
DOSSIER Philippinen: 500 Jahre Ankunft des christlichen Glaubens

Am Ende der Vollversammlung der Bischofskonferenz vom 26. bis 27. Januar 2021 haben die Bischöfe der Philippinen in einem gemeinsamen Hirtenbrief an die Ankunft des christlichen Glaubens vor 500 Jahren erinnert. Darin schreiben sie: »Unser Gedenken an dieses Ereignis ist eine Würdigung dieses immensen Geschenks an unser Volk und unser Land. Wir haben nicht nur den Glauben empfangen, sondern auch zugelassen, dass er im Laufe der Jahre Wurzeln schlägt und wächst [...]. Wir erkennen ein Geschenk an, wir lassen es wachsen und teilen es großzügig mit anderen und wir geben es mit Dankbarkeit in vielfacher Weise an den Herrn zurück.« Die Bischöfe laden alle ein, die vorrangige Option für die Armen aktiv zu praktizieren und in Pfarreien und Diözesen, »materielle und spirituelle Ressourcen mit anderen zu teilen«, insbesondere unter den Ausgegrenzten und Verletzlichen, »damit niemand zurückgelassen wird«.

Zum Jubiläumsjahr haben die Bischöfe eine Reihe von Aktivitäten geplant, über die ein eigenes Internetportal berichtet (<https://500yoc.com/>). Pablo Virgilio David, Bischof von Kalookan und Vizepräsident der Bischofskonferenz, setzt sich darin mit dieser Frage auseinander: »Warum sollen wir 500 Jahre Christentum auf den Philippinen feiern? War das Christentum nicht eine bloße Stütze der Kolonialherrschaft?« Wir dokumentieren hier seine Antwort in freier deutscher Übersetzung, weil sie die »Dialektik von Mission und Kolonialismus« belegt:

»Derselbe christliche Glaube, den die Konquistadoren zu nutzen versuchten, um ihre kolonialen Ziele in unserem Land zu verfolgen, inspirierte auch unsere Revolutionäre rund dreieinhalb Jahrhunderte später, von Freiheit und Demokratie zu träumen. Es ist derselbe christliche Glaube, der sie schließlich motivierte, die grundlegende Menschenwürde der Filipinos zu verteidigen und der Tyrannei und Kolonialherrschaft ein Ende setzen zu wollen.

Die spanischen Missionare hatten den Eingeborenen beigebracht, während der Karwoche die Leidensgeschichte Jesu zu singen. Ohne dass die Kolonialbehörden es wussten, hatte dieselbe Passion, die vom leidenden Messias handelte, der sein Leben für die Erlösung der Menschheit opferte, unsere Helden inspiriert, ihr Leben für die Erlösung unseres Landes zu opfern – auf Kosten ihres eigenen Blutes, Schweißes und ihrer Tränen.

Natürlich waren wir während der Zeit des Übergangs bitter gespalten: zwischen den Pro- und den Anti-Parteien, zwischen denen, die auf der Seite der Kolonialpolitik standen, und denen, die es wagten, auf der Seite der revolutionären Politik zu stehen. Spaltung ist nicht immer etwas Negatives. Wie der heilige Paulus in 1 Kor 11,19 sagt, es muss manchmal ›Parteiungen geben unter euch, damit die Bewährten unter euch offenkundig werden.‹ Oder denken Sie daran, was Jesus sagte, als er wie ein zorniger Prophet des Untergangs sprach (Lk 12,49-51): ›Ich bin gekommen, um Feuer auf die Erde zu werfen. Wie froh wäre ich, es würde schon brennen! [...]. Meint ihr, ich sei gekommen, um Frieden auf der Erde zu bringen? Nein, sage ich euch, sondern Spaltung.‹

Das sind unangenehme Worte, die wir lieber nicht hören wollen, vor allem, wenn wir die Einheit zu einem absoluten Wert machen. Die Menschen vergessen, dass Einheit manchmal auch negativ sein kann – wenn es darum geht, sich um ein gottloses Ziel zu vereinigen. Kein Wunder, dass Gott bei den Erbauern des Turms zu Babel Spaltung säte, damit er sie später durch Pfingsten im Geist wirklich wieder vereinigen konnte.

Unsere eigenen Vorfahren waren intelligent genug, das Gute anzunehmen und das Böse in dem, was die Spanier mitgebracht hatten, als sie in unser Land kamen, abzulehnen. Sie lernten schließlich auch zu unterscheiden zwischen den Missionaren, die sich völlig mit der Kolonialpolitik der Konquistadoren verbündet hatten, und denen, die ihr kritisch gegenüberstanden, die den Mut

hatten, die Rechte der Eingeborenen gegen die Misshandlungen und Grausamkeiten der Kolonialherren zu verteidigen.

