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Coeli Barry

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COELI BARRY

Women Religious and Sociopolitical Change in the Philippines, 1930s–1970s

This article develops a framework for the study of spirituality and the congregational lives of women religious in the Philippines from the 1930s to the early 1970s. It explores the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of membership of women in religious communities. Set within the history of women religious in the Catholic Church, the study explains the transformations in the originally Belgian order, the Immaculé Coeur Marie (ICM), while also drawing on the experiences of women leaders from other congregations. This article looks at the Filipinization of leadership and subsequent reshaping of congregational ideologies in the context of the Second Vatican Council and the Marcos regime.

KEYWORDS: CHURCH HISTORY · NUNS · WOMEN'S HISTORY · CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE · POLITICS AND CATHOLICISM IN ASIA

There is little question that the scholarly interest in nuns from the 1980s into the present was spurred by the highly visible and often controversial positions women religious took in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. In habit or in ordinary dress nuns throughout the Catholic world took advantage of the relaxation of rules that had previously circumscribed their actions, claiming greater freedom as they involved themselves in political and social work well outside the limits of school, hospital, and convent. The increasingly public roles women religious took on drew the attention of feminist scholars, historians, and sociologists.

Before those years of upheaval there is a century of history of women religious in the Philippines—even longer if the few congregations established prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century are taken into account. This is a history that remains largely unwritten, within which are the stories of individuals and communities of women working as teachers and nurses, caring for orphans and unwed mothers. They were Spanish and Filipina until the early 1900s when their number included Belgian, German, Irish, French, American, as well as Filipina. Devoting themselves to the preservation of the Catholic faith where it had already taken root and introducing it in the mission areas, these women traversed geographic, social, and national boundaries to live by congregational rules and to instill ideals of virtue and Catholic womanhood in their charges.

This article traces changes in the self-understanding of women religious in the Philippines from the 1930s through to the early 1970s, with a particular emphasis on the negotiations around national identity. During this time period Filipinas were socialized into foreign-dominated religious congregations, which required adapting to European-influenced practices and a leadership structure that privileged nonnative women. Religious community values could accommodate, but not necessarily eliminate, differences of class and nationality. The compromises women made in the name of religious community could be tolerated for a time; by the late 1960s, however, the political climate within the Philippines had shifted coterminous with reforms in the global Catholic Church. During this period women religious were encouraged to make religious life more locally meaningful and in keeping with the promotion of inculturation across all aspects of Catholicism promoted by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. As a result national differences surfaced, causing strain inside of

communities. Even in the communities that were founded in the 1950s and only had Filipinas in their number, the heavily European-influenced cultural practices inside the convents were viewed more critically. Thus this study explores the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of membership in religious community life.

By highlighting narratives and congregational practices before the 1960s this article draws attention not only to the individuals' vocations (calls to religious life), but also to the social and cultural framework within which their choices were made. They left family and went against societal expectations for women's roles and took up new identities within religious communities, where European and American-influenced ideologies of congregational life dominated. The attraction of this choice lay partly in this very foreignness, demonstrating the "ambiguous allure" of religious life in congregations led by foreigners. Sacrifices that Filipinas made to adjust and adapt to the cultural differences were judged worthwhile for membership in this institution at that moment in history.

The next section reviews the scholarship on nuns in the Catholic Church from historical and sociological perspectives in order to situate Filipina nuns within this history of women religious. By viewing religious life for women in the Philippines comparatively, we can see the similarities and differences that mark their experiences. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council radically altered the lives of nuns around the world, and Filipina nuns renegotiated their religious identities in more feminist and socially engaged ways (Claussen 2001; Hilsdon 1995), parallel to their fellow nuns in the US, UK, and Latin America. However, the delayed indigenization of the Philippine Catholic Church shaped the manner in which change was introduced and sustained at the congregational level.

The subsequent section locates international women's communities in the history of the Philippine Catholic Church and explains the transformations in the originally Belgian order, the Immaculé Coeur Marie (ICM)—today known as the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary—while also drawing on the experiences of women leaders from other international congregations. The latter part of the article focuses on the adaptations in the ideologies of those congregations that allowed for more varied and locally defined understandings of community. Emphasis is given to the Filipinization of leadership and the subsequent reshaping of ideologies during the politically divisive time after the Second Vatican Council and

during the Marcos regime. The article demonstrates the construction of a new way by which women religious related to each other within and across communities, as well as with Filipinos outside the church, in the wake of the conciliar reforms that subverted the old language/ideology of religious life.

