organizations helped to solicit support from church members throughout the country as well as to prick the conscience of the government. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) issued several statements like the post-election statement that called the election in which Marcos was declared the winner a fraud. *Konsensiya ng Febrero Siete* (KONFES) and Concerned Christian Citizens for Public Justice (CCCJ) also issued a statement: “On the Post-Election Stalemate: A Call to Legitimate Rule” which also decried the corruption in the election proceedings (Schwenk 1986:10). These and other statements pronounced just weeks before the Revolution undoubtedly played a role in propelling Protestants to the streets.

Third, Protestants in key positions figured prominently in the Revolution and the years that followed. Without the defection of General Fidel Ramos, a committed Protestant, along with Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile, the Revolution could not have transpired as quickly and smoothly and non-violently. Then of course, it was Ramos whom Aquino endorsed in the subsequent election in 1992, which he won making him the first Filipino Protestant to be elected President of the Republic. Other known Protestants who opposed Marcos during Martial Law and who subsequently became important members of the new Aquino government in various capacities were Leticia Ramos-Shahani, Jovito Salonga, Sonny and Betty Belmonte, Cirilo Rigos, Gregorio Tingson, and others (Schwenk 1986:20-21, 41).

Fourth, the prayerful participation of Protestant churches, organizations, and private citizens in the actual four days of the Revolution contributed to the overall participation of the masses. Reports of food distribution, car and jeepney-pooling, leading worship services, fasting and praying, as well as joining others in standing in front of tanks

abound (Schwenk 1986:24-32). All of these seemingly insignificant activities were the "people details" that made the Revolution possible.

And fifth, Protestant theologians and social scientists joined others in formulating significant social theologies in light of People Power, a deepening of theological reflection that continues to inform the social actions of the church. Beyond the euphoria of simply experiencing it, the Revolution begged for serious theological and social scientific thinking to help guide the nation's future. Two volumes, both edited by missionary professor Douglas J. Elwood, were published a few years after the Revolution, which compiled the best thinking of both Protestant and Catholic scholars. While the first book *Toward a Theology of People Power* (1988) viewed People Power from a theological perspective, the second book *Alternatives to Violence* (1989) assessed the Revolution from an interdisciplinary angle. From these two volumes, two major themes come to the fore—ecumenism and non-violence. The fact that the first volume comprises of one Evangelical, two mainline Protestants and four Roman Catholics testify to the ecumenism that inherently exists in a theology of people power, not just academically but also practically. Maggay remembers the group of Evangelicals, with which she was standing tall during the Revolution, praying with Cardinal Sin over the radio alongside Catholics and Muslims (1988:64). The Revolution reminded many that an ecumenism—a togetherness in God—bent toward social justice can accomplish much.

Another theme that emerges from the Elwood volumes is the political power of non-violence. The 1986 Revolution restored democracy to a nation with minimum bloodshed, thus demonstrating to the rest of the world "a Filipino model" of non-violent revolution. Theologian Dominador G. Antone expresses it eloquently:

The Filipino People Power at EDSA...is [the people's] humble reminder to the whole world to recapture and restore once more the Christianity of the first, second, and third centuries—which is truly the Christianity of Christ, a preferential option for love, nonviolence and reconciliation. This speaks well for the Filipino people's capacity for consistent nonviolence: respect for life which includes the whole of mankind, and reverence for God the author of life (1989:68).

This brief overview of Filipino Protestant responses to various repressive or revolutionary periods in Philippine history provides the material from which key themes in a Filipino evangelical theology of social transformation can be identified. The task, however, necessitates

one more historical foray that traces the ecumenical-Evangelical divide in the Philippines.

2.5 The Ecumenical-Evangelical Divide in the Philippines

The differentiation in the Philippines that exists today between *ang mga Protestante* and *mga Born-Again* suggests a history that somewhat mirrors the modernist-fundamentalist debacle that occurred in North America in the early part of the twentieth century.⁸ Sitoy mentions that Protestant churches, like the Disciples of Christ and the Philippine Baptist Convention, split as early as 1906 because of theological tensions imported from the American church scene (1989:49). Bautista briefly alludes to these imported tensions as well (1996:183). But neither goes into much detail, stating only that the splits partially defined the limits of the comity and unity agreements among the various mission groups. Nevertheless, we can surmise that a distinction was observable even in the early stages of Filipino Protestantism between conservative and liberal groups.