Allein die Tatsache, dass wir schließlich die Kolonialherrschaft ablehnten, aber auch nach dem Sieg der Revolution weiterhin den christlichen Glauben annahmen, konnte nur bedeuten, dass die Eingeborenen das Christentum nicht mit dem Kolonialismus gleichsetzten. Irgendwann war der Glaube, den sie angenommen hatten, nicht mehr fremd für sie. Er hatte es geschafft, auf dem fruchtbaren Boden unserer angeborenen Spiritualität als Volk Wurzeln zu schlagen.

Lassen Sie uns daher klarstellen: Was wir im Jahr 2021 feiern werden, ist nicht der Kolonialismus, sondern der christliche Glaube, den die Ureinwohner dieser Inseln als ein Geschenk annahmen, wenn auch von Menschen, die nicht unbedingt von den reinsten Motiven geprägt waren. Gott kann in der Tat auch auf den krummsten Linien gerade schreiben.«

Ja, die Spanier haben den Schatz des christlichen Glaubens »in zerbrechlichen Gefäßen« zu den Philippinen transportiert. Aber in dem Augenblick, wo sich die europäischen Christen dazu entschlossen, ihre Religion mit der unterworfenen Bevölkerung zu teilen und die gesamte Welt als eine einzige Rechtsgemeinschaft und eine Menschheitsfamilie zu betrachten, haben sie eine Bewegung in Gang gesetzt, die tendenziell nur das Ende des Kolonialismus und eine partnerschaftliche Weltordnung zum Ziel haben konnte (vgl. dazu: Mariano Delgado, Katholische Kirche und Kolonialismus – einige Aufgaben, in: JCSW 61 [2020] 63-83).

Aus Anlass der Ankunft des christlichen Glaubens vor 500 Jahren auf den Philippinen publiziert die ZMR in diesem Dossier einen historischen Überblick des Schriftleiters über die dortige Kirchengeschichte sowie den Text einer einheimischen Autorin über Stand und Perspektiven der Kirche im Archipel der 7000 Inseln. ♦ *Die Redaktion*

Gifted to give: Perspectives on Faith and the Catholic Church in the Philippines

by Fides del Castillo

Abstract

The quincentenary of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is a testimony to the Christian mission's value. This study explores the various perspectives on faith and the Catholic Church in the Philippines by elaborating the 1) Christianization of the Philippines, 2) Religious Articulations of Filipino Youth, 3) Basic Ecclesial Communities, and 4) Tracing God's Presence and the Christian Mission. It aims to unravel the salience of religion among Filipinos, the embedment of Christian faith in culture and society, and its various articulations in modern times. The paper concluded that the commemoration of the 500 years of Christianity continues to challenge the Filipino Catholics to lead lives of heroic love and become modern witnesses to the love of Christ.

Keywords

→ 500 years of Christianity
→ Christian mission
→ Filipino faith
→ basic ecclesial communities
→ youth

Zusammenfassung

Das fünfhundertjährige Bestehen der katholischen Kirche auf den Philippinen ist ein Zeugnis für den Wert der christlichen Mission. Diese Studie untersucht die verschiedenen Perspektiven auf den Glauben und die katholische Kirche auf den Philippinen, indem sie 1) die Christianisierung der Philippinen, 2) die religiösen Artikulationen der philippinischen Jugend, 3) die kirchlichen Basisgemeinschaften und 4) das Aufspüren von Gottes Gegenwart und der christlichen Mission herausarbeitet. Sie zielt darauf ab, die Bedeutung der Religion unter den Filipinos, die Einbettung des christlichen Glaubens in Kultur und Gesellschaft und seine verschiedenen Artikulationen in der modernen Zeit zu entschlüsseln. Der Beitrag kommt zu dem Schluss, dass das Gedenken an 500 Jahre Christentum die philippinischen Katholiken weiterhin herausfordert, ein Leben der heroischen Liebe zu führen und moderne Zeugen der Liebe Christi zu werden.

