Institutional Religion and Modernity-in-Transition: Christianity's Innovations in the Philippines and Latin America

Jayeel S. Cornelio

Commentary

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How can religion in developing countries be understood in the context of modernity-in-transition? Available works argue that religious innovations, appropriated primarily by groups of disenfranchised religious actors, serve as mechanisms for coping with the condition of modernity in non-Western contexts. In contrast, this commentary views religious innovations as strategic assertions of waning institutional influence. The argument draws from the experiences of Charismatic Christianity within Catholicism and Protestantism in the Philippines and Latin America.

KEYWORDS: RELIGION · INNOVATION · MODERNITY-IN-TRANSITION · CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

The global picture of Christianity typically portrays a decline in the West and an upsurge in the non-Western word of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Around one-third of the world's population professes to be Christian, with an unprecedented bulk found in the global South (Woodhead 2002). As believers and clergy now emerge from different sociocultural backgrounds, the repercussions on theology and praxis are expectedly unprecedented as well (Jenkins 2003).

Although Christianity's current global reach is evident, the ongoing dialogue in the sociology of religion still mainly confines itself within the experience of the West, particularly Europe and North America (Davie 2007; Hefner 1998; Lambert 1999). Many of these discussions attempt to explain the condition of religious life, whether vibrant or otherwise, by debating the viability and reality of issues such as secularization and rational choice (cf. Berger 1967; Luckmann 1967; Dobbelaere 1981; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Davie 1994; Day 2005; Hunt 2005). In accounting comprehensively for the fortunes of global Christianity, these discussions are limited as they draw from the experience of religion confined mainly to the West and its advanced or late modernity (Giddens 1991; Lyon 2000; cf. Christiano 2007). Moreover, they do not account for the fundamental differences in history, ideology, and culture of the non-Western world, which have resulted in different development trajectories of nation-states and their multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000; Sachsenmaier and Riedel 2002). As Hefner (1998, 86) puts it, "classical secularization theory oversimplified modernity and its nonmodern 'other.'" In discussing the non-West I adopt the term modernity-in-transition, an idea stimulated by Ortiz's (2000) nuances, as a descriptive concept to characterize modernity in developing societies.

This essay deals with the question: What happens to religion when it engages with modernity-in-transition? Available empirical data about religion in the non-West reveal the emergence of many innovations within established religious institutions that have historical links to the nation-state. In this essay, religious innovations refer mainly to widely participated alternative religious forms that remain to be authorized or affiliated with institutional religion.

Examining religious innovations is necessary for the contemporary sociology of religion for two reasons: they are sites for popular involvement (Heelas 2002; Woodhead 2002), and they enable the focused assessment of a historically institutionalized religion in a given society. Given the immensity

and diversity of religious experiences around the world today, the discussion is limited to accounts of innovations within Christianity in the Philippines and Latin America, two geographic areas that are historically Catholic but with considerable exposure to Protestantism. Jenkins (2003) identifies these two geographic areas as spearheading, together with Africa, the global shift in contemporary Christianity.

My argument is straightforward. In the context discussed in this essay, religious innovations contribute to the reinforcement and assertion of institutional religious influence by addressing the individual's need for physical, spiritual, and emotional fulfillment and community, which may have a significant impact on social change. Although other institutions in civil society may offer their own provisions for the individual, religious innovations have the leverage of being part of the nation's heritage to which people can easily relate. In addition, their comprehensive provisions reflect how religious innovations view the individual holistically, which interestingly deviates from the functionally differentiated self in the modern condition (cf. Hunt 2005). Hence, far from being reactive to the marginalizing tendencies brought about by modernity as experienced by religion in the West, these innovations are not reacting against global forces of modernity but instead are engaging and offering preemptive strikes. This argument builds on Taylor's (2007, 4) proposition that an analysis of the modernity of religious forms must consider how religious expressions relate with local histories and conditions.

