Pentecostalism and *Pulitika*: A Case Study in Tanauan, Batangas Province, Philippines[1]

Chuan Yean SOON

Abstract

This is a study about Pentecostals in a lowland village of Tanauan City, Batangas province, Philippines. It examines how Pentecostalism—from narratives of conversion and the structure of the church's organization to worship songs—addresses what devotees' call *pulitika* (political factionalism, corruption, and traditional politics that only serves the elite). It was found that Pentecostalism allows devotees to participate in a nonelitist, participatory, and nonhierarchical organization; to cope with the hardships of life; and present unity as an alternative political vision for Philippine society. This paper begins with a brief outlook on the rise of Pentecostalism in the Philippines. The second part deals with scholarly works and studies in the field of religion and politics both in and out of the Philippines, identifies research gaps therein, and sets out the framework of analysis used in the study. The third part explores—through interviews with devotees, analysis of church songs, and observations from the field—how the practices and rituals of Pentecostal worship are responses to the perceived difficulties—from poverty and disunity of Philippine society—that arise from *pulitika*.

Keywords: Bottom-up politics, Pentecostalism, *pulitika*, Tanauan City

Introduction

THIS PAPER AIMS TO DEMONSTRATE the significance of Pentecostalism as a critical discourse in relation to contemporary Philippine politics. Conducting research among Pentecostal Christians in Barangay (village) Angeles, in the City of Tanauan, Batangas province, Philippines, I examine how Pentecostalism helps devotees engage and cope with secular realities that they call *pulitika*, which to them is responsible for the chaos, disunity, poverty, hardship, and underdevelopment of Philippine society. The paper illustrates how Pentecostalism—from narratives of conversion, and organizational structure to worship songs and church operations—has helped devotees take part in a nonelitist, nonhierarchical, and participatory organization; cope with the hardships of daily life; and posit unity as a political alternative to the factionalist character of Philippine politics.

Pentecostalism in the Philippines: A Brief Overview

Pentecostalism derives its name from the biblical feast of Pentecost, an event during which the early Christian apostles were "filled with the Holy Spirit" and could "speak in other tongues" (The Pew Forum 2006, iv). Another feature of Pentecostalism is the practice of renewing gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and performing divine healing and miraculous signs of the Spirit. The Pew Forum defines Pentecostals as "Christians who belong to Pentecostal denominations and churches, such as Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ or the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God" (1). On the other hand, Charismatics are Christians—including Catholics and mainline Protestants. They either describe themselves as "Charismatic Christians" or "Pentecostal Christians" (though not belonging to Pentecostal denominations) or they speak in tongues at least several times a year. The Renewalists is an umbrella term that refers to both Pentecostals and Charismatics as a group (ibid.).

According to Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüland (2008), the establishment of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches in 1965 led to the formation of major evangelical denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and the Church of God. Between the 1970s and the 1980s, neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements grew in scope. These include *Jesus is Lord*, which was founded by Brother Eddie Villanueva in 1978; and Bread of Life, established Cesar "Butch" Conde in 1982. Other Catholic charismatic groups such as the El Shaddai began as a radio program in 1981, the same year the Couples for Christ was founded. (The Pew Forum 2006). At that time, the Renewalists then (Pentecostals and Charismatics) comprised 44 percent of the Filipino population (2).

Born-Again Christians are classified as Evangelicals and Pentecostals on the basis of their practice of their belief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is a clear departure from those of Roman Catholics, though it must be said that the practices of the former resemble those of the latter, including the call to sacrifice and serve the society. Thus, regardless of differences in practices and beliefs, this mandate to service and sacrifice provides an effective mechanism in generating ideas about and creating demands for political consciousness and a moral society. Unlike Catholicism, the revival of Pentecostal movements in the Philippines took the form of populism (Kessler and Rüland 2008, 14–20, 152–79). The resurgence of religious movements in the Philippines was a response to the challenges of modernity that the secular state had undergone. The process was hastened by the decline of the role of Catholic traditions in fulfilling the changing spiritual needs of Filipinos, by the waning of reform activism of civil society, and by the inability of leftist ideologies to articulate contemporary aspirations (Wiegele 2007, 10; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 267–68).

The social and political role of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements was evident during the Marcos regime when the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches became involved in the 1986 uprising (The Pew Forum 2006). Joseph Suico (2005) argues that "Pentecostal

churches are more likely to become active in social movements" because of the intensity of their commitment to rebuild family structures. An example is Couples for Christ.

Religious ideals call for the equal distribution of wealth by empowering the poor and laity. Grace Gorospe-Jamon (1999) and Katharine L. Wiegele (2007) examine the political socialization of El Shaddai as a response to global challenges and as an attempt to address the occurrence of poverty, suffering, and oppression. A solution to existing social inequalities is the continuous adherence to the value of voluntary sharing. The El Shaddai endorsed Fidel Ramos as President in 1992 and Joseph Estrada in 2001 as "divine" candidates who would save the poor. Under the Philippine sociopolitical context, such engagements transform religion into a "space" where devotees—most of whom are poor—gain social leverage.

All foregoing studies converge on a single understanding of Philippine social change: that the revival of Charismatic Christianity is a response to the nation's struggle against corruption, an unjust system, and a backward economy. Religious revivalism such as that of Pentacostalism serves as an avenue to (re) visit political change in the Philippines, where politics and religion have always had intimate linkages. Of course, the examination of this aspect of Philippine society and political change is not new. But in this study, I examine the connection not from a national or institutional level but from a local vantage point.

