

ANTONIO GRAMSCI AND EDWARD SAID'S IMAGE OF A MODERN DAY INTELLECTUAL AND THE FILIPINO ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST

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Abstract

This paper takes the erosion of the intellectual status of the Filipino Roman Catholic priest as its starting point and proposes a framework on how to re-conceptualize this status in the context of present society that has already been altered by modernization, secularization and the educational empowerment of the laity. This goal will be accomplished by first examining the images of the intellectual as theorized by the philosophers Gramsci and Said. Then, this paper will test the compatibility of these two thinkers' idea of the intellectual with the concept of the Roman Catholic priesthood, by exploring the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Then, this paper will suggest that one very good way for the modern priesthood to regain its intellectual role is to go back to the model set by Jesus. Finally, this paper will analyze how the priest as a modern intellectual would fit into the Filipino model of Roman Catholic priesthood as it is propagated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Introduction

About thirty or fifty years ago, a Roman Catholic priest in any Filipino community would automatically be considered by the people in that community as an intellectual. However, lately, perhaps due to modernism, or to secularism, or even to mere fact that more and more Filipinos now attain levels of education that are comparable to, or even higher than, that of the Roman Catholic priest, the status of being considered an intellectual is not automatically accorded to a Roman Catholic priest, especially if he is in a big urban community. If in the past this status came along ordination, today a Filipino Roman Catholic priest has to earn this by doing the task of the intellectual.

But the Filipino Roman Catholic priest need not just sit back and watch his intellectual role being eroded by modernism, secularism and the educational empowerment of the laity. The Roman Catholic priesthood may be modeled after the priesthood of Jesus of Nazareth, which was practically a Jewish priesthood focused on liturgy, but it also has a very important mandate for evangelization and the propagation of the Catholic doctrine. Thus, it may be true that the Roman Catholic priest need not be an intellectual to effectively discharge his liturgical function. But to be effective in his task of evangelization and propagation of doctrine he has to assume the role of the intellectual.

This short paper attempts to propose a framework on how to re-conceptualize the intellectual role of the Filipino Roman Catholic priest in this modern world. This goal will be accomplished by first examining the images of the intellectual as theorized by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), and Edward Said (1935-2003). Then, secondly, this paper will test the compatibility of these two thinkers' idea of the intellectual with the concept of the Roman Catholic priesthood, by exploring the life of Jesus who was both an intellectual and the forerunner of the priesthood under this investigation. Then, thirdly, this paper will suggest that one very good way for the modern priesthood to regain its intellectual role is to go back to the model set by Jesus. Finally, this paper will analyze how the priest as a modern intellectual would fit into the Filipino model of Roman Catholic priesthood as it is constructed, reconstructed and perpetuated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said and the modern intellectual

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher, journalist, political leader and theorist of socialism and anti-fascism. When he was imprisoned during the Mussolini regime for his anti-fascist activities and writings, he wrote his most valuable philosophical thoughts inside his cell on thirty-three bundles of paper that is now known as *The Prison Notebooks*. Aside from his concept of hegemony, Gramsci is also remembered for his related speculations on the image of the intellectual.

He proposed that there are two types of intellectuals: the organic and the traditional intellectuals. Gramsci believed that intellectuals are bound to some specific groups, classes, or societies, within which they would function as conceptual and organizational force. "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production," he wrote, "creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (Gramsci, 5). These are the organic intellectuals, which in the context of the industrial Italy of his time pertained to the entrepreneurs, industrial technicians, political economists, cultural organizers, legal experts, and the like (Cf. Gramsci, 5). He

stressed that these intellectuals are not simply demagogues and orators who may be able to momentarily spur some people into action, rather they are individuals who are engaged in continuous “active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer” and “permanent persuader” of the people within their respective group, class or society (Gramsci, 10).

During Gramsci’s time, the majority of the organic intellectuals in Italy was either part of or was in the service for the dominant classes. Hence, their involvement for changes amounted to the consolidation of the power of the same dominant classes over the working and the lower classes. Gramsci could only hope that the working and the lower classes can grow more and more organic intellectuals of their own to enable them to have the conceptual and organizational force to move their disadvantaged classes to assert their rights and claims for equality and justice.

