



# DIALOGUE

"You will know THE TRUTH, and the truth will  
set you FREE." — John 8:32

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MANILA, PHILIPPINES

## SITUATIONER

### Drive Against Manila's Urban Poor Entered Its Second Week

The Metro Manila Commission, the mayors of Metro Manila's four cities and 13 towns, and the National Housing Authority (NHA), have thrown their combined weight against the city's urban poor last week in a recent drive of harassment and repression.

Triggered by President and Prime Minister Marcos' statement to check, control and contain internal migration, the mayors of Metro Manila proposed last July 17 the implementation of a national identification system. The proposal, aired during a conference on squatting and "zonal improvement program" called by Governor Imelda Marcos and the National Housing Authority, calls for every Filipino citizen to register in their home province. Should they decide to transfer to other places, they should seek first accreditation by "proper" authorities.

Viewed as a way "to eliminate the metropolitan areas' perennial squatter problem", as a newspaper report puts it, the proposal would involve an initial appropriation of P2 million.

Mayor Ramon Bagatsing, on the other hand, ordered last July 14 the revocation of all permits granted to sidewalk vendors. This resulted in the arrest of hundreds of sidewalk vendors in the city of Manila alone displacing and leaving them unemployed.

At the same time, city officials start blaming each other for what they call "illegal issuance of permits to sidewalk vendors and the resulting proliferation of vendors in Manila."

As this developed, sidewalk vendors'

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## Should the Church Get Involved in Politics?

Sometimes one hears very good people say that they don't like the Church now, "because it's getting involved in politics". This is a very delicate point but very necessary to clarify. There are people who would like the Church to only touch "the spiritual things", that is, only what pertains "to God and to the soul."

Throughout history, the different social systems have sought to quiet the voices that bother them — or to buy off or terrify their consciences; always to silence them at any cost. This has been the story during the Roman Empire, Nazi Germany and the different fascisms during the past 40 years. It's the story today in the Soviet Imperialistic State.

If the Church's mission were to preach

only resignation, no one would accuse her of going outside of her jurisdiction. And yet, wouldn't a Church of this type truly be the "opium of the people" — a church that would make people tranquil rather than help to look for changes so that there may be more peace, more truth, more justice?

The Church of Jesus Christ is the Church of the liberation of man, that seeks to build a world where men may live as brothers and thus recognize that God loves them and is the Father of all. What does it mean to liberate man? To liberate is the opposite of to oppress.

The sin that is within us is the lie, the hatred, the divisions. It's the silent

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### A SECOND LOOK AT 'EVANGELISM'

## Two Gospels: One Enslaves, The Other Liberates

An evangelist working in Thailand said the other day that conditions for Christian work were never more favourable in that country than they are today. As long as he and his friends confined themselves to their calling, which is to preach the Gospel, the Government gave them no trouble whatever.

The Government of the Philippines also is favourably disposed to evangelism. Dr. Billy Graham will bear that out. When he went on his mission to the Philippines last November, the response he

had in official circles was positively encouraging. Imelda Marcos, First Lady of the Philippines and Governor of Metropolitan Manila, said of the man and his Mission:

We are grateful for Dr. Graham's presence in the Philippines, for his love and his eloquence, for his goodness and kindness. We are appreciative of the bountiful harvest that awaits the Filipino people this week.

Dr. Billy Graham, Madam Ruth  
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## Should the Church Get Involved?

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murder of abortion, the love of the "Money God", it's the blindness in front of my brother's need. If the Church only speaks out about this, no one will accuse her of getting involved in politics.

But the sin is also in the organization of society when structures do not promote brotherhood but rather are organized to favor a certain privileged group. This is what happens only too frequently in Latin America. When the Church points out this sin that is very alive in society and that has concrete causes and small groups interested in maintaining this system, then she is accused of "getting involved in politics".

If dinner is given to undernourished children, no one will call that "politics". But if the reason why these children are undernourished is looked for and spoken of, then the Church is getting involved in what is "off-limits". When the Church preaches resignation in the face of suffer-

ing and charity to the one who suffers, there is no problem. But when the Church points out the sin that is present in the social organization and the oppression and exploitation of so many of our brothers who are marginated of all power, then she is accused of "politics".

The role of the Church is not easy today in our world: To be at the same time the path of true unity among all and cry out with strength and love against all that unjustly oppresses so many of our brothers. Many find it hard to understand why the Church speaks of "human rights" or the right of the worker to organize freely or the right of the masses to express their opinion.