Schlüsselbegriffe

→ 500 Jahre Christentum
→ christliche Mission
→ philippinischer Glaube
→ kirchliche Basisgemeinschaften
→ Jugend

Sumario

El quinto centenario de la Iglesia católica en las Filipinas es un testimonio del valor de la misión cristiana. Este estudio explora las diversas perspectivas sobre la fe y la Iglesia católica en las Filipinas elaborando 1) la cristianización de las Filipinas, 2) las articulaciones religiosas de los jóvenes filipinos, 3) las comunidades eclesiales de base y 4) el rastreo de la presencia de Dios y la misión cristiana. Su objetivo es desentrañar la relevancia de la religión entre los filipinos, el arraigo de la fe cristiana en la cultura y la sociedad, y sus diversas articulaciones en los tiempos modernos. El documento concluye que la conmemoración de los 500 años de cristianismo sigue desafiando a los católicos filipinos a llevar vidas de amor heroico y a convertirse en testigos modernos del amor de Cristo.

Palabras clave

→ 500 años de cristianismo
→ misión cristiana
→ fe filipina
→ comunidades eclesiales de base
→ juventud

Introduction

The Catholic Church in the Philippines is celebrating 500 years of Christianity in the year 2021. It is a milestone for the Catholic Church, the millions of Filipino Catholics, and the Christian mission. The theme of the quincentenary is »Gifted to Give« (Gomes, 2021), which is inspired by the Gospel according to Matthew (10:8) – »Freely you have received; freely give.« Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), claims that »the Christian faith that arrived in the Philippines 500 years ago is very much alive today in the joyful witness to evangelical charity by Catholics« (Gomes, 2021). As such, it is a time to revisit, reflect and celebrate the working of the Holy Spirit, »the ultimate partner in the mission of the church« (Ma, 2015, p. 178). Indeed, the Christian mission depends on the special function of the Spirit in energizing the church to bring God's love and grace to humanity (Lim 2015, p. 204). Some critics attempt to turn the celebration on its head, saying that it commemorates the start of Spain's quest to colonize the country (Acidre 2020). However, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David asserts, »what will be celebrated is not colonialism but the Christian faith that the indigenous Filipinos welcomed as a gift (albeit from people who were not necessarily motivated by the purest of motives)« (Domingo 2019). There may have been early missionaries who were ill-suited for their duties. However, some possessed a passionate aspiration to cross boundaries for mission and, led by the Holy Spirit, carried out effective mission work. The life and work of Fr. Juan de Plasencia, OFM, exemplifies missionary zeal and identification with indigenous people by getting into their »thought world.« This »incarnational« way of the missionary is patterned after Jesus Christ, who came into the world and identified himself with it (Ma, 2015).

Fr. Juan de Plasencia is a Spanish friar who was among the first Franciscan missionaries to the Philippines (Fernandez, 1979). He preached the Gospel and founded several towns in the provinces of Bulacan, Laguna, and Rizal. Fr. Plasencia also started primary schools so that the indigenous Filipinos could learn Christian doctrine and read and write. More importantly, he wrote and published in 1593 the *Doctrina Cristiana* (Christian Doctrine) (Gutay, n. d.). The book consists of 74 pages of translations of the Christian catechism and hymns from Spanish to Old Tagalog and *Baybayin*, an indigenous writing script of the Philippines (Philippines: US library of congress holds special viewing of *Doctrina Cristiana*, 2019). The use of the vernacular is critical, for it is the voice of the indigenous culture speaking in its terms (De Mesa, 2011). Through the book, Fr. Plasencia hoped to faithfully transmit the Catholic faith's tenets to the indigenous Filipinos. Such efforts displayed early attempts of inculturation, which laid the foundation of the Philippines' Christian faith. Fr. Plasencia was a missionary who read the signs of the times and tirelessly preached Jesus to those who do not know Christ.

The flourishing of the Christian faith in the Philippines is comparable to the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32) – »the smallest of all seeds on earth that grew to become the largest of all garden plants.« Although small in size of land and population compared to some of its neighbors, the Philippine nation, through its people, traditions, and the fruits of the missionary efforts was able to shape a clear national identity that is unmistakably Filipino and truly Christian (John Paul II, 1981, para. 2). As such, it has a special mission, that is, to bear witness to the values of its Christian culture before the whole world (ibid.). The Christian ideology was introduced to the country in 1521 at the onset of the Spanish conquest and became deeply embedded into Filipino culture (Goh 2005;