If we focus on religious revivalism in the Philippines merely at the national level, we might presume that changes and developments in Philippine politics derive simply from large-scale, national religious institutions and movements. But this disregards local and subnational initiatives about politics, and the link between religion and politics is seen mainly as top-driven. In contrast, this paper examines the dynamics of politics and religion in a local (rural) setting.

Interrogating politics and religion in the Philippines

The study of Philippine politics has relatively little to say on religion as a significant area of political change. Most studies in the field predominantly look at the pursuit for political order, and has been implicated primarily in patron-client models, weak state, and democratization. Its emphasis lies on bureaucratic public culture, the structure of patronage system, violence, "patrimonial" conditions, and the proliferation of oligarchs, all of which portray the Philippine political system (and henceforth the change that takes place) as a *cacique* democracy plundering the nation.[2] This approach to the study of political development is confined within statist and institutional approaches similar to Samuel Huntington's (1996) discussion of political order. Order here often refers to the creation of a just society focusing on good governance, efficient bureaucracy, viable (liberal) economy, and the separation of church and state. Such a political vision runs parallel to a liberal democratic political culture, which fits the modernity project in post-independence Southeast Asia. Political institutions (and democratic values) become the primary point of analysis in the study of Philippine politics. Religious ideas and practices are treated less prominently, if at all, except during elections and rare circumstances like the 1986 EDSA Revolution.

However, scholars outside the field of political science examine Philippine society through the lens of religion. While their works are not entirely focused on the study of political change and development, they do touch on or stress the significance of the link between politics and religion in comprehending social change. Indeed, these studies show that the connections between politics and religion sparked revolutionary movements and influenced everyday life during the colonial and postcolonial period.[3] During the Spanish colonization in the 19th century, peasants conceptualized a utopian society through an articulation of *liwanag*—a sort of independence—or *kalayaan*, a concept akin to the religious salvation of Christ (Ileto 1998). Historian John Schumacher (1998) identifies the role of Catholic priests in the nationalist movements against

the Spanish. During the Marcos regime, Robert Youngblood (1993) illustrated the important role of the church in the 1986 EDSA movement that toppled President Marcos from power.[4]

Some anthropological and historical studies also discuss social change in the Philippines from the perspective of culture and religion. Myrna J. Alejo and colleagues (1996) analyzed the concepts of *loob* (inner being) and *taong-labas* (outsider) and explore how these are constructed through religious practices. They describe the rationale and worldview of ordinary people in selecting their popular leaders. Politicians from these perspectives are seen as mediators (similar to the shaman who mediates between spirits and the faithful) who understand the needs of the local people. Hence, they are considered to be someone from the *loob* (circle of people). The concept of *loob* not just connotes the geographical proximity of community but also connects people with each other through compassion and sympathy, enabling both parties to reach a level of equilibrium in their loob. Fenella Cannell's (1999) anthropological study of the village of San Ignacio in the Bicol region describes how the poor or *kaming mayong-mayo* ("we who have nothing at all") perceive power through the everyday idioms of emotions such as pity, oppression, and love. And from a sociological and ethnographic standpoint, Raul Pertierra (1988) looks at religion (as a system of ideology) as a mechanism that helps peasants understand and grapple with the challenges of modernization in their everyday lives. This way, religious practices and beliefs are "rational" responses to economic and political structures (194). In brief, the peasants understand their actions and consequences; and theirs are "rational" responses based on choices that are negotiated through access to information on technical knowledge, political constraints and opportunities, and so on. Robert Love (2004) showcases how peasants' perceptions of the spiritual medium, *Papa Samahan*, are generated during debates and discussions that help in interpreting coercion, unity, and oppression. Reynaldo C. Ileto (1998) looks into *loob* (inner being), *damay* (empathy), and *liwanag* (light) in the *Pasyon* texts to give meaning to the participation of Tagalog peasants in anticolonial movements against the Spanish. Maria Lourdes Genato-Rebullida (1992) revisits the concept of

"development" from the perspective of Catholic and Protestant churches. And though a political scientist, Gorospe-Jamon (1999) uses an anthropological approach to study the structural organization and ideologies of the El Shaddai movement to understand changes and political socialization in Philippine society. Wiegele (2007) deals with the Charismatic Christian movements, focusing on religious revivalism and the shifts in the religio-political structures of Philippine society. Kessler and Rüland (2008) blend anthropology, sociology, and political science to comprehend the political repercussions of the Pentecostalization of Philippine churches on the democratic culture and attitudes towards theocracy.

These preceding studies share Rhys H. William's (1996) acknowledgment of the role of religion in understanding the existence of other political resources, which aid in negotiating and resisting the dominant narratives of hegemonic institutions. Furthermore, the foregoing studies portray the politics of ordinary people—the peasants and the poor—by excavating their languages and emotions and by highlighting religious values and concepts as units of analysis. Also, they deal with what Robert Hefner (2010) has called the "micro-and meso-passions of self, family, and everyday life" (1033).[5] For Hefner (2010), these seemingly micro oriented issues involve the emotional and spiritual encounters of the devotees and have, more importantly, a significant social and political dimension.

