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Catholicity and Globalization in the Light of “The Church: Towards a Common Vision.” An Iglesia Filipina Independiente’s Perspective

Eleuterio J. Revollido

In 2005, the International Old Catholic Bishops’ Conference (IBC) initiated a process of theological conversations on globalization and catholicity. These initially took place from 2006 until 2008, and involved the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI). They led to a series of reports published under the heading *Globalization and Catholicity. Ecumenical Conversations on God’s Abundance and the People’s Need*.¹ This gathers together the theological perspectives and the experiences of the involved churches, which I refer to as “Concordat churches” because they stand in a relationship of full communion with one another.² In his opening address, Archbishop of Utrecht Dr. Joris Vercammen, president of the IBC, stated: “Our world is changing radically under the influence of the processes of *globalization*,” and pointed to the need to react to it as four churches who all define themselves “in terms of being *catholic* churches or a communion of catholic churches.”³ Vercammen posed several crucial questions: what is the vision of the Church and its relationship to the world as the people’s home? How do we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How will the exodus and the resurrection happen again in our world and in our times? From 2014, the World Council of Churches (WCC) became involved, linking the discussion about catholicity and globalization to the Pilgrim for Justice and Peace program of the WCC. The theological con-

¹ Marsha L. Dutton with Emily K. Stuckey (eds), *Globalization and Catholicity. Ecumenical Conversations on God’s Abundance and the People’s Need* (Beiheft zu IKZ 100; Bern: Stämpfli, 2010).

² *Editor’s note*: While the Old Catholic Churches and the British and Irish Anglican churches refer to “Bonn Agreement” (1931), the TEC and the author of this contribution call this agreement the “Bonn Concordat”. The full communion between the Old Catholic Churches and the Anglican Communion was in the 1960s extended (by both Communion separately) to the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. See Dutton (ed.), *Globalization and Catholicity* (as note 1), 11.

³ Joris Vercammen, ‘Words from Archbishop Joris Vercammen’, in Dutton (ed.), *Globalization and Catholicity* (as note 1), 14–16: 14.

versation on catholicity and globalization represents a double response: as churches, we need both “to see more dimensions of the call to unity and [to] remind ourselves that we are always embraced by and called to love,”⁴ as observed by the WCC General Secretary in his foreword in the document.

This article aims to (1) explore the WCC Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, and the texts from “Globalization and Catholicity”, for a common understanding of catholicity, and (2) to acknowledge the test of living-out the essence of catholicity in the Churches’ participation in the struggle of people in the context of globalization.

1. Harvesting and Re-affirming the Texts of the Conversation

Globalization and Catholicity represents a contribution to deepening full visible unity, albeit indirectly. In contrast, the WCC document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (in the following abbreviated as *The Church*) explicitly invites the churches to seek ecclesial convergence on our churches’ self-understanding and praxis of being Church, their mission, unity, and witness in and for the world. *The Church* considers Church history, the achievements and failures of the churches, the nature of the Church centered on *koinonia* and further discussions on the growth in communion, in both the now and the not yet. The document ends with a discussion of the Church and its mission – in and for the world. The former WCC director of the Commission on Faith and Order, John Gibaut, described *The Church* as “a *Harvesting Text*, drawing together the insights of the earlier studies of the Commission” dating back to 1993.⁵

The IFI has contributed to this conversation with its own experience and a series of theological statements, which offers a re-affirmation not only of the common ecclesial convergence of our churches’ self-understanding and praxis of being Church, but also of the relevance of a theol-

⁴ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper 214; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), v (in the notes abbreviated as *TCTCV*).

⁵ John Gibaut, ‘The Church: Towards a Common Vision: An Introduction’, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 101 (2013) 281–289. Gibaut argues that every Christian is an ecclesiologist, for ecclesiology is a practical and pastoral discipline of defining the church based on previous experience and understanding of what “church” ought to be.

ogy that finds its truthfulness in the struggle for justice, peace and abundant life.