Is this getting involved in politics? — or is this recalling and defending the dignity of man, redeemed by Christ who is the image of God.

—Fernando Ariztia  
Bishop of Copiapó, Chile

## One Enslaves, The Other Liberates

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Graham and their Crusade are here to remind us that Christ is our guardian and our sanctuary, and that amid all our worldly endeavours, it is only those who are Christ-informed and Christ-conscious who are strong.

It is not only in Thailand and in the Philippines that the evangelist is received with open arms. People in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, South Africa and Brazil are all, according to the Rev. Dan Armstrong of the Uniting Church in Australia, avid for the Gospel. He has just completed evangelistic missions in these countries and he should know. People in these countries, he conceded, have obvious material needs, but their spiritual needs are more basic and more urgent.

We have no dearth of Christian activity in Asia. Healing missions, multi-evangelism campaigns, and even exercises in exorcism have become regular features of life in our big cities. The chief architects of most of these and the star performers at them continue to be preachers from the First World. Their motives are often mixed, even as ours are when we go to hear and see them.

So our rulers give them no trouble. Our people flock to them in their thou-

sands. They are free to preach; people are free to respond; churches grow. Little wonder that these visiting evangelists and their local hosts are convinced that conditions for evangelism were never more congenial.

But behind this freedom lies a great unfreedom.

It is to this that the latest March First Declaration draws our attention.

March First Declarations are costly symbols of political dissent in South Korea. They have become an integral part of the nation's relentless struggle for freedom and democracy. The first of these Declarations was made in 1919. On the first of March that year thirty-three people representing various religious groups gathered in Pagoda Park and read to a large crowd the Declarations of Independence they had signed. It sparked off demonstrations all over the country against Japanese colonial rule. The 1976 Declaration which led to the arrest of many Christian leaders was made in the context of the present indigenous subversion of democracy in Korea. So is this year's Declaration.

Among the signatories of the Declaration are Cardinal Kim and Bishop Hak

Soon Tji of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Bishop Chum Hwan Lee, a Quaker Leader, well-known Christian ministers and laymen and women belonging to many denominations. They are of course all of them Korean citizens.

This is what they say on the "Situation of Religion" in South Korea:

There are over ten million Buddhists and over six million Christians in Korea. The large size of the religious population does not necessarily mean that there is religious freedom.

For any religion, there is infinite freedom as long as it is only concerned with individual egoistic pleasure after death or with material blessings in the secular world. This is because such hedonistic faith does not struggle against structural injustice and corruption in a definite historical and social context, but instead escapes from the world. The regime actively encourages this kind of individualist and hedonistic faith, and therefore there seems to be an abundance of freedom of faith

*"It is a duty that has been laid on me (preaching the Gospel). I should be punished if I did not preach it." I Cor. 9:16*

in South Korea. However, when people's religious faith leads them to criticize the absolute power of the ruler, they become immediate targets for suppression and abuse. Prophetic faith is thoroughly suppressed, and in this sense there is no freedom of religion. Today's religious reality is one in which prophetic critics receive ruthless political retaliation when they seek to share the pain and suffering of people who are unjustly oppressed, exploited, and discriminated against by the dictatorship.

We have freedom in many Asian countries to preach the Gospel, to speak in tongues, to conduct healing ministries and even to cast out evil-spirits — as long as the Gospel does not disturb, the tongues do not make sense, the healing does not extend to the diseases of the body politic, and the spirits are the ones with no visibility. We rejoice, against Jesus' explicit injunction, that the spirits submit to us; and leave the principalities and powers strictly alone.

That is why we are free, and that is the measure of our bondage.

—T. K. Thomas

## The Siege of Cordillera

The Commission on Development and Social Concerns of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines co-sponsored the Cordillera Ecumenical Consultation-Workshop in May this year at the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Philippine's Mission Compound in Sagada, Mountain Province. Fifty five participants coming from the different cultural linguistic groups in the Cordillera area and persons involved in church programs for tribal Filipinos attended the Consultation.

An important aspect of the Consultation was the report of participants on the presence, impact and correspondingly the response of the people of the Cordillera to the following: Cellophil Resources Corporation, Chico River Dam Project, mining operations of multinational firms, para-military presence, infrastructure, the general conditions of farm workers and the plight of the minorities of Cordillera.

