

**REFLECTING ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR
CHURCH OPPOSITION TO THE
MARCOS DICTATORSHIP, 1972-1986:
AN ECUMENICAL EXPERIENCE**

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*Sumulong tayo sa lupang pangako
At kapit-bisig tayong maglakbay
Katarungang ni Yahweh'y itaguyod.
Laban sa panilinlang
Puksain ang ugat ng pagkabulag
At durugin ang mga tanikala"*

*- Hymn of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of
the Philippines, based on Leviticus 25:9-55, and Isaiah 61:1-2*

The Philippine Church - both Catholic and Protestant - played a key role in the anti-Marcos dictatorship struggle. This essay reflects on the prophetic and liberating role of the church in the face of national and social oppression during the dark years of the Marcos dictatorship. There is ample basis in the teachings of the church and in the tradition of socially enlightened church people who contributed to the anti-Marcos dictatorship resistance, to persuade bishops, priests, nuns, and pastors to continue to take an active role in social transformation with the people. Immersion with the poor and their struggles thru church programs saw church people in fruitful dialogue and cooperation with committed Marxists and with other patriotic and progressive Filipinos. (Disclaimer: This article was based on first hand experiences and interactions of the author during the Martial Law period.)

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Church was one of the institutions that were affected and experienced a transformation as a sector during the declaration of martial law in the Philippines. And because the United States government was an accomplice of the dictatorship, there was a broad unity and solidarity among churches in the United States in their campaign to stop U.S. military assistance to the Marcos dictatorship and international opposition to it.

The radicalization and involvement of the Philippine Church - both Catholic and Protestant - against the Marcos dictatorship was influenced by the following factors:

First, the internal reflection of church people on their own institution in connection with intensifying repression under martial law and against basic human rights that affected especially the most marginalized poor sectors of Philippine society; Second, the attacks of the Marcos dictatorship against individual members of the Church clergy who themselves, became victims of martial law; Third, the external developments outside the Philippine Church and interactions with progressive clergy in other parts of the world.

"Radicalization" cannot be considered as extremism, but fundamentally, it is a concept of transformation in practice from being a conservative institution to a progressive church of the poor. This is the transformation experienced by the Philippine Church that we refer to as its radicalization.¹ If one has watched the movie, *Sister Stella L* (1984), one would see real-life Sister Stella L's in this paper, who experienced and went through radicalization during the period of the Marcos dictatorship.

This paper, however, is limited only to discussing the experience of the Catholic Church (with members comprising an estimated 80% of the Philippine population) and the Protestant

¹ Luis G. Jalandoni, "The Role of the Priest in Political Liberation," *Philippine Priests Forum* 4, no. 2 (1972): 16-26. See Carlos H. Abesamis, "Faith and Life Reflections from the Grassroots in the Philippines," in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed. Fabella, V. (Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 1980). See also Julio Xavier Labayen, *Revolution and the Church of the Poor*, (Manila and Quezon City: Claretian Publications and Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1983).

Church (with members comprising 10% of the population) at one of the darkest periods in Philippine history.

THE VATICAN II AND THE CHRISTIANS FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION (CNL)

The Philippine Church experienced a self-reflection among its members even before Marcos declared martial law on Sept. 21, 1972. The Vatican II or Second Vatican Council that convened from 1962-1965, had a deep influence on the direction of a Philippine Catholic Church that was in quest of relevance and direction.² Concretely, this can be seen in the direction of several congregations like the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), Sisters of St. Theresa's College, the Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica, and Maryknoll which partially phased out their exclusive schools that previously catered only to the daughters of the elite. Instead, they oriented themselves towards "conscientization"³ in the barrios and villages in remote provinces. Indeed, Vatican II under Pope John XXIII had a strong influence on them because of the unprecedented stand taken by the Vatican to be "a Church for the Poor and Oppressed."⁴

Theologian Ann Harris observes that at this time, the favorite readings of Church people shifted to the writings of Paulo Freire and Helder Camara which popularized "conscientization," and "structural analysis." Some of the questions raised in the reflections of the church revolved around the following:

1. What is the role of the church in an unjust and oppressive society where the majority are poor, oppressed, and are victims of state violence?

² Ann Harris, "Dare to Struggle, Be Not Afraid," in *The Theology of Struggle in the Philippines*, (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2003).

³ "Conscientization" is the term used by church theologians like Harris and others to mean awakening, politicisation.

⁴ Edicion De la Torre, *Touching Ground, Taking Root: Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*. (Manila: Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1986).

2. What are the role and attitude of the church towards revolutionary armed movements (including Marxist-Leninist party's organizations) of the people who are fighting oppressive structures?

Starting as pacifists, the immersion and integration of church people among the peasants, workers, and the urban poor are what bridged the gap for them to be awakened to the struggle of farmers and the poor for land, against demolition, and for a decent life.⁵ Some of the organizations that these church people were involved in included the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), Khi Rho, and the Social Action Centers of some parishes. The Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) established "Task Forces" or Mission Partners in congregations and Social Action Centers in various Archdiocese. These served as windows towards the awakening, training, and involvement of church people to participate in people's organizations struggling for a better life and against oppression.

