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Prefiguration of the Nation: The Soteriology and Ecclesiology of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract

The *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* was established in 1902, in the context of the US occupation of the Philippines. The church has become known for its outspoken emancipatory political stance in the course of the 20th century. Yet, in its early days, the church wrestled with the question how to negotiate the restrictions that had been imposed regarding explicit political agitation. This paper argues that the church found a way forward regarding this by developing a prefigurative self-understanding, according to which the church, in its self-organization, theology and liturgy, foreshadowed the future of the nation of the Philippines as a whole. The ecclesiology of the church became its political program. Using insights from the study of prefigurative politics, it is shown how this course of action becomes evident in the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente's* publications, such as journals and liturgical books.

Keywords

Iglesia Filipina Independiente – Philippines – prefigurative politics – Gregorio Aglipay – Isabelo de los Reyes – Postcolonialism – liturgy – ecclesiology

1 Introduction

That the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (Philippine Independent Church; IFI), the establishment of which was proclaimed during a meeting of the labor union *Unión Obrera Democrática* (Democratic Labor Union) on 3 August 1902, was closely tied to the struggle for Philippine independence can hardly be doubted.¹ In fact, one of the most frequently cited descriptions of the church runs as follows:

The only living and tangible result of the Revolution was the Filipino Church, popularly known as the Aglipayan or Philippine Independent Church.²

However, for various reasons, the precise nature of its involvement needs to be understood in more depth; for instance, the young IFI emphasized in some of its public statements that it was not political. Also, at least in its earliest years, it sought to align itself with some of the policies of the American colonial administration, which raises the questions of on what basis and with what kind of strategy it did so, if the IFI was indeed involved in striving for political independence, as most observers of the church thought. In this contribution, it will be proposed that a specific interpretation of what salvation amounted to (i.e., the IFI's soteriology) and a particular understanding of what the church was (i.e., the IFI's ecclesiology) were key components in the shaping of not just the church's religious, but also of its political profile. In fact, it will be argued, based on the IFI's closely intertwined soteriology and ecclesiology, that the IFI arrived at what, to borrow terminology from political philosophy, may be called a form of prefigurative politics. The possible sources of this stance will be explored at the end of this paper, suggesting that the IFI is likely to have drawn on a variety of complementary sources associated with different groups that influenced the IFI and some of its early leadership. The sources used in this paper stem primarily from early IFI periodicals and books.

1 The research for this publication was supported by a grant from the Oud-Katholiek Studiefonds and made possible due to the generous hospitality of Aglipay Central Theological Seminary in Urduyeta City in the Philippines. Conversations with the rector, the Very Rev. Dr. Eleuterio J. Revollido, Ms. Mariefe Ibarra Revollido, the Rt. Rev. José Nixon, Fr. Noel Dacuycuy, and the Rev. Dcn. Dr. Danilo Ito were particularly valuable.

2 Agoncillo, *A History of the Filipino People*, 232, 243.

2 Unpolitical but Still Political

When reviewing contemporary sources, a striking contrast emerged between the early IFI's self-presentation as an *independent* church and others' perceptions of the church. Two quotations may illustrate this, although many more sources could be referenced.

The first quotation is the least surprising of the two and is drawn from the work of William E. Curtis, a journalist who visited the Philippines, met the IFI leadership, communicated with many politicians, and wrote for the influential newspaper the *Washington Evening Star*. His perception of the IFI's establishment was as follows:

It is not a schism, but an organized revolt against what he calls the corruption, injustice and tyranny of the Spanish archbishop and clergy. Just as Aguinaldo and his associates rebelled against the Spanish civil and military authorities. This ecclesiastical revolution is closely related to the political insurrection.³

In contrast, the IFI's own newspaper took a rather different view of things, given that it commented as follows on the adjective *independiente* ("independent") in the name of the church:

este sobretítulo jamás ha tenido ni tendrá ninguna significación política. Nuestro Emmo. Sr. Obispo Máximo siempre predica la paz y ros recuerda las divina enseñas de N.S. Jesucristo de dar al César lo que es del César, y que no mezclemos la política en estas cosas puramente de Dios.⁴

this title has never had nor will have any political significance. Our Most Reverend *Obispo Maximo* always preaches peace and reminds us of the divine teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and not to mix politics with these purely Godly things.

³ William E. Curtis, "An Organized Revolt", 11.

⁴ S.a., "El sobretítulo de 'Independiente'", 3. The notion of *Obispo Maximo* (i.e., the former guerrilla leader Gregorio Aglipay) only ever preaching peace is perhaps something of a stretch, but it might actually be true for the period after his surrender in 1901. William Henry Scott noted: "Aglipay returned to Manila at the end of June 1902 and set about establishing a reputation for cooperation with the new regime. He joined the Americanista Federal Party, accepted payments from the U.S. secret service, and kept a dignified silence when yellow journals referred to him as a cut-throat boloman and murderer of American soldiers." See: Henry Scott, *Aglipay Before Aglipayanism*, 38.