On the churches' response to the Cordillera situation, we quote the "Summary of the Proceedings" of the Consultation:

Apparently, the churches' major role in the midst of all these happenings has been and continues to be *evangelization*, specifically the process of converting Igorot pagans into Christians. Attempts have been made to respond to the pressing problems of the people but these proved inadequate . . .

In recognition of these inadequacies, the Consultation drew up a Philosophy of Work substantially summarizing what the workshop achieved. Unanimously adopted by the participants in the Plenary Session of May 15, 1978, the Philosophy of Work follows in full:

### PHILOSOPHY OF WORK

"Man is created in the image of God." (Genesis 1:27)

We, the Filipino people of the Cordillera have a distinct culture and patrimony. Our history is a continuing struggle to uphold our basic rights and identity. We are aware of our strengths and we recognize our inadequacies in coping with the various forms of subjugation and exploitation.

We must have a critical understanding of the root causes of the conflicts and struggles of our people; our work to bring about genuine people's development must be based on a concrete analysis of our people's condition. A critical analysis of our history shows the active role of government entities, foreign and local big business interests in causing major problems that beset us.

We firmly hold that our basic human rights must be respected; and we believe that any development affecting us must be for us and determined by us.

Where we have to cooperate with government programs for the people we will gladly do so; where we have to pioneer in new frontiers of service and witness, we must do so.

We believe that the church must exercise its prophetic role through active participation in our people's struggles.

To achieve our hopes, we now pledge ourselves to participate in our people's programs that promote the creation of

## A Health Program That Serves the People

Forty-five participants of the Consultation on the Concept, Principles, and Practice of Community-Based Health Program sponsored by the Commission on Development and Social Concerns of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines held last Nov. 27-30, 1977 issued a communique on health with the following text:

"We community workers, social workers, church workers, health professionals and students from various parts of the Philippines have come together because of a growing awareness of the ineffectiveness of the present health care delivery system and a desire to find realistic alternatives that would meet the needs of our marginalized Filipino people.

"During the past two days of the seminar, we concretized from our various experiences the failings of the present health care delivery system. We recognize that the health problem is not an isolated one, that is, it is not a technological problem requiring only technological solution. We recognize that the health problem is closely interrelated with the present social, cultural, political and economic structures in the society, thus requiring a structural change. We believe that the present health care delivery system does not serve the majority of our people. Whereas, the majority of the people are in the rural areas, our health care delivery system is urban-oriented, hospital/doctor-centered and curative in emphasis. Decisions regarding health are made from the top by a few, imposed on the majority. It is heavily Western influenced, to the detriment of the development of indigenous health personnel and resources as has been found out.

"We therefore, dedicate ourselves to work for a health care delivery system which will serve the majority of our people, one that fosters self-reliance and is rural in orientation, preventive in character; one that encourage initiative, community participation, and relies on people's support; one that taps and develops the vast indigenous health resources of our people.

"In the end, we commit ourselves toward working for a healthy society, one that not only allows the Filipino to be free from sickness but will enable him to attain total human development."

The participants included 17 doctors, nurses, dentist and midwife; 18 community workers; 3 herbal researchers; 6 church workers; and 1 paramedic. These health workers came from Metro Manila, Cagayan, Baguio City, Kalanga-Apayao, Mountain Province, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Viscaya, La Union, Leyte, Samar and Agusan del Norte. Twenty-nine of them were Roman Catholics, while 16 belonged to various Protestant churches.

genuine Christian communities through: (a) liberating education and (b) self-reliant and self-determining people's organizations.

More than any other region in the world, Southeast Asia exemplifies the surface contradictions and the structural consistency of the Carter administration's human rights policy. For in this region, where the United States has been involved so deeply, Carter's continuation of aid commitments to pro-US dictators and denial of any American responsibility to help ease post-war hardship in Vietnam and Laos reveal the low priority of his concern for the lives of people compared to the overriding importance of opposing socialism. The coexistence of US client states and socialist governments in the region also represents a contrast in development models and approaches to human rights, which throws light on the many dimensions of the concept of human rights itself.