Taking the lead as an "activist church," the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI) was born during the 1896 Revolution as an anti-colonial and revolutionary church of the Philippines under the leadership of Filipino Bishop Gregorio Aglipay. This revolutionary tradition and spirit were continued by the IFI under the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) established an Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) way back in the 1950s, and this was transformed into its Urban Rural Mission (URM) so that it can "live in Christ with the people."⁶

The highlight of the radicalization of the Philippine church was the formation of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) in 1972 on the eve of the declaration of martial law. Here, some former pacifists and moderates of the church sector became

⁵ Consuelo Ledesma, Panayam Kay Coni Ledesma, "Madreng Naging Rebolusyonaryo," in *Sulong Kababaihan*, (Magasing Pangmasa ng Gabriela, October 1999).

⁶ Rev. Henry Aguilar, "Urban Industrial Mission, the Pioneer of Urban-Rural Mission" URM National Consultation, August 1994, in *Issues of Ichthys*, a publication of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines.

members of organisations identified with the national democratic movement.⁷

At that time, progressive church people were still a few, and it can be said that there were independent initiatives in the programs of various Congregations. The declaration of martial law which initially created internal divisions, eventually unified church people to resist the dictatorship and created a ripe situation for deeper commitment among elements of the church.

MARTIAL LAW: THE INITIAL REACTION OF CHURCHES

The official declaration of martial law, though it was declared to crush social movements seeking radical changes in Philippine society, also resulted in a lot of changes towards radicalization in the traditionally moderate Catholic and Protestant churches. The church was left as the only legal institution that was untouched by the imposition of the Marcos dictatorship. All other organizations (NGOs, people's organizations, labor unions, and independent media) and institutions for check and balance (including Congress) were padlocked or outlawed. It became the responsibility and role of the church to act in the face of repressed and outlawed legal institutions and organizations during martial law.⁸

“Martial law babies” refer not only to those born between 1972, the year Marcos declared martial law on September 21, to February 1981, the year he officially lifted it but continued implementing his repressive martial law decrees. It can also refer to programs associations that were organized during this same period between September 21, 1972, to February 1981. Established in

⁷ Outlawed, the CNL later became an affiliated organisation representing the church sector in the underground National Democratic Front (NDF) which was founded in April 24, 1973.

⁸ Interviews with: Sr. Helen Graham, Maryknoll Sister, Quezon City August 19, 2007; Sr. Rosalina Lamadrid, a retired nun at the Congregation of the Immaculate Concepcion of Mary (CICM) who lived in Kalinga Apayao during the martial law. Interviewed at Queen of Peace House, Banawe St., Quezon City, August 7, 2007; and, Sr. Aurora Zembrano, retired nun of the CICM and former Directress of the Socio-Pastoral Institute (SPI). Interviewed at the Queen of Peace House, Banawe St., Quezon City. July 9, 2007.

December 1970, was the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) at the onset of the martial law declaration. Here, the First Joint Convention of the Association of Major Religious Superiors for Women of the Philippines (AMRSWP), and the Association of Major Religious Superiors for Men in the Philippines (AMRSMP) were held. This was where they organized the joint AMRSP or the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines. The AMRSP unified what used to be separate congregations for men and women in the Catholic Church— the Associations of Major Religious Superiors for Men, and the Association of Major Religious Superiors for Women.

But something more far-reaching happened in that convention beyond merely re-orienting the two large organizations of religious congregations. They jointly issued a prophetic statement "to be part of the transformation of the Philippine church and society."⁹ Concretely, its significance signaled the deepening of the commitment of the Church for the poor and oppressed. Seminars, workshops, and symposia were held by the various congregations and convents to discuss the repressive situation, the policies, and the projects of the Marcos dictatorship that affected the church and the people. Several readings and publications were circulated for critical reflection and discussion. This became the bridge for the congregations to be closer with one another, affecting stronger solidarity among church people.

Among the activist nuns who first got involved during martial law, and who were interviewed by the author, was Sr. Mariani Dimaranan, SFIC. Sr. Mariani was one of the first church people who encouraged fellow church people to get deeply involved in the face of the challenges of martial law. Sr. Mariani was head of the newly-established Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) that documented arrests, tortures, and those involuntarily disappeared (salvaged) during martial law. TFDP was also critical

⁹ Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP), "Current Tensions Between Church and State: AMRSP Reflections," *Pastoral Letter and Related Readings* (1983).

in the role it played in the campaign inside and outside the Philippines for the release of political detainees.

I first met Sr. Mariani in the late part of 1974 when she visited us— political prisoners at Fort Bonifacio. The TFDP had just been organized then. The AMRSP was instrumental in forming and funding the TFDP, providing 10,000 pesos as initial support to the task force.¹⁰ Established in early 1974, TFDP provided political detainees with moral and spiritual support. It also assisted detainees in their spiritual needs, documented their situation within prisons, and aided in working for the detainees' release.