Pulitika and Pentecostalism

Through ethnographic analysis of the devotees' life experiences, I investigate the everyday religious life of Pentecostal devotees in a village in Tanauan, Batangas province, Philippines. I utilized an approach similar to that of the foregoing research, especially on Hefner's emphasis on the significance of "micro-and meso-passions" of religious components. In this study, "micro- and meso-passions" refer to reasons for conversions, reception of Christian music, and participation in worship practices and in a nonelitist, nonhierarchical religious organization.

Positing these practices as alternative political spaces often overlooked by conventional political science models[6] (Willford and George 2005), I look at these religious ideas as a form of politics from below that addresses *pulitika*, the failure of formal institutions—elections, political offices, political movements—to satisfy people's aspirations for liberation or a secure society. Examining the practices that encode different ways of exercising politics and shape an alternative political ideal, this study shows that the Christian movement in Tanauan showcases the way in which devotees are inclined to exert their views and exercise their 'rights' at the realm of religion, not in formal political institutions.

The political dimensions of Pentecostalism in Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, Batangas province arises from its engagement with what devotees call "pulitika." *Pulitika* mainly refers to the "disorderliness" and "disunity" that devotees perceive in Philippine society because of frustration over poverty, vote buying and selling, and the political factionalism that they constantly encounter. *Pulitika* connotes a nuance that does not involve the conventional scope of politics, i.e. consensual democracy, civic life, and so on. Ileto's (1999a, 160) definition of *pulitika* refers to "the perception of politics as a process of bargaining with implicit personal or factional interests involved. At another level, it refers to the practices where leaders cultivate ties of personal loyalty and indebtedness to them, or simply attract votes." For Resil Mojares (2002, 338), *pulitika* "...is imaged in terms of elite factional competition ("inilungay sa katungdanan"), manipulation (*maneobra*), spectacle, and dissimulation."

Pulitika is an elitist game. It is implicated in the hierarchical nature of Philippine politics that marginalizes the poor at the expense of self-centered politicians and their families in the offices who amass ill-gotten wealth and contribute to socioeconomic problems. Worse is the widening divide between the "mayaman" (the rich) and "mahirap" (poor). This much is felt by a devotee.

> *Pero kami kahit kami ay may tatlong jeep eh mahirap pa rin kami! Dahil kami... Syempre yung gobyerno natin ay talagang mahirap, yung*

> *yumayaman ay kapwa mayaman, pero yung katulad naming mahirap eh mahirap pa rin.*[7]
>
> [Even though we have three jeepneys, we are still poor. The government is having a hard time alleviating poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger. The poor are getting poorer while the wealthy are becoming wealthier.]

This inequality is compounded by the rising costs of living, medical expenses, security problems, rampant drug addiction, marital issues, the loss of love ones through death or separation in the workplace, rural-to-urban migration, unemployment, market competition, and so on.

Because of their negative view of *pulitika*, many devotees are upset with traditional politicians and traditional politics; indeed, they did not approve of the presidential candidacy of a Christian leader, Brother Eddie Villanueva, during the 2010 elections. To most of them, politics and religion should be separated. To them, running for presidency, participating in the elections, or working for politicians are equal to corruption, power relations, and boastful and selfish interests that do not have anything to do with people's welfare. Politicians vie positions for personal interests (fame, money, power), and contestations revolve around different personal interests rather than public ones. One devotee, Kuya Daquila, opines that Brother Eddie Villanueva's 2010 presidential candidacy was boastful and politically motivated. He mentioned that, "Hindi sila maglilingkod sa tao" (they will not serve the people), and that they engage in vote-buying.[8]

Engaging with *Pulitika*

In this paper, I analyze how Pentecostal religious practices and beliefs help devotees address and provide a solution to *pulitika* and its damaging effects. Through religion, Pentecostals articulate their personal dissatisfaction in varying degrees and express their desires and voices that contest the world of *pulitika*. Their sentiments and experiences encode and reflect a frustration against the chaotic, melodramatic political environment,

especially during election season, that does not really benefit them. In this context, Pentecostal religious practices become a site for containment, resistance and contestation, and address and serve as an alternative to *pulitika.*

Aside from a claim for a sacred moral setting in a secular world, believers see Pentecostalism as a cure for a social sickness. Through religion, devotees cope with the hardships of life; take part in a participatory, nonelitist and nonhierarchical organization that caters to some of their needs; and present an alternative political vision based on unity, all of which run contrary to the factionalism and chaos of *pulitika* of traditional politicians.

Nonhierarchical and Non-Elitist

This paper explores the practices of God's Highest Church (GHC) in Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, Batangas province, Philippines. Under the umbrella of its mother church, the Tanauan Bible Church (TBC), GHC was established in 1984 during a Christian gathering that has since been held every Wednesday in Barangay Angeles.[9] In 1985, what would be known as GHC members met to discuss the building of a larger place of worship to accommodate an increase in membership. The church grew and was named "Angeles Christian Ministries Inc." in 1996. Three years later, it changed its name to "Harvester Christian Church Inc." and became "The God Highest Church" in 1999.[10]

As a local, daughter church, GHC has a relatively small membership, around 200, including those working abroad, those who married outside of the village, Bicolanos, and native inhabitants. The first resident pastor was Pastor Gomez (1996–2010) who left the church when he left to work in Canada.[11] For a year, GHC had no pastor. The leaders took charge of the church's operations, inviting pastors to give Sunday sermons, conducting Bible Studies on Wednesdays, and so on.

