

ASIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: Morality, Culture, and Spirituality: Collision or Collaboration—
The Phenomenon of Filipino People Power
- Convenor: Leo D. Lefebure, Fordham University
- Presenter: Ma. Christina A. Astorga, Loyola School of Theology
and Ateneo de Manila University
- Respondent: James Bretzke, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

The meeting of the Asian Theology Invited Group began with a presentation by Professor Ma. Christina A. Astorga on the complex series of interrelationships among morality, culture, and spirituality in the development of people power in the Philippines from 1983 to 2001. According to Astorga, spirituality can infuse morality with depth and urgency, and it can also help to shape cultural values in the realm of ultimacy and transcendence. Morality in turn presents norms and demands to spirituality and culture, such as authenticity, coherence, fidelity, and integrity. The interrelationships among these dimensions, however, can bring about collision and conflict as well.

Astorga found the reasons why people power was necessary in the structures and systems of Filipino life, especially economic inequity, political patronage, and elite democracy. People power I (leading to the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986) and people power II (the protests against Joseph Estrada in 2001) arose from below and challenged the entrenched authoritarianism of the society. Rooted in faith and prayer, people power on each occasion opened out into the dimension of transcendent mystery by being eucharistic, gracious, and empowering. The leadership of the Catholic Church and especially of Jaime Cardinal Sin, was a decisive factor in each movement. The so-called people power III in the spring of 2001 constituted an attempt by supporters of the deposed President Estrada to wreak havoc on the nation. Astorga also showed a ten-minute video that portrayed significant events in 1986 and 2001.

James Bretzke, S.J., responded to Astorga's presentation very positively. He affirmed her analysis of the interlocking aspects of morality, culture, and spirituality at work in the Philippines. He noted similarities to experiences in South Korea, where he was teaching during the events of 1986. He stressed the importance of discernment of spirits in distinguishing the authentic movements of people power I and II from the deceptive and exploitative effort of people power III. He also proposed the terms "social grace" and "social spirituality" to name the inbreaking of the reign of God in people power I and II, and called for greater collaboration with social scientists in naming the complex interchange among morality, culture, and spirituality.

In the discussion, one questioner asked about dealing with Filipino students who are shaped by spiritualities that are not liberating. Astorga agreed with Bretzke's call for critical discernment in challenging certain ideas, such as pover-

ty being the will of God. Another participant asked about the role of the church hierarchy, especially Cardinal Sin, and Astorga noted that the Catholic Church is the only institution that can stand up to the government as a social, cultural and moral force. Cardinal Sin's support was crucial to people power I and II. In the aftermath of people power III, he, in the name of the Catholic Church, made a public apology for any action or behavior of its leaders and clergy that may have alienated the poor, who largely constituted people power III.

It was pointed out in the discussion that the Filipino concept of experience of the authority can be used either positively or negatively. The people's adherence to the hierarchy of authority and its force is exemplified in their decisive response to the call of Cardinal Sin for people power. However, political patronage, one of the chief social ills in the country, is founded upon this same concept of authority as hierarchical.

One participant asked whether the Filipino people are aware, first, of the reality of social sin in the conditions that gave rise to people power and, second, of social grace in the conditions that made people power possible. In response to the question, it was said that theological interventions such as the paper presented can help make people aware of the reality of social sin and grace. Also, the exposure to actual conditions raises the levels of consciousness and reflection on the realities of social sin and grace.

A final question was asked regarding the grace-filled role of women in people power. The contention was made that not only women are imbued with the social virtues and human qualities that made people power gracious or nonviolent. In response, it was pointed out the gracious role of women in people power comes from the perceived role of women in Filipino culture as life-givers, caregivers, mediators of compassion, intercessors, and peacemakers. It was, however, noted that women seem to be catapulted to power because of their links or relations with the political power of men: Cory Aquino was the wife of Benigno Aquino and Gloria Macapagal is the daughter of a former president.

LEO D. LEFEBURE

*Fordham University
New York City, New York*