To be sure, this statement may have been an attempt to avoid trouble, given that the Sedition Law of 1901 prohibited any agitation for Philippine independence. However, other statements made by the early IFI leadership make it clear that, first and foremost, the IFI sought independence from Rome and from the ‘frailocracy’ (i.e., the rule of the colonial Philippines via the colonial church) dominated by religious orders (hence, the emphasis on *frailes* [friars]) under the royal patronage of the Spanish crown,⁵ who suppressed the people of the Philippines but also constituted the Philippine church.⁶

Against this background, it may seem that journalists such as Curtis, as well as others taking the view that the IFI was a political actor, were simply wrong, but this would be a mistake. The IFI was indeed invested in Philippine independence in its fullest sense; however, its strategy was not outright agitation or revolt, but rather embodiment, in the sense of its belief in freedom as a key dimension of salvation, its celebration of such freedom in its liturgy, and its actions concerning such freedom in its church life, thereby prefiguring the freedom of the nation in the life of the church.

3 Freedom and the Return to Paradise

Freedom was a key theme in the theology of the early IFI, as it featured in most, if not all, doctrinal statements issued by the church and was a recurring topic in the journals published by or on behalf of the church – *La Verdad* (1902–1903) and *La Iglesia Filipina Independiente: Revista Católica* (1903–1904), the latter of which appeared in conjunction with the journal of the *Unión Obrera Democrática, La Redención del Obrero*.⁷ One of the instances of the topic of freedom appearing in the context of a theological blueprint is when the *Catecismo* (i.e., catechism) of the church was published in serial form in *La Iglesia Filipina Independiente. Revista Católica*, prior to appearing in book form in 1905.⁸ The first installment of this catechism described a paradisaical state

5 Regarding this dimension of Philippine politics and ecclesial life, see Steven Shirley, *Guided by God* and Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*.

6 See, for instance, the report of the proclamation of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, which is representative in this respect: s.a, ‘Proclamacion de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente, 6–7.

7 The title of the latter publication uses language that is in equal parts theological and Marxist, which illustrates the exchange between these two discourses among the intellectuals, especially Isabelo de los Reyes, involved in the proclamation of the IFI and the organization of labor in the Philippines. See Franz Segbers, “Uns aus dem Elend zu erlösen, können wir nur selber tun!”, 197–208.

8 *Catecismo de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente*.

being achieved through God's agency and will via three routes: marriage and labor, which will not be discussed here,⁹ and freedom, as is apparent in this account of creation:

[q]ue Dios instituyó la Libertad del hombre pudiendo hacer en la tierra cuanto guenos quisiere y alimentarse de todo de comestible.¹⁰

that God instituted the freedom of man to be able to do on the earth whatever he wanted and to feed himself with everything that was edible

A little later, the same text stated, “el Creador les dotó del bien mas Preciado que pudiera concederles, esto es, la Libertad” (“the Creator endowed them with the most precious good He could bestow on them; that is, Freedom”).¹¹ The subsequent installments of the *Catecismo* continued to explicate the human use of such freedom, eventually arriving at the apex of “salvation history,” i.e., the Kingdom of God (“El reino de Dios”), describing it as follows:

¿En qué se conoce el sello divino de las doctrinas de Jesús? En su inmarcesible frescara en efecto, la libertad y la democracia celeste que hace va dos mil años predicara el divino Rabbi, francamente y sin limitaciones convencionalistas, en aquella énoqa de bárbaras tiranías; la redención de las clases desheradadas, la comunidad de bienes y la abolición de las fronteras haciendo del Universo un solo pueblo de hermanos que se aman sin cortapisas del egoismo, que crean de consuaio la propiedad y los exclusivismos; estas admirables doctrinas constituyen todavía el supremo ideal de las sociedades presentes y de las futuras.¹²

By what is the divine seal of Jesus' doctrines known? By its unfading freshness, in fact, by the freedom and the celestial democracy that the divine Rabbi preached two thousand years ago, frankly and without conventionalist limitations, in that time of barbaric tyrannies: the redemption of the underprivileged classes, the community of goods and the abolition of frontiers, making of the Universe a single people of brothers who love each other without egoistic restrictions that create property

9 Certainly, regarding labor, this discussion would be inviting, given the close ties of the IFI with the Union Obrera Democrática.

10 S.a., “Catecismos de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente,” 145–146.

11 S.a., “Catecismo de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente,” 145.

12 S.a., “Catecismo de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente,” 154.

and exclusivism; these admirable doctrines still constitute the supreme ideal of present and future societies.

There are several interesting notions to be found in these quotations. First, there is an emphasis on freedom as a key dimension of both creation and the Kingdom of God, as presented in Jesus' teachings. In fact, the "sello divino" that the latter has is apparent from this emphasis on freedom. Second, given the connection between the paradisaical situation of creation and the redeemed world of God's kingdom, redemption can be understood as a 'return to paradise,' with paradise being both the primordial past and the desired future. This is, of course, a trope in Christian theology, but it is interesting to consider how it developed in the context of the (post)colonial Philippines.¹³ Third, it is also clear that the scope of this vision of salvation is humankind, not the church alone, given that the focus is on both the creation and redemption of humankind as a whole, while the section on the Kingdom of God is also focused on the organization of societies, not merely of churches. Thus, in the witness of the early the IFI, liberty played a key role as an anthropological and social ideal derived from its soteriology (a theme that would remain prominent in the IFI's theology; in the 1912 catechism of the church, the eschatological idea of being "new people", recreated by God, continues to be mentioned as a key characteristic of the church).¹⁴ However, in these texts, freedom is not presented as political freedom explicitly. As it will become clear below, this is different in the IFI's liturgy, but before discussing it, we should first consider the IFI's program of self-organization as it shows how the expectation of the Kingdom of God translated into an anticipatory realization of the same in the life of the church.