The organization (the establishment) of a Pentecostal church at the local level in Barangay Angeles is nonhierarchical. It is comprised of a

network of family and church members that does not form an institutionalized hierarchy akin to that of the Roman Catholic church. This nonhierarchical nature is evident in the relationship between "mother" church and "daughter" church.

The TBC has no exclusive authority over its daughter churches. As the mother church, TBC acts as a "network-like" center among the devotees where they can expand their practices. Conditions for financial assistance from parent to daughter church potentially create rules and regulations that may hinder self-organization. Instead, daughter churches—like the GHC—are funded through devotees' efforts and without financial aid from the parent church: a bottom-up scheme of organization. This independence from outside aid suits local members, who are free to perform their own practices.

Second, and more importantly, in the absence of a resident pastor, the devotees themselves run the church and conduct its activities. These practices foster a horizontal, nonhierarchical, non-elitist social bond and promote a sense of bonding and community. At the time of my research, Kuya Julio Alcazar and his wife, together with other church leaders from other villages, oversee the church's daily affairs—a trend that reflects a rather simple pattern of 'doing' things at the local level. Because there is no resident pastor or clergy like that of, say, the Catholic Church, Pentecostal practice is and has been more conducive for nonelitist organization.

This non-elite character is also represented by the predominant role of the Alcazar family—a family of non-elites—in GHC. And while the Alcazars do take a prominent role in the church, their leadership, if it could be called that, is a form of service and self-sacrifice for the community.

Kuya Julio converted to Born-Again Christianity when he was introduced to a missionary of World Vision. According to Ana Gomez—a World Vision beneficiary during her youth—World Vision started its partnership with TBC under the Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines (ABCCOP) in 1974. It sponsored 150 to 400 children in 1979, with Kuya Julio as one of its beneficiaries.[12] Kuya Julio currently

teaches at a private school in the village that is primarily sponsored by Kakang Odeng, Kuya Julio's sister who was once an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) and who married an American and became a teacher like her brother.

For Ate Paj, the fact that the Alcazars are well-off but still continue to serve their fellow GHC members embodies their humility and faith, which also accounts for the improvement of their social status.

> *Magpapagawa sila ng [private] iskul do'n eh... [Ang] mga anak niya nasa Amerika. Alam mo, sila mahirap dati. Kasi asawa niyan... pulis, nabaril, tinapon sa tulay. Ngayon, nagsikap siya. Ang trabaho niya, manguha ng kamyas.... Kinukuha nila 'yan tapos binebenta nila sa bayan. Do'n niya pinag-aral ang mga anak niya. Ngayon nasa Amerika na [silang] lahat. / Kasi sila, mahirap lang din sila no'n. Ang bahay nila ganito rin. 'Yong anak niya pumapasok sa fisheries, naglalakad [lang]. Lahat naglalakad. Oo, malayo, talagang tiis. Pero 'yong pagsisikap nila, ayan na. Kaya sila tumutulong din sa tao, kaya mabait ang swerte.*[13]
>
> [They (the Alcazars) will build a private school there. All of her (Kuya Julio's mother) children are in America. You know what? They used to be poor. Her husband (Kuya Julio's father) was a policeman. He was shot and thrown over a bridge. Because of it, she worked hard. Her source of income was harvesting *kamyas* (a certain fruit) and selling them in town. That's how she managed to send her children to school. Now they're all in America. They were also poor then...When her child was studying in the fisheries school, he/she walked. They all walked. But their hard work paid off. That's why they also help the people here. Because of it, they have good luck].

The contrast with traditional politicians is clear: it was faith and *pagsisikap* (hard work and perseverance) rather than political influences and financial strength, that led the Alcazars to prosper. Moreover, the Alcazars do not practice *pulitika* and enrich themselves at the expense of others; they rather selflessly serve and sacrifice their time and effort for the church and their fellow believers. This, unsurprisingly, appeals to the Pentecostals.

Hefner (2010, 1031) has written that Christian charismatic practices appear to be more "popular, voluntary, and laity based." This holds true in the case of this study. By running church affairs by themselves, the Pentecostals impart an egalitarian character to their organization where everybody contributes to the day-to-day operations of the church.

Participatory Worship

The egalitarian nature of Pentecostal worship has to do with the communal, participatory character of their activities and practices. Not only do they interpret religious texts based on their personal experiences; they also involve a two-way process of interaction between the facilitator of the Bible study group (usually senior devotees) and the audience (the junior devotees). This provides an avenue for discussion, dialogue, analysis, debates and questions that help devotees understand social (secular) conditions, such as their hardships, and receive religious guidance from the Bible.

Every Wednesday at 7 p.m., the young members and leaders of the church organize a Bible Study at different houses. Each member has a chance to host the event wherein topics differ every week, and to provide an equal amount of contribution (in terms of provision of services to the church members during the Bible Study). The leaders facilitate the sessions while the younger members serve as the "students," who are then asked to read verses from the Bible and reflect upon their experiences. This exercise deepens their familiarity with the Bible and enhance their faith vis-à-vis the realities of everyday life.

The devotees freely express their feelings and share their experiences in public without any rules or regulations. Their sentiments are heard, recognized, shared, and accepted with an audience.