2. Convergence and Catholicity in IFI perspective

The Church discusses the catholicity of the Church. It offers this definition:

The Church is catholic because of the abundant goodness of God “who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Through the life-giving power of God, the Church’s mission transcends all barriers and proclaims the Gospel to all peoples. Where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic (c.f. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrneans*, 6), as in the celebration of the eucharist. The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed to be developed into division. Christians are called to remove all obstacles to the embodiment of this fullness of truth and life bestowed upon the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶

Here the essence of catholicity is presented as an experience of God’s goodness, life-giving power and salvation present everywhere through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the responsibility of every Christian to remove all obstacles that impede the realization of this essence of catholicity.

Globalization and Catholicity, which I will refer to as the *gathering text* of the Concordat churches, defines catholicity with important references also to the definitions put forward by the Early Fathers. *The Good Shepherd Report* (2007), one of the interim reports of the *Globalization and Catholicity* process, and part of the *gathering text*, puts it thus:

The group found the words of two of the Church Fathers to be particularly helpful in articulating the shared understanding of our churches. In the late fourth-century *Catechetical Instructions*, Cyril of Jerusalem outlined five aspects of the church’s catholicity: it extends all over the world, it is united in doctrine, it includes all humanity, it can heal all sin and contain all virtue, and it extends over all time. Some decades later, in about 434, Vincent of Lerins formulated the classic definition of the term *catholic* in his *Commonitorium*. Vincent’s formulation says that as the church as catholic “comprehends almost everything universally,” it holds “to that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.”

⁶ TCTCV (as note 2), para. 22, 14.

In addition to the understanding conveyed by these two definitional passages, the representatives of the churches discerned their own lived-out experiences of catholicity in a common understanding that proceeds from an ecclesiology grounded in the experience of the local church (the diocese) with its strong eucharistic focus (...).⁷

The essence of catholicity emphasized here is arguably experiential in nature, in that it relates to a state of being where unity, healing, and virtue of people are realized by all humanity and discerned by the people in their particular local context. The document emphasized that it is the responsibility of the local church to discern what needs to be done to attain such unity, healing and virtue in the context of a “strong eucharistic focus.”⁸

The earliest articulation of the IFI’s understanding of what and how it ought to be as a church is found in its 1903 *Doctrine and Constitutional Rules*:

Our Church is Catholic, or Universal, because it considers all men without distinction children of God, and it bears the designation “Philippine Independent” to identify this association of free men who, within the said universality, admit servility to no one.⁹

The IFI’s definition must be viewed in the context of combating hierarchical power, of an understanding of the sacraments which denies their human reality and of a community that is struggling to be free.

Like the definitions of the essence of catholicity in *The Church* and *The Good Shepherd Report*, the IFI has expressed the vision of an inclusive community where equality is present and everyone is accepted as “children of God.” The essence of a truly Catholic is not hierarchy; the church is made up of people who reserve the right to fight for freedom from oppression. The statement also emphasizes that freedom should be an universal experience.

⁷ ‘The Good Shepherd Report’, in Dutton (ed.) *Globalization and Catholicity* (as note 1), 162–166: 163–164.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁹ William Henry Scott (transl.), ‘Doctrine and Constitutional Rules of the Philippine Independent Church’, in: Apolonio M. Rancho (ed.), *Doctrine and Constitutional Rules Important Documents. Various Articles and Chronology of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (Manila: National Priest Organisation, 1996), 4 pages. The original version of this text can be found in the Special Collections, Aglipay Central Theological Seminary Library, Urdaneta City.

While the Roman Catholic Church had traditionally been seen as defined by the clerical hierarchy and the sacraments, the IFI insisted that the “Church simply is humanity” and that it is made up of “children of God.”¹⁰ This reflected the fact that the IFI was founded by the first federation of labor unions in the Philippines, and that it has a strong emphasis on the need to respond to the challenges of history and to proclaim a revelation of social commitment.¹¹ It is on this basis that the IFI would like to be known to the ecumenical community. In 1947, it described itself as:

A congregation of new men [sic!] educated in and liberated by the teaching of Christ, dedicated to the worship of God in the spirit and in truth, nourished and sustained in the Eucharist, and commissioned to be witnesses to God’s love in the world.¹²