Despite Gramsci’s initial stipulation that all intellectuals are supposed to be bound to some specific groups, classes or societies, he noticed that there are some intellectuals who appear to negate this contextual connection. He stated: “every ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure. . . has found. . . categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seem to represent at historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social form (Gramsci, 6-7).” These are the traditional intellectuals who have come to regard themselves as autonomous from their group, class or social contexts and their works as timeless and changeless. “The most typical of these categories of intellectuals is that of the ecclesiastics, who for a long time. . . held a monopoly of a number of important services: religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc. (Gramsci,7).” When this monopoly broke down, the other intellectuals emerged. “Thus, we find the formation of the *noblese de robe*, with its own privileges, a stratum of administrators, etc., scholars, and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers, etc (Gramsci, 7).”

Gramsci noted that behind the traditional intellectuals’ seemingly innocuous claim for autonomy, as well as their works’ seemingly and similarly innocuous claim for timelessness and changelessness, are some sinister implications. He warned us that “one of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals (Gramsci, 10).” Hence, traditional intellectuals, regardless of their respective group, class or social origins, are already co-opted in the subtle service of the dominant classes. Thus, their supposedly timeless and unchanging works are wittingly or unwittingly supporting the status quo, including all its injustices and inequalities, against any threat of cultural and social changes. In the bottom-line, traditional intellectuals, by virtue of their being a conservative flank, hinder any initiative from the working and lower classes to establish a more humane and egalitarian society.

Based on Gramsci's distinction, a Filipino Roman Catholic priest, or any Roman Catholic priest, or even any priest for this matter, could automatically qualify as a traditional intellectual. But in the context of Gramsci's thought, being a traditional intellectual is not only something undesirable, but is also being marginalized by the proliferation of organic intellectuals brought about by industrialization and modernization. This marginalization of the traditional intellectual explains clearly why the modern Filipino Roman Catholic priest, amidst the educational empowerment of the laity, is losing, if he has not lost it already, the status of being recognized as an intellectual.

On the other hand, not every Filipino Roman Catholic priest would qualify as an organic intellectual, because to be one, he has to prove his worth in the conceptual and organizational task of consolidating and moving his flock towards certain advocacies. The few who may indeed qualify as organic intellectuals would still not automatically end up as some individuals desirable to Gramsci's eyes, because chances are greater for them to end up as organic intellectuals for the dominant classes than for them to end up as organic intellectuals of and for the disadvantaged classes.

Edward Said was a Palestinian-born American literary theorist and critic, as well as political activist. Aside from his thoughts on post-colonialism and Orientalism, Said is also remembered for his elaboration on the idea of the intellectual. His work, *Representations of the Intellectual*, took off from Gramsci's famous distinction between the organic and the traditional intellectuals.

Said was perturbed by Gramsci's casual acceptance that intellectuals proliferate in the society, as it would be undeniable that there are simply too many entrepreneurs, industrial technicians, political economists, cultural organizers, legal experts, and their like, as organic intellectuals on one hand, and clerics, professors, literary writers, or in Gramsci's own words, ecclesiastics, stratum of administrators, scholars, scientists, theorists and non-ecclesiastical philosophers, as traditional intellectuals on the other hand. Said could not accept this over-abundance of intellectuals and decided to temper Gramsci's definitions with the other-worldly speculations of the French philosopher and novelist Julien Benda (1867-1956).

Although Benda believed in a radical concept of the intellectual as "someone able to speak the truth to power, a crusty, eloquent, fantastically courageous and angry individual for whom no worldly power is too big and imposing to be criticized and pointedly taken to task," this someone belongs to a rare species of being that are set apart from the other ordinary human beings (Said, 8). In Benda's work, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, the intellectuals are defined as a select few who are not interested in the pursuit of practical goals, but in the exercise of their art, science, and speculation towards non-material ends.

Said appropriated the ideas of rareness and being radical of Benda and mixes it with the ideas of social contextualization and continuous social mobilization of Gramsci and came up with his own Saidian model of the intellectual as an “individual endowed with a faculty for presenting, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for a public;” an individual whose work is to “confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them);” an individual “who cannot be co-opted by governments or corporations;” and an individual whose mission in life is to “represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug (Said, 11).”