The distinction, however, did not play out as intensely as it did in America. In fact despite the undeniable existence of theological, missiological, and political differences, the ecumenism achieved among Protestants in the Philippines up to the Second World War deserves shining recognition in the annals of the worldwide ecumenical movement.

It was after the war and the declaration of Philippine independence in 1946 that the unruliness that has come to characterize Protestantism in general began to manifest itself in the Philippines with the sudden gush of independent, conservative Evangelical mission groups into the country (Sitoy 1989:120). Elwood observed in 1967 that before the war only 25% of the Christian missionary force in the Philippines were working independently from the older and more ecumenical bodies. As of 1967, independent mission groups make up 84% of the missionary community (1967:41). A country profile for the Philippines put out by the International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 reports how this remarkable shift has affected the population. It claims that "about 80% of evangelical Protestant Christians in the Philippines identify with

⁸ Time and space will not allow us to expound on this history-shaping controversy in the Christian church. We have already cited David Moberg's *The Great Reversal* (1972), which treats the controversy at length. For others, see Richard G. Hutcheson (1981), Mark Ellingsen (1988), Augustus Cerillo and Murray W. Dempster (1989) to name a few.

independent and non-ecumenical churches" (International Congress on World Evangelization 1974:1).

The evolution of the term "Evangelical" in the Philippines sheds some light on the divide between conservative and liberal Christians in the country. At the turn of the last century, "Evangelical" was the term of choice for the new churches because of the negative connotations that the term "Protestant" carried amidst the dominant Roman Catholic population (Sitoy 1989:12). The Unions, Federations and Councils formed before the war continued to identify themselves as Evangelical. After the war, however, the term was used less and less by the ecumenically-prone churches which began to think that the word "Evangelical" hindered some groups like the Philippine Episcopal and the Philippine Independent Church to join them in unity (Sitoy 1989:119). We can reasonably assume that one of the main reasons for dropping the term was to distinguish themselves from the new post-war wave of conservative, aggressively evangelistic, sectarian groups that identified themselves as Evangelical or fundamentalist. The generations of Christians that come from these groups are usually those whom the ordinary people on the street call the "Born-Agains," "Bible Christians," or the Evangelicals. *Ang mga Protestante*, on the other hand, are those usually associated with the older denominational ecumenical bodies in the country like the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and the United Methodist Church (UMC).

Historically, one of the main points of contention between conservative and liberal Christians has been the place of social involvement in the work of the gospel, which again has its roots in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. It was no different in the Philippines as the more ecumenically-minded led the way in church-based social reforms while Evangelicals proceeded cautiously, claiming to take apolitical stances for the sake of the effective evangelization of all (Sitoy 1989:45-49).

3. Themes in Social Transformation for Contemporary Filipino Evangelical Theology

Today, however, Filipino Evangelicals have awakened to the social mandate of the gospel (Bautista 1996:183). And it is the contention of this study that the nation's history during revolutionary times has played no small part, especially in the aftermath of the People Power Revolution. This last and final section seeks to take seriously Filipino Protestant

history in order to identify several themes in, and challenges for, an Evangelical theology of social transformation. These themes do not constitute a comprehensive social theology by any means. For example, nothing will be said about the biblical basis for social transformation, a theme that is of utmost importance for a theology that claims to be Evangelical. Nor will anything be said about spiritual warfare, another important theme, especially for the Pentecostal/Charismatic sector of Evangelicalism. Rather, these themes are historically informed reflections, showing up in the writings of contemporary Filipino Evangelical theologians, which must be part of any formulation of a theology of social transformation in the Philippine context. As we take into account Filipino Protestant history, at least four social transformational themes emerge.

3.1 Gospel-Inspired Nationalism

“Nationalism,” according to Deats, “has been broadly defined as ‘the self-conscious assertion by a people of its own individuality in relation to other peoples’” (1967:3). The first social transformational theme emerging from Philippine history is a gospel-inspired nationalism. “Gospel-inspired” does not mean that nationalism originates from Christianity. Indeed as Eleazer Fernandez notes regarding Christians involved in the national struggle that “there is already a broad struggle that has been going on *in spite of the church*” (1994:21 [italics mine]). Rather, “gospel-inspired nationalism” refers to a love of country that is rooted first in a biblical notion of basic human rights and second in an affirming Christian understanding of culture.

