



The emergence of evangelical power in the Philippines: a case study of a Born Again denomination religious group in the Philippines

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Abstract: The anti-drug war waged in the Philippines since 2016 is supported by a majority of the population. A number of former President Rodrigo Duterte's allies are defending the reinstatement of capital punishment in the archipelago. Their arguments are based on theological and political considerations. They are instruments of a new type of evangelical power in the archipelago. Based on the specific case of Born Again denomination group and part of the results of a survey conducted from 2019 until now, the article is rooted in an educational science perspective. It describes the implementation of evangelical power, as well as some of its characteristics. It also examines the change in the relationship to knowledge brought about by the implementation of evangelical doctrine. Furthermore, it examines the question of the truth of the self, which has been taken over by civil authority.

Keywords: Born Again - Philippines - conversion - War on Drugs - truth

The emergence of evangelical power in the Philippines: a case study of a Born Again denomination religious group in the Philippines

In the Philippines, evangelical groups have long been on the rise and their influence has been increasingly visible both in low-income neighborhoods and even in the political discourse. The presence of Evangelical Christian activism (Cornelio, 2018) has been manifesting since the inauguration of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 and will undoubtedly extend during the term of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the late dictator Marcos Sr., who has recently been elected following the support of the religious leaders of these groups. Thus, today the proportion of the population who practice a reformed religion, whether Pentecostal, Baptist, or Evangelical, is 9–10%, a proportion that has doubled in the last 15 years (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2018).

Richard Rorty, a pragmatic philosopher, states that liberal democracy can no longer function if authoritarian language carrying a redemptive dimension interferes in political expression (1999). However, we must admit that in the Philippines, as Filipina philosopher Tracy Llanera points out, these two aspects coexist alongside, and even feed, each other (2016). In the liberal Philippine society, the authoritarian religious discursive configuration (Foucault, 1976) is visible. Thus, theologico-political discourses in state institutions are increasingly common and constitute a central ideological device in the discourses accompanying government measures and the need to establish increasingly coercive forms of social control, as we shall see from the example of the fight against drug trafficking and consumption during the mandate of Rodrigo Duterte.

The context of the Philippines is an ideal one in which to study the rise of evangelical power, as most of the population is monotheistic, with 79.5% Catholic, 10–11% Muslim, and 9% of the population classified as "diverse Christian groups" (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2018) making it prime ground

for evangelization. The 9–10% of the population who worship in a Reformed tradition are categorized, according to national statistics, in 1) local megachurches such as *Iglesia ni Cristo* or *Dating Daan*, 2) international neo-Pentecostal churches or independent groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses or the Church of Latter-day Saints, or 3) groups with a more evangelical bent such as Kaharian ni Hesus or Born Again. Some of these groups are organized and institutionalized, while others resist affiliation and assignment to a group. To complete the Philippine religious landscape, it is necessary to add that 4% of the population practice a spirituality called animism (*Ibid.*) and that atheism is almost inexistent in the archipelago.

The diversity of this religious landscape is naturally linked to the history of colonial and post-colonial domination that the Filipino people have lived through and are still living through. The socio-historian Renato Constantino points out that the policies of *reducción* carried out in the 18th century, which consisted of the massive relocation of rural communities into organized villages, were the result of cross dynamics, carried out by both the colonial government and the Catholic religious authority (Constantino, 1968). The newly formed towns or *población* were thus organized around work in the rice fields and the place of worship, with the aim of "creating a new civilization in the Philippines, common towns, where there is a square, the church, the town hall, the school." (Gutierrez, 2000) Between evangelization and exploitation through forced labor, the relocation and gathering of rural communities in the 18th century founded the basis of the capitalist economy in the archipelago through the exploitation of native people by Spaniards and the management and speculation on possible food surplus productions, while keeping the vestiges still visible of a feudal organization through the possession of lands by the missionaries, in particular the Augustinians and the Dominicans. Constantino argues that, originally owned by the Catholic Church then by large families during the modern era, these lands have never been relinquished and are the reflection of feudalism still running in the country, which traces its

roots in a form of politico-religious colonization in which the Roman Catholic Church has played a major role (Constantino, 1974).

The coming of the Americans in the early 20th century wrought radical changes in the educational system of the Philippines. Under Spanish colonial rule, the teaching of faith and religion was required or compulsory. However, in the American public school system, this was prohibited. A Department of Education was created by the Organic Act of 1900 proposed by Governor General William Howard Taft, creating an authority to control all schools in the country and prohibit religious instruction (Pilario et al., 2015). Another obstacle to the spread of the Catholic faith appeared during this time: the arrival of approximately 600 Protestant preachers from the United States working as teachers, assigned to all parts of the country to teach according to the American model. The prohibition of the teaching of religion in the public school system led to a major conflict between the Catholic Church and the American civil government. The superintendent of Manila at that time even ordered the banning of devotions and the removal of crucifixes, religious emblems, sacred images, etc., from the school, a move clearly against the Catholic faith but serving the interest of Protestantism. This was the beginning of conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed groups, marking a new era of evangelization in the archipelago, with the creation of private religious schools, local churches, the arrival of Pentecostal groups from the United States, yielding the current diverse religious landscape of the archipelago.

Conflicts and misunderstandings between the Catholic Church, civil authorities, and reformed groups are not a recent phenomenon in the Philippines. However, particularly during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, a reconfiguration of these conflicts—always to the detriment of the Catholic Church and in favor of the reformed groups—has gradually taken hold, substantially modifying the ways in which power is exercised.

For example, the Born Again Christian Evangelical group has been increasingly visible in the Philippine Senate with four out of 24 senators being Born Again Christians. One of them is Manny Pacquiao, a boxing champion who became a senator in 2016 and a devout Born Again Christian. In 2019, he introduced Senate Bill 189,¹ a bill to reinstate the death penalty for hate crimes and drug trafficking. He constantly referred to the Bible to defend its legality, both civil and religious, as in a June 2020 statement in the Senate:

Pero gusto ko lang po i-explain sa lahat na ang pag-reinstate ng death penalty sa bansa natin [ay] hindi po illegal, hindi po labag sa mata ng gobyerno, sa mata ng Panginoon dahil, Biblically, allowed po ang gobyerno, the authority which is established by God, to impose [death penalty], especially [on heinous crimes] (Ariate, 2019).

