

Responses to Rapid Social Change: Populist Religion in the Philippines

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Introduction

Recent publications with titles such as “Christianity Re-Born: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century,”¹ “The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity”² and “Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture”³ reflect the fact that Christianity in its Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic version is gaining ground worldwide. According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, these strands of Christianity accounted for 4.5 percent of all Christians in the mid-1970s and for 11.8 percent in 1995. The greatest increase in Pentecostals/Charismatics and, to a lesser extent, Evangelicals has taken place in Africa and Latin America. In Africa the percentage of Pentecostals/Charismatics rose from 4.8 percent of the population in the mid-1970s to 15.9 percent in 1995. The share of Evangelicals increased during the same period from 4.6 percent to 8.8 percent. The figures for Latin America are equally impressive: Pentecostals/Charismatics multiplied from 4.4 percent in mid-1970 to 27.1 percent in 1995 and Evangelicals doubled from 3.4 to 7.6 percent. In Asia the success story is one of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, as its share rose from 0.5 percent in the mid-1970s to 3.6 percent in 1995, while the Evangelicals remained virtually unchanged at 0.5 and 0.8 percent, respectively.⁴

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¹ Donald Lewis, ed., *Christianity Re-Born: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

⁴ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 13-15.

Jenkins has described these growing churches as religiously conservative and Freston has shed light on the diverse ways in which they have emerged as a political force in many countries of the global South.⁵ In Asia, South Korea and China have gained academic attention as countries of Evangelical and Pentecostal church growth.⁶

The following article examines the situation in the Philippines, aside from East Timor the only predominantly Christian country in the region. Although Pentecostal and Evangelical churches have flourished here as well, the Catholic Charismatic groups—the “Pentecostal Catholics”⁷—show the most striking growth. The two biggest Catholic Charismatic lay organizations, El Shaddai and Couples for Christ, together claim three million registered members; both maintain overseas chapters all over the globe and their missions foster the growth of Asian Christianity. In the article we argue that the enormous success of these groups is due to their populist character.⁸ The discussion draws on a study of religious change in the Philippines conducted by the authors in 2003. We start with a brief outline of the methodology and terminology used in the study. The main sections present quantitative survey data on the scope of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines and, using qualitative data, elaborate on the transfer of populist styles and topics to the religious sphere. Finally, the article discusses the potential political ramifications of the Charismatic Renewal in the Philippines.

Research Methodology

Our analysis rests on more than seven months of fieldwork in the Philippines in 2003. It draws on a national survey on religious change

⁵ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*; Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶ Boo-Woong Yoo, *Korean Pentecostalism. Its History and Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988); Murray A. Rubinstein, “Holy Spirit Taiwan: Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the Republic of China,” in Daniel H. Bays, ed., *Christianity in China. From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1996); Tu Weiming, “The Quest for Meaning: Religion in the People’s Republic of China,” in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 91-94; Graeme Lang, “Religions and Regimes in China,” in Madeleine Cousineau, ed., *Religion in a Changing World. Comparative Studies in Sociology* (Westport, CT, London: Praeger, 1998); Walter Hollenweger, *Charismatisch-pfingstliches Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), p.121ff.; Li Yue Hong, “The Decline of Confucianism and the Proclamation of the Gospel in China,” in Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, eds., *Pentecostalism in Context. Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Alan Anderson, *Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 132-139; Philip Yuen-Sang Leung, “Conversion, commitment, and culture: Christian experience in China, 1849-1999,” in Donald Lewis, ed., *Christianity Re-Born: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁷ Meredith B. McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics. Power, Charisma and Order in a Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

⁸ The concept of political populism has been applied to the study of religious phenomena before. Nathan Hatch, for example, provides an analysis of the Second Awakening in the United

conducted by the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) of the Ateneo de Manila University between August and November 2003. The questionnaire was developed by the Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute in Freiburg, Germany,⁹ and adapted to Philippine circumstances in cooperation with the IPC. It consists of 125 questions covering religious practice, religious beliefs, religious attitudes, religious tolerance, the role of religion in politics and society at large as well as more general sociopolitical and socioeconomic attitudes. The questionnaire was presented to three groups of respondents. The main sample of 1,200 respondents was selected by a nationwide multi-stage random sampling design. Additional samples of 200 non-Catholic Christians and 200 Catholic Charismatics were chosen using the snowball technique, starting with respondents from the main sample.

Multi-stage sample design of the main sample included four provinces of the four major regions of the Philippines (National Capital Region, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao). However, due to security reasons, some randomly selected sites had to be replaced. The data of this main sample is weighted for age, sex and urban/rural distribution on the sub-regional level and for nationwide population distribution between the major regions according to the national census data from 2000. Fifty-nine percent of respondents in the main sample live in rural areas and 41 percent in urban areas. Metro Manila residents account for 13 percent of the sample; the biggest proportion, 43 percent, live in Luzon, 20 percent in the Visayas, and 24 percent in Mindanao. Gender is equally distributed. The age groups are as follows: 23 percent of respondents are between 18 and 24 years old, 26 percent between 25 and 34 years, 28 percent are aged 35 to 49 years and 22 percent are more than 50 years old. One-third of the respondents have completed their elementary education, 39 percent have graduated from high school and 16 percent hold a college or university degree. Only 12 percent have not completed elementary education. About two-thirds of the respondents actively participate in the labour force, one-third are studying, retired, housekeeping or unemployed. To assess the socioeconomic background of respondents,

States as religious populism. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁹ Many of the survey questions have been developed by Theodor Hanf, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute, Freiburg, Germany, and constitute a slightly revised version of the questionnaire applied in an earlier study on religious change in Costa Rica (Jean-Pierre Bastian, Ulrich Fanger, Ingrid Wehr, Nikolaus Werz, *Religiöser Wandel in Costa Rica. Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Interpretation* [Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 2000]). As the Philippines take part in the International Social Science Panel (ISSP) surveys, we integrated several questions from the ISSP on religion. The ISSPs are conducted by the survey institute Social Weather Stations, which kindly provided the data file and questionnaire of the 1991 and 1998 panels on religion. One additional question in the questionnaire is taken from the Eurobarometer. The questionnaire also benefited from discussions with staff of the Social Weather Stations and Pulse Asia. We would also like to thank Father Herbert Schneider for his help in identifying characteristics of Charismatic Christians within the survey and Dr. Reinhard Hempelmann from the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, Berlin, for his advice in classifying non-Catholic churches as Charismatic/non-Charismatic.

we combined the data on monetary income with an index of household possessions and educational attainments, both of which correlate with income. Based on these variables, the socioeconomic status of 17 percent of respondents is classified as low, and the socioeconomic status of 7 percent of respondents is classified as high.