Beyond their disagreements, both Gramsci and Said in fact hold the same thought that the desirable intellectual is a person who is deeply rooted in his own social context, who is aware of the oppressive and unjust forces operating around him, who is not afraid to publicly articulate and denounce such sinister forces. Consequently, this person’s knowledge and political action are fused as one. Knowledge of theory will not make an intellectual, and neither will the surplus of political praxis. It is the consistent and heroic fusion of theory and praxis that creates an intellectual.

The reason why Said could not accept Gramsci’s emphasis for the abundance of intellectuals specially in the industrial and modern societies, is that Said is interested only with the radical and contextualized intellectuals that roughly correspond with Gramsci’s much desired organic intellectuals for the working and the lower classes. In this sense they are in agreement, because on one hand Gramsci hoped for the emergence of intellectuals of this type, and on the other hand we have Said saying that this intellectuals are only few in number. Said, as a matter of fact, considers Gramsci as one of these very few intellectuals. He wrote; “Gramsci’s own career exemplifies the role he ascribed to the intellectual: a trained philologist, he was both an organizer of the Italian working-class movement and, in his own journalism, one of the most consciously reflective of social analysts, whose purpose was to build not just a social movement but an entire cultural formation associated with the movement” (Said, 3-4). Hence, based on Said’s definition it would be as difficult for a Filipino Roman Catholic priest to qualify as an intellectual as it is for him to be an organic intellectual for working and lower classes under Gramsci’s understanding.

After examining the highly political, Marxist, and post-Marxist, models of the intellectual conceptualized by Gramsci and Said, and after distilling a composite image of the Gramscian/Saidian intellectual, this paper faces the question of whether or not this model can be useful to the Filipino Catholic priest who we know in advance to be part of a transnational, conservative and dogmatic priesthood. It is one thing to say that many of the Filipino Roman Catholic priests would not qualify as Gramscian/Saidian intellectuals, and it is entirely another thing to ask if it is possible for these same priests to follow the pathway of these intellectuals. Thus, this paper has to address the question: is

the Gramscian/Saidian model of the intellectual compatible with the transnational, conservative, and dogmatic way of life of the modern Filipino Catholic priest?

The most promising way to address such a problem is to see the compatibility between the Gramscian/Saidian model of the intellectual with that model of the intellectual that is implicitly embodied in the life of Jesus, which for all practical considerations is the ultimate paradigm of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Jesus of Nazareth as an Intellectual

The Bible has more than a hundred titles for Jesus, such as “the Advocate,” “the Beginning and the End,” “the Christ,” “the King of Ages,” “the Light of the World,” “the Morning Star,” “the True Vine,” “the Son of Man,” and “the Word.” Among these several titles, three stand out as central to the person and ministry of Jesus. These were collectively named by Eusebius of Caesarea (circa 263-339) as the “threefold office,” and these are no other than the titles of King, Priest and Prophet. Catholic theology did not immediately appropriate and elaborate on Eusebius’ concept, although the greatest scholastic thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) came near it when he talked about Jesus as a Lawmaker, Priest and King. It was the French Reformist theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) who in effect revived Eusebius’ idea of Jesus’ threefold office, and this found its way back to Catholicism when the former Anglican John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) theologized on it and left some writings that later on influenced the doctrines of the Second Vatican Council (Cf. Crehan, 216-217). This paper then pursues its profiling of Jesus as an intellectual following the models of Jesus as King, Priest, and Prophet.

The kingship of Jesus in the New Testament is based on some prophecies in the Old Testament. Apparently what was once merely some promises to Abraham and Isaac that salvation of the Jewish people will emanate from their lineage (Cf. *Genesis*, 18:17-19; *Genesis*, 26: 4-5) was later on articulated as salvation through a royal person (Cf. *Numbers*, 24:19; 2 *Samuel*, 7: 11-16). Since in the Jewish context royal persons or kings, were placed into office through the ritual of anointing with sacred oil, the promised savior came to be known as the Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ) or the “Anointed.” In an essay written for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Leonard Geddes describes what the Messiah was for the Jews: “It is to Israel and Juda that He will bring salvation. . . , triumphing over their enemies by force of arms. . . . Even in the latter part of *Isaias* there are passages. . . in which other nations are regarded as sharing in the kingdom rather as servants than as heirs, while the function of the Messiah is to lift up Jerusalem to its glory and lay the foundations of an Israelitic theocracy” (Geddes). In the New Testament, Jesus is presented several times as openly claiming that he is the Messiah promised by the Old Testament. Thus, the title “Christ”, or “Christos” (Χριστός) the Greek translation of the word “Messiah,” was attached to

his name. But Jesus as the Messiah frustrated the common Jewish expectation, for he came to establish a kingdom that was not of this world.