This discussion indicates considerable convergence in the understandings of catholicity as not a mere description but a holistic experience of God’s presence with God’s people. Catholicity is not something that can be measured; it has nothing to do with the dominant and the minority, the small and the big, or the old and the new. Catholicity is about the presence of Christ anywhere and everywhere, and about our recognition and embracing of God’s presence to guide us in the praxis of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. This is a catholicity not measured in numbers but in the truthfulness of its witness to the Gospel of Christ amid suffering, and in the depth of faith, like a “mustard seed,” which comes alive in the struggle of our people. Catholicity cannot be quantified on the length of our membership in a church or the practice of our particular brand of Christianity, but is defined in the sincerity of our vocation that liberates, unites, gives healing, goodness, salvation and bears fruit through the power of the Holy Spirit. Catholicity is not “universal popularity,” but “universal identity.” It means living out the gospel based on “what has been believed everywhere, always, by all,” and the churches’ readiness to defend its catholicity that in essence is an experience of God’s goodness, life-giving power and salvation present everywhere through the guidance of God’s spirit.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ambrocio Manaligod, *The Ecclesiality of the Philippine Independent Church* (New Manila, Quezon City: Aglipayan Resource Center, 1988), 140–141.

¹² IFI, *1977 Constitution and Canons of the Philippine Independent Church* (Manila: IFI, 1977), 35.

3. Globalization and the Challenges to the Catholicity of the Church

On October 3, 2015, a further meeting of the Conference on Globalization and Catholicity, dubbed the Ramento Conference, was held in Manila. Its unity statement describes globalization as an unjust system that “enacts policies that are evidently more injurious to the poor” and an oppressive structure that “favors capital over communities,” and which “provides more opportunities for the corporatization of everyday life, the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of the few, and the enslavement of the people to debt.”¹³ In the light of the discussion of catholicity presented above, this statement suggests that the greatest challenge to the churches’ practice of the essence of catholicity is related to their participation in the struggle of people in the context of globalization. In 2002, the IFI celebrated its centenary in the presence of the Concordat Churches and its other partner churches. One of the most significant points of celebration was the “International Church Leaders Solidarity Summit”, in which these churches committed to *The Communique: The Manila Covenant*, a challenging statement which highlighted the need for precisely such engagement:

Together we give thanks to God for the birth of a living branch of the Church in the midst of the hopes and struggles of the Filipino people. Being in full communion with the IFI we are all united in the spirituality of grace and justice, nurtured by our roots in the community of the Living God. (...) The Summit had the opportunity to discover and to deepen the understanding of being a Church and followers of Jesus Christ in the challenges and sufferings of the present world community (...).¹⁴

The Concordat Churches discovered and affirmed their deeper “understanding of being a Church and followers of Jesus Christ *in the challenges and sufferings of the present world community*,” not on the basis of any theological statement but on the basis of people’s experience of struggle.

Similarly, the gathering of the Concordat Churches with the WCC Faith and Order Commission in October 2016 continued the conversation on globalization and catholicity with the intention of emphasizing a con-

¹³ The statement is unpublished, quotation from my own copy. [*Editor’s note*: for the conference see IKZ 106 (2016) 122–123].

¹⁴ Tomas A. Millamena, *The Iglesia Filipina Independiente and Her Centenary* (unpublished document, IFI Archives, Aglipay Central Theological Seminary, Urdaneta City, 2002), 21.

text of struggle and martyrdom while commemorating the tenth anniversary of the murder of the IFI Bishop Alberto Ramento (1937–2006). The ongoing conversation explicitly sought to include an immersion and exposure to the reality of people who are most exposed to the onslaught of globalization, in order “to discover and to deepen the understanding of being a Church and followers of Jesus Christ in the challenges and sufferings of the present world community,” as the Manila Covenant of 2002 put it.¹⁵

It is striking, however, that the word “globalization” is absent from *The Church*. Nonetheless, the final chapter of it, with its discussion of the Church and its mission in and for the world, could be considered to articulate the Church’s mission in the context of globalization. Under the sub-topic *The Church in Society*, *The Church* enumerates various social ills as direct effects of globalization, such as economic inequalities, war, racism, ethnic and religious hatred, and the use of violence. *The Church* also recognizes the unfortunate reality that churches and Christians have sometimes condoned these injustices and the violence in the world, and reminds the Church of its responsibility

to help those without power in society to be heard; at times it must become a voice for those who are voiceless (...) faith compels [Christian communities] to work for a just order, in which the good of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated.¹⁶

