

# Church and Community

Volume IV, Number 1, January - February, 1964

## CONTENTS

- 3 EDITORIAL
- 5 OUR VOCATION: TO BE CHRISTIANS  
*By Ciriaco Ganchorre*
- 11 DECISION-MAKING IN TODAY'S WORLD  
*By Richard P. Poethig*
- 18 A LAYMAN'S WITNESS AT WORK  
IN MANAGEMENT  
*By Quintin Salas Doromal*
- 22 GUIDELINES FOR MINISTRY ON  
THE INDUSTRIAL FRONTIER  
*By Cipriano Malonzo*
- 27 ARE LABOR LEADERS MATERIALISTIC?  
*By Leandro R. Ablang and  
Francisco J. Beltran*
- 29 RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP  
*By Estanislao P. Abainza*

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Rates: Subscriptions in the Philippines are P1.50 for one year or P2.50 for two years. Subscriptions sent abroad are U.S. \$1.00 per year. Copies of individual issues: P0.30 for single copies and P0.20 each for five or more copies. Checks and money orders should be made payable to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Solicitors: Persons who secure three annual subscriptions at P1.50 (or \$1.00) each will be given a fourth subscription at no additional cost.

Church and Community is published bi-monthly by the Department of Public Welfare, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 939 Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (Highway 54), Quezon City. Address correspondence to P. O. Box 718, Manila. Telephones: 7-88-74 and 7-94-90.

# DECISION-MAKING IN TODAY'S WORLD

How can the Church help its members to meet the complex problems of a modern industrial society?

PHILIPPINE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY has evolved rapidly during the last two decades. With the constant growth of new manufacturing establishments and business houses, each year more men and women take their places in modern Philippine industrial society. Many of them have come, in one jump, from rural backgrounds into the teeming life of Manila. They bring with them their understanding of life as it is lived in the close interpersonal relationships of the barrio and the poblacion. Confronted with the practices and loyalties of a business society, their basic understanding of life is called into question. The problems they face are those of people caught between two cultures—the culture of modern industrial society and that of traditional Philippine society.

Many of those who leave the barrio to plunge into modern industrial life are Evangelicals. One of the first places they go when they reach the city is to the church. Will it be able to help them face the complicated problems that are an inevitable part of industrial life? Within this situation, the church must provide another dimension—that of the Christian faith.

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By The Reverend Richard P. Poethig, Director, Industrial Life and Vocations, Department of Public Welfare, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, P. O. Box 718, Manila.

The Christian faith which the church proclaims must help men and women clarify the choices which they are called upon to make. The church must help them avoid false choices and see the legitimate alternatives that are before them. The church must help raise the level of the considerations upon which people make their choices. The real choice is not between loyalty to Philippine culture or loyalty to Western culture; instead it is between the alternatives the Christian faith provides, when its demands are seriously considered.

### DISCUSSION OF INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS

WHAT are some of the problems that our church members face, as they adjust to the new conditions of industrial society? During the past five years, the Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations has been involved in many meetings with laymen from various occupations. In these conferences and consultations, laymen have laid open the tensions which exist within their job situations. The strains of modern society are evident in the lives of both workers and managers. But what is disturbing is that the problems faced by modern Filipinos are rarely, if ever, discussed in our pulpits or in other ecclesiastical meetings. Yet these are the problems which make up the daily lives of our laymen. These are the problems which the church must set its mind to, if it is to have meaning for the people today. What are some of these problems? Let us consider two problems of industrial life: one was raised in a conference of young Christian factory workers; the other in a consultation with men in business and management.

### KICK-BACK TO THE FOREMAN

THE YOUNG MEN in the worker's conference came from a number of different factories, but most of them were employed in the desiccated coconut factories of Southern Luzon. Many of the communities of Southern Luzon are one-industry towns whose economy depends upon these factories. Migration from the surrounding rural areas has increased the available labor force so greatly that unemployment is the result. In this situation, the workers are deeply concerned about job security. How can they keep their jobs in a place where there is a surplus of workers—and where the management is considering the introduction of labor-saving machines? Many of the workers do not have the status of regular employees, but are kept on as "extras". One result of this insecure status has been to build up a system of kick-back (*pabagsak*) to the foremen (*capatas*), through whose word they can be kept on the payroll or laid

off. Many of the workers feel that it is wrong to contribute to such a system; and they want to find a Christian solution to this problem. What guidance can the Christian community give to these workers?