Nuns in Historical, Historiographic, and Comparative Perspectives

From the perspective of scholars of church politics as well as of nuns themselves there is consensus that, in comparison with other Catholics (priests and laypersons), women religious were most dramatically affected by the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council. Sr. Mary John Mananzan (1993), a key figure in the Philippine Catholic Church, feminist theologian, and former head of the women's organization Gabriela, captured this sentiment in her research commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, in which the nuns' responses were documented.

The limited and secondary role that women have had within the church was apparent in the absence of women in the historic meetings convened in Rome in the 1960s, during which decisions were made that had profound impact on their lives (Graham 2012). According to church customs and laws that obtained until the Second Vatican Council, women religious were bound by an ideal of enclosure as the "most perfect" expression of religious life that was inapplicable, if not contradictory to, the "active" life of social service they were often leading. The character of religious life for women prior to the Second Vatican Council was extreme in its rejection of the external world even if the congregation was not in fact cloistered. As Patricia Byrne (1992, 4) notes, one of the most significant aspects of all orders formed in the nineteenth century was the interiorization of religion, which "emphasized the perfection of the individual, systematized mental prayer, and active charity, conceived as the constant will to do what pleases God." Patricia Curran (1981, 109) likewise notes that "[t]he lifting of heart and mind to God meant that the religious perfected the ability to keep an interior focus and the rules of behavior contributed toward an environment that maximized the possibilities for the success of those efforts." In order to achieve this aim, the convent was completely closed to the outside; no radios and no newspapers were allowed, and the routine of the inside was ordered to foster this sense of separateness from the outside world.

In Carol Coburn's (2004, 2) historiographic essay about nuns in the US she argues that nuns are central to "religious history, women's history and social history" and reminds us that feminist history offers models of how to interpret history through the filter of gender, seeing the world through the eyes, documents, and perspectives of women who lived it. Thoughtful readings of lineages of European history by Emily Clark (2007, 85) highlight the power that came from the piety of women religious, drawing attention to the ways that their piety became "the symbolic rationale for feminine sanctity, power and authority." Nuns became political subjects in modern Philippine political history (Roces 2000; Claussen 2001; Hilsdon 1995), challenging the "traditional cultural construction of the feminine as beauty queen, wife and mother, introducing instead the woman as militant activist" (Roces 2000, 27). Stepping outside of social expectations of femininity, serving (as mistresses without masters) in a male-dominated church, they carved out lives as teachers, social workers, and leaders within the bounds of their communities.

Women's orders played an important part in the transition of the Philippine church from a landholding, colonial administrative institution into an educational institution that was by the 1940s running many of the country's secondary and tertiary schools. While the country was predominantly Catholic after more than three centuries of Spanish rule, the subsequent fifty years of American colonialism saw the reconstitution of the church that was led neither by Americans nor Filipinos but by an unusual mix of religious orders coming from Europe and North America. Additionally the dioceses trained their clergy in Hispanic-influenced conservative thinking, a fact that helped reaffirm the association in the minds of ordinary people that the church did not support the advancement of nationals (Schumacher 1990; Barry 1999). Bringing with them convent practices rooted in other histories, congregations from Europe, Ireland, and North America established themselves in various parts of the Philippines. But over time nuns slowly adapted to the demands of the nation in the making.

Locating Nuns in the Philippines

With the exception of a few orders of women religious either founded in the colony or coming from Spain, those congregations that came to the Philippines only did so in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Hence there was only a handful of religious communities for women at the close

of over three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Some communities had secured a place on the edges of the religious landscape as cloistered nuns, living behind thick walls, hidden from the world. Others assumed the work typical of their fellow sisters in Europe: caring for the sick and educating young women, in this case the daughters of the newly emerged elites. The extreme religiosity instilled in the women sent to live with the nuns in their convents while being educated became etched in popular consciousness through the heroine Maria Clara in José Rizal's *Noli me tangere*. Separated from her true love, she is sapped of the will to live. Defining through this image of Spanish-era Catholic nuns is the work that they did in the latter part of Spanish colonialism, which included training prospective teachers, for whom the cultivated ideals of Christian womanhood were less severe than those of nuns.