Both the Jewish Messiah and Jesus as the Messiah would qualify as organic intellectuals for the reason that both figures involve the task of mobilizing and unifying people under one vision. Yet without a clear element of conceptual leadership and speaking in behalf of the downtrodden, these same figures would fail short of the Gramscian/Saidian ideal of organic intellectual for the lower classes. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church for a very long time had reserved the figure of Jesus the Messiah, or the Kinship of Jesus, as a model only for the bishops and not for the priests (Cf. Crehan, 217). This kingly image was even toned down into that of the shepherd (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 20). When the Church finally appropriated the Messiah as a model for the priest, it was used only to serve as the template for the pastoral and day to day administration of the ordinary priests. Thus, the image of the organic intellectual which undergirds the figures of the Jewish Messiah and Jesus as Messiah had been overpowered with the kind of kingly image that makes the modern priest nothing but a traditional intellectual.

The priesthood of Jesus in the New Testament is also based on some prophecies in the Old Testament, even though this was not clear for a very long time in Catholic theology. Joseph Crehan, in his essay "Priesthood, Kingship, and Prophecy," asserted that it was only after the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls that Catholic theology became certain that the Jews during Jesus' times were in fact waiting for two Messiahs: a kingly Messiah from the lineage of Judah, and a priestly Messiah from the lineage of Levi (Crehan, 216). Although Jesus was not a priest in the Jewish sense of the word, the New Testament regards him as the founder of a new lineage of priesthood (Cf. *Letter to the Hebrews*, 4:14; and 6:20). Nevertheless, his priesthood is still modeled after the Jewish priesthood that starts from the line of Aaron, the brother of Moses. In an essay written for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Joseph Pohle enumerates the duties and functions of the Aaronian priest (Pohle):

Main Duties

- "Functions connected with the public worship, e.g. the offering of incense twice daily. . . the weekly renewal of the loaves of proposition on the golden table. . . the cleaning and filling of the oil-lamps on the golden candlestick;"
- "Maintenance of the sacred fire on the altar for burnt sacrifices;" and
- "Daily offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, especially of the lambs."

Subsidiary Services

- "Present the cursed water to wives suspected of adultery;"
- "Sound the trumpets announcing the holy-days;"
- "Declare the lepers clean or unclean;"
- "Dispense from vows;"
- "Appraise all objects vowed to the sanctuary;" and
- "Offer sacrifice for those who broke the law of the Nazarites."

Other Services

- Teacher;
- Judge; and
- Keeper of the Book of the Law.

Thus, the priesthood of Christ as something modeled on the Jewish priesthood leaned heavily on liturgical matters. Notice that in the Jewish priesthood the function of teaching the law was not even a subsidiary matter but was considered accidental to the office of the priest. The *Lumen Gentium*, for example emphasized that: "The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people (*Lumen Gentium*, 10)." Hence, Jesus as Priest would yield a very hazy and weak image of an intellectual.

We are left now with the last central title of Jesus, the Prophet. According to Crehan the Prophetic figure of Jesus has been a neglected theme in theologizing about the Catholic priesthood that leaned more on the Priestly and Kingly figures, and that this theme only resurfaced during the Second Vatican Council (Cf. Crehan, 228-229).

Jesus as a prophet is actually intimately woven with Jesus as a teacher. That Jesus was a teacher in the eyes of his contemporaries is something that is presented as a matter of fact in the Gospels, where he is repeatedly referred to as a rabbi. But as a rabbi, Jesus stood out over and above the other rabbis, who tended to mechanically and dogmatically expound the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus had a radical way of expounding these Scriptures. He struggled to put God and Man before the letters of the same Scriptures. Thus, Jesus preached about moral sincerity instead of the rigorous observance of the labyrinthine details of Jewish laws and rituals. This he did even with the threat of a Pharisaic backlash. This he pursued down to its ultimate logical end, his death on the cross.