The data gained from this survey was complemented by qualitative interviews using interview guidelines with 22 members of Pentecostal and Catholic Charismatic groups; these interviews were conducted in Tagalog by interviewers from IPC. The authors themselves interviewed 22 leading members and clergy of these groups and churches. All interviews were transcribed and the Tagalog interviews translated into English. The data derived from standardized questionnaires and in-depth interviews were supplemented by data gained by participant observation in various religious services and seminars and background information acquired in talks with academic experts. Whereas the survey covered all major regions of the Philippines, qualitative data (interviews, expert interviews and participant observation) was restricted to Metro Manila.

Conceptual Clarifications

The subject of our study is the rise of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines. The use of the term Charismatic in this context needs to be clarified, as social scientists relate the term Charismatic to Max Weber's sociology of rule, which would be misleading in the context of religious movements and denominations. The literature on religious movements reveals an inconsistency in how the labels Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic are employed; sometimes the terms are even used as synonyms. To further confuse readers, all of these Christian traditions are sometimes subsumed under the term fundamentalists. A short excursion on the origins of these different strands of Christianity will help to clarify this seemingly arbitrary labelling.

Historically, Charismatic Christianity is rooted in the US-American Holiness Movement and its successor, the Pentecostal churches. Pentecostalism emerged in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its aim was to renew the existing "mainline" Protestant churches by concentrating on the individual spiritual experience of believers, the charismatic gifts mentioned in the Bible and the works of the Holy Spirit. However, the established denominations reacted rather hostilely to Pentecostal practices. Consequently the renewal movement formed its own churches.¹⁰ Pentecostal churches around the world grew enormously in the second half of the twentieth century. In addition to this expansion, the

¹⁰ Harvey G. Cox, *Fire from Heaven. The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995).

Pentecostal emphasis on the Holy Spirit and on individual spirituality spread as a Charismatic movement to mainline Protestant denominations under the leadership of Dennis Bennet, an Episcopal priest, in 1959, and to the Roman Catholic Church, beginning in Pennsylvania and Michigan University circles.

Today's Evangelicals can trace their roots back to the Protestant Fundamentalists, a movement that emerged early in the twentieth century, slightly after the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals and Fundamentalists can be seen as two different religious reactions to the rapid social change induced by industrialization and urbanization in North America after the Civil War. With their emphasis on individual spiritual experience, Pentecostals offered a religious innovation, while Fundamentalists strove to restore the old religious and social order.¹¹

Despite their differences, Pentecostals and Fundamentalists agreed on most points of doctrine, such as a literal belief in the Bible and opposition to liberal theology. But Pentecostal practices, like falling in trance, speaking in tongues, weeping, crying and laughing out loud during services, were regarded by Fundamentalists as improper behaviour in God's house, and by some even as satanic activities. Despite some common ground, Pentecostals were therefore strictly excluded from the Fundamentalist movement.¹² Up to the 1950s, being Evangelical or Fundamentalist meant virtually the same in the US. After World War II, some Fundamentalists opted for cooperation for the sake of winning souls for Christ. They adopted the name Evangelical and cooperated in their missionary effort with mainline denominations that Fundamentalists regarded as apostate. Consequently, Fundamentalists eventually distanced themselves from Evangelicals.¹³

Given the broad agreement on theological issues, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches have come closer to each other. In the Philippines this is demonstrated by the fact that Pentecostal churches are members of the Philippine Evangelical Council of Churches—a council formerly called the Philippine Council of Fundamentalist Churches.

The term Charismatic is sometimes used in a narrow sense to distinguish the Charismatic Christians within non-Pentecostal denominations from Christians belonging to Pentecostal churches. In our use of the term we follow the suggestion of Poewe, who defines Charismatic Christianity as

¹¹ Martin Riesebrodt, *Fundamentalismus als patriarchalische Protestbewegung. Amerikanische Protestanten (1910-28) und iranische Schiiten (1961-79) im Vergleich* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990); Nancy T. Ammermann, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," in Martin E. Marty and Scott R. Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹² Georg M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (San Diego, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), p.153 ff, p.182 ff; Ammermann, *North American Protestant Fundamentalism*; Hollenweger, *Charismatisch-pfingstliches Christentum*, pp. 217-218.

¹³ Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, pp. 217-18; Ammermann, *North American Protestant Fundamentalism*, p. 37.

“encompassing all Christian groups that emphasize spiritual experience and the activities of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ When we speak of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines we therefore include Pentecostal churches, Charismatic Evangelical as well as Charismatic mainline Protestant Christians, and Charismatic Roman-Catholic Christians.

The acknowledgement of similarities expressed by the Philippine actors themselves also legitimizes our analysis of the different groups as part of the same phenomenon. Although Catholic Charismatic leaders are keen to clarify that they adhere to Catholic beliefs and practices, they often mention the Pentecostal and Protestant Charismatic origins of their movement. As for non-Catholics, in a survey an astonishing 19 percent of the delegates at a missionary congress organized by the above-mentioned Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches opted for counting Catholic Charismatics as saved souls in the Evangelical sense.¹⁵

The Charismatic Movement in the Philippines

Pentecostal and Charismatic groups are a relatively new phenomenon in the Philippines. Roman Catholicism is a legacy of the Spanish colonial past and mainline Protestantism first entered the islands with American colonizers in 1899. But substantial Evangelical and Pentecostal missions, also predominantly of US-American origin, did not start before World War II.

Pentecostal and Evangelical churches were soon “Filipinized,” and Filipino preachers took the lead. The Catholic Charismatic movement, which, as mentioned above, originated in the United States in 1967, reached the Philippines in the early 1970s. One of our interview partners traces the Catholic Renewal movement to a Filipino couple that had come into contact with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States. Most of the groups studied by us were established by Filipinos in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Jesus is Lord, one of the biggest Charismatic Protestant groups,¹⁶ with an estimated membership of nearly one million, was founded by Eddie Villanueva in 1978. Mike Velarde, a former businessman, started El Shaddai in 1983. Today El Shaddai claims to be the largest of the Catholic Charismatic groups, with two million registered members and an estimated seven million unregistered followers. Couples for Christ reports 1.4 million registered members in 2001.¹⁷ Other groups report memberships in the tens of thousands.

¹⁴ Poewe, *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, p. 2.

¹⁵ “So much more to do! Evaluating DAWN 2000 Philippines,” article available on the Dawn Ministries Web site, at <http://www.dawnministries.org/old_home/phil_eval.html>, June 20, 2003.