### CONFLICT BETWEEN CULTURE AND BUSINESS PRACTICE

A QUESTION confronting the members of a consultation of business and management men was "How does one decide between what my culture expects of me and what sound business practice demands?" The deeply rooted *compadre* system (persons to whom one is related by ritual kinship) was raised as a case in point. One layman stated the problem:

Greg hit the nail on the head in his criticism of the *compadre* system. In our companies and government agencies, we develop criteria by which we expect to make decisions. If your agency is lending money for home-building, you have certain criteria concerning the relation of the income of the borrower to the amount of collateral needed. This criteria should be followed, no matter what relationship the applicant has to the person making the decision. But what happens! The criteria is put aside by those executing the program. There are exceptions on account of personal friendship. They say "This fellow is a good friend of mine, I know him well. We will let him have the loan." Thus the rules are demolished!

In Philippine culture a person is expected to do his best to meet the obligations implied in *compadre* relationships. Many times, however, loyalty to a "compadre" comes into direct conflict with the rules of a company or a government agency. One's relationship to the company or the government agency is coldly impersonal, while that of the *compadre* is deeply personal. Service to the community through the company or agency seems to be an abstract idea, while service to the *compadre* has real benefits—both to the recipient and to the benefactor. In situations like this laymen ask, "Is there a Christian dimension to the conflict between the demands of the culture and of modern business?"

### RELEVANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

THERE ARE NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS to the problems presented in the situations described above. The businessman who pleaded for "the Christian answer" to a knotty problem cannot be easily answered; and even if a simple answer were possible he would not be satisfied. Persons are caught in highly complex situations, in which there may be a variety of alternatives. One management consultant writing of the situation businessmen face, says:

The businessman is engaged in transactions and relationships far more complex than were those met by the farmer of an earlier day. For him the differences between right and wrong are more likely to appear in shades of gray than in black and white. If what the minister says to the businessman is to be relevant to his workaday role, if it is to challenge him, force him to examine and evaluate his actual behaviour, the gray areas must be tackled with appreciation of why and in what way they are gray. The minister must realize the ambiguities that the businessman must resolve.<sup>1</sup>

The situation is even more complicated in Philippine society. Loyalty to underlying cultural practices adds another source of tension to the problems faced by Filipino business and management men, who have been trained in Western business principles.

If it is to relate the Christian message to contemporary business and industrial society, the church must take several factors seriously. First, it must recognize the complexity and intricacy of modern economic life. Second, it must understand the variety of responsibilities carried by men in business and industry. Third, it must learn to deal with the deep-rooted values of the traditional culture. Let us look more carefully at each of these factors:

#### AWARENESS OF THE COMPLEXITY OF ECONOMIC LIFE

THE CHURCH MUST recognize the complexity and the intricacy of the economic life which evolves in a modern industrial society. When the church proclaims simple moralisms or counsels individual piety in the face of vast economic problems, it does not help the situation; it only labels the church as obscurantist in its view of the world. The individual living in a developing economy is caught by forces, which are more than his personal resources can withstand. When some parishioners are unemployed and others are paying "kick-back" to keep their jobs, the pastor is called beyond a "proof text" approach to human problems; he must see the needs of his people in the "context" of the world in which they live.

What then are the characteristics of this modern world? It is a world in which there are more workers than there are jobs. It is a world in which more and more men leave the farms because they see no hope for a better life there. It is a world in which unions are too weak to protect workers, because there are always others waiting for their jobs outside the gate. It is a world in which factory management

<sup>1</sup> "The Church and the Businessman", James C. Worthy, *The Christian Century*. October 9, 1963, p. 1232.

must consider introducing labor-saving machinery, in order to increase production and lower costs and compete favorably in the world market. This is the world in which the church is called to bring the Christian Gospel.

#### WORKERS CARRY VARYING DEGREES OF RESPONSIBILITY

THE CHURCH must take seriously the wide variety of responsibilities which men carry in their jobs. In today's world men work at many tasks, with varying degrees of responsibility for them. Even within one company there will be a division of responsibility for different aspects of the production process. The responsibility of a production worker is limited by the particular operations he performs with his machine. The responsibility of a foreman widens in relation to the number of workers under his supervision. The foreman's decision may determine who is to be laid off or who is to be moved up in the production process. The range of responsibility of the plant production manager has even wider bounds. His decision to introduce new labor-saving machinery may affect the jobs of hundreds of workers. In the modern industrial situation, the church must not speak too easily about "making a Christian witness on the job," without knowing the life men live and the decisions they must make within their particular occupations. If the church is to speak relevantly to men's job situations, it must help provide its ministers with knowledge of the work men do and with an experience of the industrial environment in which they are called to be responsible.