On the issue of the controversial Chico River Dam that was a project in *Kalinga-Apayao* of the Marcos dictatorship funded by the World Bank, church people got involved to support the opposition of the indigenous *Kalinga* people led by Macli-ing Dulag. They admired the firm and wise leadership in that struggle of Macli-ing Dulag. This was probably why he was assassinated by the Philippine military.¹¹ According to a CICM nun who was assigned for ten years in *Kalinga-Apayao*, during those years, the Chico River Dam struggle became critical so that the involvement of the church under martial law would become more solid and unwavering. The church people became inspired by the courage of Macli-ing Dulag and the people of *Kalinga* in their opposition to the Chico River Dam that would destroy their communities.¹²

Among the ranks of the conservative bishops in the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the initial reaction to martial law was "wait and see"; others were silently contemplating "critical collaboration." Right after the declaration of martial law, the Archbishop of Manila Rufino Cardinal Santos even praised the dictatorship to wit, "...the establishment of a New Society in our beloved country, as envisioned by the imposition of martial law" maintaining that "the event should be hailed and

¹⁰ Mark John Sanchez, "Human Rights and the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines: Religious Opposition to the Marcos Dictatorship," *Kritika Kultura* 29: 126-156.

¹¹ Macli-ing Dulag was assassinated by a team of soldiers because he led the *Kalingan* tribes' opposition to the Chico River Dam. The martial law regime thought that his killing would scare the opposition.

¹² Interview with Sr. Rosalina Lamadrid, CICM, 2007.

welcomed by every peace-loving citizen.¹³ In contrast, the 300-member heads of the religious congregations that became affiliated with the AMRSP led the way towards the prophetic role of the church in acting and getting involved in a time of great challenges.

But there were also reactionary and conservative reactions among some elements of the Protestant and Catholic Church. The *Independiente Filipino Iglesia* (IFI) faction of Ilokano IFI Bishop Ga, hailed the declaration of martial rule. At Ateneo, a list of faculty and student activists identified with the national democratic movement was voluntarily given by the Jesuits to the military after the declaration of martial law. One of the names that they gave the military was my name, my address, and some of my comrades in the chapters of the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) and the *Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan* (SDK) at Ateneo de Manila University in Loyola Heights, Quezon City. The leadership of the Jesuit Order at Ateneo de Manila had an intense hatred/anger against activists identified with the national democratic movement whom they harassed and even expelled. This was while they nurtured the so-called "moderates" and "social democrats" in organizations like the *Kapulungan ng Sandigang Pilipino* (KASAPI) and *Lakasdiwa*. They were even more infuriated when leading elements of the moderates and social democrats (soc-dems) that they nurtured were converted into national democrats by joining national democratic movements like *Liga ng Demokratikong Atenista* (LDA), the KM, and SDK. The hatred by the Jesuit management of Ateneo was understandable because they were strongly influenced by the anti-communist line of "soc-dem activism" as propagated by Fr. Jose Blanco, S.J. and Fr. Archie Intengan, S.J. and this was enough motive for their actions.

CHURCH PUBLICATIONS UNDER MARTIAL RULE

The role played by the Philippine church in awakening the Filipino people during the first years of martial law cannot be understated, nor ignored. Marcos padlocked practically all newspapers and media that can be considered independent and

¹³ Ichthys, mimeographed copy (Quezon City: Task Force Detainees (TFD) office library, May 12, 1978), 15.

critical. Only those newspapers that propagated the achievements of "the New Society" under the Marcos dictatorship were allowed to operate.

It was in the atmosphere of censorship and the closure of independent newspapers, TV, and radio that the church began printing mimeographed publications such as "*Various Reports*" that first appeared in very limited circulation among church people and its networks, passed on from one reader to another. Within the church, they became the basis for religious reflection; among laypeople, they became the basis for clandestine political discussions. These church publications filled in the void for independent reporting under martial law and the church sector was the unlikely but welcome institution that filled that void. The publications contained stories that were not reported in the martial law newspapers, such as the *La Tondena* strike, as well as the other strikes and protest actions that followed it. These church publications contained stories of summary executions or salvagings, disappearances, and the unrest that was quietly sweeping the nation— stories that the regime did not want to be told.

The AMRSP publication, *Various Reports* then changed its name to "*Signs of the Times*" which first appeared in the late part of 1975 as a response of the Catholic Church community to the call for truthful and reliable information about the country in a time of the dictatorship's control of the mass media.

And when the "*Signs of the Times*" became hot in the eyes of the military, a short-lived church newsletter, "*Informationis Causa*" appeared, followed by the publication, "*Ichthys*" in September 1977. In publishing *Ichthys* (a Latin word for fish, that became a symbol of Christians being persecuted by Imperial Rome), the notation "For Religious Use" that was on the first page of "*Signs of the Times*" was removed.¹⁴ (Estella, 2007). This meant that the publication was intentionally now for everybody, a broader audience that was thirsty for news and the truth. During the early 80s, several lampoon issues of "*Signs of the Times*" appeared, with the catchy title, "Sick of the Times."

¹⁴ Chit Estella, "The Religious Press and the Marcos Years," *Philippine Journalism Review Reports*, (September 2007).

The Catholic Church also managed and operated Radio Veritas which broadcast not only for the Philippines but because of its nationwide relay stations spread all over the archipelago, it could reach listeners in the entire Asia-Pacific and transmitted in various languages. During the 70s and 80s, the Veritas radio station was operating from Fairview Village in Quezon City, then in Bulacan along the old Mc Arthur Highway, and presently at the old Panorama Theater Building on the corner of EDSA and West Avenue.