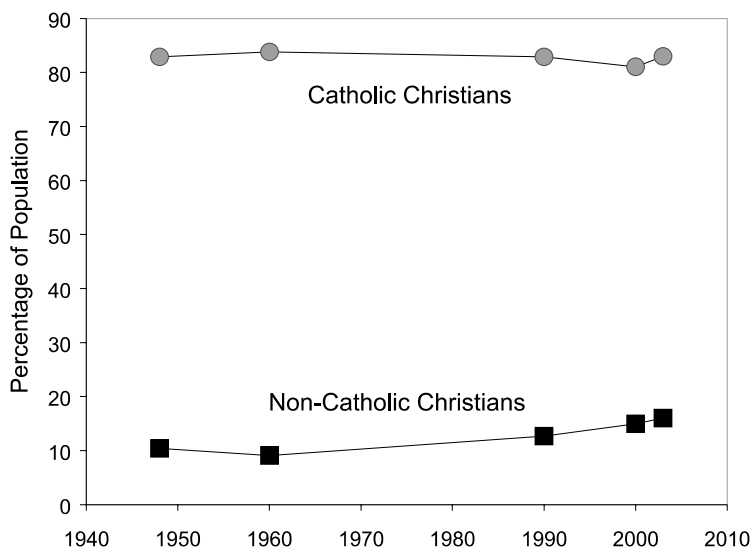
¹⁶ Jose A. Carillo, “A primer on political propaganda,” *Manila Times*, 29 March 2004, available at <<http://www.manilatimes.net>>, (30 March 2004).

¹⁷ According to our data, Couples for Christ exceeds El Shaddai in membership: 0.8 percent of respondents in the main sample are members of El Shaddai compared to 3.7 percent members of

Populist Religion in the Philippines

In contrast to the “explosion of Protestantism in Latin America,”¹⁸ which shares a Catholic colonial legacy with the Philippines, the recent growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the Philippines did not result in a substantial increase in the Protestant population. In our survey, we find a Roman Catholic population of 83 percent and a non-Catholic Christian

Figure 1
Responses to Rapid Social Change: Populist Religion in the Philippines



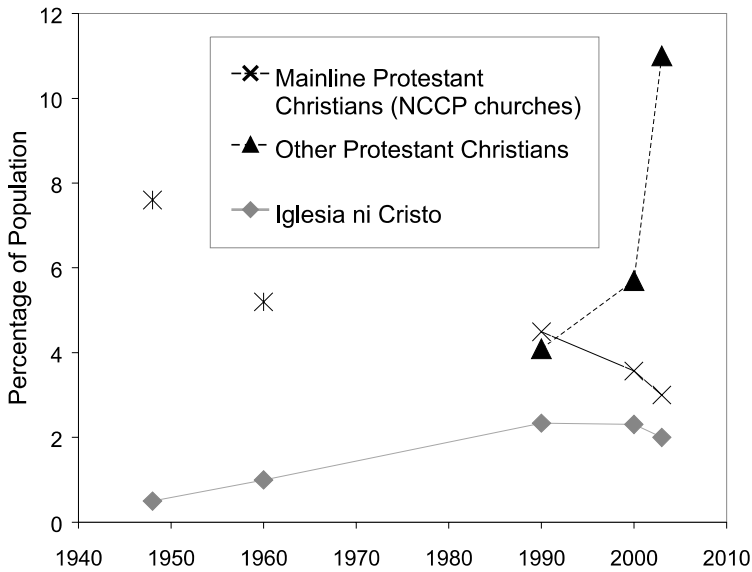
Sources:

- 1948/1960: Bureau of Census and Statistics, Department of Commerce and Industry, Republic of the Philippines, “Census of the Philippines 1960 Population and Housing,” vol. II, Summary Report (Manila: 1963) table 19, p. 17. There are no data on religion available for the 1970 and 1980 census.
- 1990: National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines, “1990 Census of Population and Housing, Report No. 3: Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics,” (Manila: 1992).
- 2000: National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines, “2000 Census of Population and Housing, Report No. 2: Demographic and Housing Characteristics,” (Manila: 2003).
- 2003: Own survey

Couples for Christ. This finding confirms the results of the Social Weather Stations National Survey of 2001, which gives the figures of 2.7 percent for Couples of Christ and 0.5 percent El Shaddai members. *SWS Survey Snapshots. A review of surveys conducted by Social Weather Stations*, vol. II, no. 3 (Manila, 2002), p. 4.

¹⁸ David Martin, *Tongues of Fire. The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

Figure 2
Philippine Protestants



Sources:

1948/1960: Bureau of Census and Statistics, Department of Commerce and Industry, Republic of the Philippines, "Census of the Philippines 1960 Population and Housing," vol. II, Summary Report (Manila: 1963) table 19, p. 17. Census data of 1948 and 1960 differentiates only between Protestants, Aglipayans and Iglesia ni Cristo. The figure given for NCCP churches here is the figure for Aglipayans.

1990: National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines, "1990 Census of Population and Housing, Report No. 3: Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics," (Manila: 1992).

2000: National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines, "2000 Census of Population and Housing, Report No. 2: Demographic and Housing Characteristics," (Manila: 2003).

2003: Own survey

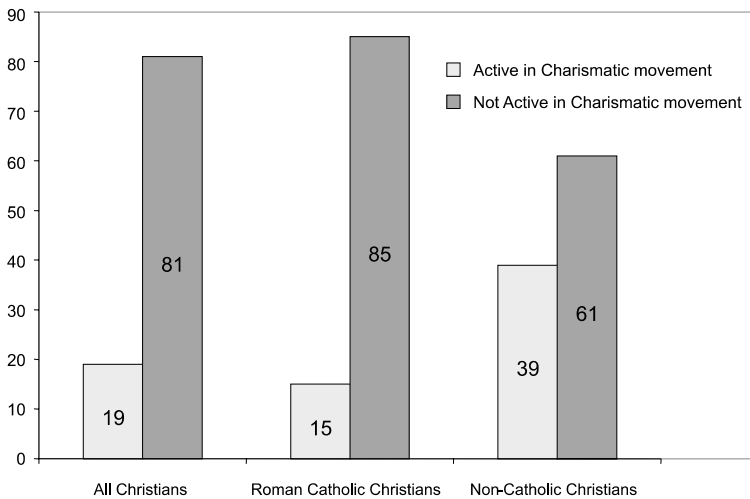
population of 16 percent.¹⁹ The data shown in figures 1 and 2 suggest that the percentage of the Catholic population has been quite stable in recent decades. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, subsumed under "other Protestant churches," grew at the expense of Protestant mainline denominations.

¹⁹ As mentioned above, for reasons of security we had to replace predominantly Muslim areas in the survey. This explains the underrepresentation of Muslims (1 percent). A Social Weather Stations Survey of 2001 reports that Muslims account for 4 percent of the population (*SWS Survey Snapshots. A review of surveys conducted by Social Weather Stations*, p. 4).