Religion and Modernity in Developing Societies

Challenging the secularization thesis that has accompanied notions of modernization in the West, studies of religion in developing societies stress the modernity of contemporary religious forms. They look mostly at the different ways these practices are engaging with elements of modernity in developing societies. Hefner (1998, 98) points out that, in situations where social borders are porous to transcultural flows, "cultural organizations that lay claim to ultimate meanings face a dilemma: how to maintain a coherent world-view and steadied social engagement while acknowledging the pluralism of the modern world." One response, according to Hefner (ibid.), is that religions are defining their own alternative modernities on a grand scale, which happens when religions cast their own vision of the social order, the nation-state, and even beyond it. Fundamentalism, according to Eisenstadt (2000), is one formidable response along these lines.

Religious forms may also offer dislocated social actors avenues to critique the alienation that comes with free market operations. Spirit possessions among women factory workers in Malaysia, although far from manifesting class consciousness, are a form of reaction against the combined forces of the state, the market, and even male oppression (Ong 1987). "Inducted into production systems where principles of assembly, disassembly and reassembly are the cybernetics of control, Malay women have emigrated to the state of twentieth century homelessness" (ibid., 213). In other contexts, religious forms as critiques of modernity may involve "separatist sectarianism" (Hefner 1998, 98).

Contemporary religion can also act as social space. Hefner (ibid., 95), for example, sees that conversion to outside religion, particularly Protestantism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, "takes hold among long-marginalized populations seeking to maintain an identity apart from the dominant culture even while appropriating the symbols and instruments of modernity." Martin (2002, 71) points out that one factor for Pentecostalism's success in Latin America is its ability to create meaningful communities: "It takes those marooned and confined in the secular reality by fate and fortune, and offers them a protected enclave in which to explore the gifts of the Spirit, such as perseverance, peaceableness, discipline, trustworthiness, and mutual acceptance among the brethren and in the family. Real and fictive fraternity are mutually supportive." Vasquez and Marquardt (2003) speak of Pentecostalism's ability to reterritorialize former members of youth gangs who had been disenfranchised by forces of modernity in Latin America. Reterritorialization as a process may encompass the physical and social spaces afforded by the Pentecostal organization, or indeed even the human body itself, such as when former gang members are tasked to don corporate attire. Reflecting on Charismatic Christianity in both Catholicism and Protestantism in the Philippines, Kessler (2006, 581) notes that "Charismatic religion incorporates the modern by offering stability in a changing environment."

In some societies, religions are being deliberately coopted by the state for national development goals, social cohesion, and even moral legitimacy as in the case of Vietnam, which is moving toward a new era of modernity, (Taylor 2007). However, cooptation does not happen easily as religious actors may assert their own agency over interpretations and practices that may diverge from the existing state ideology. In developing societies that see the importance of religious authorization, "religion can best be seen as a domain of constant negotiation between state and society" (ibid., 51).

Studies of religion in developing societies thus emphasize that religious forms, regardless of size or whether occurring within existing established religions or outside of them, can be effective sites for critique, tension, cooptation, adaptation, and even catharsis in relation to the condition of modernity. Different religious forms or practices, these studies point out, are developed in reaction to changes in society and mainly as coping mechanisms by the disenfranchised. The analysis seems anticipated because the usual empirical focus is on the marginalized religious actors in society, although Kessler's (2006) quantitative study discovers Charismatic Christianity's presence across all socioeconomic strata in the Philippines. Nevertheless these works offer insightful observations considering that the harshest tensions and negotiations of social change are felt at the enclaves of the marginalized. However, might it be possible to consider religious forms within developing societies not merely as reactions to the condition of modernity?

The question is sociologically pertinent. Arguably, the most vulnerable religious institution within transitions to modernity is the established religion. As development issues are mainly socioeconomic, the religious institution's voice and participation are accommodated at the margins, that is, they are perceived merely as noncentral, nongovernment interventions. Thus, for instance, the recent threats of excommunication and refusal of communion by some clergymen to policymakers who favor family planning are indicative of the Catholic Church's panic over waning institutional influence in the Philippines (cf. Salavierra, Esguerra, and Tupas 2008). In other words, established religions have to be understood as being in transition also, in the sense that given social change their institutional position in society is being challenged. Put differently, shifting the sociological gaze from the religious actor to innovations within established religious institutions offers the possibility of an alternative interpretation of religion in developing countries.