PROTESTANT INITIATIVES

In a personal interview, Pastor Alvaro Senturias, Jr. said that the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) was the first governing body of a church in the Philippines, as an organization to call for the dismantling of martial law. The general assembly of the UCCP, its highest ruling body, called for the dismantling of the "machinery of martial law," the exact words of the resolution which also created a human rights desk to implement this mandate.¹⁵ The UCCP also hosted the *Wednesday Forum*, a unique forum at the time when freedom of assembly and speech was suppressed. The *Wednesday Forum*, initiated in 1973 a few months after the declaration of martial law, was convened by Rev. Dr. Cirilo A. Rigos and later by Senator Jovito R. Salonga at the UCCP Cosmopolitan Church. This became a venue for open discussion on crucial issues under martial law. The forum invited speakers from the officials of the Marcos martial law regime, and also from the opposition. According to Pastor Senturias, though the forum organizers still made it a point to let their stance on issues oftentimes critical of the dictatorship, the *Wednesday Forum's* survival during a time of suppression was because of the UCCP's powerful connections within the Marcos government, most notable was UCCP member General Fidel V. Ramos, then the chief of the Philippine Constabulary (PC). The UCCP, through Pastor Alvaro Senturias, Jr. also helped in the publication of a book documenting

¹⁵ Interview with Pastor Alvaro Senturias, Jr. United Church of Christ Cosmopolitan Church (February 12, 2018).

human rights abuses: *Iron Hand, Velvet Gloves* (1979), written by writers Ceres Doyo and Chit Estella.

THE AMRSP AND ITS "TASK FORCES"

As its concrete involvement in the issues of the people, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) set up the following "Mission Partners" or "Task Forces": 1969- Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), 1974- Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), 1974- Task Force Orientation of Church Personnel (TFOCP), 1974- Task Force on Urban Conscientization (TFUC), 1977- *Urban Missionaries* (UM), 1979- Education Forum (EF), 1980- Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPICC).

The Catholic church sector was instrumental not only in establishing the TFDP, but it also helped start the Community-Based Health Programs (CBHP); while CBHPs eventually birthed organizations like the Medical Action Group (MAG) that at first, catered to the urgent medical needs of political detainees under martial law. The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, comprised of nuns from various congregations, collaborated with youth health professionals and created the first CBHPs. The first three CBHPs, established in 1973, were all under the dioceses of Ilagan, Tacloban, and Iligan.¹⁶

The radicalization of the Catholic clergy was immediately observed among Social Actions Centers nationwide. These were given direction by the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA), especially when Bishop Xavier Labayen became NASSA's national director. NASSA was the "justice and peace arm" of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Locally, the Basic Christian Community Organizations (BCCOs), Justice and Peace Programs, the Community Based Catechist, and Community Based Health Programs of the church gave it and the church people the exposure towards "conscientization." This exposure led to awareness about the poverty of the people, military abuses in the

¹⁶ Michael Tan, "The Development of Health NGOs in the Philippines: A Socio-Historical Review" *Philippine Sociological Review* 41, no.1:4 (1993): 111-122.

communities, and resistance of the poor against the dictatorship. The military has long been placed under the surveillance of church programs because these were closely related to suspected subversives in the eyes of the government.¹⁷

The AMRSP was not waiting for the go-signal of the CBCP of Cardinal Jaime Sin for it to make the call in early 1973 for the release of political detainees and the withdrawal of the declaration of martial rule. On January 22, 1973, at the initiative of the AMRSP, a "*Misa Para sa Kalayaan*" was held to express dissent against the Marcos dictatorship's Constitution. Some of the bishops then were still quiet, but a number of their priests and nuns in church programs in the barrios experienced a deep transformation.

Some programs or institutions that eventually sustained themselves but started as projects of the church include the Ibon Databank, Inc., which started issuing a mimeographed fact-sheet, "Facts and Figures" from a small room at the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS) in 1978. An RGS nun Sr. Sol Perpinan helped set up Ibon with two laypersons. The Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER) was another example of a project started by some church people in the form of church support for the labor movement through "genuine trade union"(GTU) education. Both programs sustained themselves up to the present, though they have become autonomous from the church.

To anchor itself to the idea of a "Church of the Poor," in 1978 the Socio-Pastoral Institute (SPI) was established by the AMRSP. The SPI organized symposia and seminars on relevant national issues for church people as well as for lay Christians. The discussions in these activities reflected on the Liberation Theology. The SPI also published articles for reflection which were circulated for discussion among church people.