Data on church membership is of only limited value when it comes to identifying Charismatic Christians, as they are found in virtually all denominations. We therefore asked all Christian respondents in the main sample for Charismatic practices and membership in Charismatic groups. The resulting figures on active Charismatics show the “pentecostalization” of Philippine Protestantism. More than one-third of all non-Catholic Christians in the Philippines are members of a Pentecostal church or a lay group that has adopted Charismatic practices. These results buttress the census figures on church membership, indicating that the rise of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches changed not so much the relations between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, but the religious landscape within Philippine Protestantism.

However, this assessment is misleading insofar as it takes only the loss of church members into account. The Catholic Church is as much affected by the rise of the Charismatic movement as the Protestant churches. In the long run it might be even more affected, as Catholics are simultaneously Catholic and members of the Charismatic movement and therefore affect the Catholic Church from within. The most striking result of the survey is the high percentage of Catholic Charismatics: 15 percent of all interviewed Catholics are active in the Charismatic movement. Thus, although Philippine Protestantism has a strong Charismatic wing, the bulk of Philippine Charismatics belong to the Roman Catholic Church. The Charismatic

Figure 3
Charismatic Engagement



Source: 2003, Own survey.

Christians in the survey are comprised of 70 percent Catholics and only 30 percent Pentecostal/Protestant Christians. In terms of numbers, the most successful religious current in the Philippines is therefore the Catholic Charismatic movement.

This result is also remarkable in comparison to Latin America, where the success of Pentecostal churches has substantially increased the number of Protestant Christians.²⁰ There is a Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America as well but, unlike in the Philippines, it seems less successful in preventing conversions from Catholicism to Pentecostalism.

The roots of this “Catholization” of the Pentecostal/Charismatic religiosity can be traced back to the way in which the Philippine hierarchy dealt with the beginnings of Catholic Renewal. After initial reluctance and suspicion, the Roman Catholic Church welcomed the Catholic Charismatics. The hierarchy successfully integrated the movement into the Church structure and ensured that the Charismatic groups stuck to Catholic doctrine while simultaneously adapting a Pentecostal style of worship and religious practice. Philippine Catholics thus do not have to dismiss the faith they were brought up in, if they wish to live their religiosity the Charismatic way.

Most observers tend to accept that support for the Charismatic movement is strongest among the lower strata of society, depicting it as a phenomenon of the uneducated urban poor. This impression stems from media coverage of El Shaddai prayer rallies, attended by the poorer segments of the population in Metro Manila, and is supported by studies on Pentecostal churches in Africa and Latin America. This assumption is not borne out by our data. Poor respondents are not over-represented in the Charismatic movement. Metropolitan residence even works in the opposite direction. Compared to the other major regions, the percentage of active members of the Charismatic movement is smallest in Metro Manila. Contrary to our expectations, respondents with tertiary education are slightly over-represented. The same holds true for women, but much less than expected. The gender difference is not significant. This difference between the Philippine Charismatic movement and Charismatic Christians elsewhere is probably due to Catholic dominance. In the Philippines, becoming a Charismatic is not equivalent to joining a social minority, but a subgroup within the Catholic culture of the majority. This might contribute to the attractiveness of Charismatic groups for all social strata. However, one has to keep in mind that in the Philippines the vast majority of the population are poor by any standards; consequently, the vast majority of Charismatic Christians are poor. Therefore, the success of the Charismatic movement in the Philippines does not contradict the findings of other studies, which

²⁰ Paul Freston, “Contours of Latin American Pentecostalism,” in Donald Lewis, ed., *Christianity Re-Born: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 227-229.

connect Charismatic religion to the lower strata of society. It qualifies these findings by showing that Charismatic religion is attractive for the poor, but not exclusively for them.

To evaluate religious change, one has to go beyond membership of churches and lay groups and ask about religious beliefs, practices and attitudes. A principal component analysis of our data reveals that the high participation rates in the Charismatic movement also reflect a specific type of religiosity. Charismatic religiosity includes practices and beliefs that are comparatively new in religious expression in the Philippines, such as tithing, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, participating in Charismatic seminars, publicly testifying one's faith in religious services, etc.

The Charismatic religiosity factor consists of 16 items (Cronbach's alpha 0.81), covering intense religious practice, Charismatic religious experiences or Charismatic/Pentecostal religious beliefs. We classify the top quartile of respondents, who agree to at least seven of these items, as showing a high Charismatic religiosity (26 percent of all respondents in the main sample). Within the Protestant respondents this share jumps up to 64 percent. Among the Catholic respondents we find a high Charismatic religiosity in 19 percent of respondents, still almost one-fifth of all Catholics. The Pentecostal character of Protestantism in the Philippines is obvious here. The reverse picture is at the other end of the scale: 24 percent of the main sample respondents score one or none on Charismatic religiosity, but only 3 percent of Protestant respondents, as opposed to 27 percent of the Catholic respondents. Socioeconomic factors are either irrelevant for Charismatic religiosity or work in an unexpected direction, as respondents with tertiary education are slightly over-represented among those scoring high on Charismatic religiosity and Metro Manila dwellers are under-represented in this group. There is no significant correlation between socioeconomic status or income and Charismatic religiosity. Our qualitative data suggest that different Charismatic communities tend to cater to specific socioeconomic groups, but Charismatic religiosity is restricted to neither the poor and lower-middle-class constituency of El Shaddai nor the elite members of the Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Metro Manila residents are less likely to be Charismatics, but in other regions the urban/rural split does not segregate Charismatics. Gender is less important than expected. Some groups of Catholic women are more likely than others to be Charismatic, but education and certain sociopolitical attitudes are more decisive than gender.

Not surprisingly, Charismatic religiosity is clearly related to active involvement in the Charismatic movement (Cramer's $V 0.6^{**}$). These figures indicate that the Charismatic movement in the Philippines is based on a certain type of religiosity, a set of practices and beliefs that has the potential to survive possible weaknesses in the movement's organization, leadership changes, etc. These results raise the question of the causes of this success.

What makes Charismatic religiosity so attractive compared to other, presumably older, forms of religiosity in the Philippines?

The Charismatic Movement as Populist Religion

We propose the thesis that the transfer of populist styles and populist topics into the religious sphere accounts for the success of Charismatic religion in the Philippines. It is the populist style of Charismatic preachers and the populist character of Charismatic practice and belief that renders this type of religiosity so successful in the Philippines.

Populism as a political phenomenon combines a certain style of mobilization, a certain set of topics, and a specific stand on the effects of modernization, understood as complex, interrelated processes of urbanization, industrialization and individualization.