del Castillo 2015). The Philippines is considered the numerically largest Christian nation in Asia (Bautista 2014) and the third-highest Catholic population in the world after Brazil and Mexico (World Population Review 2020). Among 110 million Filipinos, around 80% are Catholics, and 11% are other Christian denominations. While there are other religions in the country, such as Islam and Chinese Buddhism, Christianity dominates the religious landscape. As a result, many Filipinos' socio-cultural norms and lifeworld are deeply imbued with Catholic cosmologies and expressions (Macaraan 2019). Many young Filipino Catholics are highly religious and demonstrate their religiosity primarily in the ideology and private dimensions (del Castillo et al., 2021a). Also, even in a demographic group assumed to exist in tension between sex/gender identities and affiliation with religious institutions, some individuals consider themselves highly religious (del Castillo et al., 2021b). Many Filipino Catholic youth informed by the Catholic Church's teachings on human suffering employ a pattern of positive religious coping (del Castillo & Alino, 2020). The importance of Christian ideology to many Filipinos is also demonstrated in their strong beliefs on God's role in health and well-being (Patinio 2020). For a significant number of older Filipinos, the Christian faith serves as a source of strength and a protective buffer to stress and suffering (Buenaventura et al. 2020).

This paper explores the various perspectives on faith and the Catholic Church in the Philippines. However, the richness and complexity of the country's Christian faith cannot be covered in a short essay. As such, this paper will discuss the 1) Christianization of the Philippines, 2) Religious Articulations of Filipino Youth, 3) Basic Ecclesial Communities, and 4) Tracing God's Presence and the Christian Mission. This study aims to unravel the salience of religion among Filipinos, the embedment of Christian faith in culture and society, and its various articulations in modern times.

Christianization of the Philippines: A »Christ of Culture« Perspective

Clerical involvement with European economic ambitions in pre-nineteenth-century Southeast Asia helped mark a path toward the domestication of Christianity in the Philippines (Andaya 2010, p. 357). However, the flourishing of the Christian faith in the Philippines can be attributed to the Gospel-culture relationship (De Mesa, 2011; del Castillo, 2015). The *Relation* (considered the primary source material concerning the first circumnavigation of the world) written by Antonio Pigafetta (Torodash, 1970) records the indigenous Filipinos' initial contact with Christianity. The Portuguese voyager Fernão de Magalhães and his three boat-fleet and the remaining Armada de Molluca reached Eastern Samar, Philippines, in March 1521 (Field, 2006). When Magalhães came to Sugbu port (located in Cebu province) in April of 1521, he entered into trading relations. Also, he initiated the baptism of the local king Humabon, the kinglet's wife, and the numerous indigenous people. Magalhães also gifted the kinglet's wife Juana with a wooden carving of the Child Jesus or *Santo Niño* (Skeleton, 1969). One cannot help but wonder why the indigenous Filipinos accepted the Christian faith since they have an autochthonous religion. While it is possible that fear and greed could have moved the indigenous Filipinos to become Christians (Catindig, 1965), this researcher argues that these are not enough to grow and sustain the Catholic faith. Hence, the successful Christianization of the Philippines could have been facilitated by the indigenous culture.

Many of the indigenous Filipinos believed in a Supreme Being who created the world and all living things. The Supreme Being stood at the apex of other powerful spirits and was called by different names depending on the ethnolinguistic group. Among the *Ifugaos* of Northern Luzon province, the Supreme Being is called *Kadak'lanKadak'lan*. The indigenous people of Pampanga province revere *Miglalang*, while the indigenous people of Zambales province worship *Malayari*. Indigenous people from the Tagalog regions invoke *Bathalang Maykapal* (*Bathala*, the Creator) or *Panginoong Bathala* (The Lord, *Bathala*). However, in the indigenous Filipinos' autochthonous religion, *Bathala* rules with other lesser divinities or *anito*. They act as ministers of *Bathala* and serve specific functions. As such, indigenous Filipinos believe in certain *anito* who can increase their rice harvest and reap the sea's bounty. There is also a particular *anito* who assists in battles and another who helps cure the sick. The indigenous Filipinos believe that no one can speak to the great God *Bathala*. As such, their many *anito* serve as common recourse (Francisco, 1965). The indigenous Filipinos also believe that the intangible *anito* can be represented through sacred images called *likha* or *larawan*. Such god-representations also have the power to heal and cure their sickness. Moreover, they can ward off evil spirits and protect the community from harm.

Among indigenous Filipinos, there are rituals in honor of gods led by specific persons (McCoy, 1982). Depending on the indigenous communities, such a person is called *Babaylan*, *Dawac*, *Balyan* or *Balian*, *Katalonan*, *Ma-Aram*, *Mangngallag*, *Mumbaki*, *Mambunong*. They have the »ability to mediate with the spirit world, has her spirit guides, and is given gifts of healing, foretelling, and insight« (What is a Babaylan? n.d.). Mendoza-Strobel (2010) further describes the Babaylan (usually a female) as the »mediator between ordinary and non-ordinary realms of reality« (p.3). The Babaylan is highly regarded that when the kingly is away, she becomes in charge of the tribe (Kasaysayan, 2008). However, what truly sets the Babaylan apart is her work on healing the relations between man and the spirit world (Salazar 2007, p. 8).

Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (1951) offer theologians, missiologists, and academicians five models to understand the relationship between the Christian faith and indigenous culture. Postulating that there is more than one correct type of Christian theology, Niebuhr (1951) asserts that we can observe and situate the accent of particular theologies of inculturation within a spectrum of interactions between Christianity and culture. »Although the framework is not a complete picture of how Christianity relates with culture, it provides information regarding the varied and complex dynamics between these two realities in Asia« (De Mesa, 2011, p. 56). The model, »Christ of Culture,« is significant in the Philippine milieu. It posits that there is fundamental but not total agreement between the Gospel and [indigenous] culture. This is evidenced by the lack of great tension between being Christian and being a member of the [indigenous] group. More importantly, the Gospel is understood with the culture's resources, and the culture is interpreted through the Gospel (Niebuhr, 1951).

Language plays an essential role in culture as a vehicle of indigenous thought (De Mesa, 2011). As such, the researcher compared some religious terms between the indigenous Filipinos and Christianity. As shown in Table 1, there was construct equivalence between the autochthonous religion and Catholicism despite the difference in actual words used.

Table I
Comparison of Autochthonous Religion of Indigenous Filipino
and Catholic Religious Constructs

Religious Constructs	Autochthonous religion	Catholicism
Supreme Being	<i>Bathala</i>	God
Intermediaries to the Supreme Being	<i>anito</i>	saints
Ritual officials	<i>Babaylan</i>	Priests
Acts of worship	Rituals in honor of gods	Holy Mass, prayers, and feasts
Places of worship	<i>Sibi</i>	Church
Religious images	<i>likha or larawan</i>	Religious icons

There are striking similarities between the autochthonous religion and Catholicism which can help explain how the indigenous accepted Christianity and how it was embedded in the culture. De Mesa (2011), using the roles of the indigenous spirits and Catholic saints to shed light on the model »Christ of culture,« said: »Though officially presented by the Church as particular models of holiness, the saints are regarded [by the indigenous] like the spirits [anito] who are asked to grant favors. [...] In this process, the holiness of a person regarded as a blessed or a saint by the Church is no longer important. It is what the saint is capable of doing that interests people« (p. 60).

Tupayupanqui (2010) asserts, »the departure point of our theology is the faith in Jesus Christ and the manifestations of God present as the seeds of the word« in the indigenous traditions of our cultures (p. 89). This aligns with Fanning's (2009) view on the universal Christian faith's translatability into the forms and symbols of indigenous culture. Hence, the similar religious constructs between the indigenous culture and Catholicism contributed to the acceptance, development, and dominance of the Catholic faith in the Philippines.

Religious Articulations of Filipino Youth

Culture refers to a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Clifford 1993, p. 89). For a particular culture to perpetuate, the youth needs to recognize it, put it into practice, and hopefully transmit it to the next generation. Religion, especially in the predominantly Catholic Philippines, is a crucial container of culture. Recognizing the youth's importance in the transmission of the faith, the Catholic Church refers to the Filipino youth as »the Church's greatest resource for evangelization« (Agoncillo 2015). Since many Filipinos are affiliated with the Catholic Church and Filipinos by nature are »family-centered,« one can presuppose that the majority of young people in the country are, at the very least, nominal Catholics. While there are studies on the religious orientations of the Filipino youth (CBCP-ECY and CEAP, 2014; Agoncillo 2015), they did not evaluate the extent to which religiosity occupies a central place in the life of the individual. More to

the point, »there is a lack of studies on the dimensions that characterize a person's notions of religion« (Baring et al., 2018). Addressing this knowledge gap, Del Castillo and other scholars investigated religion's salience among select Filipinos. They discovered that many Filipino youths are »religious,« which means religion is essential in their life. Although, it is not critical in their decision-making process (Del Castillo et al. 2020b). However, among select Filipino Catholic youths, many registered as »highly religious,« which means that they have a profound religious life (del Castillo et al., 2021a).