The senator's expression reveals how a theologico-political power gradually takes over the Philippine archipelago, especially since the election of Duterte. Pacquiao develops his position based on his different affiliations: his status as a senator and his being a devout Born Again Christian.

This article aims to study the way in which the Philippine society, which has long been influenced by the Catholic institution, is becoming more and more permeable to Evangelical groups. This study uses the case of a Born Again Christian group and the war on drugs led by the government of Rodrigo Duterte. To understand the local context, I first detail how the Roman Catholic Church whose faithful are increasingly converting to a Born Again Christian denomination, finds the war on drugs, be an insurmountable challenge, which tends to discredit it. The paper will then show how the war on drugs is the expression of a theologico-political power centered on the concept of *kaligtasan* or salvation, based on the analysis of the discourse produced by the Philippine government and congress. Finally, I present the results of a field survey conducted from 2019 to 2021 in a Born Again neighborhood church,

¹ SBN 189: *Death Penalty for Drug Trafficking & Manufacturing*, <https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/3040427189!.pdf>

analyzing both an individual journey of conversion to the group and the discourse developed by the pastors during preaching. I conclude by analyzing the educational dimensions of conversion leading us to glimpse the exercise of theologico-political power in the Philippines through the prism of the forming of the self and the impossibility of access to the self.

1. The Roman Catholic Church in crisis: a lack of credibility due to an ambivalent position

When Rodrigo Duterte was inaugurated in 2016, the government launched a major national campaign called *Laban sa Droga* [War on Drugs], which provoked strong reactions from Catholic religious representatives. The latter protested human rights violations, police violence, and the government's witch hunt against drug users and sellers, which has resulted in more than 7,000 people being killed in police operations (Amnesty International UK, 2020).

Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church, which has not ceased to criticize the Philippine government and the war on drugs since 2016, has in an ambivalent position towards this campaign: it has indeed contributed to the development of the negative perception of drugs, through the moral position it has held for decades, but also through its way of dealing with this problem. Very early on, the Roman Catholic Church referred to rehabilitation and care (Hechanova, 2019). Religious people have indeed developed strategies to fight against drugs: treatment first, then moral conduct to follow. Others have worked with the police to denounce people who are using drugs. The government, however, has opted for a total criminalization of drug use.

Sociologist Jayeel Cornelio argues that the criminalization of drug use can also be seen as an outgrowth of the Church's moral perception of drugs as a sin, which has become political. The Church, even though it is against the drug war policy of the present government, may have contributed to the view that drugs are a moral problem and not a social problem. Thus, when the Church takes a position against the war on drugs, it has little credibility (Cornelio & Medina, 2019). Since 1970, the Catholic

Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has addressed the drug problem in some 20 pastoral letters. The expression could be divided into three successive phases: destruction of youth, health, and disintegration of social morality.

Cornelio stresses that, in the 1970s, the Church focused its expression on the destruction of the youth; the pastoral letter of 1971,² in particular, states that the Church is concerned about the destruction of the youth and thus the health of the population. The 1971 pastoral letter identifies drugs and pornography as two scourges that are destroying youth, with drugs being the devil that destroys the nation. The letter thus emphasizes saving the souls of drug addicts, speaking of spiritual corruption. The following 1972 letter stresses the guilt of the seller and producer who destroy the lives of the youth. The Church accuses drug-addicted youth of being corrupted by Western values and considers them unpatriotic, or enemies of the nation. The expression of the Church then changed in the 1990s: during the dictatorship and the decade that followed, drugs were not mentioned in the 74 pastoral letters issued it was not until 1997 that a letter on the drug crisis was issued with a completely different expression. This letter puts drug use in perspective alongside the development of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the health problems related to its use. HIV can be transmitted through contaminated needles, among other things, and the Church has capitalized on this to promote its moralizing discourse against drugs. The letter calls on the government to use the legal arsenal to eradicate this scourge (*Ibid.*).

The appearance of the Church's new form of expression on drugs under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte is noteworthy. Pastoral letters express the disintegration of social morality. According to the Church, the war on drugs is a sign that social morality is disappearing and moral values are disintegrating. This is a new expression against the war on drugs. Still, a few months before the 2016 elections, the Church had suggested in a pastoral letter to support any anti-drug initiative to enable the

² Full text: <http://cbcponline.net/list-of-pastoral-statements>

police and government authorities to prevent drug trafficking, arrest drug dealers, crack down drug syndicates and cartels, and ensure that seized drugs are not used or sold again. The Church has relentlessly promoted a religious discourse leading to moral disgust, which has since been translated into a policy of total criminalization of drug use (*Ibid.*)

The moral policy against drugs is based on the discernment between what is good or not for a society and what constitutes transgression or sin (Meier, 2016). However, the Church formulates now a narrative who seeks for compassion for an enemy that it has helped created through its renunciation of drugs. This response seems to be too weak and is not credible anymore (Cornelio, 2018). The change in discourse on political events is not well grounded as it contradicts its previous expression.

It is important to consider two other features, highlighted by Filipino philosopher Tracy Llanera, that show a weakening of the power of the Catholic Church in the last decade in the Philippines: from the perspective of modernization, this institution tends to seek a clear separation from the state as respect for the Philippine Constitution. Long criticized for meddling too much in political life, it now faces reproach and insults from the Philippine government and former President Rodrigo Duterte, who did not hesitate to call the pope “a son of a bitch” in 2015. Relations between the government and the Catholic institution have therefore become antagonistic, and the recent scandals of corruption and pedophilia faced by the Catholic Church only intensify this rift (Llanera, 2019).

The ambivalent position towards drugs, the desire for a clear separation from the State, and the scandals weaken the Roman Catholic Church as a possible counterpower to the civil authority. This institution, a major force in ousting the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, is now considered a second-rate counterpower in just over thirty years. Nonetheless, this is a nuanced statement. Recall that the Church remains very much rooted in the local neighborhoods and is the bearer of an important popular infatuation: the idea that the next pope could be the Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio

Tagle (Radde-Antweiler, 2018).

The weakening of the Catholic Church's force as a counterpower signifies a new discursive configuration and a redistribution of religious and political power in the Philippines—a theologico-political power (Foucault, 1975) —which benefit new groups. These groups are becoming part of the political discourse, particularly in legislative work, giving rise to a new legal discourse that is increasingly visible in the archipelago, especially, I argue, in the context of the war on drugs.