It cannot be denied that the Liberation Theology of Latin America influenced in a significant way the church in the Philippines especially under conditions of repression under martial

¹⁷ Galileo Kintanar, "Contemporary Religious Radicalism in the Philippines, An Analysis," in *National Security Review*, (National Defense College of the Philippines, 1979).

law. In Latin America, Catholic priests were joining and even leading guerrilla movements against U.S.-backed military dictatorships. One specific inspiration was Colombian priest Fr. Camilo Torres who joined the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN)/National Liberation Army guerrillas but was killed in combat against troops of a repressive military dictatorship. In 1964, before he died, Fr. Camilo Torres declared: "If Jesus Christ was alive today, he too, would be a guerrilla fighter." Liberation Theology helped solve the religious dilemma regarding the use of revolutionary violence and Church-Marxist unity in the struggle against oppression. Another Colombian priest Fr. Manuel Perez, even became a leader of the ELN guerrillas in the 70s. These developments no doubt influenced the socially progressive interpretations of Christianity in the Philippines.

The commitment of the church was strengthened with its immersion with the poor, oppressed, and repressed. It did not take long before other progressive organizations were organized such as GOMBURZA, an organization of seminarians in the Philippines; the Promotion of Church People's Rights (PCPR), and the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF) which exist up to this day. Some of the first protest actions under martial law that saw the involvement of church people were among the sectors of workers and urban poor. As a form of support for those clandestinely organizing workers in factories, the AMRSP set up the Church Labor Committee (CLC), a support group for the labor movement.

THE HISTORIC LA TONDEÑA STRIKE

The first, thus historic significant strike recorded under the martial law Marcos dictatorship broke out on November 3, 1975. This had the full support and participation of some progressive church people both from the Catholic and Protestant churches. Obviously, the event was not even reported by the daily newspapers under martial law such as *Daily Express*, *Manila Bulletin*, *Times Journal*, and *Evening Post*.

The *La Tondeña* Strike was first announced in *Signs of the Times*, the mimeographed publication of the AMRSP. This was how it reported the *La Tondeña* Strike:

At 2:15 a.m., three buses full of workers sped out of the factory. When the fourth bus was about to drive out, the priests and nuns barricaded the gate. They told the military to likewise arrest them since they had violated the curfew. The military said they were exempted. The workers in the fourth bus were mostly women. When approached by the religious, some complained that they were boxed and pushed by the soldiers. The religious requested the officers inside the bus to let them go with the people. The officers refused to say that, "they have their orders, their mission." The religious retorted that they, too, have their mission, 'to serve the people.' Realizing that the military men were bent on following 'orders,' the religious decided to cling to the door and the windows of the bus. A military officer, who revealed himself to the religious as a devout Catholic, requested the latter to get off the bus. He was near tears; he was confused.

The refusal of the owners of the *La Tondeña* liquor factory to regularize their workers set in motion what was to become one of the most famous strikes in Philippine history, for it was the first to openly defy the ban on strikes under martial law. On October 25, 1975, an estimated 800 workers of *La Tondeña* Inc. defied the ban on strikes and protests by the dictatorship.

Some of the calls of support articulated by the church for the historic *La Tondeña* strike are the following: "UPHOLD THE WORKERS' RIGHT TO STRIKE!" "UPHOLD THE CHURCH'S MISSION TO BEAR EFFECTIVE WITNESS TO JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS!" "JUSTICE FOR THE FILIPINO WORKERS!"

CHURCH REFLECTION ON PRESIDENTIAL DECREE 823

The Philippine Church eventually made an official stand after the violent state reaction against the workers' strike at *La Tondeña*. A number of priests and nuns who supported the workers' strike at *La Tondeña* were arrested, although they were eventually released.

The strong solidarity between church people - both Catholic and Protestants - and workers was not lost on the Marcos regime and its minions. To further curtail dissent and put a stop to the collaboration between workers and members of the church, the repressive state introduced a new decree. This new decree was meant not only to quash workers' power but to also sever the ties that bound the workers and church people in solidarity.

On November 3, 1975, Marcos issued Presidential Decree 823 (P.D. 823) that not only affirmed the ban on strikes, and picketing against corporations. Also banned were institutions and organizations - Filipino or foreign - such as churches, from assisting or giving support to strikes or labor actions, which were branded as subversive activities. The Catholic and Protestant Churches united with one voice, including their bishops against this P.D. 823. They saw this as a violation of the principles of the church to be compassionate and involved on issues of the poor, and in the struggles of the oppressed masses. On November 14, 1975, Archbishop Antonio Ll. Mabutias of Davao wrote a letter to President Marcos where he advised him to withdraw P.D. 823. Likewise, Archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin also wrote to Marcos to rescind the decree. So widespread was Church opposition to the decree that in Imus, Cavite, the clergy publicly issued the Declaration of Priests and Religious of the Diocese of Imus, Cavite against P.D. 823 on November 16, 1975.

These events were followed by a mass, march, and public meeting on November 17, 1975, participated by 5,000 urban poor residents of Tondo, an event that was organized by the Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO). On that day also Fr. Timoteo Butalid, Sr. Mary Rosario Battung, and Manila Cardinal Jaime L. Sin held a dialogue with Marcos to present the demands of the poor

against the massive demolition of their houses in Tondo and nearby areas.