There was a time not so long ago when, confronted by evidence of advances in public welfare in socialist countries, liberal academic defenders of American client states would say: "Yes, but only at the sacrifice of democratic rights. Free world countries may not have achieved as much materially, but at least they have their freedom". One does not hear this argument any more. Nor does one hear much of the "free world" when liberal policy-makers explain why the US supports some states and opposes others. Now the argument has been reversed to justify American support for universally acknowledged dictatorships: "small" freedoms must be set aside in the interest of development. The effect of this logic on the lives of millions of people all over the world is brutal.

In an attempt to halt this degradation of American ideology abroad — to "re-establish the moral superiority of our system over all others" as Senator Moynihan humbly puts it — President Carter announced the defense of human rights as one of the main pillars of his new administration's policy. The fervor with which he intoned this pledge seemed at first to fit in better with the moral pieties of Plains, Georgia, Sunday school sermons than with global strategy. Even so, the new thrust seemed better than the cynical *Realpolitik* of Dr. Kissinger. Serious doubts surfaced only when it became apparent that Carter's human rights commitment was primarily a justification for criticizing socialist governments, which hardly depend on the US for economic or military support. When the Car-

# Human Rights and US Policy in Southeast Asia

## The New Realpolitik

By Joel Rocamora  
The SOUTHEAST ASIAN CHRONICLE

ter administration announced it would not stop military aid to repressive regimes, its policy was finally exposed as nothing but ideological window dressing for business as usual.

Even if the defense of human rights has been discredited as a genuine policy goal, it continues to be used as an instrument to achieve other goals. It has served already to divert attention from American responsibility for human rights violations by American client states by focusing on the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe. And it has reinforced a narrow concern which recognizes only civil and religious liberties as rights. Because it highlights dramatic individual cases, often of prominent citizens, such an approach distracts concern from the economic exploitation that brings so much suffering and degradation into the lives of its millions of anonymous victims. Indeed, the violations of political rights that have attracted so much attention are the logical extension of systematic denial of economic rights. Political repression is made necessary by the growth of popular resistance movements — which are the direct result of the poverty created and intensified by increasing economic exploitation. But as long as American transnational corporations benefit from their denial, economic rights will not be among the "human rights" that concern American officialdom.

### Investment Aid and Credit

Most lists of repressive regimes include Southeast Asian countries: the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. The bulk of US investment credit and aid to Southeast Asia goes to these three countries, and all three are heavily dependent on US contributions to their armed forces and involvement in their economies. Moreover, American aid and investment in these three countries increased dramatically precisely in the years after repressive regimes were imposed in 1957 and again in 1976 in Thailand, in 1966 in Indonesia, and in 1972 in the Philippines. In all three cases, the US State Department in-

sists that US assistance to the existing regimes in these countries should be continued, despite their acknowledgement of human rights violations.

The connection between these facts is not fortuitous. It is not necessary to establish cloak-and-dagger CIA conspiracies to show that US economic and political pressure was a significant factor in the shift to dictatorial regimes in these three countries. In Indonesia prior to 1966, the nationalist and left-leaning Sukarno regime was gradually nationalizing foreign-owned enterprises, had refused US aid and was moving closer and closer to China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in its foreign policy. When the Suharto regime took over in 1966 with covert but widely acknowledged US assistance, Indonesian domestic and foreign policy turned full circle. Nationalized enterprises were returned to their previous owners, US loans and aid were solicited, the powerful Indonesian Communist Party was literally physically eliminated, and investment laws were liberalized to encourage foreign investment.

In Thailand and in 1958, the military regime of Gen. Sarit Thannarat, which had seized power to end a period of political ferment, began a process of involvement with American economic and military interests that culminated in Thailand's support role in the Indochina war. During the three years of democratic experiment and political debate from 1973 to 1976, US aid to Thailand dropped substantially — except for military hardware. Just months after the civilian government ordered American military installations closed, the military returned to power in a bloody coup. In the Philippines, one of the first acts of the Marcos regime after declaring martial law in 1972 was to abrogate legislation and financial regulations that limited the economic rights of foreign investors. While both US aid and investment had declined in the years prior to 1972, subsequent years showed quantum jumps in both indices.

### Aid Against the People

In addition to reflecting a large portion of US aid to repressive regimes that cooperate with American capital, Southeast Asia provides examples of the specifically repressive influence of American aid, much of which goes to bolster military and police agencies. Major segments of both the Thai and Indonesian military-police establishments have been organized, trained and equipped with US assistance — in both cases creating a powerful apparatus that could not have come out into being without access to outside resources. American aid has also been a vital factor in the dramatic growth of the Philippine military and police forces under martial law. In all these cases, these forces are deployed not against external enemies but against opposition groups at home.