In the IFI's *Doctrina y reglas constitucionales* (i.e., Doctrine and Constitutional Rules), published in 1903, liberty was also highlighted as a key dimension of the IFI's theology and theological anthropology: "La libertad es uno de los dones más preciosos con que nos ha favorecido el Creador (I.II.VIII; "Freedom is one of the most precious gifts with which the Creator has favored us.") Subsequently, this document ties what is ultimately a human characteristic and a key dimension of redemption to the life of the church:

13 For a work exploring this in the early Jesus tradition, with reference to prefigurative politics, see Scott, *The Jesus Revolution*, esp. 124 (*Urzeit – Endzeit* paradigm).

14 De los Reyes, *Catequesis de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, 2–3. The scriptural reference that De los Reyes used was Eph. 4:22–25; 22—"to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires," 23—"and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds," 24—"and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Nuestra Iglesia es Católica ó Universal, porque considera á todos los hombres sin distinción hijos de Dios, y lleva en sobrenombre de Filipina Independiente, para caracteriyar á esta agrupación de hombres libres que dentro de la mencionada universalidad no admiten la servidumbre de nadie.¹⁵ (1.II.IX, see also section 2.I.II)

Our Church is Catholic or Universal because it considers all people, without distinction, children of God, and bears the nickname of Philippine Independent, to characterize this grouping of free people who, within the aforementioned universality, do not admit the servitude of anyone.

Thus, the characteristics of redeemed humanity were considered to be realized in the IFI, or at least seen as part of the self-understanding of this church. The church's ecclesiology can, accordingly, be understood from a soteriological perspective. This is confirmed by the extracts from what would become the 1905 *Catecismo*, which also saw freedom as a key dimension of the redemption of humankind.

A further dimension of the idea that the church embodies social ideals that not merely ecclesial but part of a vision for society at large is also apparent in a further section of the *Doctrina y reglas constitucionales*. This section regulated the way in which the church should handle property and proposed the communal ownership of the same (see section 2.II.V). This is entirely congruent with the notion of the Kingdom of God, as presented in the *Catecismo*. There, communal ownership of goods and the abolition of private ownership were seen as a dimension of Jesus' proclamation and God's reign. This publication also indicated that this ideal, which was, fundamentally, an ideal for society and humankind in general, ought to be already realized in the church (i.e., in an anticipatory manner).

Furthermore, the ideal of equality, grounded in the IFI's theological anthropology, which has, in turn, its basis in its soteriology, found expression in a rather outspoken view of authority in the church. Authority was said to belong to the people of God and was a direct gift to them from God (rather than a gift of God to the ecclesial hierarchy, which would have been a current model in mainstream Roman Catholic theology at the time).¹⁶ The relevant section of the IFI's *Doctrina y Reglas constitucionales* reads as follows:

15 S.a., "Doctrina y Reglas constitucionales," 7–8.

16 It is, however, by no means the only view espoused in the tradition of Western Catholicism, for instance the view usually associated with Edmond Richer, who himself refers back to

El Gobierno de nuestra Iglesia descanca sobre la mas pura Democracia Cristiana, sobre aquellas divinas palabras de Jesucristo: “Vosotros todos sois Hermanos: el que es mayor entra vosotros será vuestro servidor.” Mat. C. 23, vs. 8 y 11.

En efecto, todos los que pertenecen á la Iglesia Filipina Independiente serán absolutamente iguales; pero nuestra Iglesia escoje varones de virtud, temerosos de Dios, varones de verdad que aborrezcan la avericia (Ex. cap. 18, v. 21), á quienes encomienda el mirar, pesar y ejecutar todo aquello que conduzca á la mayor gloria del Supremo Hacedor y al bien de nuestra Santa Congregaci'n; y natural es que á esos tales temenos que obedecer, para que puedan desempeñar debidamente sus cargos por el bien mismo de todos.

El poder, pues, viene de Dios ó de sus santísima palabra; para directamente al pueblo, y este lo tranmite á sus apoderados elegidos por el mismo, ó sean nuestros Obispos, Gobernadores eclesiásticos, Párrocos etc. que vienen á ser como nuestros guías y superiors, pero que en realiedad no lo son, proque une es nuestro maestro y guía, el Cristo (Mat. cap. 23, vs. 8 y 10); y uno es nuestro Padre, Dios (Ib. v. 9).

“Sométase pues, toda alma á esas potestades superiors; porque no hay potestad que no sea de Dios, y las que hay, ordenadas son de Dios.

El que resiste, pues, á la potestad, resiste á la ordenación de Dios; y los que le resisten, ellos mismos atrane á sí la condenación.” (Rom. c. 13, v. 1 y 2).¹⁷

The government of our Church is based on the purest Christian democracy in the divine words of Jesus Christ: “You are all brothers: he who is greatest among you will be your servant” (Mt. 23:8;11).

In fact, all those who belong to the Philippine Independent Church will be absolutely equal, but our Church selects men of virtue, fearful of God, men of truth who abhor avarice (Ex. 18:21), whom it charges with the oversight, consideration and execution of all that which is conducive to the greater glory of the Supreme Creator and the good of our Holy Congregation; and it is natural that we should be obedient to them so that they can dutifully discharge their offices for the common good of all.