#### CONFLICT BETWEEN BUSINESS PRACTICE AND THE CULTURE

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PATTERNS have a profound effect upon man's behavior in modern society. I have already suggested that deeply rooted personal loyalties have an impact upon the decisions a man makes in his business transactions. These loyalties may come into direct conflict with the goals which a company, government agency or institution is striving to achieve.

One great contribution which the church can make in relation to the conflict between the traditional culture and the requirements of modern technology is to clarify the issues. A man's actions, which spring from cultural behaviour, have become second-nature to him. He has grown up assuming that certain actions and reactions are correct behaviour in his society. He does a favor for a *compadre*; likewise he reacts

against those who do not fulfill their obligations to a *compadre*. But an industrial society calls into question the alliance system which the *compadre* relationship promotes. Industrial society is concerned with creating a new community that is based upon ability and responsibility. Many times this desire for a new community comes into conflict with loyalty to traditional alliances. The judgment of modern industrial society is that if it hinders industrial growth, then personal loyalty must be subordinated to industrial goals. The church is called upon to help its people see the issues clearly and to weigh the conflict between their loyalty to their cultural background and their aspirations for a modern technological society from within a Christian perspective.

### CONCLUSION

**I**F THE CHURCH is to live responsibly in the midst of a changing industrial society, it must take seriously the complexity of economic problems, it must be aware of the wide variety of job situations in which men work, and it must understand the influence which cultural patterns have upon man's behaviour. As it seeks to relate its message to the context of modern society, there are two Christian concerns which need always to be kept in focus. These provide the ethical dimension of the church's relation to the world. The first Christian concern is for the human being; and the second is for the community.

**Christian Concern for the Human Being.** In a world which is growing ever more impersonal there is the need to rediscover the meaning and the importance of man in God's creation. Modern technology comes as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, technological advance and modernization are necessary factors in meeting the human problems of more mouths to feed, more bodies to clothe and more people to shelter. The dynamic of technology is to expand production, with the expenditure of less human energy. But on the other hand, man himself may become only a means to higher production goals, rather than the end for which production exists. This is especially true in the nations that are struggling to industrialize. Here the problem is an increasing labor supply just as industry is becoming more and more automated. New companies begin with up-to-date automation, while "older" companies must consider introducing labor saving machinery to cut labor costs and increase production. Thus the growing number of unemployed laborers hangs as a Sword of Damocles over those who must make the decision for or against automation. Our Lord continually reminded his listeners that God did not create laws as ends in themselves, but in order to benefit man in society. Jesus told the Pharisees that "Man was not made for

the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for man." In like manner we must be reminded today that man was not made for higher production, but production was made for man. In our growing technological society there is a need to continually reassert the dignity of human life and to see that the primary goals of industrial society are to enhance that dignity.

**Christian Concern for the Community.** In the biblical view, the neighbor stands dramatically opposed to any limiting of the human community. "The neighbor" in New Testament terminology was beyond kinship—*compadre* or otherwise. When told that his mother and his brothers were waiting for him, our Lord pointed to the crowd and indicated that the world was his mother and his brothers. In our modern industrial society a new community is being created beyond the boundary lines of family, tribe, language and nation. Writing of the basic changes demanded by a technological society, Robert Bilheimer says,

The whole thrust of the desire for raising standards in the underdeveloped countries through technology is one which in itself requires a new sense of community. Trust in one's fellowmen, a willingness to work, to share and to some extent to sacrifice for the community across the lines of traditional loyalty . . . is necessary to the whole process.<sup>2</sup>

In this emerging technological society men are to be judged not by the family, the class or the race to which they belong, but by the contribution they make to the welfare of the community. Even as technology deals with the mass problems of society, so our Christian approach to this mass society needs to take on a social dimension. The very complexity of industrial society requires that we see our Christian responsibility beyond individual or family piety; it must include our work group, the neighborhood where we live, our city and national government. Christian concern for the neighbor transforms loyalty to family, clan and party to responsibility for the welfare of the community. Christian concern for the neighbor puts flesh and blood into the cold newspaper statistics about poorly housed squatters, uneducated children and unemployed workers. It breaks the bounds of our loyalty and draws a circle to include the unseen neighbor.

These two concerns, the rediscovery of man as made in the image of God and our commitment to an ever-widening community, are the guideposts for decision-making in modern industrial society.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethical Problems of Ecumenical Aid and Technical Assistance*, Robert Bilheimer, Project Papers, Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.