The Philippine case provides a good illustration of the implications of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's statement to Congress that "in each case we must balance a political concern for human rights against economic or security goals". What he tried to convey was that it may be impolite for the US to impose its human rights standards in situations where US economic and security interests might be adversely affected as a result. A severe limitation on the moral thrust of President Carter's human rights policy admittedly, but an accurate statement of broader US foreign policy goals nonetheless. What Secretary Vance neglected to tell Congress is that in certain instances the human rights policy would actually be used to advance not human rights but US economic and security interests. Hence, Carter used pressure on the human rights issue to persuade Marcos to back down on his demands that the US pay his country more for the use of its territory as military bases. Marcos also was denied the more favorable terms of trade he was seeking. While the State Department report on human rights in the Philippines came closer to truth than did its reports on Thailand and Indonesia,

and while Carter himself took a well-publicized interest in the torture case of urban poor organizer Trinidad Herrera, the Carter administration has simultaneously worked hard to prevent Congress from cutting military aid to the Marcos regime. The only explanation for such apparently contradictory behavior is that Carter was more interested in using the human rights issue to force Marcos to make concessions on base "rental" and trade terms than he was in using the American aid leverage to force respect for human rights.

### US Attacks New Socialist States

The other side of the coin of American relationships in Southeast Asia is the calculated American economic, diplomatic and media barrage against the newly liberated Indochinese states of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. Many people have already denounced the presumption of American criticisms of alleged Vietnamese and Kampuchean human rights violations. They have documented the fact that some of these allegations are outright fabrications, while many others are based on unsubstantiated rumors circulated by interested parties. They have pointed out that the country that rained millions of tons of bombs and defoliants on Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea has no right to pass judgment. What is at issue, however, is more than just the veracity of refugee reports of atrocities or the character of re-education camps.

On the other hand, the propaganda offensive against the socialist states of Indochina serves larger American interests abroad. By projecting an image of repression under socialism to Third World people, the US hopes to discredit the socialist alternative to existing structures. In an effort to shape reality to the propaganda image, the US has also actively used trade embargoes, economic sabotage and various other techniques to exacerbate conditions during the already difficult transition from dependent capitalism to socialism in newly liberated states. The sanctions now applied to Vietnam and

Kampuchea have previously been applied to China and Cuba, while lesser measures have been used against Mozambique.

On the other hand, for the peoples of Indochina as well as resistance forces elsewhere in the region, the question of human rights cannot be separated from the question of national rights. In their experience, the very concept of individual rights has been a meaningless abstraction for all but a very few as long as their countries have been subordinated to foreign interests and their local allies. To achieve human rights in all their dimensions — economic, social, political and cultural — they must secure the independence of their nations and reconstruct societies raped by centuries of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.

For the workers and peasants who constitute the majority of the people of Southeast Asia, the dichotomy between "bread and freedom" is a false one. There is not now, nor has there ever been, such a choice, for without bread there is no freedom, and without freedom there is no bread. As the peoples of Indochina work to overcome the legacies of war and colonial subordination and develop new political, economic and social forms, more and more of the people of other countries of Southeast Asia are being repressed politically precisely to facilitate their increasing exploitation.

The struggle for democratic rights in countries such as the Philippines or Thailand, therefore, is directly related to the struggle for economic rights, which in turn, cannot be separated from the effort to free these countries from their subordination to American security and economic interests.

If people are risking imprisonment, torture, and death in their struggle, it is not for some abstract Western notion of freedom but for the right to control their lives — to have a say in the making of decisions which affect their livelihood. Because the forces arrayed against them are powerful, they can achieve their goals, in the way that the people of Indochina have achieved theirs, only by working together, by painstakingly reconstructing the social ties that colonialism and neo-colonialism have tried to destroy. In the ultimate analysis, it is only in the context of this struggle, and the communities that come out of this struggle, that human rights have taken on real meaning for the peoples of Southeast Asia.

## SITUATIONER

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groups were reportedly preparing to protest against this restrictive and repressive measure by city authorities concerned. "This is a matter of survival for us," as one vendor said.

In another development, the National Housing Authority (NHA) proposed the creation of task forces to be used in driving squatter settlements out of the metropolitan area.