Moreover, among select Filipino youth who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) belonging to non-affirming religions, the majority registered as »religious« while some are »highly religious« (del Castillo et al., 2021b). The religiosity of select Filipino youth is demonstrated primarily in the ideology and private dimensions (del Castillo et al., 2020; 2020b; 2021a). The results align with the findings of Agoncillo (2015) that [select Filipino Catholic youth] »strongly feel the presence of God in their lives and they have had religious experiences that indicate this presence. Filipino Catholic youth have ordinary spiritual experiences, which means that most of the time, they feel a spiritual connection with God and with others« (p.127).

Studies have shown that religion can contribute to a person's health and well-being. Koenig (2018) reports that individuals who are more involved in religious activities or describe religion as very important in their lives are less likely to become depressed over time (p. 83). Also, religious involvement is associated with a lower risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, including completed suicide (ibid., 85). Martinez et al. (2020) mention that »mental illness is the third most common disability in the Philippines wherein an estimated 6 million Filipinos live with depression or anxiety. [Moreover,] suicide rates are pegged at 3.2 per 100,000 population with numbers possibly higher due to underreporting or misclassification of suicide cases as »undetermined deaths« (p.1397). Many Filipino Catholic youths consider academic problems, financial difficulties, family relationships, the death of a family member or relative, and romantic breakdown as major life stressors (del Castillo & Aliño, 2020). These stressors are also »major trials of faith,« which cause moral and physical suffering (John Paul II 1984; Benedict XVI 2008; Francis 2017). However, many Filipino Catholic youths utilize religion as a coping resource. During difficult times, they »ask God for the forgiveness of sins,« »try to see how God might be trying to strengthen them in the situation,« »seek for God's love and care,« and »look for a stronger connection with God.« Thus, we can infer that many Filipino Catholic youths have a deep sense of spirituality, enjoy a secure relationship with God, and believe that there is meaning found in life (del Castillo & Aliño, 2020).

Basic Ecclesial Communities: Voices From the Grassroots

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are small Christian communities that promote a more active engagement of the lay people to be a source of inspiration and be an embodiment of the examples of Jesus Christ (Azevedo, 1985). The first BECs sprouted in Latin America and spread throughout Africa and Asia (Robredillo, 2006; Picardal, 2011). It is providential that, during the tumultuous political period of the 1960s, the first BECs in the Philippines was formed. It became an essential resource for many struggling Filipinos. Since the Philippine government failed to provide vital social services to the needy, »the Church workers involved in the BEC movement encouraged the poor to help each other by pooling their resources and talents to meet their needs as a caring and compassionate community« (Holden & Nadeu 2010,

p. 91). When democracy was restored in 1986, many BECs began to engage in social action and supported the livelihood projects and sustainable agriculture of their communities (Picardal, 2011). In 1991, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines adopted the promotion and formation of BECs all over the country. The Second Plenary Council (PCP II) made the BECs a pastoral priority. As such, the BECs were unified and integrated into the life of the Church. The National Secretariat for Social Action (the humanitarian, development, and advocacy arm of the Catholic Church in the Philippines) assisted the BECs in implementing various programs geared toward alleviating poverty. Some of these programs are sustainable agriculture, livelihood projects, peace advocacy, environmental protection, community-based health program, microfinance, skills training, and more (Picardal, 2011). Over time, the number of BECs in the country grew, and various expressions of small Christian communities. Some communities are chapel-centered. Others pursue integral faith formation and catechesis. There are also BECs that work on social action programs, microfinance, and other advocacies. In whatever forms they are, BECs thrive in both rural and urban areas.

In consideration of the 50 years of BEC and the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, Monsignor Manuel Gabriel, with Br. Raymundo Suplido, FSC, asked the Basic Ecclesial Community Research Team of De La Salle University-Manila (DLSU-BEC Research Team) to re-articulate the basic ecclesial communities of the different regions in the Philippines. An extensive profiling report for the basic ecclesial communities and focus group discussions was done by Baring, del Castillo, Demeterio, and Habaradas (2021). The researchers discovered that the Philippines' basic ecclesial communities are very much alive and active in promoting the priestly, kingly, and prophetic mission of Christ. BEC members strive to integrate faith into their daily life. However, various communities in the regions feel that there are challenges in the BECs. These are brought about by competitions at denomination and parish levels. There are gray areas regarding the support given by the parish and the lay. In some BECs, worrying about priorities is a concern. But most of the communities look at the limited participation of the youth as an alarming concern.

The positive experiences of BECs drove off these challenges in their environment, structure, and culture. There are communities specifically in Mindanao that experience full cooperation and openness from both the BEC leaders and the members. This develops a positive environment among the members. Collaboration and support make the community prosper. Active involvement in the catechesis and social action programs is inherent in some BECs. This only proves that Pope Francis' challenge to bring a new evangelizing zeal to renew the Church is actively present in the Philippines' Basic Ecclesial Communities. The laity does not lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish but instead participates readily in the pastoral activities of the Church. This shows the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church today.