Power, therefore, comes from God or from his most holy word; it passes directly to the people, and they transmit it to the representatives

Alonso el Tostado, also indicated that authority was given to the church as a whole first and foremost. For a discussion, see: Hallebeek, *Alonso « el Tostado »*.

17 S.a., “Doctrina y Reglas constitucionales,” 33–34.

they elect themselves, that is, our bishops, ecclesiastical governors, parish priests, etc., who appear to be our guides and superiors, but who in reality are not, because one there is who is our master and guide, the Christ (Mt. 23:8–10), and one there is who is our Father, God (ibidem, v. 9).

Therefore, submit your whole soul to these in authority; for there is no power that is not from God, and those that have been established are from God.

He who resists authority, therefore resists what has been ordered by God; and those who resist it will bring condemnation on themselves (Rom. 13:1–2).

Thus far, references to the relationship between freedom and national independence have been conspicuously absent. However, this changes when considering the IFI's liturgy. A key source of insight into this is *Oficio Divino*, the church's service book, authored by Isabelo de los Reyes, which provided an alternative to the Roman Missal that had been, until the new book's appearance in 1906, the church's main liturgical resource. This new liturgy made an explicit connection between the life of the free, independent church and national freedom. A key instance of this can be found in rubrics regulating the ritual at what was for people accustomed to 19th century Roman Catholicism the most sacred moment of the entire Mass: the elevation of the consecrated host. At this moment, the rubrics mandated the following:

El celebrante se arrodillará al són de la Marcha Nacional filipina; y luego levantará el símbolo del Cuerpo de J.C.: hasta los ojos y volviéndose en semicírculo hacia el lado derecho, lo muestra al pueblo¹⁸

The celebrant will kneel to the sound of the Philippine National March; then, he will raise the symbol of the Body of Christ up to his eyes and, turning in a semicircle to the right side, he will show it to the people

Other examples of such rituality could be added and were studied by Ranche.¹⁹ A clearer connection between the redemption of humankind in terms of a

18 De los Reyes, *Oficio Divino*, 151.

19 See: Ranche, "The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI)," 513–534, 528–529. Ranche draws attention, for instance, to the "Misang Parangal sa mga Bayani ng Himagsikan," a Mass commemorating the heroes of the revolution, with liturgical texts reminiscent of the Katipunan (see below). Besides the national anthem, the national flag was eventually incorporated into the IFI's liturgy in response to a law of 1907 forbidding the display of the same in public. Again, the church ritually prefigured the country's freedom.

return to freedom, the means of grace that the church has at its disposal for this, and a longing for national freedom is hard to imagine, even if the connection was made through ritual action and instrumental music (i.e., without words). This did not lessen the impact, although it may have skirted the letter of the 1901 Seditious Act just enough to prevent trouble, given that another aspect of the American colonial administration, the separation between church and state (Philippines Organic Act of 1902), made it reluctant to intervene in the internal life of churches.²⁰

However, there was one exception to the rule mentioned at the end of the last paragraph. This concerned to the possession of church buildings and such like. While the colonial (i.e., Roman Catholic) church argued that these possessions should remain its property, even after the people and the church had been freed from colonial rule, the Philippine church argued the exact opposite and acted on it, which led to interventions by the American administration, taking the side of the colonial church. This dispute cannot be discussed in full here, but the rationale that the IFI followed to claim these properties is of interest. The reason for this is that it can be seen as the realization of a freedom within the church that had yet to become a reality for the wider society. In one programmatic text, the issue was outlined as follows:

Los antiguos templos y cementerios de Filipinas son verdadera propiedad de los respectivos vecindarios ó en su representación de los municipios, porque se han levantado en solares donados por los vecinos, ó de la propiedad del Estado ó del Municipio respectivamente, y fueron construidos con fondos y obreros municipales para su propio servicio espiritual, sin que conste en ninguna parte que los vecinos havan cedido á la Iglesia Romana su propiedad; sino qu muy por el contrario, el Estado ó el Municipio siempre ha ejercido como propietario, consteando los gastos de su conservación y dando para ello obreros municipales polistas y dando siempre entender que los parrocos eran meros administradores, como que hasta les pagaba sueldo, así como á sus coadjutors; esto és el Gobierno ejercía y costeaba la que se llamada Patronato.²¹

The old churches and cemeteries of the Philippines are truly the property of the respective neighborhoods or in their representation of the

20 On the introduction of the separation between church and state, see: Reuter, "William Howard Taft and the Separation of Church and State", 105–118, esp. 116–117 regarding the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*.

21 S.a., "La propiedad de los templos y cemeteries," 25–26.

municipalities, because they were built on land donated by the neighbors, or out of the property of the State or the Municipality respectively and were built with funds and municipal workers for their own spiritual service, without it being recorded anywhere that the residents have ceded their property to the Roman Church. On the contrary, the State or the Municipality has always acted as the owner of the property, paying the expenses of its conservation and providing for it municipal workers and always giving the impression that the parish priests were mere administrators, and even paying them a salary, as well as their coadjutors; that is, the Government exercised and paid for what is called Patronage.

The piece developed these ideas further by arguing that, since the Philippines was now free from Spanish rule, the churches ought to be the property of the people that built them, and who had now organized themselves into a free church. This idea is closely connected to the redistribution of colonially possessed land that took place at the same time and can easily be seen as pointing toward the people of the country taking possession of the same, even if this was realized first by the church with regard to ecclesiastical properties and then by the wider society.