Jesus as a rabbi was a perfect instance of what Gramsci hoped for, an organic intellectual of the lower classes, caring and leading them towards social and spiritual changes. Benda, on his part, was explicit in naming Jesus as an example of what he meant by a rare and other-worldly intellectual, and placed him side by side with the Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 BC), the Jewish Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the French Enlightenment writer and philosopher François-Marie Arouet, or Voltaire, (1694-1778), and the French philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892) (Cf. Said, 5). Jesus as rabbi was likewise a perfect instance of what Said thought of as an intellectual: somebody who fearlessly articulates a message and challenges the powerful orthodoxy and dogmatism.

The word "prophet" is a rather confusing term due to the layering of the Hebrew *nabi* (נָבִי) and the Greek *prophetes* (προφήτης). Whereas the Greek word strongly connotes the images of the seer, the oracle and the soothsayer,

the Hebrew word, de-emphasizes these things and stresses the social and religious functions of the *nabi* to unconditionally deliver the message of God to the people even at the threat of persecution and death. Thus, the Jewish prophet is not basically someone who foretells the future, but someone who is consumed by the Spirit to fearlessly deliver the word of God.

The Gospels present Jesus not only as a typical Jewish prophet, but also as the prophet promised by the Book of Deuteronomy (Cf. *Deuteronomy*, 18:15-20; *Mark*, 6:14-16; *Mark*, 8:28; *Matthew*, 21:11; *Luke*, 7:16; *Luke*, 24:19; and *John*, 6:14). Even the Holy Qur'an takes the prophetic identity of Jesus, or Isa the son of Maryam, as a matter of fact (Cf. for example, Surah 19:30-35). Jesus unconditionally voiced out his social and religious protests against the powerful Jews and Romans. Just like Jesus as a rabbi, Jesus as a prophet would be a perfect example of what an intellectual is for Gramsci and Said, and even for Benda for that matter.

The idea of the intellectual as a person who is deeply rooted in his own social context, who is aware of the oppressive and unjust forces operating around him, who is not afraid to publicly articulate and denounce such sinister forces, and, thus, whose knowledge and political action are fused together, is therefore compatible with the model of the intellectual embodied in the life of Jesus. If Jesus is the paradigm of the Roman Catholic priesthood, the same idea of the intellectual is also compatible with the Roman Catholic priest.

After establishing the compatibility between the Gramscian/Saidian intellectual and the life of Jesus, this paper faces another problem of how would this same image of a Gramscian/Saidian intellectual fit into image of the priest as constructed, reconstructed and propagated by the supreme gatekeeper of theological matters in the local Philippine church, which is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Would this body find it acceptable to have in its local church priests who are not only politically radical but vocal and confrontational as well?

the place of the prophet/intellectual in the pronouncements of the catholic bishops' conference of the philippines

Robert Youngblood, in his essay "Structural Imperialism: An Analysis of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines," had established how in the 1970s and early 1980s this ecclesiastical body had been dominated by powerful conservative cardinals, archbishops and bishops. In his analysis the distribution of the political leanings of the members of this collectivity was: 46%, conservative; 18%, moderate; and only 15%, progressive (Youngblood, 40). It is easy to imagine how this body would immediately frown upon the idea of encouraging the Filipino Roman Catholic priests to pursue the definitely progressive pathway of the Gramscian/Saidian intellectual.

But Youngblood failed to anticipate that even with minimal changes in the cardinals, archbishops, and bishops' political leanings, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, in just a matter of few years after the publication of his essay, would suddenly become radical to the point of openly challenging the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. What Youngblood saw as a predominantly conservative body had swiftly become a progressive force in Philippine politics at the middle of the 1980s.