Religion in Modernity-in-Transition

This essay's argument concerning religion rests mainly on the premise that developing societies are to be understood as sites of modernity-in-transition, where issues such as political stability, vulnerability, the local against the global, and the gut are heightened. In this mainly socioeconomic context, and aside from the usual tensions with the state, a subtle way by which religion is engaging with modernity-in-transition is seen through the innovations existing within the institution itself. For the purposes of this essay, I

focus on innovations that may challenge but nevertheless still operate within parameters acceptable to or accommodated by the institutional religion, specifically Christianity. As shown later, these innovations are contemporary reinterpretations or applications of religion. Hefner (1998, 98) asserts that

> contemporary refigurations of Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity remind us that, contrary to conventional secularization theories, religion in modern times has not everywhere declined as a public force, nor been domiciled within a sphere of interiority. Not a reaction against but a response to the modern world, the most successful religious refigurations thrive by drawing themselves down into mass society and away from exclusive elites, if and when the latter lose their hold on popular allegiances.

I take Hefner's statement about religious innovations by conceptualizing the movement "down into mass society and away from exclusive elites" as engagement with the issues of the individual in modernity-in-transition. This view complements Taylor's (2007) position concerning the uniqueness of contemporary religious forms in their engagement between local context and global cultural products. However, a substantive difference separates religious refigurations (or innovations) in late modernity from those in modernity-in-transition, more specifically those within religious institutions with established links to the nation-state, such as Catholicism in the Philippines.

In developing societies, institutional religions are aware of the contemporary social condition and are perceived to be responding well. From the perspective of the religious institution itself, one sees that innovations are located in modernity-in-transition and can be understood as assertions of institutional influence. Stated differently, established religions are developing or facilitating the development of religious innovations not merely to provide coping mechanisms for their adherents but also to assert institutional relevance and authority in the society.

To a large extent actors who see the value of relevant religious grounding in a changing environment make possible this strategic response—which contrasts with the Pope's adamant rejection of the rise of the nation-state in the eighteenth century or with fortress Catholicism in the early twentieth century (Hornsby-Smith 2004). The fact that innovations are taking place within religious institutions means they are being actively managed by re-

ligious experts, who may have either direct or indirect links to the institution that authorizes them. However, direct institutional supervision is not a prerequisite because individuals who are in agreement with institutional officials about the condition of religion in modernity-in-transition can carry out the innovations.

In addition, actors behind religious innovations are possibly cognizant of the fortunes of religion in highly developed societies where religious authority has been "detraditionalized" from the institution to the self (Woodhead and Heelas 2000; Roof 1999; Luckmann 1967). This observation seems valid for Christianity because, despite its thriving global presence, it is already struggling to keep its roots grounded in European soil. As modernity progresses in developing societies, historically established religious institutions increasingly become aware of the secularizing threat to their position. The experience of their counterparts in the West is taken both as precaution and opportunity.

In other words, religious innovations within institutional Christianity in developing societies are an attempt to prevent the privatization of belief, which is imminent as the established religion becomes marginal in the modern condition. In so doing, the relevance of religion in individual affairs is strategically asserted and maintained throughout the nation-state's ongoing "search for modernity" (Sachsenmaier 2002). In what follows, empirical focus is placed on the Philippines and Latin America, where Christianity is experiencing massive innovations initiated by religious actors.

Innovations within Christianity

One important innovation is seen in the rise of Charismatic communities within both Catholicism and Protestantism, with the former learning increasingly from the latter. This innovation is a strategic engagement with basic human issues within the condition of modernity-in-transition.

Charismatic communities are becoming prominent especially within the Catholic Church, which faces an exodus of membership to Pentecostal movements in Latin America and the Philippines. The common thread that runs through different charismatic organizations is their adoption of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, healing and aspirations for spiritual fulfillment are prominent, which Heelas (2002) considers as evidence of a spiritual revolution. For example, Catholic priest Fr. Marcelo Rossi, an important figure in the Charismatic movement in Brazil for tapping new

technology to bring his message across, "brings God into the emotions: 'Joy is in the heart of those who know Jesus'" (ibid., 374). Through this religio-emotional orientation, the Catholic Church's significance to individuals is secured—providing one reason for the stability of Catholic followership in Brazil (Downie 2007). The same may be said of the El Shaddai movement in the Philippines, whose emphasis on prosperity preaching and healing appeals to millions of followers, mostly from the lower classes. El Shaddai events usually begin with a solemn mass, which is a clear assertion of its Catholic identity.