In 1892 a royal decree was issued creating the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers under the direction of the Augustinian Religious of the Assumption. The school lasted only a few years because the revolution of 1896 and the Spanish–American War caused the sisters to be recalled to Spain. Colonial religious leaders, especially those involved in women's education, embraced a vision of Christian womanhood. Although the Spanish were forced to withdraw from the Philippines, the messages of faith and virtue were core to the teaching of nuns who came and established schools and convents in the twentieth century. A speech given in 1897 by the directress of the Superior Normal School, Sr. María de la Cruz, is revealing in its tone of detached acceptance about the likelihood that Spain might be forced to leave the Philippines and the inevitability of her own need to leave as well.

Who knows whether this war that is fast assuming national proportions will change the political status of your country? If that should happen, I shall be obliged to go. Bear in mind, therefore, that it is you who will take our place. Be ready to shoulder with your countrymen the new responsibilities you will have to face. . . .

Stay together, unite and help each other in propagating the true Faith and the virtues essential to the advancement of your people. . . . [P]repare yourselves to do all that is within your power to open

up a new path that will lead to the happiness and glory of your race.
(cited in Carmen 1954, 227–28)

That the directress saw her relation to the women students in terms of the “true Faith” that bound them while simultaneously acknowledging the racial and political divides that would separate them reflected, in part, the vision of Christian womanhood embraced by colonial religious leaders, especially those involved in women's education (Sill 2010). This ideal, which entailed crossing national and race divides to prepare women for lives as mothers who would themselves be responsible for their family's religious well-being, pervaded schools and convents in the twentieth century.

The church in the first decades of the twentieth century inspired resentment and disinterest. As the most powerful cultural force throughout Spanish colonial rule, it appeared anachronistic and ineffectual in contrast to the modern, Protestant-inspired American values that became ascendant during this period (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). Nonetheless, as the institution that represented the dominant religion of the country, its material and symbolic resources remained significant. The institutional church reconstituted itself in the wake of the expulsion of the Spanish rulers, priests, and nuns by relying on new leaders appointed by Rome. Coming from Ireland, continental Europe, and the US, the first infusion of women into the Philippine Catholic Church in the twentieth century was almost completely cut off from the Spanish traditions that continued to color the thinking of the male Filipino clergy into the first few decades of American rule. The women's orders were not beholden to the Spanish language and were open to, if not fully at ease in, using English in the schools where they taught. The schools run by these women's congregations played an important role in training an English-speaking female elite.

Between 1900 and the outbreak of the Second World War, eighteen new women's congregations were introduced in the Philippines. The typical pattern for most of the women's orders that came to the Philippines between 1900 and 1940 was to establish “paying schools” based in or around Manila as well as a poor school also in Manila or in the congregation's mission territory. Convent schools served a function at a particular time in Philippine history and in the development of the religious orders that administered them. The paying schools became recruiting grounds for the orders when these began to accept Filipinas. The dates of the admission of Filipinas varied a good deal.

One of the first orders to arrive in the twentieth century, the Benedictines, accepted a Filipina by 1917, while the Immaculé Coeur Marie (ICM) sisters, who arrived in 1910, did not accept Filipinas until the late 1920s. The first Filipinas to be admitted to these orders were drawn from the girls who attended their schools.

By midcentury the paying schools founded by women's orders had developed into prestigious women's colleges that educated the daughters and wives of the Philippine elite as well as the growing middle class. When the congregations that ran two well-known women's colleges in Metro Manila (the ICM sisters' St. Theresa's College and the Maryknoll sisters' Maryknoll College) decided in the late 1960s to shut these schools to enable the sisters to work more directly with the poor, their students and alumnae protested vociferously against the closures. The social functions of the schools included networks of friendship that they held throughout their adult lives, and the education at these elite schools offered Filipinas "a cultural system of social rules, conventions and values . . . that gave meaning to their daily behavior and to their friendship with other women" (Barry 2005; Coburn and Smith 1999, 127).