2. *Kaligtasan* (Salvation) and the War on Drugs

One of the main manifestations of this theologico-political power is the war on drugs led by the Duterte government. The proposal to reinstate capital punishment, backed by a Born Again Christian senator, falls within this framework to eliminate drug sellers and repeat users (Cabbuag, 2017). To understand this context, it is important to know that when Rodrigo Duterte took office in June 2016, he ordered the police force to kill anyone suspected of using or selling drugs (Human Rights Watch, 2017), and that to avoid being killed, people who use or sell drugs were urged to turn themselves in [*sumuko*] to the authorities to be taken care of. Those who did turn themselves in largely avoided being shot by law enforcement in extra-judicial killings (Reyes, 2017).

Senator Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, close to the Born Again group and often named as one of the leading architects of this war (Kennert & Eligh, 2019)³ due to his former position as Chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), described the first months of the anti-drug campaign as follows:

When I was the National Police chief, I lead the war on drugs, according to our record we were able to have 1.3 million drug users and drug pushers surrendered [sic.] to the folds of the law and most of them have a new life. [translated by me]

*Nung ako'y nag-chief [sa] PNP, nung ako'y nag-lead sa war on drugs, record po 'yan: we were able to have 1.3 million drug users and drug pushers surrendered (sic) to the folds of the law at karamihan sa kanila nagbagong buhay.*⁴

When the Roman Catholic Church criticized the war on drugs, Senator dela Rosa replied:

We did this to show you that what we are doing is right. We are pro-God then you say that we are theatrics. It's like you're the only one holy as you are priests, and us we are sinners. It's like we do not deserve to hold a Bible and carry a rosary? [translated by us]

Ginawa na nga namin ito lahat para ipakita sa inyo na totoo ang aming ginagawa...kami ay maka-Diyos tapos sabihin niyo theatrics. Wow. Kayo lang ang banal, porke't kayo ang mga pari, kami mga makasalanan na, hindi kami karapat-dapat maghawak ng Bibliya at magsuot ng rosaryo?⁵

Senator dela Rosa was critical of the Roman Catholic Church and described his action using the word *maka-Diyos*, which means to acting according to God's desire. Rodrigo Duterte also used this word in his public communications when talking about his faith, such as in 2019 when he gave an interview with his spiritual advisor Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, founder of the Evangelical church Kingdom of Jesus and a self-proclaimed son of God (Brillantes & Lorenzo, 2021).

You might think that just because I quarrel with the cardinals and bishops, that I am irreverent, that I could be a sacrilegious guy. Pastor knows me, I am a deeply religious person, that's the truth. And

⁴ CNN Philippines Senatorial Forum, Dec. 2, 2018, 24:12-24:4. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/CNNPhilippines/videos/310055523169445/>

⁵ CNN Philippines Staff (2018), "PNP Chief: Use of religion items in anti-drug campaign not theatrics," 2018.

my guiding light, Pastor knows that, is the Bible.⁶

During the war on drugs, the government has placed particular emphasis on the possibility of salvation for drug addicts: drug addicts can save their lives by surrendering to the authorities in door-to-door operations, known as *tokhang*, conducted by the national police. The word used by the government is *kaligtasan*, which means salvation in a religious context. These *tokhang* operations are defined by Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa as follows:

What’s the essence of *tokhang*? (Knock on their door and plead with the drug personality saying, “Please stop with the drugs and change your life for the better.” We don’t shoot the drug personalities immediately [translated by me].

What’s the essence of *tokhang*? Knock and plead, *katukin ang bahay ng drug personality at pakiusapan na*, “Please, huminto ka na. Mag bagong buhay ka.” *Hindi namin binabari agad ang mga drug personalities.*⁷

Jayeel Cornelio has studied how religious institutions fare in times of crisis and how such crises gives rise to evangelical power such as in the Philippines. According to Cornelio, the war on drugs is an expression of the religious in the political, which he calls public theologization. He has analyzed the response of different religious groups to this war and found that this response is not uniform but rather polymorphous (Cornelio, 2019). According to the sociologist, this response to the war on drugs, whether it is support for or denunciation of the operations carried out, depends strongly on the way in which the drug user is perceived: Is he a sinner? Is drug use linked to more general social problems? Where does the responsibility of the user lie? These in turn raise the question of how this war is perceived in the minds of

⁶ See the full interview: <https://ops.gov.ph/presidential-speech/interview-of-president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-with-pastor-apollo-c-quiboloy-3/>

⁷ “Dela Rosa: We’re Waging War on Drugs because We value life,” *Inquirer*, en ligne, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/938247/bato-dela-rosa-pnp-drug-war-killings-human-rights-life-drug-lords>, 2017.

believers and religious representatives, especially when one notes that anti-drug operations are supported by 88% of the nation's population (Curato (dir.), 2017). There is thus a certain discrepancy between the discourse produced by Catholic representatives and the real experience of the faithful, who do not seem to see any contradiction between supporting the drug war and living an authentic faith (Cornelio & Medina, 2019). This shows a failure of religious representatives: The usual response to evil has become judgment; there is no compassion. It is a failure of faith.

According to Cornelio, the believer who supports the war on drugs has an idea of justice in mind. For such believer, justice is associated with protection through the punishment of those who break the ideal life in society. There may therefore be coherence in the mind of the believer who supports Rodrigo Duterte and his drug war, but this implies that the morality and the message of togetherness are modified. Faced with this failure of faith, the Church has reacted by taking a stand against the war on drugs, while representatives of reformed religious groups have given their support, even to the Senate, as we have seen with faithful members of the Born Again Christian group.

There appears to be a problem with the transmission and religious education in the parishes: the values distilled by the Church are not put into practice, and the Church is content to give voting instructions without really proposing that these values be put into practice in daily life. In other words, there is no space for thought offered to the believers to be able to understand the social issues that give rise to the war on drugs. On the one hand, the Catholic Church is weakened and fails to promote the implementation of its values; on the other hand, other groups clearly support the government's campaign.

This analysis that aims to explain the issue is based on the analysis of different groups and on a global sociological perspective. Thus, against the diverse religious landscape of the Philippines, I have conducted a survey on a local scope, the methodology and results of which will be presented here.