Populist political mobilization draws on charismatic leadership (in the Weberian sense of the concept), rhetorical skills and unconventional methods to attract public attention. Populists articulate protest against the elite and the system that this elite supports, while refraining from propagating class-based interests. They call for a reduction in (institutional) complexity and idealize the past. Instead of complicated representative procedures in a mass democracy, populists propagate personal relationships, face-to-face interaction and small communities in which grass-roots democracy can flourish and leaders are personally accountable to their followers.²¹ Populists strive for a society and a state that is firmly grounded in a shared moral system that encompasses private as well as political and economic institutions. In other words, populists want to reinstate the sacred cosmos of premodern societies and get rid of the complexity, insecurity and pluralism that accompany modernization. Populism has therefore been considered a “revolt against modernity.”²²

However, this equation fails to recognize that populists do not simply stick to a backward vision of a less complex, traditional, premodern society. Populists fight against corrupt elites, anonymous bureaucracies and arrogant experts on behalf of the ordinary man. They legitimize their actions with

²¹ Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Populism into the Twenty-first Century,” *Government and Opposition*, 22: 46 (1996), pp. 187-200; Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” *Political Studies*, vol. XLVII (1999), pp. 2-16; Yves Meny and Yves Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” in Yves Meny and Yves Surel, eds., *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Yannis Papadopoulos, “Populism, the Democratic Question, and Contemporary Governance,” in Meny and Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*; Paul Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” in Meny and Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*; Hans-Jürgen Puhle, “Zwischen Protest und Politikstil: Populismus, Neo-Populismus und Demokratie,” in Nikolaus Werz, ed., *Populismus. Populisten in Übersee und Europa* (Opladen: Leske+Budrich, 2003).

²² Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, p. 22.

reference to the rights of ordinary people. The assumption underlying this legitimization—that ordinary people *have* rights to defend and that rulers *are* accountable to the ruled—is based on quite modern concepts of citizenship and democracy. Populism therefore reacts to modern societal complexity and plurality by combining the modern notion of citizens' rights with the imagined qualities of premodern societies based on personal relations governed by morality and shared ethics instead of procedural agreements.

Transferring the political concept of populism to the religious field is not a novel idea. The above-mentioned Nathan Hatch, for instance, fruitfully applied the concept of “religious populism” in his seminal study of the Second Awakening in the United States between 1780 and 1830.²³ We prefer to speak of populist religion instead of religious populism in order to emphasize that we are not dealing with a hyphenated version of political populism—such as right-wing populism or left-wing populism—but with the transfer of a certain political style to the religious sphere. As a result of external influences, exacerbated by homegrown institutional factors, populist techniques are deeply entrenched in Philippine political culture and ready to be picked up and used by religious movements.

The Philippines inherited from the US a political system that provides ample space for populism. Presidentialism and plurality voting, for instance, favour personalism and populist styles of electioneering. In the absence of party programmes, candidates usually operate with simplistic election platforms which address key concerns of ordinary people without solving them: jobs, prosperity, shelter and public safety. The enormous success of populist strategies in politics was highlighted by the presidential campaign of Joseph E. Estrada in 1998. It was no coincidence that many of his supporters were also followers of the Charismatic El Shaddai movement. Political populism responds to the deep distrust and cynical attitudes of many ordinary Filipinos towards their political institutions, which in their view have been hijacked by a corrupt elite and are incapable of mastering the challenges of a rapidly changing world. They have produced neither sustained economic growth, nor a modicum of social justice. Not surprisingly, distrust of Philippine political institutions and general cynicism towards politics is widespread among El Shaddai members.²⁴ This coincides with the results of other opinion polls in which political institutions rank low, whereas churches score well.²⁵

²³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

²⁴ Grace Gorospe-Jamon, “The El Shaddai Prayer Movement: Political Socialization in a Religious Context,” *Philippine Political Science Journal*, vol. 20, no. 43 (1999), pp. 83-126 and pp. 116-117.

²⁵ José V. Abueva, “Philippine Democratization and the Consolidation of Democracy Since the 1986 Revolution: An Overview of the Main Issues, Trends and Prospects,” in Felipe B. Miranda, ed., *Democratization: Philippine Perspectives* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1997), p. 77.

The enormous attraction of the Charismatic movement has shown that populist styles of mobilization can successfully be transferred from the political to the religious sphere. The following sections describe this transfer in greater detail for the central populist features: miracles as unconventional methods of gaining attention, mass media, the internal structure of the movement and the topics of anti-system protest and reduction of complexity.

Supernatural powers: Miracles

Like political populists, Charismatic leaders rely on powerful language and joyful rites. The persuasiveness of their rhetorical appeal increases with their ability to induce an aura of extraordinary power, a power derived from of their closeness to God. Miracles are often cited as testimony to the great power of the Holy Spirit.

One favoured domain for miracles is healing. Leaders often have a reputation as successful healers. While Mike Velarde of El Shaddai and the chairman of the National Service Committee on Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Father Joey Faller, are outstanding in this respect, nearly all Charismatic and Pentecostal groups highlight the healing experiences of their followers. The invitation to a “Life in the Spirit Seminar,” a kind of entry seminar into the Catholic Charismatic movement, states: “Healings and miracles have been manifested in the lives of those who experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. You are in for a surprise ... your life will never be the same again.” In a country in which healthcare benefits for the majority of the population are virtually nonexistent, the prospect of miraculous healings must have a strong appeal.²⁶ Adding to this appeal are affinities to traditional religious practices. Involvement with sickness and healing was a central element of Philippine pre-Christian religion. Tuggy and Toliver thus noted that healing is more important than speaking in tongues among Filipino Pentecostals.²⁷

Testimonies of miraculous healings and the messages of the preachers are broadcast to a wide audience by radio and televangelism. In fact, El Shaddai, the largest Charismatic movement, began as a radio apostolate. In the meantime, Velarde’s DWXI radio station broadcasts 24 hours a day and has become one of the most popular stations in Metro Manila. El Shaddai also has 14 hours of TV time weekly, which gives it a presence on several channels all over the country.²⁸ Radio and TV cover El Shaddai’s prayer rallies, with people listening to live broadcasts even while on the way to or attending prayer rallies.²⁹

²⁶ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 73.

²⁷ Leonhard A. Tuggy and Ralph Toliver, *Seeing the Church in the Philippines* (Manila: O.M.F. Publishers, 1972), p. 80.

²⁸ Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, *El Shaddai. A Study* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2001), p. 10.

²⁹ Katherine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), p. 43 ff.