Here, *The Church* reiterates the conviction that the essence of catholicity subsists on humanity, while globalization is conceived of materially. The challenge is not to humanize globalization, or to allow it to be presented as both a blessing and a curse. Rather, globalization has to be defeated; it must be recognized as a venom that forms a habit of accumulation and an appetite for greed. Globalization is the opposite of catholicity, which serves as the source of God’s goodness, life-giving power and salvation, present everywhere through the power of the Holy Spirit, and yet in constant need of reflection and liberative action.

The challenge to the churches is to realize the essence of catholicity in praxis. Catholicity needs to be rooted in experience with the people in their context. It represents a collective effort, together putting into practice

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *TCTCV* (as note 2), para. 64.

the habit of love, of caring behavior to care, of courage to act to dare, and of serving without counting the cost. To become catholic is to become like the prophets who proclaimed God's judgment on all injustice. In protecting the essence of catholicity, "the witness (*martyria*) of the Church [will] entail, for both individuals and for the community, the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom."¹⁷ This commitment is exemplified by the engagement of the martyred Bishop Alberto Ramento.

4. Conclusion

While the theological conversation continues to deepen the understanding and widen the cooperation of Churches, these signs of visible unity offer an important opportunity to reiterate the commitment of individual churches as Pilgrims for Justice and Peace. Ecumenical texts need to be gathered, harvested and re-affirmed such that they become flesh and blood in the lives of the churches, allowing as Christ's presence to reveal the real essence of catholicity. The practical and programmatic expressions that have been identified in the on-going dialogue have emphasized the following: capacity building, establishing churches as sanctuary for migrants, putting pressure on governments which violate human rights, and developing solidarity networks in response to globalization, to name but a few. The challenge is to move beyond theological understanding to embrace a shared ethical perspective. In May 1999, Bishop Alberto Ramento put it like this:

The challenge is to transform the society into a new heaven and new earth (...). Are we willing to make steps forward and be counted remembering that doing so would mean carrying our cross? (...). To carry one's cross means denying ourselves to the luxury of life we now enjoy. It means fighting for justice even when we ourselves would be treated unjustly. It means to take the risk of being accused as communists because we sided with the oppressed; because we recognize Jesus in the least of our brethren.¹⁸

¹⁷ *TCTCV*, para. 65.

¹⁸ Franz Segbers/Peter-Ben Smit (eds), *Catholicity in Times of Globalization. Remembering Alberto Ramento, Martyred Bishop of Workers and Peasants* (Lucerne: Exodus, 2011), 79–80.

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Zusammenfassung

Katholizität und Globalisierung sind zwei Schlüsselbegriffe, die die Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union, die amerikanische Episkopalkirche als Teil der *Anglican Communion* und die Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Kirchen, die durch das Bonner Abkommen (1931) in Sakramentsgemeinschaft miteinander stehen, zu einem anhaltenden theologischen Gespräch anregen. In dieses Gespräch wurde die Kommission für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung des Ökumenischen Rat der Kirchen (ÖRK) in Form ihres Dokuments «The Church: Towards a Common Vision» einbezogen. Dieser Beitrag benennt die Konvergenzen im Verständnis von Katholizität, die in den behandelten Dokumenten des ÖRK, den Gesprächsergebnissen der genannten Kirchen in Sakramentsgemeinschaft sowie in den Dokumenten der Iglesia Filipina Independiente zu finden sind. Der Test für die lebendige Umsetzung des Wesens von Katholizität liegt nach Ansicht des Autors in der Teilnahme der Kirchen am Kampf der Menschen im Kontext der Globalisierung. Er schliesst daraus, dass das Gespräch über theologische Inhalte hinausgehen und die Kirchen sich den ethischen Herausforderungen stellen sollten.

Key Words – Schlüsselwörter

Globalization – Catholicity – Vision – Convergence – Justice