The *La Tondeña* strike inspired more workers in other companies towards collective action. Sr. Mary John Manansan, OSB recalls one of the many strikes that followed *La Tondeña*, was at the Engineering Equipment Inc., She narrated the story of priests and nuns forming a human barricade around the workers – a barricade that stood between the workers and the military while the workers engaged the military in negotiations. Nuns prevented the arrests of workers on strike that day; nuns boarded the buses trying to take away arrested workers, and the military refusing the religious along to the camps to be detained with the workers. The priests' and nuns' habit served as a shield of sorts to protect workers who were waging the strikes, and the religious clergy wearing them. As some nuns were also educators in various Catholic-run schools in the Philippines, they used the unique opportunity during the Marcos years to enlighten their students in their classes. Workers, farmers, and even urban poor people were invited to talk about their plight before students and other lay faculty members.

The commitment of more church people was strengthened towards solidarity and involvement in the collective actions and organization of the people, especially in Negros Island, the location of the largest sugar plantations in the country.¹⁸ Most of them experienced torture and detention with peasants, workers, and urban poor. Priests and nuns not only observed but also experienced the violence of martial law. They witnessed the brutality of demolitions in urban poor communities and the use of state violence against the poor. They experienced hamletting, and repression against peoples' organizations. But they were also witnessing the spirit and courage of the struggling masses and people who endured the threats against their families, as well as personal security and threats to their own lives.

According to the former Chair for Women of the AMRSP, Sr. Emelina Villegas, CICM: "More than anything else, we hurdled the fear in our actions despite the dangerous situation. But we

¹⁸ Niall O'Brien, *Island of Tears, Island of Hope: Living the Gospel in a Revolutionary Situation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993).

recognize that the work for justice and freedom is dangerous because of the control of the powerful on the powerless."¹⁹ A nun from the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS), Sr. Mary Soledad Perpiñan's initial expectation of her life as a nun being, in her own words, "*dasal lang*" (prayers only) within the convent was shattered as she witnessed first-hand the lives of the people at the margins whose plights were exacerbated by the imposition of Martial Law. Sr. Mary Soledad traces back her involvement in the anti-Marcos dictatorship movement to her experiences in traveling around the country and witnessing the displacement of the poor from their homes, and the dismissal of workers who were merely fighting for a decent wage and better working conditions.²⁰ Sr. Mary John Manansan in her autobiography said that since she was overseas when martial law was declared, her initial thoughts were then maybe Martial Law was "what we need," referring to the need for discipline, and that she was ready to give it a chance. Sister Mary John's hopeful but cautious optimism did not last long, however, as she changed her mind within a month of being back in the Philippines. Her anti-dictatorship leanings were galvanized further in her involvement in the historic *La Tondeña* strike which she credits as her "birth of fire" as she likes to call it. Her participation in support of the *La Tondeña* workers' strike spurred not only her active participation against the dictatorship but also her activism that persists to this day.

Likewise, United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP) Pastor Alvaro Senturias' initial attitude at the onset of martial law was "wait and see." But later in 1974, his change of attitude and involvement in the anti-dictatorship struggle gelled when people he knew became victims as involuntarily disappeared, imprisoned, tortured, and displaced due to their homes being demolished.

The challenges and commitment of the Philippine Church were further strengthened because of the call of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace of the Vatican in

¹⁹ Sr. Emelina Villegas, "The Groans and Growth of AMRSP" in *Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, 25 Years*, (AMRSP, 1997).

²⁰ Interview with Sr. Soledad Perpiñan, RGS, 1994.

documents that were disseminated during the 70s, with the title, "The Church and Human Rights." The document stated: "The Church cannot remain neutral when human rights are truly violated."²¹

CHURCH PEOPLE AS VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Church people themselves became victims of martial law, especially those immersing with the people and acting in solidarity with the struggling oppressed among the people. Several foreign Catholic priests like Australian Fr. Brian Gore, SSC were arrested and deported by Marcos. Other Catholic priests, nuns, and Protestant pastors were arrested, tortured, and detained, and some were even salvaged or abducted and made to disappear as *desaperacidos* (involuntary disappeared). A case in point is Fr. Rudy Romano, a Redemptorist priest who was at that time the Chair of the *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN) in Cebu. Fr. Romano was a very vocal figure against martial law. He had a close relationship with the urban poor in the Visayas and was engaged in helping organize workers. Fr. Romano was active in mobilizations in Cebu against human rights abuses. On several occasions, he invited me to speak in Cebu on the issue of U.S. military bases and intervention, bringing me around Cebu City on his motorcycle. On July 11, 1985, Fr. Romano and a companion were on a motorcycle when last seen being intercepted and abducted by armed men who are suspected to be from the military intelligence, as they were both forced at gunpoint into a jeep. He was never to be seen again. When Fr. Romano and his companion were abducted, the head at that time of the Cebu Metropolitan District Command (Metrodiscom) was Col. Panfilo Lacson. Lacson was a former deputy for Military Intelligence and Security Group (MISG) headed by Col. Rolando Abadilla. Abadilla and the MISG were notorious for the abduction and torture and salvaging of activists who were resisting martial law.

²¹ "The Church and Human Rights," *Pontifical Commission Working Paper* no.1, 1st edition (1975):80.