3. Survey conducted in a local Church (2019–2021)

In a survey conducted from 2019 to 2021, I decided to focus on a particular Born Again Christian Evangelical group because of the presence of some of its representatives in the Senate such as Manny Pacquiao. The objective of this research was to capture the educational dimensions of Born Again Christian evangelicalism, based on a local church. The discipline of reference is educational sciences.

The Born Again Christian group in the Philippines is elusive in its form, as the term is used interchangeably to describe both a group of Evangelical churches founded by Pastor Horace Hockett in the United States and a non-homogeneous group of small local churches. In the Philippines, to say that one is a Born Again Christian means that one has accepted Christ by surrendering one's life to His plans.

This Evangelical movement emerged in the late 1930s in the Philippines and gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, its golden age. From the 2000s onwards, Born Again Christian churches have grown by targeting young people in schools (Tan, 2015). These churches can be found in many places, especially in rural or poor urban areas or in areas not reached by the Catholic Church. The physical structures of these churches, which often look more like chapels, are not as inviting as the personal interaction of pastors among workers. Whether they are small house churches, or garage churches in some cases, or small congregations, these groups offer personalized attention to the spiritual and earthly needs of the people who attend. Very little research has been done on this intangible group, so defining it properly has been difficult.

A non-scholarly article published by the Department of Anthropology at Ateneo de Manila University states that the foundation of the faith of Born Again Christians is John 3:3: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God'." In terms of this religious conversion, *born again* or the new birth does not refer to the physical resurrection experienced by Jesus Christ, but rather to a new birth in a spiritual realm, experienced by those who receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The faith of Born Again Christians is based on a personal

relationship with Christ.

To investigate the educational dimensions underpinning the Born Again Christian Evangelical faith, I conducted ethnographic research in a local church in Manila whose leaders wanted to evangelize the residents of a very poor neighborhood. I had worked in the said district as an international volunteer from 2015 to 2017. I chose two ways to collect data: by conducting research interviews with some of its members and by listening to sermons aimed at members of this group.

I first conducted non-structured interviews with seven members of this group. I then conducted semi-structured interviews. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the interviews, which were carried out in the native language, Tagalog, or in English, from August 2020 to February 2021, face-to-face or by video conference, depending on existing COVID-19 restrictions in Metro Manila. To analyze the interviews, I relied on a qualitative and structural content analysis method used in the field of education (Bourgeois & Piret, 2007) allowing for the inclusion of a biographical dimension as well as the contribution of the life stories of the interviewees. This method is based on, among other things, the search for disjunctions, the identification of transformative moments, and the study of temporalities in the life stories collected. The moments of conversion to Evangelical Protestantism and departure from the Catholic Church emerged as pivotal moments in the non-directive interviews, thereby corresponding to intense moments of formal, informal, and non-formal education.

I also collected data by listening to, transcribing, and analyzing about 20 pastors' sermons. These sermons were transcribed in the source language, Tagalog or English, from December 2020 to March 2021. The aim of this data collection was not to reconstruct the theology of the Born Again Christian group. I looked for central and redundant ideas that appeared in them. They are indeed an intermingling of political and religious discourse: on the one hand, they give information about a way of life and about the Kingdom of God on Earth; on the other hand, they give information about the relationship to God

and the spiritual life of the Christian.

The research is anchored in the educational sciences and therefore calls upon several disciplines—sociology, philosophy, history, and anthropology—but always keeping at its very core the dialectical link between education and evangelicalism, whatever the disciplines of reference. The data I collected were analyzed both in terms of sensible experience, through the interviews conducted, and discourse, through the attention paid to the preaching. I will now detail the results of this survey; in particular, the moment of conversion as well as the analysis of the preaching.

3.1. The moment of conversion to the Born Again Christian group

Megachurches may sometimes use charity to expand its institution such as by giving help or offering services to people they wish to convert (Cornelio, 2017). I thought it would be interesting to place the moment of conversion in the context of life trajectories in order to highlight other elements than the mere fact of benefiting from charity. I will present here one example, among others, to show the plurality of reasons that can explain the conversion to a Born Again Christian group.

One participant, who gave permission for the interview data to be published, explained that she was introduced to the Born Again Christian group by her neighbor who was picking up free school supplies given by the religious group. This participant, Gloria (not her real name), lives in a public cemetery in Manila and is very poor. She is 61 years old and her main source of income is cleaning the graves when families visit their deceased. Gloria looks after about 20 graves and is paid 500 PHP (7 USD) per year per grave. Her annual income is about 200 USD, which she supplements with donations from various assistance organizations working in Manila's public cemetery. Gloria is food insecure on a daily basis and has made scavenging (*sikap*) her lifeblood.

She explains that after collecting the school supplies, her neighbor suggested that she convert to

the religious group. However, at that time, she did not understand the way this Born Again Christian group uttered prayers with weeping and wailing. She adds that she was challenged by the form of the prayers, songs, and weeping, and that she mocked the group by parodying their name “*Buang Again*” (crazy again). One may therefore wonder why she made the decision to convert, beyond material considerations. She talks about it in these words:

But now that I've experienced that, I'm one of them too, I understand why they cry, why they sing. I have experienced it while we were singing. We worshiped; the song seems to be in my heart. It was just that we were doing worship at the Sunday service then, suddenly there was a song, suddenly my tears started to flow, and then our pastor, he turned his back—because here I am, there's my pastor, he's facing there. But suddenly when I was crying, he spoke: "Sister Gloria, the Lord has forgiven you." I cried during the song because we were worshipping then. It's like I was taken there by the song. [translated by me]

Pero ngayon na naranasan ko yun na, isa na rin ako sa kanila, naintindihan ko na kung bakit sila umiiyak, bakit sila kumakanta. Naranasan ko na habang kumakanta kami. Nagwo-worship kami, yung kanta parang umano sa puso ko na. Basta nagwo-worship kami noon Sunday service noon, bigla na lang may kanta, biglang tumulo yung luha ko, tapos yung pastor naming, nakatalikod siya—kasi eto 'ko, nando 'n yung pastor ko, do 'n siya nakaharap. Pero bigla siyang, nung umiiyak ako, nagsalita na: “Ate Gloria pinatawad ka na ni Lord.” Iniyakan ko yung kanta, kasi nagwo-worship kami noon. Parang nadala ko doon sa kanta.⁸

The way the pastor addresses the participant using the word *ate* [elder sister] is interesting to note. It is a word that is used in the street to address an older woman or in the family to refer to older women. It is