Tracing God's Presence and the Christian Mission

In March 2021, Pope Francis celebrated the Holy Eucharist at St Peter's Basilica in Rome to mark the 500th anniversary of Christianity's arrival in the Philippines. The Mass was significant for its context and content. In his homily, the head of the Roman Catholic church acknowledged »the witness of faith Filipinos offer through their discreet and hardworking presence [and at the same time] urged them to persevere in the work of evangelization« (Watkins 2020).

Reflecting upon the homily of Pope Francis, the researcher is reminded of one of the articles of *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican Council, 1965), which spoke of the mission and the ultimate goal of the Church: »Its end is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God Himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time« (ibid, art. 9). The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican Council, 1965) also mentions that among the laity (i. e., all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church) also »rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given to them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church (art. 33).

Pope Francis, reflecting on the action of God's love, also mentioned that love »takes us out of ourselves, and always seeks to give itself fully. [...]« it shatters the shell of our selfishness, breaks out of our carefully constructed security zones, tears down walls and overcomes fears, to give freely of itself« (Watkins 2020).

It is important to celebrate the 500 years of the birth of Christianity in the Philippines. The quincentenary of Catholicism is an opportunity for numerous Filipino Catholics in the country (and the millions of Filipino immigrants who serve as joyful »smugglers« of faith« [Patinio, 2021]) to celebrate God's gift, which was freely given, and the responsibility to sow the faith. It is also a time to search and (re)discover within the Filipino culture traces of God's presence. Such »traces,« translated in Filipino as »*bakas*« by Filipino theologians José M. de Mesa and Rebecca Cacho, can also point us to where we should go and what we should become as a Church: »We are constantly challenged to be sacraments of God's salvation in the world. This means preaching, serving, and witnessing God's kingdom, especially in the struggle against injustice, oppression, apathy, corruption, and dehumanizing situations in the world. We take our cue from Jesus, who proclaimed the good news of God's salvation« (De Mesa & Cacho, 2012, p. 62-63).

Conclusion

The quincentenary of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is a testimony to the Christian mission's value. Initially conceptualized as the expansion of territories or recruitment of new members into the Church, the mission is now appreciated as »an invitation to accept God's offer of salvation to share this with others too« (De Mesa and Cacho, p. 62). Christian missionaries who respected the indigenous people and preserved after conversion the elements compatible with Christianity are effective witnesses (Gutay, n. d.; Delgado, 2019). Like the »seeds that fell on good soil,« the Christian message received by the indigenous Filipinos »produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown« (Mt 13:1-9). Today, there are millions of Filipino Catholics. Many believe in the importance of the Catholic faith and claim that it facilitates spiritual and mental well-being. The Catholic Church has also been instrumental in the growing number of Basic Ecclesial Communities, which serve as recourse for those in the peripheries. The theme »Gifted to Give« is also apt if one considers how Filipino Catholic missionaries and saints Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod received the gift of faith and, in their desire to share it, suffered martyrdom. They stand as models of holiness for Filipino Catholics. More importantly, the commemoration of the 500 years of Christianity brings to the fore the vocation of all baptized: to lead lives of heroic love and be modern witnesses to the love of Christ. ♦

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Sandiwaan: philippinische und europäische Theolog*innen im Dialog

**Nord-Süd-Begegnungen als
Übungsfeld solidarischer Theologie
und Kirchenpraxis**

von Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel

»Was habe ich gelernt? Am wichtigsten
war wohl die Erfahrung, dass Begegnung
und persönlicher Austausch zwischen
Menschen, die einander völlig fremd sind,
möglich ist – mehr noch, dass dieser
Austausch uns verändert, öffnet.«

»Ich glaube, diese Erfahrung einer Kirche,
die sich in Gefahrensituationen vor die
Menschen stellt und sie mit dem eigenen
Leben schützt, werde ich nie vergessen.
Für mich ist diese Erfahrung heilig, und
sie prägt mich bis jetzt.«

»Nachdem ich die zwei Wirklichkeiten [...]
des so unterschiedlichen Lebens in Öster-
reich und auf den Philippinen gesehen
habe, weiß ich, dass mein Traum in denen
Realität wird, die weiter für den Frieden
arbeiten und für die Gerechtigkeit. [...] Auf
dieser Basis können wir weitergehen,
uns weiter einsetzen und gemeinsam
an der Zukunft arbeiten.«