CHURCH PEOPLE AS VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In January 1973, a foreign Carmelite priest, Fr. Engelbert van Vilsteren was killed by members of a fanatical paramilitary unit in San Francisco, Agusan del Sur. This is according to the still unpublished "Martial Law Memoirs" of a former Carmelite priest, Arnold van Vugt. Then, there was the case of the Italian priest, Fr. Tullio Favali who was killed on April 11, 1985, by members of the paramilitary Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF) in North Cotabato.

Among the Filipino priests who were arrested and detained during martial law was Fr. Jose Nacu of the Lasallete Order who was apprehended because he supported the Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO), the largest organization of the urban poor then. Another priest arrested was Fr. Edicio de la Torre, SVD, who was tagged as a leader of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL). Also arrested were foreign priests like Fr. Daniel MacLaughline M.M., Fr. Cornelio Lagerwey, MSC, Fr. Brian Gore, SSC, and Fr. Edward Gerlock, M.M., were arrested in Davao City.

While the involvement of members of the clergy against martial law widened and deepened, so did the direct repression by the dictatorship against the church.²² On November 21, 1973, the Santa Cruz Church in Binondo was raided by the military to stop the holding of a "Misa ng Kalayaan" (Mass for Freedom) where songs like "Bayan Ko," "Pilipinas Kong Mahal," and "Lupang Hinirang" were being sung.²³

On August 24, 1974, the religious noviciate in Novaliches was raided by the military and police, with helicopters as a backup. The military alleged that, Jose Ma. Sison, leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), was in hiding there. Their target, Sison, was not on the premises but the military arrested all the lay people there who were not members of the noviciate, including gardeners and house cleaners.²⁴ Because of this

²² Karl Gaspar, "Church Persecution in the Philippines: From the Pastoral Perspective," in *That We May Remember*, (Quezon City: Promotion of Church People's Rights, 1989). See also F.V. Carino, *Ibid*.

²³ *Taliba ng Bayan*, January 26, 1973.

²⁴ Estella, "The Religious Press..."

kind of harassment, a protest vigil was held at the Manila Cathedral the following Sunday led by Jaime Cardinal Sin where at least 3,000 people attended. In Mindanao, some of the radio stations under the management of the Catholic Church were also padlocked by the military.

DILEMMAS OF THE CHURCH IN THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH MARXISTS.

The church premises everywhere have historically been considered as sanctuaries for those faced with persecution. The involvement and unity of church people with people's organizations especially among the ranks of peasants, workers, and urban poor created a dilemma of sorts. Most of the committed laypeople with whom church people interacted were organizers— underground members of the National Democratic Front (NDF), the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), or the New People's Army (NPA). The latter had an effective underground organization and political infrastructure during martial law, in both the cities and the rural areas. Though some were arrested during the first few years of martial law, on the whole, the clandestine infrastructure was able to survive and overcome the "*sunog*" or raids consisting of raids on "UG" Underground Houses and arrests by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine Constabulary (PC). The progressive members of the clergy could not avoid integrating with the most committed and dedicated organizers of the NDF and the CPP in the provinces and the cities. It could be said that the internal discipline in their respective religious congregations that church people were conditioned and used to, also prepared them for the iron discipline of the national democratic movement, the CPP and NPA. Some progressive members of the clergy admitted that they did not have a hard time adjusting to the discipline of the underground movement (*kilusang lihim*), unlike those from the other sectors of society.

At first, the task given by the national democratic forces for the clergy was in terms of "bahay, prente, pera"(house, cover, funds), or as a logistics unit that supported the underground movement and giving legal status for activists. It did not take long before they

were organized as a separate sector with organizational integrity, and awakening producing leaders for the progressive church movement, as well as other significant tasks in the movement (liaison work, international relations). An undated internal document of the CPP Mindanao Commission that I found at the University of the Philippines Main Library Archives had the title, "Tasks of the Church Sector in the Philippine Revolution" and, "The Party's United Front Policy on Churches and Religion" (no date). Some other documents at the U.P. Archives included: "Message to the First Conference on Party Work Among Protestants" during the Party Conference in the Church Sector on November 12, 1981; and "The Party's Tasks in the Church Sector" (no date).

Some priests joined and even became leaders of the revolutionary underground movement against martial law like Fr. Edicio de la Torre, who became a leader of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL), NDF. There was also Fr. Conrado Balweg who became a leader of the NPA in the Cordilleras; and Fr. Nilo Valerio. There were also priests and nuns in the Visayas and Mindanao who joined the underground and became leaders of the CPP and NPA. Two of the prominent leaders of the NDF who are based in Utrecht, Netherlands were former members of the clergy: the couple Luis Jalandoni and Consuelo Ledesma. Both were tempered by martial law, they experienced detention and even more became committed to the revolutionary movement.

During the clandestine meeting of the CNL held in 1981, it was reported that some of its members were priests, nuns, pastors, deaconesses, novices, and seminarians were sufficient to classify the "church" as a revolutionary sector. Since the Marcos martial law dictatorship era up to the present, there is always a discussion and prevailing question about the continuing dialogue among church people with Marxists; Is it the church that influences the Communist Party, or is the Communist Party the one influencing the church?