⁸ Excerpt from a non-directive interview conducted on 16 February 2021 with Gloria, in Manila. The purpose of this interview was to collect data on the moment of the respondent's conversion to the Born Again group. The interview was conducted in Tagalog.

not used in a formal situation, however, as it may be disrespectful. This is what Gloria says about it:

Because, in Catholicism, even if you say you are a member of a group there, I have never seen, never experienced, what Born Again is doing. You are really their family, they treat you like family. Everyone, almost every time you go to church, they all call you "mom" or "ate". We have the same mother but the love is really there, the family is there, even though the Catholic Church is the other rich [translated by me]

Kasi, sa Katoliko, maski sabihin mo pang member ka ng isang grupo doon, hindi ko nakita, hindi ko naranasan, yung ginagawa ng Born Again. Pamilya ka talaga nila, pamilya ang turing sa 'yo. Lahat, halos tuwing magsisimba ka, lahat sila "nanay" o "ate" ang tawag sa 'yo. Pare-pareho kaming nanay pero talagang nandoon yung love, nandoon yung family na, kahit na yung iba nga pangmayaman yung Katolikong Church.⁹

Gloria finds a familiarity in this group, a closeness that she did not find in the Catholic Church, which she says is for the rich. She explains that at first, she did not understand the format of worship using crying, singing, dancing and that she has changed her perspective and has experienced feeling God's presence during the contemplative moments. She began to build a relationship with God, which helps her in her daily life to overcome her difficulties:

Then, I will admit to you, I tried to use drugs. Yes, I remember, yes, didn't I tell you? But I did that when I avoided cigarettes, I avoided drugs. They say, once you taste drugs, you can't leave. No, it's a lie. Pray for him. The problems we have in life, if you are struggling, just pray, "Lord." Or if you are sick, "Lord, I don't like this feeling. I know only you can help me, only you can get rid of this illness of mine." Or "You are the only one who can rid me of my vice, remove it from me. I don't want it anymore." Then one day you will wake up, you don't want all the vices, which is what I experienced. I can shout at him, testify, right, testify that when you want God to be there, Christ is with you, God is with you in your life, you can do everything without difficulty. Look, during the pandemic, we never experienced that we didn't have anything to eat or anything. No matter what, you are there. [translated by me]

⁹ *Ibid.*

Tapos, aaminin ko sa ‘yo na, nag-try akong gumamit ng drugs. Oo, natandaan ko, oo, di ba sinabi ko sa ‘yo. Pero nagawa ko ‘yon nang sabay iniwasan ko ang sigarilyo, iniwasan ko ang drugs. Sabi nila, once na tumikim ka ng drugs, hindi ka makakaalis na. No, it’s a lie. Pag-pray mo siya. Yung mga problema natin sa buhay, kung nahihirapan ka, ipag-pray mo lang, “Lord.” O kaya kung may sakit ka, “Lord, ayoko nitong nararamdaman ko. Alam ko ikaw lang ang makakatulong sa akin, ikaw lang ang makakaalis sa akin nitong ganitong karamdaman ko.” O “Ikaw lang ang makakaalis sa akin ng bisyo ko na ‘to, alisin mo sa ‘kin ‘to. Ayoko na nito.” Then one day magigising ka, ayaw mo na lahat ng bisyo, which is naranasan ko. Puwede ko siyang isigaw, i-testimony ko, right, i-testimony na kapag ginusto mo na nandiyan ang Diyos, kasama mo si Kristo, kasama mo ang Diyos sa buhay mo, magagawa mo lahat ng hindi ka nahihirapan. Look, sa pandemic, hindi namin naranasan kahit papa’no na wala kaming kakainin or ano. Kahit papa’no, nandiyan ka.¹⁰

She also echoes this idea of the strength of the relationship she was able to build with God to cope with her problems, recalling a police raid in 2016. By then, Gloria had been a convert for almost three years:

It is really necessary that you really surrender all of yourself to the Lord. Give up... accept Jesus as your Lord and personal savior of your life. That's ok, because back then, didn't my son get out of the precinct, that's where his case was. Then when there was a raid in our area, with drug addicts, with drug lords, wasn't my youngest son with them? Almost got shot. But maybe, my prayer was also heard my noise-noise that's the strength of my prayer. Change the mind of the police, who are there inside [our community], because my grandson is holding my son. I talked to the police, "Sir, why is that..." I said, "They are just sleeping." They didn't even carry my grandson like a dog and returned him to his mother. Because my son is pregnant, he asked me what is the name of your son. I said, "Eric" [not his real name]. That's not the answer to me, so maybe they know who they're going to get, they have a name, that's not the one who got away. They just released the two partners, the two neighbors, and then also, so because of events like that, it seems like they made a promise. Because I promised "Lord, as long as my son can get out, no matter what, I will change my life." I told him, I started reading the Bible.

Talagang kailangan pala na i-surrender mo talaga lahat yung sarili mo kay Lord. Sumuko ah... tanggapin mo si Jesus bilang iyong Lord and personal savior of your life. Gano’n ok, kasi nung, di ba nakalabas yung anak ko sa presinto, dun nga naano yung kaso niya. Tapos nung merong raid do’n sa lugar namin, sa mga drug addict, sa mga drug lord, ‘di ba nasama yung anak kong bunso? Muntik nang mabartil. Pero siguro, dininig din yung dasal ko ang ingay-ingay ko do’n ang lakas ng dasal ko na. Baguhin yung isip ng mga pulis, na nando’n sa loob [ng komunidad namin], dahil hawak nga yung apo ko yung anak ko. Nakausap akong pulis na “Sir bakit gano’n yung...” Sabi ko, “Natutulog lang sila.” ‘Di naman nila ano pati nga yung apo ko binitbit na

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

parang aso e binalik do'n sa nanay. Dahil karga ng anak ko, anya tinanong sa 'kin anong pangalan ng anak mo. Sabi ko, "Eric" [not his real name]. Hindi 'yun ang sagot sa 'kin so siguro alam nila kung sinong yung kukunin nila, may pangalan sila, hindi 'yun nga nakawala. Pinakawalan lang nila yung dalawang magkumpare, yung dalawang magkapitbahay, and then din, so dahil sa mga pangyayari na ganyan parang nahahat nangako. Nangako kasi ako na "Lord, makalabas lang yung anak ko, makaano lang, babaguhin ko yung buhay ko." Sabi ko sa kanya, nagsimula ako ng magbasa ng Bible.¹¹

Gloria credits her prayers and surrendering her life to God as the cause of positive events in her life, namely, her son's release from prison and stopping drug use. She was baptized a year after she started attending the Bible study group.