Die drei Stimmen von (ehemaligen) Theologiestudierenden – zwei aus Mitteleuropa und eine aus den Philippinen. Gemeinsam ist ihnen, dass sie am Partnerschaftsprojekt *Sandiwaan*, der Katholisch-theologischen Fakultät der Universität Wien und des *Inter-Congregational Theological Center Manila (ICTC)* teilgenommen haben.¹

Das Konzept scheint einfach, ist aber herausfordernd: Europäische Theologiestudierende reisen auf die Philippinen um am Exposure-Programm des ICTC teilzunehmen und hautnah »Freude und Hoffnung, Trauer und Angst« der Menschen, »besonders der Armen und Bedrängten aller Art«² kennenzulernen; diese Erfahrungen werden im interkulturellen Diskurs – Pole sind nicht nur Mitteleuropa und Südostasien, sondern zugleich auch Frauen und Männer sowie Lai*innen und Ordensleute – bearbeitet.

1 Das Projekt *Sandiwaan* im Lauf der Zeit

Bisher reisten acht Exkursionsgruppen in die Philippinen, um vor dem Hintergrund der politischen, sozialen und religiösen Herausforderungen, die konkrete Kirchenpraxis zu erleben, sie mit lokalen Theolog*innen zu reflektieren und für den mitteleuropäischen Kontext fruchtbar zu machen. Integraler Bestandteil ist jeweils im Folgejahr ein Aufenthalt von philippinischen Studierenden in Österreich, um analoge Erfahrungen mit Kirche und Theologie in Europa zu machen. Die Lernerfahrungen im fremden Kontext stellen dabei die eigenen Vorurteile und theologischen Konzepte in Frage, fordern intensive Bemühungen um einen gelingenden Transfer in die eigenen Kontexte und führen so nicht nur zu einer Horizonterweiterung, sondern auch zu einer Klärung der eigenen theologischen Optionen.

Das Projekt wurde Mitte der 1990er-Jahre ins Leben gerufen: Acht Jahre nach der sogenannten »Rosenkranzrevolution« und drei Jahre nach dem *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II)*, wo sich die katholische Kirche dazu bekannte und verpflichtete, *church of the poor* zu sein, war aus europäischer Perspektive viel Neues zu entdecken.³ Die *theology of struggle* war an einem Höhepunkt angekommen, die Augenzeugen und Proponenten der Revolution fanden sich in kirchlichen und politischen Ämtern und der Neuaufbruch von Demokratie und Wohlfahrt schien auf gutem Weg. Große Teile der Kirche waren von den politischen Erfahrungen der Diktatur geprägt und engagierten sich im Einsatz für soziale Gerechtigkeit.⁴ Für die Exkursionsteilnehmer*innen bot sich

1 Zum Projekt insgesamt, seiner theoretischen Grundlegung und praktischen Durchführung vgl.: Maria K. MOSER/Gunter PRÜLLER-JAGENTEUFEL/Veronika PRÜLLER-JAGENTEUFEL, Gut(e)Theologie lernen. Nord-Süd-Begegnung als theologisches Lernfeld, Ostfildern 2009.

»Sandiwaan«, ein Wort aus der philippinischen Hauptsprache Tagalog, bedeutet wörtlich »in einem Geist sein«; frei übersetzt: »Solidarität«.

Das ICTC ist die Ordenshochschule der Franziskaner und Karmeliten in den Philippinen. Gegründet 1986, unmittelbar nach dem Sturz von Ferdinand Marcos, betreibt sie ein Programm, das auf der *theology of struggle* aufbaut und eine enge Verzahnung von pastoraler Praxis und theologischer Reflexion vor dem Hintergrund der sozialen und politischen Verwerfungen des Landes versucht.

Die Zitate finden sich auf den Seiten 30-33.

2 GAUDIUM ET SPES 1.

3 Vgl. Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (20.1.-17.2.1991), Manila 1992.

4 Wesentliche Dialogpartner in dieser Zeit waren Bischof Julio X. Labayen OCD (1926-2016), die *Association of Major Religious Superiors (AMRSP)* und die *Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)* mit deren Leiterin Sr. Mariani Dimaranan SFIC (1925-2005). Vgl. Julio X. LABAYEN, *The Spirituality of Bishop Labayen. Builder of the Church of the Poor*, Manila 2016; Mercedes V. CONTRERAS (Hg.), *We did not Learn Human Rights from the Books. The Philippines and Human Rights in the Period 1986 to 1996*, Quezon City 1996.