### 20,000 Workers in 22 Firms Defy Strike Ban

In defiance of General Order No. 5 (no strike in vital industries), more than 20,000 workers in 22 firms in Metro Manila struck in a series of militant actions during the period February to July 1978 to protest restrictive management policies, mass layoff, termination of union leaders, harassment, and to demand their emergency and living allowances.

These were: The Regent of Manila, Feb. 22; Riverside Mills Corp., March 15; Philips Electrical Lamp, March 20-21; Yupangco Cotton Mills, March 26-31; Aris Philippines, Inc., March 30; Impact Corp., April 1-12; Sacoba Mfg. Corp., April 1; Pier 2 Arrastre Service Corp., April 4-5; G & S Mfg. Corp., April 4; S & J Cottage Industries, Inc., April 4-11; Manila Midtown Ramada Hotel, April 5; Roque Woodworks, April 18; S & J Motors; Pantranco Bus Line; Mandarin Hotel; Hyatt-Regency Hotel; Manila Garden Hotel; Hooven Comalco and Polymer Industries.

The biggest strike occurred at Aris Philippines, Inc. with 6,500 workers; Yupangco Cotton Mills and Riverside Mills Corp., 3,000; Hooven Comalco, all workers; Polymer Industries, 2,000; and G & S Manufacturing Corp., 2,000 workers. The other firms had 200 to 300 workers joining the picketline. At Sacoba Manufacturing, only six workers were left inside the factory.

In the case of the Manila Midtown Ramada Hotel, workers got most of their demands in only three hours and 15 minutes (10 a.m.-1:15 p.m.). The work stoppage occurred during lunch preparations and coincided with the arrival of the First Lady who was to address 2,000 guests at 1 p.m. that day.

Delay in CBA negotiations had result-

ed in denial of wage increases, vacation and sick leaves, seniority pay and retirement plan, the workers charged.

Often the strikes were intimidated and harassed by management, military and police forces. Workers at Aris experienced fire-hose treatment; guns were fired by security men at workers of Sacoba; and picket-busting by Metrocom troopers marred the strike at Yupangco Cotton Mills.

### School for Scandal (Far Eastern Economic Review—June 30, 1978)

A group of 121 parents and other residents of Metro Manila have written to Philippine Education Minister Juan Manuel, with copies to his senior officials, protesting that teachers in the Philippine capital were bribed to help make the April election for the country's first limited legislature under martial law what they termed "the dirtiest election in our whole lifetime".

The protesters claimed that in Manila, teachers were paid bribe money of P200 (US\$27) each, school principals P500 and supervisors P800. Teachers monitored polling during the election, supposedly to prevent fraud. But the letter complained that there was a "systematic design and effort to cheat the people of Metro Manila and that the public school teachers, guardians of the polls, had by and large allowed themselves to be used in the commission of frauds and acts of terrorism that characterized this first election under martial law".

### FROM ABROAD

#### Carter Ordered Young to Shut Up (Reuter/AFP—July 18, 1978)

President Jimmy Carter, in an urgent telephone call from Bonn, West Germany, where he is now attending an economic summit, ordered his ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, to shut his mouth.

Carter's blunt conversation with Young was in reaction to the latter's revelation on the possible existence of a good number of political prisoners in the US made during a long interview with a Paris daily. Young was told his remark was "incorrect, ill-timed, and had harmed the United States.

The president was visibly concerned that his human rights stance would be undermined.

# Launch Out Into The Deep\*

By: JOVITO R. SALONGA

This morning, as we celebrate the anniversary of this Church, it might be a good thing to talk about the unforgettable miracle in the life of Simon Peter, the fisherman.

The unusual call to Peter and the other fishermen to be the first disciples of Jesus is recounted in the accounts of Matthew and Mark with a simple command:

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

But in the account of St. Luke, the call to Peter is preceded by a wonderful miracle.

Let us review this narrative found in Luke 5:1-11.

Peter had just finished fishing the whole night, and by a stroke of bad luck, he and his companions failed to catch a single fish. *Talagang walang swerte*, as we might say in Pilipino. He was washing his nets to they could be dried and made ready for the next evening when the Lord of all history, Jesus, came into his simple, uncomplicated life.

On that day, there were crowds who wanted to listen to Jesus preaching the Word of God on the shore of the lake. The multitudes must have been so anxious to listen to Jesus at close range they pressed in on him.