The conquest and colonization of nations violate all that we know about human rights. Human rights demand justice and dignity for all. From a Christian perspective, this demand is based upon the inherent value of each person, which is made in the image of God, as well as upon the good news of the kingdom of God as Jesus preached it (Moltmann 1977:130). From confiscation of property to forced labor to mass killings, the exploits of the colonial era were an obvious affront to God’s demand in Christ for justice and dignity for all.

In the Philippines, five hundred years of atrocities and their enduring consequences upon every level of Filipino culture and society today should evoke a strong sense of gospel-inspired nationalism. Moreover, the history of struggle for independence against foreign domination, especially Christian involvement in that struggle, should also evoke it. The dual legacies of injustice under foreign powers and the resistance

against it justify a Christian affirmation of nationalism. Evangelical theologian Arsenio Dominguez quotes an early statement by a Filipino Protestant organization, which says, "We believe in the Christian interpretation of nationalism. Therefore we hold that God has called the Filipino people to a high mission of service to humanity" (1989:78). This ongoing service is to resist any form of foreign control that disregards the rights of the Filipino *as* Filipino; it is to speak out against injustice; it is to protect human dignity. By so doing, this kind of nationalism affirms the kingdom of God. Arsenio states boldly, "A true and mature Christian nationalism is a necessary ally of effective church ministry" (1989:77).

The other aspect of gospel-inspired nationalism affirms that culture—albeit a "fallen" human construct—is the locus of God's self-revelation. In other words, God's person and will can be discerned within all cultures. This opposes the theology that accompanied the colonizers, which claimed that God must be brought to heathen lands, thus perpetuating the notion that God's self-revelation happened in Europe and North America and not anywhere else! The steady advances of the growing discipline of contextual theology have rendered this notion obsolete.

Unfortunately however, "colonial theology" still lingers today between missionaries and nationals in the Philippines (and in other post-colonial lands), which makes it vitally important to affirm a nationalism that sees God at work within Filipino culture. Voices like Maggay, Lim, Bautista, who have already been quoted throughout this study, and others like Eduardo Lapiz (1999) and Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano (1995) make up a small but strong minority among Filipino Evangelicals. These voices call for the Filipinization of both church and society. As prolific writers and speakers, they encourage both church and society to *be* Filipino, to shed off the skin of colonialism (and ongoing neo-colonialism) and to find the God who has already revealed himself through their own traditions, customs and beliefs. Regarding imported Protestantism, for example, Maggay writes, "There is a highly propositional and cerebral element to [American] Protestantism, which does not appeal to the more emotional, ritualistic and intuitive apprehension of the divine in the indigenous imagination" (1998:26). Pastor Eduardo Lapiz, chief organizer of *Kaloob: Sayaw Alay Kay Hesus*⁹ aptly summarizes this culturally affirming kind of nationalism, not only for the church in the Philippines, but for all churches and nations seeking to find God authentically through their own culture:

⁹ *Kaloob* is a movement dedicated to studying and redeeming traditional Philippine music and dance for use in Christian worship.

The worldwide church must be freed from the monolithic, intrusive, patronizing and colonialist Western Church culture that has been imposed over it. Every tribe and nation must be allowed to evolve a brand of Christianity whose spirit is biblical but whose body is indigenous (1999:26).

A nationalism that is defined by both a kingdom notion of human rights (justice and dignity for all) and cultural affirmation honors the history of the Filipino struggle against foreign rule. It carries on the theological vision for a free church and a free society. It is the first social transformational theme arising from Philippine Protestant history for contemporary evangelical theology.

3.2 Practical Church Unity as Social Witness

The second is practical church unity—an ecumenism that, by virtue of being united, already testifies to Christ in society. But beyond that, it is also a practical ecumenism that is ready for cooperative social ministry. The pursuit of church unity traces back to Filipino Protestantism’s earliest beginnings, and it has never really let up.