In its 1998 pastoral letter entitled "Catechism on the Church and Politics," the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines justified its intrusion into politics thus: "Philippine politics the way it is practiced has been the most hurtful of us as a people. It is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving full development" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Catechism on the Church and Politics," Article 28). The local church of the Philippines cannot but fight the specific evils of Philippine politics, namely patronage politics, politics of personalities, politics of pay-off, elitist power and control, and political dynasties (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Catechism on the Church and Politics," Article 29). In this same document, the ecclesiastical body even detailed its program of action:

- Catechesis or Christian education in politics in order to evangelize our political culture which is characterized by a separation between faith and politics;
- Issuing guidelines on properly choosing political officials, so that the people may have a properly formed conscience in their electoral choices;
- Helping keep elections honest, clean, peaceful, and orderly through various church organizations, cooperating with non-government organizations;
- Pushing for structural changes as a goal of pastoral action in the political field, such as urging for reforms in the electoral processes in order to avoid delays and ensure integrity throughout the entire electoral process from voting, to counting, to reporting, and finally to proclaiming the winners;
- Political advocacy such as lobbying for legislation that promote the common good and against bills that promote the vested interests of the few;
- Getting involved in a movement of civil society (civic organizations, peoples' organizations, non-government organizations, associations of lay people and religious, school associations, etc.) to change politics for the better;
- Organizing her own network of parishes and organizations, pastoral and social centers, etc., such as NASSA VOTE-CARE and PPC-RV, to help keep elections clean, honest, peaceful and orderly; and
- The living witness of all the Catholic faithful to Christ and to the values of the Gospel. This is the most important contribution of the Church to the evangelization of politics (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Catechism on the Church and Politics," Article 27).

In its 2006 pastoral letter entitled "Shepherding and Prophecy in Hope," this collectivity even stated: "In the Old Testament God chose prophets to proclaim God's word, announcing judgment and hope to Israel. Today the Church fills the role of prophet to herself and to society. Her social doctrine is prophetic.

It is both judgment and hope. It calls to conversion. It enkindles hope. It bears the seeds of personal and social transformation” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Shepherding and Prophesying in Hope,” Article 14). The pastoral letter implies that the local church should not just sit on the Priesthood of Jesus, but also struggle as well side by side with the Prophetic and Rabbinic images of Jesus.

In the context of this politically awakened local church the image of priest as a Gramscian/Saidian intellectual would not only fit perfectly, but would even be the desired model for a pastor who is capable of educating and leading the faithful towards the local church’s envisioned political praxis and project of cleansing Philippine politics.

Unfortunately, the rather abruptly politically awakened Philippine church does not constitute the totality of the picture. Recent studies on the political ideology of the same Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines have revealed that its upsurge of radicalism that started in the middle of the 1980s was just a phase that would eventually run down towards the latter part of the 2000s (Cf Ablellanosa; Raneses).

Without a clear explanation on this downward curve, this paper can only surmise that the predominantly conservative members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, as observed by Youngblood, could just have been pushed against the wall during the height of the Marcos dictatorship, leaving them without an option but to fight back, igniting in the process their decades long political praxis. After driving away the dictator and after re-establishing semblances of a democratic society, it would not be surprising to think that the cardinals, archbishops and bishops comfortably slid back to their predominantly conservative ideologies.

But even if the current members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines are mostly abandoning the pathway of open political praxis, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines as a whole have already left behind a doctrinal legacy that gives enough space for a Filipino Roman Catholic priest to assume the role of a Gramscian/Saidian intellectual.

Conclusion

The role of the modern intellectual may not be for each and every Filipino Roman Catholic priest. Because to be one, this priest has to be deeply rooted in his own social context, has to be aware of the oppressive and unjust forces operating around him, has to be unafraid to publicly articulate and denounce such sinister forces, and has fuse together his political theory and praxis. Obviously, not every Filipino Roman Catholic priest is up to these great challenges. What is a little ironic about this paper is the thought that to be a modern intellectual, all that the Filipino Roman Catholic priest has do is to go

back to the ancient way of life of Jesus and to the even more ancient way of life of the Old Testament prophets.

For the rest of the Filipino Roman Catholic priest who are not up to the challenges of becoming a modern intellectual, they will be left with the unsavory roles of remaining traditional intellectuals or organic intellectuals for the upper classes. Unwittingly they will contribute to the perpetuation of that kind of social and political order that even the local church has denounced as riddled with patronage politics, politics of personalities, politics of pay-off, elitist power and control, and political dynasties (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Catechism on the Church and Politics," Article 29).

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