Adjusting and Adapting in the Name of Sisterliness

The training to become a nun sought to obscure national differences in the name of the sisterhood, but it was hard to disguise the fact that Catholic convent life remained attached to practices rooted in European or American culture. Even when Filipinas did not have to travel overseas in order to join an international congregation as what happened after the Second World War, the simple presence of apple pie in the convent menu, for example, served as a reminder that one lived inside an American enclave. A requirement to wear black stockings, so inappropriate in a tropical climate, signified how thoroughly German one's congregation remained. And although the aspiring sister was supposed to humble herself before other members of her community, this requirement of humility was not always easy to practice.

The training to become a nun took place in two connected phases, both of which required that the young woman join others in a training facility called the novitiate. Life in the novitiate was essential to the process of becoming a full member of the congregation. As Carmen Mangion (2007, 411) writes, the novitiate was "a shared experience that separated laywomen from consecrated women, creating a bond between novices. Novices were

involved in most aspects of religious life and their practical, vocational and spiritual training was intended to form not only a good sister, but a loyal member of the congregation."

In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s Filipinas who wanted to enter religious life with the international orders had to be able to go to Europe or the US to train for three years of novitiate. There they found the onus was on them to adjust to the congregation's foreign culture.

An ICM sister, Asuncion Martinez, nicknamed Asun, traveled to the motherhouse in Belgium for her training, and she recalled what it was like: "At times it was very lonely, the food is different, [it was] so cold. At the same time, I experienced our sisterliness. They [the Belgians] pampered us a little" (Martinez 1990). When it was cold outside, Asun remembered, the Belgians knew that the weather was hard for those from the Philippines. "She's a Filipina," they would say, "close the door" (ibid.). Although Asun acknowledged that Belgian ICMs "made many allowances" for the Filipinas, unquestionably the burden of accommodation fell onto the Filipinas. Asun found it very difficult to adjust to Belgian food and to the Belgian expectations of training sisters for the missions. She had expected an ascetic existence in keeping with the preconceptions of the ICM order, and missionary life would be arduous and physical strength had to be built up.

[W]e had to eat their food. And so much. If you are a missionary you must eat a lot and become strong. I could not eat that much. So much brown bread! One piece was enough for me. But we were obliged to eat so much. What kind of convent is this, I said. Instead of fasting, we must eat! I did not like that fresh milk with all that sticky cream on top. But you were obliged to eat. (ibid.)

It was not only the preconceptions of the order about missionary life that Asun confronted. She also found herself an item of curiosity in the eyes of her Belgian fellow sisters and their families. For the most part, the Belgian women were drawn to the ICM congregation because of its missionary character. And, as was typically the case, the work of the sisters among the tribal minorities of the Cordillera received greater attention than the more mundane work of running a school in Manila and Cebu. Asun recalled the reaction of her Belgian sisters to her being from the

Philippines. “Sometimes they would think that we are in a wild place here. They asked us if we had a house, if there are snakes around, if there are many monkeys” (ibid.).

At the time that Asun joined the congregation in 1934, although the founder was a Flemish-speaking Belgian, the language of communication in the novitiate was French. Asun (ibid.) recalled,

It was not really a problem for me because I know Spanish and it is very much like French. Plus we had French classes in high school and college at St. Teresa’s Cebu. Many in Belgium didn’t speak French, they spoke Flemish. They didn’t want to [speak French]. They were also oppressed by the French people. . . . The Flemish are more farmers’ stock, the nobility were French. That’s why our prayers were all in Latin, to avoid the conflict.

For some the conflict derived more directly from class differences between the Filipinas who came from either elite or upper-middle-class families and their fellow sisters of humbler backgrounds. Reminiscing about her novitiate days, one sister said she was greatly annoyed when the novice mistress, whose father was a postman, corrected her English. From a well-to-do Manila Chinese family, this Filipina was quite confident that her command of the language was at least equal to, if not better than, that of the American woman’s. Barriers of nationality, language, and class were never far from the surface. These differences could be subsumed by the ideal of sisterliness, but they never completely went away. As Mananzan (1990), explained, “I thought that wearing heavy black stockings was a sign of a good Benedictine but then I realized it was just a German practice.” Her ability to make this distinction in no way diminished her pride in the role that her order had played in civilizing Europe, however: “We kept learning alive during the Dark Ages” (ibid.).