> *'Yun laang eh dito nung ako'y naging Born-Again nababasa ko 'yung bible oh na-iaapply ko sasarili ko na gay-on pala ang ibig sabihin ng Panginoon. Tularan natin Siya. Ipamahagi natin 'yung nalalaman natin, ipamahagi natin sa kapwa, 'wag sa sarilinin. Ah, sabi nga ng Panginoon*

> *si Hesus ang daan at ang katotohanan, at ang buhay walang makapagliligtas, kundi ang Ama na nasa langit . 'Yun ang aking natutunan dito sa Born-Again. Nung ako'y Katoliko, hindi ko natutunan 'yun. Basta lang ako nasimba, basta lang ako nasimba nakikinig ng kanilang mensahe 'yun lang. 'Di katulad dito sa Born Again na talagang halos eh, halos nadadama mo 'yung espirito na siyang umaano sa atin.*[14]
>
> [Only then when I became a Born-Again that I was able to read the Bible and able to make sense of my life. I realized that God wants us to do what he did; that we have to be selfless and share our knowledge to others. Ah... Just like what God said, "Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that He is the only one who will save us", that is what I learned when I became a Born-Again. When I was a Catholic, I just attended the service and listened to the homily. However, here in Born-Again Christianity, I feel the presence of the spirit.]

Similarly, in one of the Sunday worship services I attended, one devotee was asked to share her experiences after joining the church. The devotee—Kakang Bebeng Onsen—is a housewife from Barangay Angeles. I observed her children roaming around the village half-naked and not bathed. Her house was made of *nipah* leaves and bamboo gathered from the forest. Before going to the sermon, I had a conversation with her about the reasons why she converted from Catholicism to Born-Again Christianity. According to her, she was physically ill for a long time, but after joining the church, she felt better—at least spiritually—if not physically. On stage in the church, the sharing of her experiences cut across classes. Her fellow devotees sympathized with and prayed for her.

Faith allows them to make sense of and cope with hardship

Religion has a lot of "individuality" among Born-Again Christians, i.e., they interpret everyday hardships and the social problems in light of their personal experiences. Religion offers a space in making sense of the mishaps and struggles they encounter. Indeed, many devotees who convert to Born-Again Christianity recover from hardships—such as illness, family problems, loss of love ones, and tragic social encounters.

For Kuya Julio, Born-Again Christianity instills discipline. The death of his father devastated his childhood. But by being a Born-Again Christian, he eventually developed an attitude of diligence and discipline that helped him overcome his personal struggles and succeed in school. More importantly, he continues to engage in religious work and in spreading the "faith" among his fellow villagers.

Ate Consulo, a former canteen owner and saleslady, converted to Born-Again Christianity in 1983. Her reason for doing so was her youngest daughter's illness (leukemia), along with other family problems. Kuya Danny, a former drug addict and academic delinquent during college , is now a dedicated church leader in charge of youth affairs. He is together with his wife, Ate Charmaine, a teacher from Barangay Santana. Like Kuya Danny, she is actively involved in youth activities, especially in taking charge of the choir. The strength of Ate Charmaine's religious belief relates to her father's sickness. Her prayers were answered when her father recovered from hypertension. Kuya Daquila, a worker and a leader of the church, was introduced to Christianity when he was 11, but did not immediately convert because he was still a child. He was baptized as a Born-Again Christian in 1984. For him, the Catholic mass did not provide him a better grasp of personal problems and the social world.

Other reasons for conversion pertain to caring and providing for family members. In a Sunday worship service I attended in May 2010, one devotee prayed for her mother's welfare and family's well-being. Lastly, Kakang Loneta, another devotee, prayed hard so that she could sell all the goods (eggplants, fishes) she peddles every morning despite the competition from other younger and stronger vendors. To most of the devotees, their religious practices are one of the ways through which they cope with the hardships of everyday life.

Christians Church Music

The act of addressing *pulitika* is also highlighted in the songs of the churches—Christians Church Music (CCM). This section entails how lyrics

and music offer a sense of liberation to the devotees and explains how *pulitika* can be resolved. Even though most of the songs predominantly refer to the love of the Lord and establish the Lord's presence as a guide, they also inculcate values and establish themes.[15] These include connecting to the divine; liberation; support and comfort from everyday hardships; and the need for unity.

Christians Church Music (CCM) began in the 1970s in the United States (Gormily 2003). Coopting rock and folk music to become a catalyst for evangelization, CCM was a reaction to American pop culture, which was perceived immoral. Evangelists engaged in a moral battle against such immorality, and the cure for such "evils" is to realign a worldview akin to the Evangelists' religious beliefs (2003, 259). CCM "resonates strongly with the listeners...considering the influence that music has on the attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts of the subculture that embraces it" (255).

In a textual study of Pentecostal prayers and songs, Shoaps (2002) identifies the production of "earnestness" and a development of "a specific relationship between language use and the speaking subject that is prerequisite to true 'communication' with God" (42). And among the Pentecostals in Batangas, such songs please and praise God.

> *Aba! Ganire, ang sabi ng Panginoon, magsayaw, magsaya ka, sumayaw ka para mo maipakita na yung kaluguran ng Panginoon na gusto mong gawin, iyong maipamuhay mo sa sarili mo. Maibigay mo 'yung pagpupuri sa pamamagitan ng sayaw. Sa pamamagitan ng kanta maibibigay mo yung papuri sa Panginoon.*[16]
>
> [Ah! God said we must sing, laugh, and dance in order for us to show our delight for Him! You can praise Him through singing and dancing.]