Church unity as church unity already testifies to Christ in society. Simply to *be* the unified people of God—living out the compassion, the justice, the righteousness and the peace of the kingdom of God in its life together—already witnesses to Christ sacramentally in the world. This understanding reflects Jesus’ teaching, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Our love for one another—our unity—demonstrates to the world what God desires for the rest of the world. Lewis S. Mudge writes, “Ecumenism has helped Christian faith communities to imagine how they could live together toward the encompassing horizon of the *missio Dei*, of God’s mission to humankind” (1998:46).

In the Philippines, it has been the older denominational churches that have led the way in the pursuit of church unity. The UCCP and the NCCP are products today of their efforts. Filipino Evangelicals, though notoriously cautious of unity for unity’s sake, in time also established mergers amongst themselves like the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the Philippines for Jesus Movement (PJM).

Simply *being* the unified people of God, however—as powerful a witness as this may be—does not define the whole social witness of the church. Indeed, witness also entails active engagement. The unity of the church must also reach out practically in a needy society. Both the NCCP

and the PCEC have social action arms that engage in disaster relief as well as in community development work.

Other exciting coalitions among Evangelicals have formed as well. As a result of several years of informal meetings and loosely structured joint ventures among Evangelical development organizations, a formal alliance was formed in 1992 called the *Samahan Ng mga Organasyong Pangkaunlaran* (SANGKOP) or the Alliance of Christian Transformational Agencies (ACTA). Its distinction from other umbrella organizations like the PCEC or the PJM is its expressed purpose to work holistically among the poor. Chief founder Corrie Accorda De Boer reminisces,

At first it was just six of us back in June of 1988. We met in my office...and the results from the brainstorming that emerged from that ad hoc committee is seen in an organization of 30 Christian groups... which have consolidated their forces into an effective, holistic, and relevant body working with and for the poor (quoted in Tizon 1999:20).

SANGKOP organizations range from holistic church planting missions like Servants Among the Urban Poor which emphasizes incarnational ministry to medical ministries like *Botica Binhi* which assists local communities to establish pharmacy cooperatives via training and access to affordable pharmaceuticals. A more recent development in Manila, spearheaded by De Boer and other SANGKOP leaders, is the formation of the National Coalition for Urban Transformation (NCUT), which seeks to promote dialogue and cooperation between Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Roman Catholics for the sake of the city ("Signs of Hope" 1998).

In order to be true to the historical pursuit of ecumenism among Filipino Protestants, the church today must work toward a practical church unity that seeks to do its part in transforming society first, by virtue of the unity itself, and second, by cooperating across denominational and traditional lines in active social ministries.

3.3 Attending to the Poor: Compassion and Social Justice

The third social transformational theme to emerge from Philippine history focuses upon the poor as central to the gospel. The reality of poverty reminds us of the enduring destruction that colonialism set in motion among the peoples of the Two-Thirds World. "Mass poverty is increasing everyday and is spreading like a mortal plague all over the Third World...[and] a great deal of it arises from the colonial system

which was imposed for centuries” (quoted in Blaser 1996:206). Of course, colonialism is not the blame for everything, but can anyone deny its contribution to mass poverty in post-colonial contexts? Indeed stripping a people’s rights on all levels—psychological, social, economic, religious and cultural—over centuries has played a major role in their continuing underdevelopment. The poor abound in the Philippines.

Our broad sweep of Filipino Protestant history has demonstrated the church showing compassion to the suffering, as well as challenging oppressive social structures, as it has sought to serve the poor in Christ’s name (Sitoy 1989:45-49). This balance of compassion and works of justice is crucial in an Evangelical theology of social transformation (Samuel and Sugden 1999:269-71).

Filipino Evangelicals have fared well in works of compassion. Relief, and more recently, community development have become constituent aspects of church and para-church ministries (Maggay 1994:64). SANGKOP has already been mentioned, a coalition of evangelical relief and development organizations, which demonstrates that not only do a considerable number of compassion ministries exist in the Philippines; there is also a level of maturity among them that fosters a spirit of cooperation.

Compassion ministries require a human face. “One of the struggles of people in the Third World,” asserts Ruby V. Barcelona, “is how not to become callous toward the poor.... Too much dose of poverty is like morphine. It deadens the nerves and drains out the passion in our hearts” (1996:3). How can such a numbing be avoided? Barcelona suggests that if we intentionally get close enough to the humanity of poverty, then it turns from being a statistical mass of non-persons to suffering individuals with names and faces. “Stories of real men and women in their struggle to survive make poverty real” (1996:3). In sharing the poverty of the *Aling Marinas*, *Kuya Kaloy*s, *Jojo*s, and *Nenas* of urban squatter and desperately poor rural areas, the church can authentically carry out works of Christ’s compassion.