Wiegele (2006, 496) keenly sees El Shaddai's Catholic identity as a negotiated one, in that it is able to "present itself as a world apart from old Catholic hierarchies and traditions of mediation, and yet does not require its followers to give up the 'sacred canopy' of birthright Catholic identity that cross-cuts Filipino culture, family, and communal life." The founder himself, Brother Mike Velarde, sees the movement's goal as to "bring the Church closer to the people" (ibid., 510). This approach makes religion relevant to and integrated with the local experience by adopting the intrinsic and the felt, while downplaying the extrinsic and hence peripheral elements of Catholicism. Consistent with the argument here, the result is that this "ambiguous and delicately balanced identity may be an advantage both to followers not wanting or needing to completely sever old communal attachments, and to church leaders attempting to stop the flow of Catholics to Pentecostal churches" (ibid., 496). A similar pattern is discernible among Charismatic Protestant churches in Latin America where "young people, the segment of the population with the greatest potential for violent, destructive behavior, can redirect their energy to the spiritual struggle of staying clean" (Vasquez and Marquardt 2003, 136).

All these instances show that, through religious innovations that deal with physical, spiritual, and emotional fulfillment, one's identity is forged with institutional Christianity.

This task is complemented by many Charismatic organizations that serve as alternative communities where a more appealing religious socialization takes place and the value of the family is upheld. In the Philippines, the Couples for Christ movement of the Catholic Church has given birth to Singles for Christ and Youth for Christ, all Charismatic organizations that encourage interaction and fellowship. Decidedly lay, these wide-reaching Catholic organizations effectively implement socialization into the institu-

tional religion. As Kessler's (2006, 580) findings reveal: "The Christian family is seen not only as the core of society but also as the model for society in general. This model Christian family is based on Christian morals, firmly grounded in faith and ideally integrated into a charismatic community that supports its members in their endeavor to live up to the standards of Christian morals."

Strategic religious socialization, in turn, has repercussions on individual behavior and collective social action, an argument that Martin (2002) makes about Pentecostalism. Here it is argued that religious innovations like Charismatic Christianity become an assertion of institutional religion as they also bring about individual change. Interestingly, El Shaddai's Catholic Charismatic approach focuses on renewing perspectives. Although achieving prosperity is its main feature, the overwhelming majority of El Shaddai followers undeniably falls below the poverty line. Wiegele (2006, 504) observes nevertheless that "people whose lives have not improved materially in any obvious way are still convinced of the transformative power of Velarde's teachings. For many it is because they now *see* prosperity or blessings where before they saw poverty or suffering—the way they view their lives has changed."

As it facilitates behavioral change, Charismatic Christianity can provide the language for followers to engage with global capitalism and, in so doing, achieve prosperity. Martin (2002, 77) is forceful about the relationship between personal change and wealth accumulation:

> They promote marital faithfulness not celibacy, and moderation and responsibility rather than a monastic renunciation of wealth. The new Latin American Protestants may be disciplined and, mostly, poor but they are not world-denying and they have by no means set their faces against wealth creation. Indeed, one might almost argue that they have recognized exactly those dystopic dimensions of a secular ultra-individualism to reconsider whether it might be economically as well as socially advantageous to restore cultural guarantees of mutual trust, self-discipline, and social cohesion.

Brusco (1995) provides rich narratives of Colombian women who are leading the transformation of the family by domesticating men through Protestant Christianity. As husbands imbibe their religious responsibility of taking care of the family, the household's welfare is equally transformed. Wood-

berry (2006) offers other possible dimensions of Pentecostalism's economic consequences in other contexts.

As we have seen, the engagement of Charismatic Christianity with the basic issues of the individual is in terms of healing, spiritual and religio-emotional aspirations, effective religious socialization, and individual change. Beyond all these, however, religious innovations assert institutional influence by addressing bigger social issues. The Couples for Christ movement is a founding partner of a local version of Habitat for Humanity, Gawad Kalinga, which builds houses for poor communities. Involved in this effort are religious instructions. In these contexts, Catholic religiosity is made relevant and individual subjectivity in terms of one's Catholic faith is made contemporary and socially important—made more apparent as social impact is often bound in religious language. Kessler (2006, 580) gleans the moral viewpoints of Couples for Christ as follows:

> The solution for all societal and economic problems of Philippine society is seen in the moral renewal of the political and economic elite, as well as that of the common people. Structural change is regarded as futile when it is not accompanied by individual moral renewal. Such a renewal will make the fight for structural changes unnecessary, as the rich and powerful will refrain from unjust accumulation of wealth, treat their workers and tenants fairly, and refrain from any immoral practices in order to keep their grip on power.

