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## **Churches in Contestation: Asian Christian Social Protest**

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CHURCHES IN CONTESTATION. ASIAN CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PROTEST. By Parig Digan. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984. x, 214 pages.

In the Philippines the decades from the late sixties to the present can be rightly characterized as the contemporary period of social protest. Those who find it difficult to understand why Filipino Catholic priests, religious, seminarians, Christian lay leaders, students, workers, and various ecumenical Church groups have been in the forefront of protest marches, demonstrations, and rallies, will find an answer in this pioneering historical and sociological survey of the phenomenon of social protest in Asia. Parig Digan has for the first time assembled in one volume all the available sociological data and documentary evidence from 1965 to 1982, and analyzed and interpreted with depth the meaning and significance of the Asian churches in social protest which the author considers a historical novelty. As a sociologist and historian engaged in Far East area studies, Digan is most qualified to do this synthetic analysis of Asian Christianity.

In the Introduction, Digan points out the problems and difficulties of such a scientific study. After posing the specific question: "has Christian protest been qualitatively and quantitatively *significant*?" (p. 3), the author states the purpose of his book which is to investigate "whether there was evidence by the early 1980s of an enduring trend of Christian social protest in Asia against the status quo there" (p. 4). As the title of the book—*Churches in Contestation*—indicates, the author's focus is the *corporate* kind of Church statements and actions in the direction of social change.

In order to understand profoundly Asian Christian social protest, Digan provides the global background (chap. 1), the Asian background (chap. 2), both the colonial antecedents (chap. 3), and the postcolonial setting (chap. 4), against which he studies the impact of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), officially representing about 50 million Asian Catholics, and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the official representative of 35 million Asian Christians. The author shows his objective sensitivity by asking the right question: Who speaks for the Church?—the FABC and CCA or the local churches with their activist avant-garde? Since the Church as a fixed point is not accessible to empirical study, Digan offers a more scientifically observable paradigm of the Church as "a scattered moving pilgrimage in the midst of a larger mass of people also on the move" in which, despite a certain unity, a "permanently precarious distance between the head and the tail of the procession, and between the standard bearers and the scouts" (p. 70), is observed. The author identifies the embodiment of the transnational avant-garde (chap. 5) of Asian social protest, not with the official Church standard bearers but with the scouts on the Asian frontier; namely, the poor masses (peasants and workers), the youth, and the intellectuals who are the religious

meaning-makers, e.g., the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

In the seven Asian territories representing 84 million Christians, the author pinpoints only one-tenth of the total Asian population as the local sources of militant social protest (chap. 6), singling out the cases of the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia as most instructive. From an overall transnational perspective (chap. 7), the author projects the future of Asian social protest by scrutinizing the Asian options between nationalism and transnationalism, capitalism and communism, and between "the powers that be" and "the cry of the people." Digan believes that "Christianity as a whole will weigh significantly more heavily than before on the side of social change, and significantly less heavily than before on the side of social status quo" (p. 131). In conclusion (chap. 8), on the basis of the outcome of three factors—"demographic progress toward outgrowing the Asian Christian minority complex; continuation of a critical imbalance in the sharing of the world's and Asia's goods; and continuation in practice as well as in theory of the shift of some of the weight of the churches in the scales of society from the side of the haves to that of the have nots" (p. 165)—the author makes modest predictions about the future outlook of Asian social protest. Will the Asian Church be "the Church of the poor," "the Church of all the people and of all peoples"? This, in the author's view is the challenge of third millennium Catholicity.

A significant part of the book is devoted to a study of the Philippine case. The reason for this selectivity is partly because Parig Digan is a Columbian priest who served for ten years as parish priest in the Philippines (as the saying goes: "he has been there") but mainly because the Philippine experience provides a unique and most instructive lesson in militant social protest. The Philippine reader will find eye-openers in the author's insights on—the crossfertilization of Latin American liberation theology and the Maoist variety of Marxism-Leninism; the low level of institutionalization of Philippine Catholicism; the pattern of protest only from the Church radical periphery; the issues of violence and Marxist-Christian collaboration. This reviewer cannot but agree with the author's observation about the history of the Mindanao Sulu Pastoral Secretariat (MSPS) being an example of Communist double-dealing, infiltration, and manipulation of the Church, and with his conclusion that "the Philippine experience suggests that there would have been no Christian ferment on the fringes had there been no heat applied by national security ideology from one direction and by Roman curial centralism or Protestant mission-board possessiveness from another" (p. 119). In retrospect, were the author to update his book, he would surely not give the same importance to Fr. Edicio de la Torre as he would to Frs. Balweg, Kangleon, Gore and the priest-martyrs, Frs. Agatep and Alingal. In other words, this book is an unfinished story that must be continued periodically.

The seven appendices at the end of the book—Key World Events (1945-1969), Key World and Asian Events (1970-1982), Other Events related to Asian Social Protest (1965-1982); Asian National and National Christian Populations Circa 1980; Distribution of Roman Catholics and Other Christians Circa 1980; Relative Institutionalization of Catholicism in Asian Nations; and Notion of Transnational Relations—provides invaluable data and figures for any researcher and student of Asian Christianity. The book also contains a representative bibliography and an author-subject index. This scientific, scholarly, perceptive, insightful, analytical and interpretative study by a highly competent social scientist and historian is highly recommended to all Christian Church leaders and to all rank and file educated Christians who belong to the social protest movement in the Philippines.

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GOING FORTH: MISSIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS IN THIRD WORLD CATHOLIC CHURCHES. By Omer Degrijse, C.I.C.M. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984. xi, 98 pages.

A major event for Asia and for the Philippines was the International Congress on Mission (ICM) in Manila, 2-7 December 1979 at which the final message contains the following significant words quoted by the author of this book (p. 41):

"Mission" is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the "older churches" to the "younger churches," from the churches of the old Christendom to the churches in the colonial lands. Now—as Vatican II already affirmed with all clarity and force—every local church is and cannot but be missionary. Every local Church is "sent" by Christ and the Father to bring the gospel to its surrounding milieu, and to bear it also to all the world. For every local church this is a primary task. Hence, we are moving beyond the vocabulary and the idea of "sending" and "receiving churches," . . . *every local church must be a sending church* (Italics supplied).

These final words of the ICM sums up the central thesis of Omer Degrijse's well-documented book on the emergence and evolution of missionary consciousness in the Catholic churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The author collects all the available facts and statistical and documentary evidence to date to show that "the center of gravity within the church is moving very quickly from the Western churches to the churches of the South and the