On a less material plane, another freedom was emphasized repeatedly – freedom of conscience and of thought, presented as a divine gift from the Creator and, hence, a characteristic of humans in their paradisaical state. This was to be exercised within the new free church (*Doctrina y Reglas constitucionales* 1.2.v), which also translated into the freedom to read books (*Doctrina y Reglas constitucionales*, 1.2.viii).²² All of these elements, as well as their coherence, were also indicated by the heraldic motto of the IFI, which not only indicated that the church was “Pro Deo et Patria,” but also that its core values were “Scripturae, Scientiae, Caritas en Libertas.”

Thus, the IFI espoused a belief in freedom as a key dimension of (redeemed) humankind and sought to embody this freedom in its own life, both in general and, at least in its liturgy, by claiming a direct connection with the freedom of the Philippines. Thus, the IFI embodied in a proleptic fashion both the future of humankind and the future of the nation, the freedom of which could be seen as a realization of God’s liberating salvation. In this thinking, dogmatic questions regarding, for example, the doctrine of God and the understanding of salvation were inextricably bound up with questions concerning theological anthropology and ecclesiology. These, in turn, provided a blueprint for human

22 This emphasis can doubtlessly be seen against the background of the index of forbidden books used in the Roman Catholic Church.

society as a whole, given that the scope of salvation was not the church, but humankind, the future of which the church, through its life of witness, worship, and service, anticipated. To further reflect on this, the next section presents the discourse on prefigurative politics.

4 The Church as Prefiguration: Prefigurative Politics and the Church

The IFI's understanding of itself as an anticipatory embodiment of a redeemed world can be theorized further, especially to shed light on the intellectual network in which the IFI participated.²³ Viewing itself as the place where a desired future world had already been realized in terms of its worldview and self-organization, the IFI positioned itself not only as a means to an end, but as a place where the end could be experienced in the means used to achieve it. This aligns with a particular brand of political action – political prefiguration – that has been theorized in the context of (anarchist) political philosophy. An insightful and well-received definition of this approach is as follows:

Rather than looking to a revolutionary vanguard to seize existing power structures and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses or to trade unions or political parties to leverage reforms within the existing system, a prefigurative approach seeks to create the new society “in the shell of the old” by developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation.²⁴

This approach gives a particular shape to movements adopting it, especially in terms of transcending a number of common dichotomies.²⁵ For instance, their understanding of time is changed; not only do they orient themselves toward the future, rather than to the past or the present, but they also view themselves as already embodying the future. The present and future thus overlap.

23 This network has been analyzed in various ways, with a particular perspective being provided by the early periodicals of the church, on which, see Hermann, “Publicizing Independence,” 99–122, and “The Early Periodicals of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente,” 549–565. Hermann rightly stresses the international outlook of the newspaper, the companion of which also had this outlook, since information about the international labor movement abounded in it (see Segbers, “Elend.”) A broader panorama of such journals can be found in Koschorke, Hermann, Mogase, and Burlacioiu, *Discourses of Indigenous-Christian Elites in Colonial Societies*.

24 Leach, “Prefigurative Politics,” 1004–1006.

25 For the following, see Van de Sande, *Prefigurative Democracy* and Raekstad and Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*. See also Ben Smit, “Exploring the Eschaton,” 59–72.

Similarly, presence and absence overlap: the yet absent world to come is simultaneously already present in the community. As mentioned previously, a distinction between the means and the end, with the end justifying the means, does not work; if the future is to be present in the movement embodying it, this can only be by means that are aligned with the future. Furthermore, because such movements always deal with social practices and can be understood as social experiments, any mind/body dichotomy becomes difficult to sustain, as ideas about the future present themselves in embodied form in the concrete social experiment of a community, not just as an idea about how things might be in the future. Moreover, since most such movements are marginal, the relationship between margin and center is also changed, given that the (apparent) margin is really a seed of the future planted in the present. Also, it is worth underlining that the dimension of experimentation (and its evaluation) is of key importance in prefigurative politics: the future can only be discerned experimentally through the life of the movement, which is, therefore, also subject to constant evaluation. Accordingly, all group members also matter – radical democracy is the organizational form that fits prefigurative politics. Finally, ritual, whether ‘religious’ or ‘non-religious,’ can be seen as playing a particular role in prefigurative groups: rituals always confront those performing them with the tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be.²⁶ Even a group that is convinced it authentically embodies the future in its ritual praxis still has to confront a ‘more’ or a ‘beyond’ and challenge any *stasis* to which it may have unwittingly succumbed.

Interestingly, the discourse on prefigurative politics has been characterized by a certain neglect of, or even an explicit distancing from, religious influences or connections. The following position taken by Raekstad is quite representative:

Although this word [prefiguration] later came to be used to denote political organizations aiming to institute in the present some aspects of what they aspire to in a future society, there are crucial differences. First, to prefigure something in this [sc. early Christian] sense is not actually to do it or to try to do it. For Moses to prefigure Christ does not entail that Moses aspires to the same goals as Christ, or that Moses consciously and deliberately works towards what Christ achieves. By contrast, for a revolutionary organization to prefigure the future society it aspires to bring about is for it consciously and deliberately to aim for that future form of

26 Regarding this notion, see Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 63: “Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in tension to the way things are.”