According to Vasquez and Marquardt (2003, 137), Pentecostalism, for all its effectiveness in reterritorializing youth gangsters, may have significant implications on the creation of a "culture of citizenship where all social actors, institutions, movements, and individuals share a civic, intersubjective world." They observe that when Pentecostal organizations strengthen basic institutions like the family, school, and churches, the ultimate beneficiary is the development of democracy in Latin America.

Implications for Religion and Society

In the established religions in the context of modernity-in-transition in the Philippines and Latin America, shifts are taking place through a democratized involvement of religious actors whose link, whether direct or otherwise, to the institutional religion is reasserting and maintaining its institutional position by engaging with the basic human issues of the individual. The result, arguably, is threefold.

One, religious innovations are preventing the privatization of religious belief imminent to the forces of global modernity that permeate the boundaries of the nation-state. The importance of the religious institution to one's everyday life and identity is asserted, within an accommodation of changes in meanings surrounding certain religious practices and rituals. Weekly liturgy for example does not have to follow the historical pattern of solemnity. In Martin's (2002, 75–76) account, Pentecostalism rejects suffering as a value to be upheld and has "called on women to leave passivity and fatalism behind and demand the reform of their menfolk."

Two, these religious innovations are asserting the value of the religious community as a primary avenue for religious socialization and exercise. The concept of the community ranges from the family to the entire institution. The value of the family is upheld and the roles each member plays are espoused. In the institution, particular discipline over the body is expected.

Finally, these religious innovations are championing to fulfill a certain destiny for society, and thus serve as providers of an alternative definition of modernity. Consequently this essay complements Taylor's (2007) view on the uniqueness of contemporary religious forms by noting the engagement between the local context and global cultural products. Vasquez and Marquardt (2003, 137) speak of Christian organizations that "in addition to organizing prayer vigils" stress the "need for prevention rather than harsher law enforcement" against youth gang members. Martin's (2002, 73) account is instructive: "in slowly climbing out of the maladies of poverty [Pentecostals] are pragmatic, canny, and apt for a bargain. . . There is no pursuit of pie-in-the-sky to the denigration of their circumstances in the present." Indeed, there is a push to move things forward. "As one Methodist Pentecostal pastor in Chile put it: 'I would like a technological university for my people so that they could gain skills . . . it is time we Hispanics caught up with the Japanese, the Americans and the Germans'" (ibid.).

The modernity that these religious innovations seek to create concerns the society at large, which is why the expansion of the religious community is emphasized, in the hope of becoming as influential as possible on the nation. This expansion entails the elements that have been enumerated about Charismatic Christianity, including spiritual fulfillment, effective religious socialization, individual change, and social impact. In a way reminiscent of

Weber's thesis (1904–5/1998), they aspire for a modernity that imbibes many religious flavors that give taste to the actions of individuals. It may not even be too much to say that value rationality is what these religious innovations hope to offer the future of their society.

The propositions spelled out here are derived from the experiences of Christianity in the conditions of modernity-in-transition of the Philippines and Latin America. It would be interesting to see if religious innovations in other traditions in other nation-states could be seen in the same light. Another question concerns the future shape of institutional religion in modernity-in-transition. Given the democratized environment in which religious innovations operate, recurrent confrontations with orthodoxy, which religious institutions uphold, may be expected.

Note

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Jayeel S. Cornelio is a Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, AS1 #03–06, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570. He is a recipient of an Asia Research Institute Ph.D. Scholarship Grant. He obtained in 2003 the BA in Development Studies from the Ateneo de Manila University, where he is currently a Visiting Research Associate at the Institute of Philippine Culture. His research interests include religion, identity, generations, and modernity. He is a member of the British Sociological Association's sociology of religion study group. <j.cornelio@nus.edu.sg>