Today, virtually every Charismatic group has its own radio programme and Christian programmes reach a substantial proportion of the population. Thirty-one percent of the respondents in the main sample reveal that they listen to religious services on radio or TV weekly and 8 percent do so daily. Electronic mass media have created “virtual Christian communities,”³⁰ which also cater to those who have not joined a parish-based prayer group. Their mobilizing effect is supplemented by other media such as newsletters, pamphlets, videocassettes and books. El Shaddai, for instance, distributes 300,000 free copies of its monthly *Bagong Liwanag* magazine, which contains Velarde’s sermons.³¹

Strong leadership and authoritarian structures

While the Charismatic groups and churches usually stress equality and, in keeping with the ideals of early Christianity, choose congregational forms of organization, in practice they rely on hierarchical patterns of organization. Most Charismatic and Pentecostal groups interviewed by us practice neither democratic leadership recruitment nor democratic decision making. Often the leader is the founder of the group or church, supported by an oligarchy of elders. Elders are usually persons with a long track record in the group who are proposed and nominated in an informal and top-down process by the group’s leaders. Ultimately, the authority of leaders is based on the Bible. Not surprisingly, Gorospe-Jamon found in a survey of 200 El Shaddai members that 70.5 percent believed in everything that their leader, Mike Velarde, says.³² Nevertheless, if disagreements occur within the congregation, they often end in schism, which is one reason for the spread of various new communities and organizations. However, although one could sense underlying conflicts between different Charismatic groups in our interviews, the common cause of spiritual renewal and Charismatic revival seems to outweigh internal differences and factions.

Anti-elitism and anti-system protest

The populist anti-elitism is anti-system protest. It may be directed against a particular system of government, bureaucracies, political parties, business conglomerates or even established church organizations. The fact that existing institutions are unable to represent the interests of ordinary people delegitimizes the system, although the key targets of the protest are the leaders and functional elites of these institutions. Their power is viewed as overwhelming. Ordinary people thus have no chance to protect their interests against these elites, which are perceived as arrogant and corrupt and to blame

³⁰ Gorospe-Jamon, *The El Shaddai Prayer Movement*, p. 100.

³¹ Mercado, *El Shaddai*, p. 11.

³² Gorospe-Jamon, *The El Shaddai Prayer Movement*, p. 109.

for hardships. Populists thus act as advocates of the suppressed interests of the common people. With their appeal to the people they seek to create unity and to transcend social classes.

If populism is an assault on established authority, so is the Charismatic movement. While political populism targets political authorities, the anti-elitism of the Charismatic movement challenges established church hierarchies. The Catholic Charismatic movement even challenges hierarchies from within. As elsewhere, in the Philippines their criticism is directed mainly against the Catholic Church. But Protestant mainline churches are not spared from criticism. They are also taken to task for their cold, cerebral, liberal theology, which has no place for emotion and spiritual experience.

In the Philippines, criticism of the Catholic Church varies in intensity. Evangelical Charismatics and Pentecostal groups are more vocal in their criticism of the Catholic Church than Catholic Charismatics. Most of the numerically dominant Catholic Charismatic groups, including the El Shaddai, accentuate their Catholic identity and accept the doctrinal guidance of the Roman Catholic Church.

But apart from this streamlining in doctrinal matters, Charismatic Catholics seem to maintain a sense of distinctiveness. In our snowball sample of 200 Catholic Charismatics we made the interesting observation that 12 percent identify themselves not simply as “Catholic” but as “Charismatic Catholic,” some even as “El Shaddai”; none of the members of non-Charismatic Catholic lay organizations were specific when asked for their religious affiliation. This indicates that being a Charismatic somehow qualifies one’s “Catholicness” as different from fellow Catholics, not only in scope, but also in quality. Charismatics are not only “*Katoliko serado*,” very devoted Catholics, they are Charismatic Catholics. We interpret this as a subtle but recognizable way of distancing oneself from the Catholic Church as such.

What then is wrong with Catholicism from the perspective of Charismatic groups? Wiegele gives a hint when she quotes El Shaddai leader Velarde as saying that he wants to free people from the bondage of religion, because religion blocks the relationship with the Holy Spirit. This is echoed by one of our Catholic Charismatic respondents, when she says, “My religion can’t save me, only through my faith ... can save me.” What she and Velarde are obviously referring to here is Catholic ritual and tradition, its preoccupation with sacraments and its neglect of evangelizing.³³ Spirituality is mediated through priests who stand in the way of a direct and personal relationship with God. “We are the Church and the Church does not belong to bishops and cardinals,” said the leader of another Charismatic group when interviewed.³⁴ Velarde claims that Filipino Catholics went over to “Born Again” groups precisely for these reasons.

³³ Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, p. 50.

³⁴ In-person interview with the leader of a Charismatic group, Manila, September 2003.

While the remoteness of the church from the faithful is a common denominator of Charismatic discontent, Velarde's El Shaddai went further in its distance from the Catholic Church than most other Charismatic groups. Unlike the more middle-class-based groups such as Loved Flock, Couples for Christ and Bukas Loob sa Diyos, which strictly adhere to the institutional church's political agenda, El Shaddai has repeatedly been at loggerheads with the church hierarchy in the political arena. In the 1992 and 1998 presidential elections, for instance, El Shaddai supported presidential candidates Fidel V. Ramos and Joseph E. Estrada.³⁵ Both were vehemently opposed by the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime C. Sin, then the most senior Church official in the Philippines, and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). The impeachment of President Estrada three years later, based on charges of corruption, led to another serious confrontation between El Shaddai and the Catholic Church. While the latter, like many mainline Protestant churches, strongly supported the people's power movement, eventually forcing Estrada out of office, the supporters mobilized by Estrada were in their majority members of El Shaddai and the Iglesia ni Cristo Church. In their view President Estrada was a man who may have failed, but was willing to do better—with the help of his trustworthy spiritual adviser Brother Mike Velarde. Velarde gave the impression that he was simply trying to be loyal to Estrada as someone seeking his spiritual support—a sinner, maybe, but an honest seeker. His opponents were viewed as simply striving for power. In this view any member of the political elite was regarded as being corrupt. Blaming other politicians for corruption was thus regarded as a thinly veiled attempt to seize power for oneself. President Estrada was not necessarily thought to have integrity, but neither were his opponents, who claimed to protect political and democratic morals. They advocated abstract democratic principles, whereas Velarde demonstrated personal loyalty in times of crisis, putting personal ties above abstract principles.

The anti-elitist outlook of many Charismatic groups is supplemented by a concern for the (religious) needs of ordinary people, another central feature of populism. Charismatic mass movements such as El Shaddai in particular claim to meet the emotional and religious needs of the masses neglected by the official church. This includes a strong quest for unity, denying social differences and stressing the equality of rich and poor. The oneness of followers is symbolized in prayer meetings by practices like holding hands in a circle and hugging each other.³⁶

³⁵ Edgardo E. Dagdag, "The Politicization of the Philippine Catholic Church," *Asian Studies*, vol. 34, centennial issue (1998), pp. 50-77, p. 55; Gorospe-Jamon, *The El Shaddai Prayer Movement*, p. 89; see also *Today*, 28 January 2003, p. 2, and 7 February 2003, p. 1.

³⁶ Mercado, *El Shaddai*, pp. 8-9.