From Gloria's story, we can see that there are several elements that came into play in her conversion: the fact that she was no longer really linked to a religious group or practice, the conjunction of events that occurred at the time she met the Born Again Christian group, her desire to have a new life, or the presence of the Born Again Christian group in her district, its charity, and evangelical activities. Another element was the closeness and love she found there, which she did not find among Catholics. What determined her conversion is therefore a plurality of elements that can only be expressed through the singularity of her life trajectory.

3.2. Sermons focused on the shift from darkness to light

In addition to the research interviews conducted, I had the opportunity to attend several Born Again Christian church services. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, these services were held online through live streaming on the church's Facebook page. Four pastors took turns preaching from week to week, calling themselves either pastor, *kapatid*, or brother.

I observed that the pastors repeated the same ideas and techniques consistently. I noted the personal way in which the pastors presented themselves to the audience, addressing the [online] viewers directly, such as Pastor Norman: "Good morning! My name is Pastor Norman and welcome to our daily

¹¹ *Ibid.*

word. First, let me greet all of you a blessed new year of 2021. How are you this morning? How was your first week of 2021?"¹²

The pastors used their first names to introduce themselves and engaged with the audience directly with questions or interjections. This was rhetorical, as the preaching was conducted online, so it was impossible for the audience to answer these questions. They all systematically used phrases that imply emotional or family ties, such as "my friends," "my loved ones," or "hello, family," as also indicated by the survey respondents. A message of hope was developed in a triptych: a new beginning is possible, we must submit to God's plans, we become God's envoys on Earth.

3.2.1. A new beginning is possible

The pastors addressed the suffering, and this was a recurring theme in all the preaching. They addressed "those who feel hopeless,"¹³ "the anxious and worried,"¹⁴ preaching that "it is never too late to start again,"¹⁵ and challenging the audience to identify the "uncertainties and challenges that hinder our ability to be happy."¹⁶ The pandemic and the social problems linked to this crisis were recurrent in all the preaching. The pastors associated feelings of suffering and anxiety with the current situation. However, they did not limit the cause of suffering to the present circumstances. They repeatedly mentioned the cumulative suffering, or what we experienced in our lives before the pandemic. The way they described the human condition was by that of a human who has experienced tragedy, a fall, distress, suffering, and has made mistakes. Everyone could relate to this, as we have all experienced difficult events. In the Philippines, living conditions are difficult for a large part of the population, and the use of

¹² Excerpt from a preaching on 9 January 2021, *In the midst of all these Uncertainties, we can put our Hope in God*, preached by Pastor Norman, in the English language, in the studied Born Again parish.

¹³ Excerpt from a preaching of January 6, 2021, *Our hope is alive*. preaching given by pastor Pareja, in English, in the studied Born Again parish.

¹⁴ Extract from a preaching of January 4, 2021, *How to have peace as we move forward this 2021*, preaching given by pastor Jovin, in English, in the studied Born Again parish.

¹⁵ Extract from a preaching of 9 January 2021, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Extract from a preaching of 5 January 2021, *Who is in total control and gives assurance of peace on today's*. preaching given by Pastor Lito, in English, in the studied Born Again parish.

this language may help create this closeness between pastors and listeners. The pastors recognized that human existence is punctuated by suffering, difficulties, and mistakes. However, they did not develop a corrective discourse that would aim to condemn sinners: the dimension of hope was strongly marked. The word “hope” appeared 50 times in the ten sermons. The word “saved” was uttered nine times and the word “savior,” six times. The word “light” was mentioned 43 times and the word “forgiveness,” more than 15 times. There is a kind of opposition between a vision of the fallen man and the saved man that we find in the preaching. What makes it possible to go from the fall to salvation is God. All our problems can be solved by God, because we are the fruit of His creation.

3.2.2. We must submit to God's plans

Can you imagine? If you failed yesterday and you ask for forgiveness, God does not carry it over today? Why? Because his mercies begin anew every morning. If there are times in your life that you don't feel forgiven when you ask for forgiveness, there are only two possibilities: 1) It's the enemy, the devil accusing you of being unworthy. 2) It's maybe because you have been doing the same sin over and over again. But this is not about God's mercies, nor about his forgiveness, this is something for us to take note: Because while we are free to make our own choices, we are not free from the consequences thereof.¹⁷

These are the words of a pastor that are based on Lamentations 3:19–23, which speaks of how misery, distress, or poison bring down our souls and make us lose ourselves. It is God's infinite love—His love, but also His mercy, which is constantly renewed—that gives hope in trouble. The imagery is powerful: the pastor refers to the abandonment of Jerusalem, the consequences of the famine, the corpses that litter the streets, the children eaten by their parents. He challenges the listeners by telling them again that if we are alive and willing to change, God's grace will always be available to us. This

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

change is therefore linked to personal will. If we want to change, we can, because God's grace is always available. To change, we must accept God and especially the plans God has made for our lives.

I noted a saturation on two points: 1) the fact that only Jesus can save us from evil and 2) the level of rhetoric, i.e., the pastors used examples from everyday life, quoted passages from the Bible, and gave messages of hope. They described the darkness, then the light, then the way to move from one situation to the other. Their language was one that spoke of redemptive truth, focused on submission to God's plan for salvation.

3.2.3. By submitting to God , we become God's envoys on Earth

The pastors repeatedly pointed out that the fact that we must know God's plan and act according to it gives each human being a kind of mission: each one can become an envoy of God on Earth. Human beings have a mission, they are the work of God, who has created good works for them to do. He wants us to make the world a better place, and every Christian is an envoy of God. Not all Christians are pastors, but all Christians must be messengers of God.¹⁸

To conclude the presentation of the preaching, I would like to stress that the idea of being sent by God introduces the possibility of having a mission. This insight is important because not only does it set Born Again Christian members in action, but it also reverses the notion that poor or sinful people have nothing to contribute to society. By joining the Born Again Christian group, people who are not recognized or expected to contribute can find a space in which a possibility unfolds. Something is expected of them; they are recognized as people who can act, serve God, and contribute to society. Once again, we find the image of the passage from the shadows to the light.