The songs are not just of praise and worship, however. To the devotees, singing and dancing help them reach out to the Holy Spirit. Songs produce a connection between the devotees and the "divine," turning "sacred" texts and messages into a discourse that guides devotees in facing

everyday hardships. This is evident in the song, "Here We Are" by Don Moen, particularly in the following lines:[17]

For every answered prayer
For always being there
For love that hear us when we call
In arms that lift us when we fall
You have always been
Right beside us, leading us all along the way
And made it through

In other cases, the songs bring out the feeling of emancipation and liberation. "Free to Dance" by Hillsong goes, "Your spirit brings me liberty/ Your breath of life has set me free."[18]

But the significance of the songs lies not simply in the lyrics; the music itself plays a vital role. It brings out the devotees' emotions, especially when the application of the texts and experiences are connected. "You feel it," Kuya Julio asserts. For him, singing the Christian songs was essential because music—the melody, the emotion, and the presence of the Holy Spirit—all combine to generate an immediate presence of the divine. The peak of emotions is reached at the end of the service, where the songs are sung in the highest tune so as to symbolize and reflect closeness to the Lord.

Resolving *pulitika*: Pentecostalism and Unity

Pulitika involves corruption and dishonesty. Therefore, come election time, judging the intention of the candidate is essential. To the devotees, the expression "relationship to the Lord" serves as a criteria to evaluate candidates and counter the practices of *pulitika* such as vote buying and selling.

Ganito 'yon... 'Yung, ah... Ano ba ito? 'Yung lumang politics kasi, unang history noon kasi nauso 'yung bayaran; babayaran ka iboto mo

lang ako, 'no! So, ikaw bilang Kristiyano, bilang Born-Again, bilang mayroong tamang relasyon sa Diyos, hindi lamang—hindi ka doon titingin sa mga bagay na ibinibigay sa'yo. Unang-una, susuriin mo kung ano ba ang pagkatao niya, ano ba 'yung nais niyang gawin, ano ba 'yung desire niya, ano ba 'yung... Aalamin mo kung ano ba talaga 'yung kalagayan ng kanyang motive. Ano ba 'yung motibo niya kung bakit siya tumakbo, bakit siya gusto niyang tumakbo or mag-run bilang isang ganung posisyon?

Oo nagbabayad sila, nagbibigay sila sa mga tao, kaya nga sabi ko nga, kung ikaw ay may tamang relasyon sa Diyos, hindi mo ipagbibili 'yung boto mo. 'Yon ang prinsipyo at ang pananaw ng isang Born-Again o ng isang tao na may tamang relasyon sa Diyos. Kasi kung titingnan mo, kung tatanggapin 'yon, wala siyang pagkakaiba. Ibig sabihin noon, sarili lamang nila 'yung kanilang pinahahalagahan, hindi 'yung taong bayan. So, mayroon kang concern. Mayroon kang pag-ibig na pipili ako hindi para sa akin kundi para sa bayan 'yon.[19]

[It goes like this: traditional politics entails vote buying. A politician will pay you so you will vote for him/her. However, as a Born-Again Christian or even as a person who has an intimate relationship with the Lord, you will not consider voting for that politician just because of his/her money. You always have to look into his/her desire and motives. What motivated him/her to run? Why did he/she run for public office?]

[Yes, they really do pay. Therefore, as I have said, as a person with an intimate relationship with the Lord, you will not be engaging on this. That is the principle held by a true Born-Again Christian, or any other person who fears the Lord. If you're going to accept the money, you're no different than the others. You recognize that you should not just decide for your welfare, but for the welfare of the country as well.]

And in contrast to *pulitika* and its factionalism, Pentecostalism emphasizes the need for unity and the blessings it entails. This is seen in the song, "Hi Love" by Malayang Filipino.[20]

"Sa Tuwing Tayo'y Nagkakaisa
Bumubuhos ang pagpapala Niya"
(Everytime we unite,
His blessings shower us)

Unity (getting together) is stressed in another song, "Awesome in this Place" by Hillsong United.[21] The song also highlights the Church as a shelter that protects and unites the devotees.[22]

Much of this unity is embodied on how the devotees themselves collaborate and contribute to the organization of church's activities, as has been discussed above. Indeed, this has a sociopolitical correlate; as believers feel that in the presence of the Lord, Filipinos must reach out to and help one another, cooperate, and share each other's burden regardless of social status and class differences. All of which are vital to the unity and progress of the entire Filipino nation. Unity, along with the grace of the Lord, is a guide towards an orderly nation.