society as a goal and to use this aim to structure the way it organizes in the present. Second, whether something is prefigurative in the first sense is determined only retrospectively. We are able to imagine that Moses prefigures Christ only after Christ has come and gone. Since it is impossible to tell beforehand whether something prefigures anything else, and since prefiguration is disconnected from the intentions and goals of the agents doing the prefiguring, prefiguration in this sense does not offer practical guidance to a social and political movement or organization. The contemporary understanding of what today is called prefigurative politics developed in the 19th century without reference to the religious meaning of the term, and only over a century later did the term start to be used to denote this sort of politics²⁷

As will become clear in what follows, this distinct break between the Christian tradition and prefigurative politics in the 19th century may have to be relativized in light of the IFI's self-understanding and *modus operandi* in the very early 20th century. This is a side effect of the main purpose of this paper – to gain a clearer understanding of this church's way of life and identity with the help of theoretical insights offered by the political philosophical discourse on prefigurative politics.

Regarding the IFI's political profile and strategy, it can be argued that it is a rather good fit with the paradigm of prefigurative politics. Some dimensions stand out. First, it is clear from the preceding analysis that the IFI saw itself as already anticipating a future society, based on freedom, which was also prominent in the IFI's soteriology. The future and present – and thus, the presence and absence of God's kingdom – thus overlapped in the church's self-understanding: the church viewed itself not merely as a religious institution, but as a first instantiation of redeemed humanity. Second, it is also clear that this self-understanding was enshrined in the church's practices and organization, a description of which fits a prefigurative mode of operating: aspects

27 Raekstad, "Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics", 359–372, 361. Anarchist authors who fail to acknowledge that there is not only an analeptic (backward looking) form of prefiguration but also a proleptic (forward looking) form of prefiguration in Christian tradition are often very limited when it comes to providing examples. See, for instance, Gordon, "Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise", 521–537, 524–526. Gordon acknowledges that Christian tradition (the Jewish tradition is overlooked) knows of analeptic and proleptic forms of prefiguration, but the theme and its possible connection with prefigurative politics is only developed in a rather minimalist fashion.

such as democracy in the church (and the identification of the people as the source of authority), the embracing of modern science (a topic that could not be considered here), the communal ownership of goods, the indigenization of the church (and its property), and the empowerment of the church's lay members (and indigenous clergy) can all be seen as practices that aimed to embody the ideal of redemptive liberty in one way or another.²⁸ This emphasis on practices also meant that any distinction between mind and body, or, to use an analogical Christian theological dichotomy, between spiritual and temporal goods, could no longer be sustained, as the spiritual future was seen as existing in the temporal present, making practices regarding the church's temporal goods, such as property, the media by which to realize the desired future in the present. Also, as indicated previously, the life of the IFI was to be community-based and, literally, empowered by the people, collectively seen as the source of any authority in the church (although such authority ultimately derived from God). In view of the IFI's minority position within Philippine society (even though it attracted up to 25% of the population in its earliest years), the relationship between the marginal group and the center, or mainstream, was an important dimension of its way of operating. Despite being a marginalized minority, the IFI saw itself as embodying the future of the entire nation. Ritual also played a role in this, as the preceding examples show: celebrating a future independence ritually meant both anticipating it and being aware of the road still to be traveled. A church that operates in this manner can fittingly be described as engaging in a prefigurative social experiment.

Given these considerations, it can plausibly be argued that the IFI's *modus operandi* can indeed be described in terms of prefigurative politics, not only because it bore all the hallmarks of a social experiment – not to say adventure – but also for other reasons. These reasons include the manner in which the life

28 A good illustration of this intellectual universe, which, in a way, also indicates what personalities the IFI understood to be prefiguring its own existence and ideals, can be found in the liturgical calendars the church produced to communicate its theology to a broader audience, which included many (enlightened) Filipinos from the (recent) past, such as José Rizal, Andreas Bonifacio and GomBurza, i.e., the three priests Mariano Gómez, José Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora, who were executed in the context of the 1872 Cavite Mutiny, but also exemplary women, such as Saturnina Salazar de Abreu (commemorated on 19 January), as well as people associated with the French revolution and the enlightenment, from Napoleon to Voltaire and Kant, representatives of religious renewal and critical theological reflection, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin; and representatives of modern science, such as Charles Darwin. For an analysis, see Gealogo, "Time, Identity and Nation", 147–168. On the creation of a Philippine pantheon, see also Mojares, *Isabelo's Archive*, esp. 240–248.

of this church can be seen as negotiating some of the dichotomies mentioned previously in relation to prefigurative politics. It is clear that in the life of the IFI, the future (paradise) and the present were seen as two overlapping realities: the future is present in the church's life in the present, and not just in its liturgy, but also in other dimensions of its existence. This also applies to the simultaneous presence and absence of social and national liberty: it is present, or at least represented, in the life of the church, while it is absent at the same time, given that the country was under American colonial rule. A third dichotomy that is typically transcended in prefigurative politics – that is, the one between means and ends – was equally surpassed in the IFI: the church's life was understood and shaped as a means to an end that in terms of its form and content also agreed with this end (regarding, for example, the question of property, or also freedom). Similarly, a fourth dichotomy, between mind and body, also can be seen as being transcended, given that the future was anticipated and experimented with not in terms of an idea but in terms of an embodied practice, which certainly had its noetic dimensions, but also integrated these into a more encompassing embodied performance of the future. Part and parcel of this performance was at least the attempt to arrive at a fairly throughgoing form of democracy via its self-organization. Furthermore, also the relationship between center and margin came to be reinterpreted: although a minority, certainly at the time of its founding, but also later in its history, the IFI still considered itself to be at the 'center' in terms of prefiguring the future of the nation and even of humankind as a whole. Finally, although one might expect this in the case of a church, it is also clear that ritual played an important role in performing the future state of affairs that the IFI longed for and sought to embody.