Growth and Expansion before Filipinization of Church Leadership

The end of the Second World War brought many changes to the church around the world. In the Philippines an expansion in its administrative structure throughout the country prompted the church to build up religious orders and increase the number of educational institutions in the provinces,

which were now under independent bishoprics. After the war more training centers for congregations were opened in the Philippines in response to the growing need for women’s orders that could oversee the training in newly established congregations that were being set up. This expansion meant that women from the provinces who might not have had a chance to join the “international” Manila-based orders now might join the more numerous orders that were founded in the 1950s and 1960s, for which the training did not require going overseas. These diocesan women’s congregations were established in places far from Manila. For instance, one was set up in northern Mindanao, which enabled women from that area and from the neighboring island of Bohol to join the congregation. In addition, the international orders began to open novitiates in Baguio and in the hills of Antipolo outside of Manila, some of which began to be listed in the *Catholic Directory of the Philippines* as early as 1953.

The shift toward a local base of training meant that religious congregations adjusted their requirements to permit women from less-privileged families to join. Traditionally a payment called dowry was required of women upon entering the order, but the amount of the dowry was greatly reduced when the novitiates were set up in the Philippines. In contrast to the prewar period, when all training was conducted abroad and the young woman’s dowry had to cover her passage abroad as well as her living expenses throughout three years of training or novitiate, in the postwar period a woman could work for a few years after college and earn this money on her own. In some cases congregations were willing to accept the college degree in place of a dowry.

The predominance of European and American women in positions of leadership in many congregations continued into the 1950s and 1960s. But, rather than a deterrent, the foreign leadership and associations evoked by its international character seemed to have served more as a “pull factor” in attracting younger recruits. Throughout the 1950s the number of women joining increased. According to the 1953 *Catholic Directory*, the number of Filipinas who were fully professed (excluding those still in training) was 1,490 sisters. By 1963 there were 3,606 Filipinas and 1,039 foreigners. The very mixed and diverse character of nationalist consciousness in the Philippines in the independence period allowed people to either identify with or aspire to membership in institutions that were rooted outside of the Philippines and whose standing on the local landscape was enhanced precisely because of the authority derived from these associations. Certainly the Catholic Church in the

Philippines in the first decade and a half after independence served to embody these attributes. But there were those within the church who were impatient with the fact that so many positions of leadership were still held by foreigners.

In 1957 when six Filipino religious priests sent a memorial to the Vatican urging greater recognition of Filipinos in the church, decrying the fact that there were so few Filipino priests in the religious orders and in church leadership more generally (de la Rosa 1990), they did so without the participation of the women's orders. The charge that the Philippine Catholic Church was hostile to Filipinos was not one that the women were ready to take up at that time (Barry 1999), although given the limited and restricted contact that women religious had with priests the entire event could have gone on without much discussion inside convents. The women's orders did Filipinize their congregations but not until they changed a great deal else about their lives as nuns: Filipinizing the leadership was simultaneously combined with cultural Filipinization that included changes in what was served at mealtimes and in one's dress.

Remaking Convent Life: Spirituality and Institutional Church Life in Flux

Meals were Filipinized, silver service was abandoned, Tagalog was introduced. And gradually the foreigners left. I didn't say "Go home" but we changed our language and our menus.
—Filipina nun on the changes in her international congregation

In the early 1960s the Catholic Church convened the historic Second Vatican Council. Held between 1962 and 1965, the council signaled the church's acceptance of the modern, secular world it had fought to keep at bay for the previous two centuries. The wide-reaching changes that the Second Vatican Council ushered in touched upon every aspect of Catholicism and affected the lives of Catholics throughout the world; rituals were simplified and the Latin mass was replaced by liturgies in local languages. For women religious the changes introduced by the council were especially dramatic given the then-prevailing convent culture. The Second Vatican Council altered every aspect of the lives of women religious; their highly interiorized, spiritually derived identity was subverted when women religious interpreted the conciliar reforms and redefined themselves as nuns. Although the council was first and foremost a European event, born of issues affecting the

church there in the postwar period in particular, the reforms took shape in very different ways depending upon the local conditions of the country into which they were introduced.

The reforms of the Second Vatican Council came to the Philippines in a climate of radical nationalism and student activism, a fact that added to the impact of the historic changes in Catholicism. In the nationalist climate that pervaded campuses by the 1960s congregational practices that disguised European-based traditions were less tenable. As the Catholic Church sanctioned the vernacularization of rituals and encouraged priests and nuns to work more closely with the poor—not simply *for* them in the conventional charity-based understanding of that relationship—nuns in the Philippines reassessed their lives as members of congregations.