To bring immediate relief to victims of disaster, malnutrition and disease obviously falls under the category of compassion ministries. To empower people by organizing them and catalyzing micro-loan programs, learning centers, infrastructural improvements, deep well digging and other community-wide development projects is a slower, more enduring approach than relief, but it still falls under compassion ministries in that it seeks to improve the lives of individuals and their communities. Propelled by Christ’s compassion, Evangelicals engage in both relief and development work among the suffering. According to Ticao and Dizon,

"The majority of the programs of the Evangelicals focus on relief, rehabilitation, and the provision of health and other social services" (quoted in Barcelona-Lavarias 1998:26).

Compassionate works among the poor are indispensable. But at some point, the church must investigate the reasons why the masses continue to suffer, and it is no less spiritual to do so. To get at the sources of poverty and challenge them, to work on the level of reforming social systems, to be the prophetic conscience against social structures that may be the cause of widespread oppression are works of social justice that ultimately bring compassion ministries full circle. In his explosive book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), Ronald J. Sider tells a story of a group of Christians who operated an ambulance service at the top of a mountain village (1977:203-204). It was needed because people were regularly getting injured or killed due to the dangerous neglected road that wended down the mountainside. A visitor came to town, and when he assessed the situation, he suggested to the Christians that they should do something about the road as well as speak to the government to do whatever it takes to prevent further fatalities and injuries. The Christians countered him with a "righteous indignation" that the church should not get involved in politics. "The church is called to preach the gospel and give a cup of cold water. Its mission is not to dabble in worldly things like social and political structures." The visitor wondered to himself, "Is it really more spiritual...to operate the ambulances which pick up bloody victims of destructive social structures than to try to change the structures themselves?" (1977:204). Sider writes bluntly, "Compassion...apart from structural change may be little more than a gloriously irrelevant ego-trip" (1977:204).

Dominguez asks rhetorically, "Do we [the church] have anything to say in order to change the social structures of our society that condemn large numbers of people to poverty, ignorance, and disease?" (1989:63). Since the 1986 People Power Revolution, Filipino Evangelicals have become more confident in their social involvement. They participated in and witnessed first hand what God can do, not just in the context of evangelistic crusades and church services, but in mass political rallies and acts of civil disobedience. They are now increasingly reading the Bible differently with an eye for social change. Isabelo Magalit, president of the Evangelical Asian Theological Seminary, wrote biblical guidelines for Christian political involvement to prepare the flock for the 1992 and 1998 national elections respectively (1991:6-7 and 1998:10-11, 18-20). As Bible-believing Christians, Filipino Evangelicals have increasingly come to believe that they can affect social structures that will have

bearing on the suffering masses. Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, who understood the Christian responsibility for social change even before the 1986 Revolution, speaks now for many Evangelicals when she testifies:

When I take my seat as a poll “watchdog volunteer” to help minimize election frauds...I recognize that I am within my Christian duty. When I march to the National Parliament to show my solidarity with the many other thousands of citizens who demand a clean canvassing of election returns, I am simply being a Christian. And when I write protests and criticism against unethical acts of the government and government officials, that is...within the purview of my faith (1994:156).

Compassion and social justice are two vital sides of the church’s ministry among the poor, which, if carried out, continues the legacy of Filipino Protestant social concern.

3.4 The Unity of Evangelism and Social Transformation

The last theme that can be derived from Filipino history for our consideration views social transformation as inseparable with evangelism. Along with the American missionaries, to proclaim the gospel to fellow Filipinos for the purpose of conversion (conversion missions) was a primary objective of the Protestant church. The nationalist Zamora, for example, was a great evangelist (Deats 1969:331-32). Social transformation and evangelization therefore must be seen as flowing from the same source—namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are not the same activity and they should not be confused with each other, but they both witness to the kingdom of God in the world (Maggay 1994:16-22).