Thus, it can be argued that the IFI embarked upon a prefigurative political course, prefiguring the future of the Philippines as a free nation. The remaining question is whether this was merely a phenomenological coincidence, or whether the IFI drew directly on sources of (anarchist or other) prefigurative politics and, if so, which ones. This topic will be considered next.

5 Sources and Backgrounds of Prefiguration

Concerning what has been described as the IFI's operating in terms of prefigurative politics, a number of backgrounds can be identified, none of which needs to be the only or most original source of prefigurative thinking in the early IFI, but which were probably the most important as a conglomerate.

First, a rather obvious connection between the IFI and anarchist political thought is the involvement of one of its key founding figures, Isabelo de los Reyes, in European anarchist politics in Spain and France (not least through his ‘political education’ in the infamous Montjuich prison in Barcelona), which he left in 1901, traveling back to the Philippines accompanied by not only the works of Marx, Darwin, Voltaire, and Aquinas (and a Bible), but also works by Dmitri Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta, two prominent anarchist thinkers. This has been well documented by, for instance, Scott and Anderson,²⁹ despite the latter not considering whether anarchist ideals might have influenced De los Reyes’ involvement in the IFI, which he treats more as an afterthought to De los Reyes’ political life.³⁰ De los Reyes’ activities as a labor organizer with anarchist inspiration and his bringing to the Philippines of anarchist literature speak for his being an (important) source of prefigurative perspectives in the early IFI, given that this was (and continues to be) an anarchist way of organizing and thinking.

Second, in the Philippines itself, revolutionary societies abounded, at least some of which understood themselves as already embodying the new society they strived for. The most prominent among them was, without a doubt, the so-called Katipunan,³¹ of which Gregorio Aglipay, another key founding figure of the IFI, was a member³² and about which De los Reyes wrote extensively.³³ In their self-understanding and operations, together with others, these founding figures embraced nationalistic ideas and the ideals of unity, fraternity, and equality, along with other modern, emancipatory notions, which seem to be drawn from a number of sources, including Masonic traditions, Christianity, and the Enlightenment. The initiation rites of the Katipunan, as analyzed by Iletto and Scott,³⁴ clearly indicate that neophytes entered into a new kind of existence that already embodied, in an anticipatory fashion, the future of the country and its people, especially in terms of freedom in all of its aspects. (It is not a coincidence that the Katipunan newspaper was called *Kalayaan*, meaning ‘Freedom’.) As mentioned, the Masonic tradition may well have been a further influence, given that De los Reyes was a mason; masonic lodges viewed themselves as anticipating a better society, and freemasonry was a driving

29 See: Scott, *The Union Obrera Democratica*; Anderson, *The Age of Globalization*.

30 Anderson, *The Age of Globalization*, 228.

31 I.e., *Kataastaasang, Kagalanggalangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (“Suprema y Honorable Asociación de los Hijos del Pueblo” – in English: “The supreme and honorable association of the sons [or ‘children’] of the people”).

32 Cf., e.g., Scott, *Aglipay*, 18–20.

33 One example is the short monograph by De los Reyes, *La religión del “Katipunan”*.

34 Iletto, *Pasyon*, 91–99; Scott, *Ilocano Responses*, 113–126.

anticolonial force in the context of the Spanish colonial empire. The rituality of the Katipunan may also have been informed by Masonic traditions.

Third, outright millenarian religious groups may also have played a role.³⁵ Aglipay is known to have been close to some of them. Such closeness is well documented regarding the *Sagrada Familia* (i.e., Holy Family) movement in Ilocos Sur; Aglipay's (only) daughter Liwliwa even grew up close to the group's main community in a house that her father had built near Kilang.³⁶ Although the history of *Sagrada Familia* needs to be researched more thoroughly, it is apparent that in experimenting with practices that ranged from attempts to dispensing with clothing in a paradisaical manner (see Gen. 2:25) to holding property communally after the example of the earliest Church (esp. Acts 4:32–37), which the members combined with an intense life of prayer and that they viewed as a way of embodying the Kingdom of God in an anticipatory fashion. In doing so, the group also understood God's Kingdom clearly in a this-worldly fashion (rather than, for instance, in terms of a life after death), amounting to a renewed creation. Beyond this specific group, there is evidence of contact between Aglipay and another similar group, the *Guardia de Honor* (i.e., Guard of Honor), or at least some of its remnants, which had a center in the town of Urdaneta, Pangasinan that Aglipay also visited and where an early IFI presence was established.³⁷ The affinity between Aglipay and the IFI on the one hand and these groups on the other seems to indicate that he felt at home in such groups and that many of their members eventually joined the IFI.