This expression and conviction of becoming God's messenger on Earth is also repeatedly found in Senator Manny Pacquiao's speech:

¹⁸ Excerpt from a preaching on September 4, 2020, *God has Asked you to Serve Others*. preached by Pastor Norman, in English, in the studied Born Again parish.

God has a purpose. He brings me back into His kingdom to use me to glorify His name, to let the people know that there is God who can raise the people from nothing into something. [...] I want to have friends around me and drinking and have girls beside me, and of course, gambling. [...] I hate to do that anymore, and my heart wants to read the Bible, wants to obey God and that's my heart. That's how God changed my life. [...] If I start to go into politics, I think I believe that I can serve more, I can help more people. [...] When you have Jesus in your life, when you have God in your life, like the thing in this world is not important to your heart. The more important is God in your hear.¹⁹

From these data, I have analyzed several educational dimensions that re-articulate them with the overall context of the Philippines. Two of these dimensions are presented here: the modification of the relationship to knowledge and the status of the Truth *of* the Self [*Vérité du sujet*].

4. Transformation of the relationship to knowledge and status of the Truth *of* the Self

Becoming an envoy of God on Earth is a concern for Bishop Pabillo who belongs to the Philippine Roman Catholic Church. He wonders why believers can see President Duterte as an envoy of God.²⁰ He shows that in the Bible there are two views of how a Christian must relate to authority. The first is the one that says that every Christian must submit to higher authorities. Their authority comes from God and to oppose authority means resisting against a provision established by God. Those who are engaged in such a struggle will receive the punishment they have brought upon themselves²¹ as God must be obeyed

¹⁹ Melanie Arter, “Boxer Manny Pacquiao: God Uses Me to Glorify His Name,” *CBSNews*, online, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/article/melanie-hunter/boxer-manny-pacquiao-god-uses-me-glorify-his-name>, 9 février 2015.

²⁰ Bishop Pabillo, “Why did God gave us Duterte?,” *Rappler*, en ligne, , <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/206219-why-god-give-duterte-bishop-pabillo/>, 1er juillet 2018.

²¹ Romans 13:1–2.

rather than men.²² The other view is that subordination to legal authority is not possible if the latter does not support Peace, Justice, and Truth.²³

To have a better understanding of the establishment of a new type of politico-religious power carried by Evangelical groups, starting from the particular case of the Born Again Christian, I will focus on the transformation of the relationship to knowledge induced by the evangelical doctrine. Additionally, I will examine the status of Truth in the shaping of the Self to elucidate the objective of the educational processes linked to conversion: Does it give access to the Self? What is the educational project underpinning this doctrine?

The Born Again Christian Evangelical group inherits certain elements of the Protestant doctrine. For example, I noted that the rectification of sin does not involve penance or the practice of confession in this group. The abandonment of confession has a very profound educational implication: the relationship between knowledge and power is greatly modified.

In *L'histoire de la sexualité* (*The History of Sexuality*) and in *La volonté de savoir* (*The Will of Knowing*), Michel Foucault demonstrated the investment of the body by the relations of power-knowledge, using the example of confession. The priest is an intercessor between knowledge and the person who confesses, and confession focuses on concupiscence and the flesh. Foucault identified in Saint Augustine's thought, through concupiscence, the dimension of the libido: this is the involuntary part of our sexuality, be it at the level of excitation or orgasm. In our sexuality there comes an involuntary element which is the reproduction of our disobedience to God: this is the original sin. The rectification of sin is therefore performed by the body. Power is exercised as close as possible to the singular dimension of our existence and is invested in the body by producing knowledge about the body

²² Acts 5:29.

²³ Matthew 22:36–38.

(Foucault, 1975). That is to say, the power of the intercessor is exercised through the knowledge extracted from the subject who confesses.

In the Born Again Christian group, the intercessor between the believer and the knowledge is in the back seat, we can indeed point out his relative disappearance. The absolution of sins is achieved neither by acts nor by confessions, but by faith and by putting God at the center of one's life, which transforms the relationship to power. The Born Again Christian believer regains a kind of power in this configuration because one become less dependent on the pastor than the Catholic is on the priest on the question of salvation. The believer becomes capable of reading and interpreting the Bible for oneself. There is a liberation of self-potential, and knowledge is directly available. However, this does not mean that the Self is formed without revealed Truth: encounter with the divinity is always from the point of view of evil, and healing remains necessary.

These two points—the abandonment of confession and direct access to scripture—refocus the practice of faith on the individual. The individual is much more central to Born Again Christianity than to Catholicism. The individual makes a choice to put God at the center of one's life, but this choice is always subject to the status of human beings as God's creation.

This deeply individual characteristic of the practice of faith in this Evangelical group finds its historical roots in Arminianism and the Great Awakenings of the 19th century. Arminianism, as a contestation of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, asserts that every believer can be saved by God in a gratuitous way and not because of good deeds or any other merit, provided that the believer is willing to adhere to this salvation. Salvation is thus affirmed as a sincere desire for God, unconditional and incompressible to acts (Cottret, 2015). The Great Awakening, a reaffirmation of the main doctrines of the Reformers, marked the practice of faith with a strong individualistic tendency, affirming that

Christianity is not a doctrine but a life. Religion is an individual regeneration, which can become the essence and foundation of social reforms (Marin-Lamellet, 2014).

There is thus an symmetry between the status of the subject responsible for one's salvation (*kaligtasan*) by surrendering to God (*sumuko*) and the status of the addict who must surrender to civil authority (*sumuko*) to obtain salvation (*kaligtasan*) and will be punished if one does not acknowledge one's faults. By distilling in their sermons the idea of regeneration of the subject, based on personal choice, it can therefore be said that certain Evangelical groups such as Born Again Christian groups normalize the idea of the personal responsibility of the Self to take charge of themselves, thus relieving civil authority of any responsible intervention.

This individual configuration also raises the question of the objective of the educational process: Can evangelical conversion lead to a form of liberation or to a form of subjection? In other words: Can the Self access oneself and one's own Truth? During the survey, I could observe how the conversion to the Born Again Christian group had changed the lives of the respondents as they found a new role and new responsibilities or entered local solidarity networks. They described with enthusiasm and conviction how they were able to achieve liberation and a new life in a form of self-narration that was often, romanticized.