The conciliar document *Decree on Religious Renewal*, which guided nuns in their initial efforts to redefine themselves as religious, begins by advocating that:

The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, especially in missionary territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances. (Second Vatican Council 1965)

While preconiliar convent rule was based on a hierarchy in which the superior represented God's authority and obedience to her evidenced one's willingness to submit to God's will, the *Decree* advocated an altogether different ideal of relations between superiors and community members.

Sanctioned by conciliar directives to "engage with the modern world," women religious joined priests in embracing the less triumphalist version of the church (Abellanos 2013). They now understood their faith and the church as coming from direct experience with the world. The Filipino Jesuit theologian Catalino Arevalo, who served as a key interpreter of conciliar reforms for his Philippine audiences, argued that the phrase "signs of the times" encapsulated this new view of the church and the world. Arevalo (1972, 18) wrote that the theology which emerged from the Second Vatican Council

takes up the analysis of sociology and like knowledges on how these changes [in and of the modern world] affect human consciousness,

human knowledge, human affectivity, human sensibility and human life, theology then begins to reflect on the direction that they are taking, on the direction in which they are leading human history to see how God's plans are being fulfilled in them. . . . Here is where theology, the reflection of faith, enters to see just precisely how these developments are furthering the designs of God. This theological approach has as its point of departure not Scriptural text and not Tradition but "what is going on in the world."

This imperative to position oneself and one's community differently in the world profoundly disturbed the terms by which religious life had been established. The apostolate, or the work a congregation focused on, was now viewed in a very different light. Thus the relationship between individual and community spirituality had to be reinterpreted. One had to explain and justify years of work in what had been considered a perfectly acceptable field: education. One sister recalled how disappointed she was when travelling in the provinces to see graduates from St. Theresa's, students for whom this nun had dedicated some forty years of her life to teaching, notable for their absence from life in the parishes:

They were most visible in high-class social functions, in popularity contests for their children. . . . These disappointing findings pained me deeply. Were these the only results of almost a lifetime of work and sacrifice? . . .

My formula did not seem to work. The elite whom we trained did not bother at all to reach out to the mass base. The non-working mothers were not better mothers—they spent their time playing mahjong, going abroad and neglecting their children.

At this time there was a great desire in me to break through the walls of the convent and the school in order to study and become truly part of the community. (Martinez 1988, 4–5)

The Second Vatican Council ushered in a spirit of reform that was initially directed as much at the internal workings of the church as it was with creating organizations to facilitate direct involvement with the poor. The

Laymen's Association for Post-Vatican II Reforms or LAPVIIR, for example, demanded from the Archdiocese of Manila that it account for its wealth and devote itself to the poor. The representatives of the church hierarchy, specifically the Archdiocese of Manila in the person of Cardinal Rufino Santos, were the object of protest and criticism for their unwillingness to commit their resources to the poor. The demands of LAPVIIR also included making religious ceremonies more meaningful in a "local context," calling for the use of vernacular languages in masses. The Second Vatican Council resulted in Latin being abandoned as the language of the church.

In 1966 the Catholic Welfare Organization (precursor to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines) established the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA). The NASSA's first programs were in the nature of self-help economic and community development projects. Subsequently regional branches were established in the Visayas and Mindanao. These social action centers offered opportunities for women to work far from the home base of the congregation. Additionally the introduction of basic Christian communities (parish-based groups that combined experimental religious practice with socioeconomic and often overtly political work) took women religious from Manila and provincial cities into parts of the Philippines that were new to many. The sociopastoral network was the primary means by which religious personnel came into contact with those people and ideas entirely unlike anything they had known when working in traditional areas such as teaching. The desire to bring the church more in line with the majority of poor Filipinos necessitated redirecting congregational resources away from institutions like schools to free women up for reassignment in other work.