As already mentioned, our survey data show that the Charismatic populist claim of transcending social classes is not simply ideology. However, although the Charismatic movement definitely offers common ground for people from all social strata, it does so in a fragmented way. Different socioeconomic classes concentrate in different organizations. Whereas El Shaddai is dominated by the poorer segments of society, Couples for Christ caters predominantly to a middle-class audience. Other organizations such as the “Brotherhood of Businessmen and Professionals” restrict membership to the upper class. In reality, the pronounced unity and oneness in Christ is practiced with people of one’s own social background, but the maid attending Velarde’s mass prayer rallies can relate to her boss’s Saturday breakfasts with his Brotherhood of Businessmen as manifestations of the same spirituality.

Reduction of complexity

Modernity is usually equated with complexity. This complexity is the result of ongoing diversification and differentiation of institutions, roles, norms and interests. People exposed to rapid modernization are forced to adapt to new institutions and find themselves in unfamiliar roles shaped by new norms and interests. They have to cope with the growing complexities and technicalities of a modernizing society. These experiences render populist views such as “complexity only blurs responsibilities and undermines accountability”³⁷ acceptable and attractive.

The populist answer to these grievances is a return to simple solutions. Populists thus appeal to the wisdom of common sense, are suspicious of experts, and hostile to deliberation.³⁸ If political populism thrives on the reduction of complexity, the Charismatic movement in the Philippines corresponds to this pattern of behaviour. With regard to the complex challenges in the worldly domain, Charismatics provide a simple explanation: the modern world has turned away from God and his ways. The own movement is then seen as reaction to this godless way of life. By interpreting social change in moral terms, populist religious leaders explain why worldly institutions are seemingly unprepared to respond adequately to rapid modernization and why a Christian renewal is so urgently needed. In fact, the sinful worldly institutions are an integral part of the problem.

Simple remedies correlate with simple explanations. The solution to all temporal problems and hardships, personal as well as societal, economic as well as political, is simply trust in God and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. Correspondingly, this message is a recurring theme of the sermons and prayers in Charismatic and Pentecostal meetings. “Pray hard, it works!” reads an advertisement on one of the major highways of Manila. This is an

³⁷ Papadopoulos, *Populism, the Democratic Question, and Contemporary Governance*, p. 53.

³⁸ Papadopoulos, *Populism*, p. 51.

approach that differs markedly from the pastoral letters of the Catholic bishops or mainline Protestant churches, which provide a structural analysis and call for political solutions.

Mike Velarde, for instance, is famous for his “prosperity gospel.” He encourages his followers to make prayer requests and love offerings or to tithe. Tithing—giving 10 percent of one’s income to one’s religious community—is practiced by 36 percent of respondents with high Charismatic religiosity in our main sample, compared to 13 percent of all respondents. Velarde preaches that God will reward these offerings in a very literal, material way.³⁹ The prosperity gospel is thus little more than a religious equivalent of a most basic entrepreneurial premise: it pays to invest in God. In a society where 40 percent of the population is below the poverty line, such prospects must certainly have a powerful appeal. They are a source of hope for a better worldly future and a guarantee for a place in heaven. In other words, leaders of Charismatic groups suggest to their followers that there is practical, otherworldly help for worldly problems. Unlike the distanced God of mainline churches or unreliable presidential candidates using populist promises in their election campaigns, the God proclaimed by populist religious leaders not only maintains a personal relationship with his followers, he also actively intervenes on behalf of the faithful in worldly affairs like visa applications and university examinations.

This idea of an active God corresponds with the widespread belief that the Bible must be taken literally. There is no place for an intellectual interpreting away signs and wonders or demons and Satan. Whatever the Bible tells us about God’s deeds is true and requires faith, not exegesis. The approach of some biblical scholars, who look for scientific explanations for supernatural phenomena reported in the Bible, is entirely rejected by Charismatics. Fifty-five percent of active Charismatics in our survey take the Bible literally. However, as 50 percent of all respondents share this perception, Charismatic leaders can relate to a pre-existing widespread belief, instead of having to convince their audience.⁴⁰ Active involvement is not confined to God: Satan and demons are present and very much active in the modern world. Speaking in tongues, for example, is such an important gift of the Holy Spirit to Charismatic Christians because “this is the only language Satan cannot understand,” as we learned in Charismatic seminars and services.

Poewe can thus hardly be faulted for concluding that Charismatic Christianity “reverses the emphases that we have taken for granted: the centrality of the rational, of calculated doing, of articulate verbal skills, of

³⁹ Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, p. 17 ff.

⁴⁰ The question concerning literal belief in the Bible was taken from the questionnaire of the International Social Science Panel on religion in 1991 and 1998, administered in the Philippines by Social Weather Stations.

doctrines, and of things Western.”⁴¹ This re-enchantment of the world is not only a solution for personal problems in a modernizing world, but also for broader political and economic problems.

Populist Religion as a Recipe for Success

Having illustrated the parallels between political populism and the Charismatic movement in their style of mobilization, their anti-establishment, anti-hierarchical, and class-crossing drive, as well as their simple solutions and backward vision of a society governed by shared morals and values, one question remains: Why is populist religion so attractive?

We cited some roots of political populism in the Philippine political system above. But the attractiveness of populist religion has deeper roots than the responsiveness of the political system to populism. These roots lie in the questions posed by modernization, successful modernization as well as failed modernization. To put it very simply: successful modernization erodes cognitive and emotional security, and failed modernization erodes material security. Mass communication confronts individuals with competing moral systems; people become aware that there are alternatives to their way of life. Institutions like churches and families that formerly provided moral guidelines lose their monopoly. Economic processes foster migration and modern education systems offer opportunities for social mobility. People increasingly have choices and decisions to make: Do I migrate to Singapore to offer my children the opportunity of better schooling? Do I trust traditional healers or try to get access to Western medicine? Do I stay with my partner or leave him for good? Where industrialization and processes of modernization have failed to improve the standard of living for the majority—as is the case in the Philippines—modernization increases the number of people confronted with existential material crises and extreme poverty.

Populist religion enables people to participate in modernization processes and offers protection from their drawbacks, both successful and otherwise. Summing up the results of the interviews with members of Charismatic groups, we can state that populist religion meets a range of different needs. The religiously legitimated worldview and moral outlook of Charismatic teachings give orientation for everyday decisions and general conduct of life. Spiritual experiences provide the emotional energy needed to cope with the strains of everyday life. Membership provides a social network and the sense of belonging to a community. These aspects render the Charismatic movement attractive to people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, in different personal circumstances, and for different reasons. Poor and uneducated people may be attracted by the message of hope for betterment and spiritual as well as material assistance. People experiencing the fragility of

⁴¹ Poewe, *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, p. 12.

their family networks might be attracted by the close-knit social ties of the communities. Middle-class and well-educated people might be attracted by the clear morals and values that the Charismatic worldview offers in a world full of choices.