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH

The Church Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (CCHRP) was established in 1981 in Washington, D.C. at the Methodist Building, beside the Capitol Building of the U.S. Congress. CCHRP was the outcome of church people directly becoming victims of repression in the Philippines. Rev. Paul Wilson and his wife who were visiting the Philippines were arrested in a raid by the 5th Constabulary Unit (5th CSU) at their rented apartment in Quezon City in 1974. Included among those arrested at the Wilson residence were Rev. La Verne Mercado, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines (NCCP); Rev. Harry Daniel, an official of the Christian Conference for Asia, Dr. Dante Simbulan, and other staff members of the NCCP. The Wilson couple were having dinner with their house guests when the military raid happened, and everyone was arrested and tortured. Even the American Couple Rev. Paul Wilson and his wife Didi were arrested, interrogated, and subjected to mental torture, and were summarily deported to the United States. The local Filipino NCCP staff who were neither religious missionaries nor pastors were severely tortured, in Filipino term, "*bugbogsarado*." The arrest and interrogation of Rev. Paul Wilson, his wife, and other high-ranking officials of the Christian Conference for Asia, and those of the NCCP, became the spark for the American churches (especially those with branches in the Philippines) to act, and take concrete action against the martial law dictatorship. Thus, the Church Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (CCHRP) was born and became an effective inter-faith, ecumenical lobby group of the church in Washington, D.C. against the dictatorship. The person who played a key role in the establishment of the CCHRP was Rev. Paul Wilson who was a martial law victim himself.

The CCHRP became a disseminator of news about the Philippines for all the churches outside the country, especially about human rights violations. It became an important lobby against U.S. military assistance and economic aid to the Marcos dictatorship in the U.S. Congress, which was its building neighbor in Washington, D.C. This role was significant because of U.S.

government support for the dictatorship which enabled it to sustain repression. According to the CCHRP Declaration of Purpose: "We are a Coalition of churches and church-related organizations who seek to address the issue of human rights because of our faith commitment." Also effective in the international struggle against martial law were Catholic and Protestant churches in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan.

The churches abroad took the lead in highlighting human rights violations of the Marcos dictatorship and they brought pressure to their respective governments to terminate whatever military or economic aid it was giving to the dictatorship. From Europe, Church-based NGOs and funding agencies gave concrete moral and material support to the task forces of the churches in the Philippines. Notable is the Catholic organization for Joint Financing of Development Programs (CEBEMO), the Inter-Church Coordinating Committee (ICCO), the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), etc. Even more significant was the active support of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

It can be said that the church played a vital role in the international work against the Marcos dictatorship. "Bring the Philippine Struggle to the International Scene" was one of the tasks given by the NDF to the progressive Church Sector. The broad international solidarity work against the Marcos dictatorship gave strong support to both the Catholic and Protestant institutions that became the voices of resistance to the dictatorship.

THE CHURCH AS A VITAL SECTOR OF THE OPPOSITION DURING THE U.S.-SUPPORTED DICTATORSHIP

Martial law heightened the solidarity and unity of all religious congregations, convents, and religious orders of the clergy.²⁵ These church people and institutions did not anymore treat each other as competitors to recruit novices and seminarians, or in getting the attention of the Vatican, but they now considered themselves as one voice through the Association of Major Religious

²⁵ Interview with Sr. Rosalina Lamadrid, ICM...

Superiors of the Philippines (for men and women). Various congregations now coordinated and cooperated in raising the awareness of the various congregations, while immersing themselves with the struggles of the people.

The church people were so effective in convincing their communities and parishes to take a stand against the dictatorship. They had the credibility based on moral grounds, to remove the legitimacy of the dictatorship in the eyes of the people and the world. The church also had a large organization and structure inside and outside the country to fight the dictatorship. Outside the country, the voice of the church was very effective in highlighting the issue of human rights violations.

On the part of the Vatican, its local representative in the country, the Papal Nuncio, cautioned their local counterparts in the clergy especially the AMRSP that, "you are too political." In response, the AMRSP held several dialogues with the Papal Nuncio. Let us be reminded that the Philippine church has a reactionary and conservative history from the time of Spanish colonization. Dr. Jose Rizal in his novel *Noli Me Tangere*, criticized the Spanish friars - in the person of Padre Damaso. But the church also had a progressive tradition that begun with the spirit and martyrdom of Filipino priests Frs. Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora (GOMBURZA) were executed for their attempts to Filipinize the church. Let us also not forget Bishop Gregorio Aglipay who established the revolutionary church, the Philippine Independent Church (IFI) because the Spanish-controlled church in the Philippines condemned the Philippine Revolution.

CONCLUSION

The Marcos dictatorship was a test in the Philippine clergy who underwent reflection and an internal transformation. This became a test, challenge, and opportunity to practice the teachings of the church and to act on what they preached. It heightened the unity of church people, especially in the face of repression against the members of the church who were arrested, tortured, deported, abducted, or involuntarily disappeared because of their commitment to the poor. We witnessed here during this time

several committed clergies who offered solidarity to the masses towards a just and principled resistance against the U.S.-supported Marcos dictatorship. They did not hesitate to join forces with Marxists members of the church cooperated or even joined the CPP, NPA, and NDF.

As theologian Ann Harris had observed, we can consider this experience of the church during this era of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines as "*The Theology of Struggle*."

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