The Filipinization process, which began for women religious in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was characterized by changes including the promotion of Filipinas to the highest positions of leadership. In the case of the ICM congregation, Sr. Ramona Mendiola's election to the position that was previously known as "superior" was to prove crucial. (In the spirit of postconciliar democratization within the church, the ICMs decided to have a district team, headed by a team leader, the title Ramona held at this time.) At the 1969 General Chapter in Rome, a meeting of the entire congregation, Ramona began to challenge the racially based structure of power within the international congregation. Ramona wrote a series of newsletters from Rome addressed to her ICM sisters in the Philippines about the proceedings of the meetings.

Ramona recognized that, in order to revise the extant structure of the congregation, the spirit and teachings of the mother foundress would have to be revised.

If this Chapter [congregational meeting] will have accomplished nothing else than the clarification of the ICM task in the Church today, it will have accomplished very much. You might ask, why, what is so outstanding in the repetition of the aim of our congregation? What is so new about that? Did Sister Marie Louise de Meester not define that aim once and for all in 1897? (Mendiola 1969, 2)

By claiming the authority to define for oneself just what it meant to be an ICM sister, Ramona and every other ICM for that matter would now have greater freedom to find individual meaning in their lives as ICM sisters. In the following section, the phrase “vocation as process” implies that the definition of ICM-ness is not written in stone, not fixed because the Mother Foundress said so, not bound to any standard other than one defined by the present demands. As Ramona stated:

This is where I beg to disagree. Every ICM vocation is the process of an answer to a call, basically the same for all ICM members, true, yet unique for every member. As such, that ICM vocation necessarily develops in the vocation of every member. . . . And while studying what that ICM vocation implies in 1969, facets and nuances of that same basic call come to light through understanding the “signs of the times,” the present stage reached by the world, the Church and our Congregation within the world and the Church. (ibid., 5)

The case of Sr. Christine Tan, elected as provincial of the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS) in 1970, illustrates the speed with which the change in mood within the convent was affected. On the heels of her election Christine quite sincerely intended to lead her congregation by working within its tradition, of which she was very proud. In her address during the first Provincial Chapter of her administration her devotion to the order was apparent as she reflected on the impressive growth the Philippine province had undergone in the short years since it was declared a semiautonomous entity:

During the past five years we have opened five houses. Within a span of eight years, a Novitiate, a Juniorate, Provincialate and a contemplative branch found root in native soil. Vocations flourished from 11 to 192 professed sisters, 175 of whom are native. . . . When nationalism so deemed that native leaders take over the reins of government, Filipino superiors were not found lacking—our foreign sisters have trained us with genuine detachment . . . We possess a wealth of potentialities—our average age is 40; our apostolate is timely and timeless; we build on foundations laid . . . by our elder sisters; rich is our heritage passed on by foreign influence; our old sisters are holy; our Mother General is sublime. With God’s pervading grace, who can be against us? (Religious of the Good Shepherd n.d., 77–78).

But her “conversion” was to come shortly after this speech. While attending the First Asian Bishops Conference, convened in 1971, Christine saw things very differently. She heard of things that were concerned with “the outside,” things that had nothing to do with problems internal to the sisters. The conference “was the most powerful event that caused the birth of the new ministries and a new spirituality, we felt lost in our work with the poor. Our Congregation, of course, did not provide training in this ministry, no guide, no spirituality” (ibid., 81).

Divisions within Congregations

Changes in the idea of spirituality and community culture within congregations were additionally affected by the participation of nuns in their work against the Marcos regime. This involvement put sisters at odds with their congregational life. Sisters had to miss meals at the convents and stay out late to go to meetings. The freedom, sometimes hard won, from congregational routine permitted women religious to come to know and support the plight of those suffering under often brutal working conditions. One sister recalled how her political involvement with women workers on strike (contravening martial law prohibition on strikes) meant she had to keep late hours and be away from her community. The women “asked me to come to their meetings which were in the evening after work. So I had to make alibis to my superiors, because I was coming in late” (Martinez 1990). But when the strike took place and women religious were there beside the

striking workers, it was this nun's "second baptism. I saw religious with rosaries in one hand giving out food with the other" (ibid.).