Therefore, materialistic explanations along the lines of the “opium of the masses” fall short of explaining the success of populist religion. There is the aspect of religion that gives meaning to desperate living conditions, but there is more to Charismatic religiosity than comfort. This kind of comfort is offered by any religion. What Charismatic religion has to offer are meaning, orientation and a social cohesion for individuals who retain their ability and their right to choose. It is exactly this combination of acknowledging individuals as independent, empowered persons and simultaneously acknowledging the need of individuals to be embedded in a social network that provides orientation and meaning to life which renders Charismatic religion so attractive. The Charismatic movement offers a (modern) individual access to God as well as the comfort of the (pre-modern) community. This combination resembles the political populist blend of modern individual civil rights and politics based on shared values and personal relations.

Conclusion

Much of the literature treats populism in pejorative terms. However, more recent research has broken with this negative view. Canovan and Taggart, for instance, have shown that populism is not necessarily anti-democratic, but may address inclusivist aspirations of the people in representative democracies.⁴² As outlined above, the populist support for the interests of the common people is based on the modern democratic concept of equal rights for equal citizens. Reintroducing the ethics of face-to-face interaction into complex political procedures aims to legitimize democratic leadership and government. At the same time, populism’s reliance on shared moral values delegitimizes the plurality of values and lifestyles in a modern democracy, and by disregarding the need for specialization and administration in a modern, functionally differentiated society it deprives state institutions of legitimacy.

Political populism and populist religion attack the drawbacks of modernity. They criticize the breakdown of stable social structures caused by individualization and pluralization and try to protect traditional social structures. They reject the complexity of modern institutions caused by differentiation, because this complexity reduces the “*Gestaltungsmacht*” of

⁴² Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in Yves Meny and Yves Surel, eds., *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Taggart, *Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics*.

ordinary people to determine their own lives (and their relationship with God). They advocate simple solutions, comprehensible by non-experts and applicable by laity. They reject impersonal procedural relationships as the basis of society, as these deprive people of embeddedness in social structures. However, in fighting the perceived ills of modernity and appealing to premodern qualities, political populism and populist religion rely on the very modern notion of individual rights and freedom to choose. This ambiguity of populism results in ambiguous societal potential: it can foster democracy with its reliance on individuals' rights and it can foster authoritarian regimes with its quest for simplicity and intolerance towards those who are perceived as different.

Populism retains this ambivalent character with regard to democratization if transferred to the religious sphere. Populist religion in the Philippines has a pro-democratic potential in as much as it fosters an ethic of honesty and accountability grounded in Christian values. If this ethic gains ground within the political sphere, the currently lacking legitimization of political institutions could be effectively improved. Populist religion may also strengthen democracy in other ways, although its influence on political culture and political attitudes is indirect, convoluted and ambiguous. The democratizing effect of a theology that emphasizes the personal relationship to God over the church's intermediary function has been analyzed by Hatch (1989) in detail. According to his analysis, individual spirituality liberates people from dogmatic subordination. Finding one's own way to God and relating spiritual experience to personal circumstances requires independent thinking, a requisite usually attributed to democrats. As religious individualism produces frequent church schisms, it erodes thinking in hierarchies and centralized organization, questions authority and accustoms people to a pluralist social reality—again, important requisites for democracies. Martin has made a similar point about contemporary evangelical Protestantism as a “creator of free social space” with regard to Latin America.⁴³

It is assumed that these religious characteristics would soon spill over into other spheres of life, not least the political domain. However, in the Philippines the anti-elitist and anti-authoritarian thrust of populist religion is much weaker than in the United States during the Second Awakening. Given the predominantly Catholic character of the Philippine Charismatics, it is questionable whether conclusions drawn from predominantly Protestant Charismatics can be transferred to the Philippines. As the Catholic Charismatic Movement is firmly embedded in the Catholic Church's hierarchical structure, its capacity to create “free social space” is surely more limited than that of Pentecostal or Evangelical churches. In the US, religious

⁴³ Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, p. 279.

populism went hand in hand with Jeffersonian Republicanism and its assault on political authority.⁴⁴ Such a political movement is missing in the contemporary Philippines. Moreover, the elements of the new religiosity considered suitable for democratization must be weighed up against the authoritarian and apolitical elements of populist religion. One is the hierarchic internal structure of most Charismatic lay organizations and Pentecostal churches, a trait they share with other intermediary and supposedly democratizing institutions in the country, such as NGOs.

Another counterdemocratic element is the fundamentalist tendencies inherent in the Charismatic movement's aim to build a society rooted in Christian faith. Enforcing Christian family ethics by law in a society with a substantial Muslim minority contradicts the democratic principle of protecting minorities. In a very basic sense, the moral outlook and enchanted worldview of Charismatic Christians can be criticized as anti-democratic: whoever truly believes that his or her political opinions reflect divine revelation might have difficulties participating in a democratic discourse to search for the best arguments. The Charismatic Renewal therefore might foster a Christian authoritarian and theocratic vision of society.

Stoll has asked similar questions about the Latin American context: "Is Latin American Pentecostalism a step on the road to demystifying, secularizing, and rationalizing Latin American society, as predicted by Martin, or is it inevitably thaumaturgical—that is magical and mystifying—as argued by Bastian? ... Is Latin American Protestantism basically caudillistic, or do its tendencies to fragmentation give it more democratic implications?"⁴⁵ Ströbele-Gregor has aptly called this ambiguity "anti-enlightened enlightenment."⁴⁶

On balance, the "anti-enlightened enlightenment" of populist religion in the Philippines may indeed contribute to democracy, but certainly a highly conservative democracy, a democracy that offers little scope for social action. Such an assessment coincides with the fact that most Charismatic groups hardly go beyond charity in their development work. So far none of them pursues a systematic approach to poverty alleviation and social change, unless one regards evangelization and individual spiritual renewal as such an approach.

Although we are convinced that religious attitudes do affect people's behaviour, especially if embedded in a social movement like the populist

⁴⁴ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ David Stoll, "Introduction," in Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, eds., *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Juliane Stroebel-Gregor, *Dialektik der Gegenauflklärung. Zur Problematik fundamentalistischer und evangelikaler Missionierung bei den urbanen Aymara in La Paz (Bolivien)* (Bonn: Holos Verlag, 1988), quoted in: Yves Bizeul, *Christliche Sekten und religiöse Bewegungen in der südlichen Hemisphäre. Eine Literaturstudie* (Bonn: Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, 1995), p. 143.

Charismatic religious renewal, we conclude this article with a caveat. All considerations regarding the potential political effects of this movement in the Philippines are the result of deductive thinking rather than of empirical analysis. This is hardly surprising, considering the enormous methodological difficulties in establishing tested causal relations between populist religion and the actual political behaviour of Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians. Our study explored the scope and quality of populist religion; researching its lasting tangible political effects will be the challenging and promising task of future work.

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