In a 1992 seminar on Christian Community Development held in Manila, Lim presented a useful continuum regarding basic positions that can be held concerning this relationship:¹⁰

Humanization	Liberation	Transformation	Evangelization	Salvation
social concern only	social concern	social concern- evangelism	evangelism social concern	evangelism only

Humanization on the far left, where social concern stands alone at the expense of evangelism, and *salvation* on the far right, where evangelism has no need of social concern, represents the non-integrative

¹⁰ Lim explains this continuum in narrative form (1992:29).

and extreme positions. To the right of *humanization* is *liberation*, where social concern is primary over the secondary but still important activity of evangelism. In the center is *transformation*, where social concern and evangelism hold equal importance. And right of center is *evangelization*, where evangelism is primary over the secondary, but still important activity of social concern. The majority of Filipino Evangelicals locate themselves under *evangelization*.

Transformation, which occupies the center, represents a minority sector within the Filipino evangelical community (including Lim),¹¹ a sector that interprets the gospel of Jesus Christ as the salvation of humanity in its entirety. The good news of the kingdom announces the salvation of soul, body, mind and society. To view social concern and evangelism as unified partners in the proclamation of the gospel is one of the chief pillars of transformation theology.

4. Conclusion: The Need for Further Study with Reference to Foreign Missionaries

This study is, among other things, intensely personal. As a missionary who has spent the better part of the 1990s in the Philippines involved in social transformation ministries, and who plans to return, I am compelled to ask the crucial question of the changing role of missionaries in social transformation in the context of post-colonial Philippines. In light of contextual theology, this question must be directed primarily to the Filipino church. What are Filipino Evangelicals saying to missionaries regarding their role in social transformation?

Beyond the personal, several other reasons prompt the question. First generally speaking, the increasing influence of post-colonial thought upon international relations, which would include the relationship between missionaries and nationals, evokes it. The ongoing

¹¹ Elsewhere, however, Lim distinguishes the *theological* primacy of evangelism from the practical outworking of transformation theology (1992:29). In its practical outworking, evangelism and social concern are equally important. Some transformationists would take issue with Lim that even theologically, we cannot prioritize the two activities.

decolonization process since World War II in Two-Thirds World countries makes the question an important one.

Second, missionaries are more prone today to understand their calling as involving some kind of social engagement. Context-sensitive principles, therefore, seem essential to guide missionary social activity. The Committee for East Asia and the Pacific, a division of the National Council of Churches in the USA, apparently saw this need in 1982 and produced a report entitled, "The Development of Guidelines on Missionary Involvement in Social-Justice and Human-Rights Issues" (1982). If it was essential then, it is more so now as missionary training across the board has increasingly included grappling with issues in contextual theology, liberation theology and economic globalization.

In that same report, the Committee deemed that "there is no universal formula to solve the dilemmas about involvement in human rights and social justice issues in different countries where missionaries serve" (1982:9). Each context, therefore, should use what is presented in the report to work out its own guidelines. Third then, speaking particularly to the Philippine Evangelical situation, it is timely to ask the question concerning the missionaries' role in social transformation because Filipino Evangelicalism is today responding to social problems more seriously than ever before (Bautista 1996:183), while also continuing to affirm missionary involvement. While Filipino Protestantism's ecumenical counterpart began controlling the flow of missionary personnel and funding in the mid-70s (which already speaks volumes concerning the ecumenical perspective on the role of missionaries), Evangelicals remain "most hospitable to foreign missions" (Bautista 1996:180).

For reasons then that are partly personal, partly macro-sociological, partly missiological, and partly national/ecclesial, the question of the role of missionaries in social transformation in the Philippines must be asked, and it must be directed primarily to the Filipino church. To answer this will require an involved separate study that is well beyond the scope of this paper.

Hopefully, however, this social transformational look into Filipino Protestant history provides the needed background to pursue such a question. Four themes—a gospel-inspired nationalism, a practical unity for social witness, ministries of compassion and justice among the poor, and an integral relationship with evangelization—have emerged from looking at what Filipino Protestants were doing during revolutionary times.

The spirit of these four themes conveys an even more basic theme—namely, to be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ in an authentically Filipino way. If future studies on the role of the missionary in the Philippines build upon such a theme, then they stand a chance in achieving a practical, cultural relevance that can affect positive social change for the sake of the kingdom.

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