

The Philippine Missions Movement c. 2010: From an Evangelical Perspective

A. Introduction

The founding of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches could be considered a landmark in the growth of evangelicalism, as well as the missions movement, in the country. Prior to 1995, there were only a few Filipino missionaries serving locally—primarily among Muslims—and also overseas. With the increasing missions awareness that began in the mid 1990s, a greater number of evangelicals started to consider missions cross-culturally.

B. Background: A Brief Mission History and Key Players

I will focus now on the missions movement involving the evangelicals belonging to the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC), starting with what has been the state evangelical churches and mission organizations that created an environment conducive to the rise of incidental missions. It had been said that one can find Filipinos in any part of the world as a result of the Filipino migration. Starting in the mid 70s, Filipinos began migrating due to employment opportunities in the Middle East. Pushed by the lack of employment at home, coupled with job openings abroad—particularly in Saudi Arabia and other neighboring Arab countries—skilled professional and technical workers started the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) phenomenon.

As a result of this migration, Filipinos are now settled in more than 180 countries. The number of Filipino workers is approaching 10 million, the bulk of whom are found in North America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Filipino labor migration began with 36,035 workers in 1975 and swelled to 598,760 in 1990. By 1998, it had grown to 831,643, and by 2003, Filipino labor migration numbered 867,964 workers. According to former Philippine Overseas Employment Administration head Rosalinda Baldoz, the number could have been higher were it not for the Iraq war and the SARS epidemic threat. The National Census and Statistics Office (NCSO) reported that between April and September 2008, there were two million OFWs working abroad. This figure represented an increase of 14.6 percent compared to the same period in 2007. Of this figure, 51.7 percent are males and 48.3 percent are females. Almost one-fourth of OFWs (25.7 percent) deployed during this period were in the 25-29 age group. Another third (32.4 percent) were laborers and unskilled workers. This category of OFWs includes domestic helpers, cleaners and manufacturing laborers.

B.1 Historical background and how church and para-church organizations were involved in missions

In July 2009, I participated in a consultation of missions' practitioners, teachers and mobilizers held in Butuan City. The event was organized by Living Springs International, the producer of the Kairos Course mentioned earlier. In one of the sessions, the participants identified some trends and outcomes the Philippine church had experienced within a forty-year timeframe. We wanted to know what had happened during those decades that had hindered the church from effectively fulfilling her mission. Here is an outline of what we discovered.

B.2 From 1970 to 1989

The trends noted during this time include: The introduction of the charismatic movement, the formation of ministerial fellowships, and the recognition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit together with the phenomenon of signs and wonders. A number of leadership training seminars conducted and large

open-air evangelistic meetings took place. Evangelicals experienced a renewal movement similar to that in the Catholic Church. It seems the church's focus was on herself rather than outside of her fellowship at this time.

Because of these trends, new and independent churches arose. There was also a loosening of theological suspicions of the supernatural. This resulted in lively worship beginning to appear in churches. Many Catholics were won over to evangelicalism because of the phenomenon of spiritual gifts, healings and miracles. Unity and cooperation among pastors and churches took place, which led to the breakdown of denominational barriers. Believers and churches experienced a deeper understanding of the Bible that resulted in growth and spiritual maturity. It was during this period, and perhaps influenced by the trends of the time, that the Philippine Missions Association (PMA) and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) were founded.

While the church experienced growth and maturity during this time, some things were still lacking. Among these were intentional discipleship, community impact, missions training, emphasis on the Word, spiritual fruitfulness and character development. The church's efforts to reach influential community members and to train and develop leaders were also inadequate, and there was an absence of strong prophetic and apostolic leadership in the church.

B.3 From 1990 to 2009

In this time period, the Philippine church started to receive modular training on missions awareness, mobilization and education. The idea of community development was slowly introduced into the churches. A number of evangelicals began to be visible in some sectors of society. Churches also began campus ministries. Cell groups, small groups, and house churches became more acceptable. Several churches also participated in the government's moral recovery program. The prophetic and apostolic movement gained inroads.

The Philippine church also started to gain a global mindset. There was cross-pollination of theology and churches started working together on holding large-scale seminars and conferences, particularly in the areas of missions and leadership training. Many local churches established schools starting at the pre-school and kindergarten levels. After several years, some churches were able to open high schools and even a few college level programs.

What were the positive outcomes from this period? Many local churches became "senders" and their members "goers" in missions. The concept of sodality became accepted in the larger body of Christ. Missionaries who went out as OFWs or tentmakers became more numerous. Lay people were released into ministry and new and emerging church leaders were raised up.

The need for intentional discipleship within the churches was addressed. Many in the government and military sectors became open to the gospel. The churches opened up to the idea of engaging the community. Many began to get involved in community development. A few pastors and churches became wealthy. Growth within the church was structured, and the phenomenon called "bapticalism" appeared. More young people were coming to church and a number of new churches were established on campuses.

The involvement of church members was very noticeable, perhaps due to a greater awareness of the concept of the "ministry of all believers."

Yet in this period, the church lacked significant dialogue among church leaders, a biblical worldview among pastors and an in-depth understanding of the Bible to keep pace with the multiplication of churches. Many pastors experienced woundedness and failings and there was no ministry to meet their particular needs. The church on the whole had no standards for installing bishops and pastors. The "spirit of conquest" of the nations based on the Great Commission was also lacking.

In the area of missions, the church did not have the means to address global migration. Also absent

were the tools needed for effective engagement with unreached people groups. Coaches and mentors at the pastoral level were also lacking. In terms of reaching the community, the church did a poor job of equipping lay workers or pastors to do ministry in government circles and the marketplace. The church did not have the means to equip members to address the needs of the next generation, and there was a gap in understanding of her role in society. A kingdom mindset to disciple whole communities and nations was conspicuously absent. The church was also unaware of the emerging shift in global culture from modern to post-modern. Lastly, she was not addressing the needs of the overseas Filipino workers, particularly the needs of the families they left behind.

B.4 2010 and Beyond

If the Philippine church is to move forward, she needs to have a paradigm shift. She must address the issues and implications of the emerging post-modern culture. She must instill among her members a kingdom conquest mindset. She also needs to focus attention on the next generation and wrestle with environmental concerns. As a whole, the church must live out the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14 and come to a deeper repentance regarding what she is called to be and to do in the Philippines.

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