> *You have that ___ (mis-recording) you're not... 'di ka magagalitin, na -kokontrol mo sarili mo na hindi ka magalit dahil 'yun ang kailangan mo, maging ka-ugali... ugali bilang Kristiyano. 'Di ba maganda? Kaysa, purong nasa isip mo violence; "papatay ako, gusto ko laging away," 'di ba? 'Di 'yun ang tinuturo ng Bible, 'di 'yan ang tinuturo ng Bible. Kapag 'yan ang sinunod mo, pagbasa ng bibliya, this nation will... walang away. 'Di katulad sa Mindanao, walang peaceful ang ano. Kaya 'yan ang pinapanalagin naming mga Kristiyano, ng bawat isa, bawat Pilipino ay makarinig, sumunod, makaunawa ng salita ng Diyos para ang bayang ito ay pagpapalain. Is that a family? Di ba kapag magulo ang pamilya, 'di natutuwa ang ating magulang, 'di happy. Sa halip na i-rereward mo, natuwa ka, bigyan mo lahat ng gusto mo ng kaya mong ibigay, dahil sila ay magugulo di mo sila bibigyan but when they're*

peaceful mababait sila 'di ba. The father, the mother ____ (mis-recording) just like that when you think as a nation, if the people has a relationship with God, believe in God...then I believe that this nation will rise...so if every Filipino like us, this will be a good nation.[23]

[You have that... you're not short tempered. You're able to control your anger because that is the right attitude of a Christian. Isn't it better than always resorting to trouble and violence? This is what the Bible tells us. If you follow the Bible, there will be no more violence in this country; unlike in Mindanao where there is no peace and order. We Christians pray that every Filipino will listen, follow and understand the words of God in order for this country to be blessed. Isn't that similar to a family? If the family is chaotic, the parents are unhappy. They remain unrewarded for their disorderliness. But when they're at peace, they are good. This also applies to the nation: if the people have an intimate relationship with and believe in God, I believe that this nation will rise.]

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have argued that by excavating informal political realms (religious discourse and practices of Pentecostal), we can see that the discourse on political change need not necessarily be limited to and conducted within institutional frameworks such as elections, social movements, and government offices. Through a closer look at the practices of Pentecostalism—its organizational structure, rituals, and practices—the paper attempted to show that the religious practices of Pentecostals function as a political response and counterdiscourse to *pulitika* that evokes a nonelitist, nonhierarchical organization, and emphasizes unity in contrast to the chaos of *pulitika.*

Religious practices should not be seen as "irrational" acts and minor responses of the devotees about society. My observation on a Christian group in Tanauan City indicates that they are not simply passive readers or uncritical receptors of a certain canonical text (religion, songs, etc).

Through their awareness of *pulitika*, the devotees are cognizant of the divergence between a desired order (a place of unity, among others) and the secular world (filled with *pulitika*). Their religion, Pentecostalism, allows them, to a certain extent, to engage with the secular world of daily life and *pulitika*. For instance, the nonelitist, nonhierarchical and participatory nature of Pentecostal worship can be read as a popular desire for an egalitarian society; and the desire for unity, as encoded in Christian church music, is their riposte to a dysfunctional and chaotic political system. Theirs is a religious and sociopolitical discourse vis-à-vis *pulitika*, political cronyism, and disorderliness.

Notes

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[2] On the role of oligarchs and "cacique" democracy, see Amado Doronilla (1985), "The Transformation of Patron-Client Relations and its Political Consequences in Post-war Philippinrd," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 16 (1): 99–116, and Benedict Anderson (1988), "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review* 169: 3–31. On the role of the state in plundering the nation, see Paul D. Hutchcroft(2000), *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press). On "new men," see Kit G. Machado (1971), "Changing Aspects of Factionalism in Philippine Local Politics," *Asian Survey* 11 (12): 1182–99; Kit G. Machado, "Changing Patterns of Leadership Recruitment and the Emergence of the Professional Politician in Philippine Local Politics," in *Political Change in the Philippines: Studies of Local Politics preceding Martial Law* edited by Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, 77-129, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii); and Kit G. Machado (1974), "From Traditional Faction to Machine: Changing Patterns of Political Leadership and Organization in the Rural Philippines," *Journal of Asian Studies* 33 (4): 523–47.

[3] For a comprehensive study of religious millennial movements during the late 19th century Southeast Asia against European rulers, see Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Religion and Anti-Colonial Movements," 193–244 and Paul Stange, "Religious Change in Contemporary Southeast Asia," 201–256 for contemporary religious movements in the region, see both

in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Volume Two, Part Two, edited by Nicholas Tarling (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a specific Southeast Asian case study, see Sartono Kartoddirdjo (1966), *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888: Its Conditions, Course and Sequel. A Case Study of Social Movements in Indonesia* ('S-Gravenhage-Martinus Nijhoff); Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1983), *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press); Reynaldo C. Ileto (1998), *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. Fifth Printing (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press); and Vicente L. Rafael (2000), *Contracting Colonialism*, Second Edition. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press).

4 However, the main focus lies on the institutional change that churches are capable of in collaboration with civil society via a large-scale social movement.

5 He continues to state that the "micro-and meso-horizons" of religious revivalism are not the "triumphant reassertion of the local, but of the fact that everyday life-ways have now more than ever been drawn into transnational networks of information, commoditization, and power" (1034). See Robert W. Hefner (2010), "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69 (4): 1031–47.

6 For an analysis of the "public" space vis-à-vis religion in Southeast Asian politics, see *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia* edited by Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George, (New York: Southeast Asia Program Publication, 2005). Other works that subscribe to a similar argument on the role of religion in politics and nationalism, see Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, "Introduction" and Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* edited by Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (1999), 3–14 and 178–96 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press); and Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* edited by Peter Berger (1999), 1–18 (Washington, D.C: Ethics and Public Policy Center) among others.

7 ibid.