As members of the community went their separate ways and returned to the convent at different times during the day or evening, community prayer life necessarily changed shape. If the congregation itself relinquished the preconiliar prayers in favor of more personally meaningful ones, so much harder was it for nuns to find ways to pray that made sense in the context of their political actions. Sr. Emelina Villegas, founder of the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, wrote a collection of prayers called *Psalma ng mga Tao* (Psalms of the People). Emelina explained that, in her work with industrial workers, the more traditional prayers of her convent did not work. "The breviary," Emelina pointed out, "was too strange for them" (Villegas 1992). As the work of the nuns took them in different directions, it was increasingly difficult to extract anything remotely resembling a common lesson on the basis of which prayers could be said and the community could proceed feeling itself united. There were no prayers to be said on return to the convent from a rally. Instead individuals or small groups created their own rituals. One example of this was "sharing" or "faith-sharing." Prayer reflections or "sharings" were considered an integral part of the process of being politically and socially aware. These sharings represented attempts to replace the traditional spiritual practices with ones more suitable to the activities people engaged in. Individuals or small groups returning from a particular exposure or event met together to share, interpret, or "process" their experiences.

The desire to communally make sense of the new work the nuns were engaged in—the new and often shocking situations in which nuns found themselves—provided the impulse from which group-oriented practices began. The problem was that only certain people took part in the exposure. As a result small groups would form within the community—groups that had come together to pray and "process" that to which they had been exposed.

Increasingly, then, sharing came to mean its opposite; groups only "shared" with those whom they were already assured of agreement. Sharing came to signal that you had decided, in advance, with whom you could or could not share. Latin had been the language of prayer and unity, while silence served as the "language" of obedience, signifying the blending of one's individuality and will with the congregation. But in the postconciliar era many women religious ceased to see self-abnegation as the measure of

an individual's spiritual growth. When self-expression in speech replaced self-abnegation in silence, Filipina women religious expressed themselves in their vernacular languages. The introduction of various kinds of speech accompanied the replacement of Latin: where the Latin mass and the routine of daily prayers had kept community members bound to one another, there was now Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, and Ilonggo; and choices to be made about whom to pray with, how, and when. Political involvement with workers, farmers, and the urban poor required new idioms through which a nun's faith could be articulated. During meals, masses, and prayers, the conflict that was spreading outside made itself felt inside of women's congregations. As a result, individual nuns and entire congregations faced years of strain and division.

Conclusion

From the 1930s through to the early 1970s, a pivotal time in the country's history, congregations of women religious in the Philippines built educational and social welfare institutions. As the country transformed itself from a colony of the US to an independent nation, women religious educated young women in schools that provided the settings in which bonds were formed among the daughters of the elite and the emerging middle classes. As Filipinas came to know vocational life through their own time in these schools, those who chose to enter religious life were taught to accommodate national differences. Adhering to practices inside of their communities that derived from European Catholicism and led by Europeans or North Americans, these women contributed to the growth and expansion of the church in the Philippines. However, the Second Vatican Council inspired directives on religious life that provided Filipina nuns a vocabulary with which they tried to articulate a more personally meaningful spirituality. Congregations subverted the standards of congregationally based identity: they began to be divided between those who remained in classrooms and those who went to work in the recently expanded "social action" network. Competing political outlooks guided the ways in which nuns articulated their faith.

To date women religious in the Philippines have come to life in the scholarly and popular imagination after they moved more directly into politics during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Consequently the decades leading up to the late 1960s and beyond have been treated as merely

a backdrop. By contrast, this article lays the framework for a more historically grounded and nuanced approach to the study of women religious, and in so doing it brings into sharp relief the differences between pre- and post-Second Vatican Council Catholic thought and practice in the Philippines. Studying the lives of women who chose vowed, Catholic community provides a prism through which prevailing ideals of womanhood can be appreciated. Looking closely at how they embraced a way of life that rejected “the world” and the conventional paths to marriage and motherhood enables us to appreciate the social and cultural norms that defined that world. More research on the histories of women religious will deepen our understanding of their place in the religious and political landscape.

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Coeli Barry teaches at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Panyapipat Building, Mahidol University, Salaya, Nakorn Pathom, Thailand 73170. Her current research interests focus on intellectual life and regulatory regimes in higher education in Southeast Asia, political and social thought in postdemocratic societies, and inequality in Asian societies. She has contributed chapters in *Rights to Culture: Heritage, Language and Community in Thailand* (2013); *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia* (2012); and *Religious Organizations and Democratization in Asia* (2005). She is editor of *The Many Ways of Being Muslim: Fiction by Muslim Filipinos* (2008, 2010). <coeli.bar@mahidol.ac.th>