To elucidate the objective of the educational process of conversion, two facets of Truth must be considered in the process of construction of the Self. The first is the Truth held by the power or the institution, to which the Self must submit under the gaze of the benevolent master, the policeman, the pastor, or the priest. It is a Truth *of* the subject to which the latter must conform with a model of educational conversion: Interiority adapts to a well-defined exteriority, and the Self cannot deploy itself (Moreau, 2018). In the case of religion, the Truth *of* the subject is that of possession by a divine transcendence and by the power that represents it: Human beings are the fruit of divine Creation, and

this assigns them a special status in the World; they must conform to an external Truth in order to obtain salvation. The second facet is the Truth *about* the subject, which manifests itself “in that capacity of the subject to experience that he is changing by being educated.” (*Ibid.*) Here, experience allows for transformation and educational metamorphosis is possible, provided that it can be analyzed with a look at oneself.

In Born Again Christian Evangelicalism, the external Truth is given once and for all by the pastor and the religious discourse: One must submit to God's plans and work in His name for his glorification. Thus, we no longer speak of a Truth of which the subject in formation is the artisan, but of a Truth *of* the Self in which the converted person must merge. The emphasis is not placed on the educational dimension and the possible metamorphosis of the subject through education, but on the need to submit to the divine plan. History, whether individual or collective, loses its progressive dimension, and Time remains in some way suspended after the death of Christ, which constitutes the last historical moment conditioning existence. Individual experience is thus no longer valuable and is transcended by the external Truth. The Truth *about* the Self, accessible by the exercise of a subjectivity and the recognition of the value of the singular experience in the metamorphic education, becomes a Truth *of* the subject, recognizing neither the subjectivity nor the value of the singular experience and held by the religious authority: The Self can thus not act by oneself anymore, but according to dogmas expressed by the religious discourse (*Ibid.*). In other words, there is a break with any educational project: Education is no longer thought of as a mean to access the Self in the Born Again Christian Evangelism, because of this change in the regime of Truth. It becomes a drama in which salvation is played out, and existence a staging of God's will that binds us to act in His name. From the metamorphic educational model allowing the deployment of the Self conceived by theorists of the Reformation like Melanchthon, there

is a shift to a model of conversion, in which interiority becomes evil again and must be saved by an authority and no longer by education.

Contact with the divinity is always from the point of view of evil, which is an indispensable condition, perhaps even a prerequisite for establishing a relationship with Christ. Experience, history, and Truth *about* the subject are no longer of value. The therapeutic space offered by the pastors of the Born Again Christian group certainly aims at healing but does not propose a real educational project allowing the liberation of the Self: This therapeutic space is a space of conversion and recognition of evil, healing or aspiration to happiness, or escape from evil being conditioned by the obligation of conversion. In other words, the education of the Self is abandoned.

This therapeutic platform, proposed by the Born Again Christian Evangelical group, is therefore not an educational space, but a space of attachment to a well-defined, non-progressive identity, known to all, namely, the identity of a sinner who must be saved through conversion. Here lies the heart of the objective of the educational process of conversion: the emergence of the Self in this type of evangelism consists therefore in a form of individualization according to the exigencies of power. We find here the two facets of subjection as thought by Foucault in his genealogy of the Self: the attachment to a non-progressive identity and the absence of educational requirement which directs the transformations of the Self according to a necessity of the exercise of power (Ibid.)

This change in the status of Truth allows civil authority, which takes over the Truth *about* the subject, to pose as a remedy for social evil—in this case, drugs in the Philippine archipelago. The government thus establishes an objective of curing the evil, formerly attached to religious authority, which, as we see, struggles in this redefinition of the borders between the civil and the religious. Where the Catholic Church is clearly opposed to the government's taking in hand the nation's salvation by eradicating drug addicts without being able to allow the implementation of its values, some Born Again

Christian Evangelical churches find there interstices to develop and accompany, through discourses and educational practices, increasingly coercive social control measures by accompanying the dispossession of the subject of one's singular history, thus renouncing the education of the self.

This is how President Rodrigo Duterte's mandate, marked by the deployment of ever more oppressive forms of control, can be described as governmentality by salvation, based on the exercise of theologico-political power, whose main manifestation is the dispossession of the Self and the impossibility of accessing one's own Truth. The architecture of this form of governmentality is, as we have seen, enabled and accompanied by discourses and educational practices distilled by Evangelical groups such as Born Again Christian groups.

Conclusion

We have seen that even though the Catholic Church in the Philippines takes a stand against the war on drugs waged by civil authority, the majority of the population remains in favor of the measures taken that target drug addicts.

The example of Manny Pacquiao and the analysis of the evangelical doctrine allow us to understand that the line between civil and religious is redefined when people who join the Born Again Christian Evangelical group can become God's envoys on Earth. We can speak of a theologico-political power that has seized the Truth of the people by dispossessing them again and again of their own appropriations. Manny Pacquiao is not alone, as nearly 30% of Philippine senators belong to an Evangelical or Pentecostal group,²⁴ as well as some members of the former government, such as former Department of Education Secretary Leonor Briones or former Bureau of Immigration Director Jaime Morente.

²⁴ These senators were elected with the following voting percentages: Joel Villanueva (41.39%), Manny Pacquiao (35.6%), Win Gatchalian (33.58%), Bong Revilla (30.92%), Ronald dela Rosa (40.18%), Titto Sotto (38.51%), Cynthia Villar (53.4%).

Demonstrations of this evangelical power can be seen in several places in the world, especially in Brazil with Jair Bolsonaro, who was baptized in the Jordan River by a neo-Pentecostal priest, and in the United States under the mandate of Donald Trump. Evangelical churches have been increasingly popular in the Philippines to the point that the Catholic Church is concerned as it sees many of its followers converting to Pentecostal and Evangelical groups. Some Evangelical communities welcome authoritarian regimes that can impose their individual conservative ethics on a nation, with little regard for human rights. While the first Protestant Churches deliberate in Synod, some Evangelical Churches, like the Born Again Christian Church, are under a regime of leaders or providential men, whom they believe to be clothed with a special anointing of the Holy Spirit. This brings them closer to certain political leaders. These churches no longer distinguish between civil and religious and are approaching the notion of a theocratic state.

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