8 Kuya Daquila. 2010. Interview by the author, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 14 May.

9 Based on the 2003 census, the Born-Again Christians comprise 3.8 percent of the population of Tanauan City, while 93 percent are Roman Catholic therein. The names of the barangay, churches, and individuals are converted to pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the church members. The data were obtained from *Comprehensive Land Use Plan & Tax Mapping for the City of Tanauan, Batangas* (Final Report), prepared and submitted by MADECOR Environment Management Systems, Inc., December 2004.

10 Before God's Highest Church (GHC) was established, evangelization by the Tanauan Bible Church (TBC) took place in Barangay Santana. TBC was under the auspices of Pastor Maling Santor in 1964 (or 1965) when he was invited to become a visitor pastor of Santana. When World Vision worked with TBC in the 1970s and expanded its mission

to Santana in 1985, the churches there and in what would become that of Angeles developed a relationship through bible study between the two barangays. At present, Angeles has become the main site for activities such as Sunday services, meetings, and Bible study. The Angeles church was made of a *nipa* hut situated beside Taal Lake. In November 1989, Typhoon "Unsing" destroyed the church, and they were forced to move to an inner location in *Purok* (precinct) IV in Barangay Angeles. The 600-plus square feet land was sold to Kakang Odeng A. Jacinto (Kakang Odeng) for PhP 50,000. The cost was lower than the market price at that time.

11 Pastor Gomez is a "part-time" pastor. Originally born in Cavite, Pastor Gomez traveled to Angeles to provide his service in 1989 as a layman and a teacher (of the church).

12 World Vision is a Christian organization mainly working in uplifting the welfare of children around the world, especially by providing education to the poor. It started its mission in 1950 by Reverend Bob Pierce. For further details on World Vision, see http://wvi.org or http://www.worldvision.org.ph.

13 Ate Paj, Interview with author, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 16 November 2005.

14 Ate Consulo, Interview with the author, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 12 May 2010.

15 The songs that I collected were from Ate Charmaine, a member of the singing group in the church. The songs, either in Tagalog or English, are presented largely via PowerPoint, the slides for which she uses during sermons. They are arranged in a way that only Ate Charmaine knows well. The slides only have the title of the songs and the lyrics. I attempted to locate other details but not all the information could be traced. These songs come in Tagalog and English. The English ones are predominantly from Canadian, Australian, and American singers such as Martin J. Nystrom and Don Harris, Paul Baloche and Ed Kerr, and Bob Baker and Don Moen, respectively. Some of the Australian songs are from Hillsong, while the Tagalog ones are composed by local pastors from various churches such as Ernie Palacio and the Big Leap (I Care Fellowship Music Team).

16 ibid.

17 For full song lyrics, please refer to the Appendix.

18 For full song lyrics, please refer to the Appendix.

19 Kuya Danny, Interview by the author, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 14 May 2010.

20 For full song lyrics, please refer to the Appendix.

21 For full song lyrics, please refer to the Appendix.

22 For full song lyrics, please refer to the Appendix.

23 Unidentified Born-Again devotee. Interviewed by author during bible study session, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 12 May.

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Kuya Julio. 2010. Interview by the author, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, 12 May.

Pastor Do. 2010. Interview by author, Barangay Uno, Tanauan City, 19 May.

Appendix

Here We are
(by Don Moen)

Here we are,
Lifting our hands to you
Here we are, giving you thanks
For all you do
As we praise and worship your holy name
You are here dwelling
Within our praise

Chorus:
For every answered prayer
For always being there
For love that hear us when we call
In arms that lift us when we fall
You have always been
Right beside us, leading us all along the way
And made it through
Because of you

Free to Dance
(byHillsong United)

This song in my heart
This song in my soul
This song I was born to sing
It's your song of freedom
Now I'm free to dance again
I'll sing in the darkness
I'll laugh in the rain
Rejoice your love again
It's your song of freedom
Now I'm free to dance again

Pre-chorus:
Your spirit brings me liberty
Your breath of life has set me free

Chorus:
Jesus, your love it lifts me high
Give me reason to run this race with joy
This song within me Lord
We'll bless your holy name
Jesus I'll dance before your throne
Bring this heavenly sound to you alone
We'll bless your holy name

Hi Love
(byMalayang Filipino fromIkaw Ang Maghari Album)

Hi Love, kumusta Ka
Ako'y nagagalak (joy, cheer) na makita Ks
Hi Love, kumusta Ka
Ako'y natutuwana makasama Ka

Koro I:
Sa pagpupuri (praise) sa Dios Ama
At pagdiriwang sa kabutihan Niya
Ako ay masaya 'pag present Ka

Koro II:
Sa tuwing tayo'y nagkakaisa
Bumubuhos (pouring) ang pagpapala (grace) Niya
Tuwang-tuwa (very cheerful) sa'tin
Ang Dios Ama

Awesome In This Place
(by Hillsong United)

Here in this house of the Great King
We've come together now to worship Him
This house is built on Christ our rock
Cannot be shaken
Cannot be shaken

Chorus:
God is awesome in this place
We sense his presence as we sing his praise
There is power here for miracles
To set the captives free and make the broken whole
God is awesome
He's so awesome
God is awesome in this place (x2)
I've found where I belong
I'm a living stone
In this house
I will grow
There is power here for miracles
Set the captives free and the broken whole
God is awesome
He's so awesome (x3)
God is awesome in this place