Fourth, as Iletto has shown, a longer and broader tradition of religious and political thought existed that may well have played a role. This tradition integrated the political and the religious, for instance by reading the passion accounts in an indigenized manner that equated Jesus's suffering with that of the people and his resurrection with their redemption. Passion plays thus became ritual enactments of both the world as it was and of the world as it should be, particularly pointing the way forward to a 'New Eden.'³⁸ Iletto paraphrased the strategy of these groups as follows:

35 For this and the following, see Scott, *Responses*, 126–128; Sturtevant, *Popular*, 78–114.

36 Together with Rev. Dr. Noel Dacuycuy, the Rt. Rev. Nixon Jose, and the Very Rev. Dr. Eleuterio J. Revollido, I visited Kilang on 10 August 2023. The church continues to keep and honor a collection of early photos of Aglipay, including a rare photograph of his (only) daughter, while the memory of *Sagrada Familia* is kept alive among current members of the Aglipayan tradition in this place.

37 Cf. Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings*, 99. The Very Rev. Dr. Eleuterio J. Revollido, Dean of the Aglipay Central Theological Seminary in Urdaneta, referred to oral traditions confirming this connection in a conversation on 21 August 2023.

38 Ranche, "Iglesia Filipina Independiente," 528–529.

The Lost Eden is not, in the final analysis, an empirically verifiable state of bliss but an emblem of the perceived difference between a past time and the present. When Rizal and other Ilustrados wrote of the pre-Spanish past as a state of perfection and harmony, they not only attempted to resurrect an empirical past, but constructed it in terms of a difference between a Lost Eden and the Age of Darkness wrought by Spanish colonialism, a structure that is also found in the *Pasyon*. The logical aftermath is an awakening, a redemption, a passage to light. We have already made reference to the repetition of this structure in Katipunan literature. Now in post-Katipunan literature, the structure is repeated with the uprising against Spain occupying the Lost Eden position.³⁹

Such views fed into both late 19th- and early 20th-century 'secular' attempts to achieve independence in the Philippines, while they also informed the establishment of a Philippine tradition of Marxism.⁴⁰

Fifth, it should be recognized that the general history of Christian ecclesiology and sacramental theology has strong prefigurative dimensions that may well have provided further inspiration.⁴¹ Viewing the church, or movements within the church, as anticipatory instantiations of the Kingdom of God, which is, in turn, a return to paradise, is, in fact, quite common, and the same applies to the sacraments, which can be seen – as they have for centuries been seen – as rites that anticipate God's Kingdom and involve, at least on a ritual plane, a prefigurative way of operating.

These various sources may well have contributed to the IFI's development of a politico-religious form of prefigurative politics despite not fitting into the historiography of prefigurative politics, as proposed in the earlier quotation from Raekstad. In addition, two other factors should be considered regarding why a prefigurative strategy focused on the internal life of the church could have been convenient. First, the clear defeat of the Philippine forces by the

39 Iletto, *Pasyon*, 118. Establishing a new society in the shell of the old was a recurring theme among the movements that Iletto studied. A valuable survey of extant research can be found in: Quibuyen, "*And Woman Will Prevail Over Man*". In his (unpublished) doctoral dissertation, Dennis Shoesmith showed that the expectation of and attempts to proleptically embody a 'New Eden' or 'New Jerusalem' played a key role for a number of religiously inspired groups pursuing a society that differed from the Spanish colonial one. See Shoesmith, *Church and Revolution in the Philippines*.

40 Nemenzo, "The Millenarian-Populist Aspects of Filipino Marxism," s.a. (ed.), *Marxism in the Philippines*, 1–40. Nemenzo seemed to make the arrival of Marxism coincide with the beginning of a communist party; however, intellectuals such as De los Reyes had actively and explicitly embraced the work of Marx decades before.

41 See, for example, Leithart, "Signs of the Eschatological Ekklesia," 631–644.

American invaders showed the futility of armed resistance or even of direct political agitation for political independence. Second, American rule, which was also seen by the early IFI as ideologically aligned with at least some of the values that it also embraced, provided space for considerable freedom in terms of churches' self-organization and cultic life, given that it was a firm proponent of a separation between church and state. This not only led to the disestablishment of the colonial (Roman Catholic) church, much to the delight of the IFI, but also to much freedom for the newly proclaimed Philippine church to design its internal life as it pleased, even in terms of anticipated national independence.

6 Conclusion

Given these considerations, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the IFI's political *modus operandi*, especially in relation to national independence and the discourse regarding prefigurative politics.

First, it can be seen, based on its soteriology and ecclesiology and the connection between the two, that the IFI viewed itself on theological grounds as an anticipation of God's world to come.

Second, ecclesiological and liturgical sources, in particular, demonstrate that this prefigurative self-understanding was focused on a future redeemed society, not "just" a church, in which national freedom in the form of Philippine political independence most certainly had a place.

Third, a comparison of the IFI's *modus operandi* with key characteristics of the (anarchist) political philosophical discourse on prefigurative politics provides further the understanding of the IFI's early theology and ecclesiology, as it can be seen as a form of prefigurative politics, albeit one with a strong theological dimension.

Fourth, when considering at least some of the intellectual and political influences that the early IFI was exposed to (and a product of), it is clear that affinities with prefigurative politics and theological forms of prefiguration (which are no less political) were no coincidence, given that a direct connection with anarchism could be identified. Moreover, links with revolutionary and religious groups and traditions that strongly emphasized anticipating a new society or world to come (or the former in the shape of the latter or vice versa) in their own lives existed in the Philippines.

In summary, it is possible to argue that the early IFI understood itself as a prefiguration of a (free) nation, a religious endeavor with clear political

corollaries, and that this self-understanding should be part of the broader historiography of prefigurative politics.

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