It was at this point that Jesus noticed two empty boats lying at the water's edge. He stepped into one of the boats and asked its owner, Simon Peter, to push the boat a little out into the water so he could speak to the people from the boat.

Luke does not tell us what Jesus said to the crowds of people, and how they reacted to His words. After Jesus finished preaching, He turned to Simon Peter and said:

\*54th Anniversary Message, United Church of Manila, July 18, 1978. A reflection on "Launch Into the Deep" by Dr. Harry Pak.

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"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets, and you will catch a lot of fish."

You recall the answer of Simon Peter, as if in protest:

"Master, we toiled all night and did not catch a thing."

Let us pause for a while and elaborate on the reaction of Simon Peter in the language of our time:

"Look, Master, I heard you speak to the multitudes. I must admit you are a great speaker. I noticed how the people listened to you in rapt attention as you talked to them about the things of the Spirit. I understand you were a carpenter from Nazareth like your father before you. But I hate to say this — you don't know a thing about fishing. We didn't catch anything last night — how can we catch any fish now that the sun is up? You see, the things you talked about — love and faith, truth and justice — have nothing to do with catching fish.

"You are okay, but why are you interfering with our simple lives?"  
I wonder if this is not what many in our country are actually saying today.

"Master, all that you say in the Gospel is good and fine. But you don't know a thing about the stock market, about finance and economics, about science and technology. You have no idea about how elections are run in Metro Manila, about how to run a government under martial law, about subversion and peace and order. Yes, Master, your Gospel is good as far as it goes, but here in the Philippines, we separate the things of the spirit from the affairs of Government. We shall adore you and worship you in Church, but please, Lord, do not interfere in any way with our lives outside the Church."

About a year ago, last October, I was dismayed by the report of *Fortune* magazine, a well-known American publication for businessmen, that described the Philippines as the second most corrupt nation in Asia. I am sure those in high positions would belittle the report. But

even if this were only half-true, our loud pretension that we are the only Christian nation in Asia should be a cause for deep shame. Perhaps one reason why Christianity has not affected the whole life of our society is due to our deliberate effort to confine and imprison God within the four walls of the Church, and to separate Him from the world that He created, the same world for which Christ bled and died to save. If this analysis is correct, then the first mission of the Christian faith today is to Christianize the Christians inside and outside the churches — in the sanctuaries as well as in offices and factories, in schools and gymnasiums, in convention centers and prison camps — so that in actual deeds, we may glorify Jesus Christ as the living Lord of our lives.

Let us go back to Peter where we left him. That morning when he listened to Jesus, something in Peter's heart told him to obey the command of the Master, even if the command sounded illogical and unsound.

"We toiled all night, and we didn't catch a single fish. Nevertheless, at your word, I will let down my net."

Fishing in the daytime, after a long night without catching anything, must have sounded like Mission Absurd to Simon Peter. But Peter, the impulsive fisherman, was willing to obey, even if Jesus' command sounded so ridiculous and absurd. "NEVERTHELESS, at your word, I will let down my net."

If what Jesus told Simon Peter at the time was Mission Absurd then what Jesus, after His resurrection, ordered his disciple, to do, may well be called Mission Impossible.

You recall that before Jesus was crucified, one disciple, Judas, turned traitor, and after His death on the Cross, the remaining eleven became a bunch of scared, frightened men. Yet it was to these ignorant, terrified men that Jesus entrusted the Great Commission:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matthew 28:19).

Simon Peter, confronted by what I call Mission Absurd, allowed Jesus to change the ordinary logical routine of his life, and, in absolute trust, obeyed the Master. He launched into the deep, let down his nets, and just as the Master said, he caught a lot of fish. The nets were so full Peter and his companions filled the two boats with fish. The abundance of God's grace was beyond his wildest imagination.

And so, St. Luke tells us that Peter fell down on his knees before Jesus. He saw his own unworthiness in the holy presence of the very Son of God. Unable to bear the presence of Jesus and so overwhelmed by the experience, Simon Peter cried out — "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man."

But Jesus, who knew Peter better than himself, did not go away. He told Peter — "Do not be afraid. Henceforth, you will be catching men."

St. Luke tells us that Peter, along with the other disciples, left everything, and followed the Master. Peter became the great leader of the early Christian Church. And this is the heart of the miracle. When a man — against all the dictates of logic and human reason — stands up and obeys the call of Christ, in complete trust and confidence, he becomes the channel of the endless grace of God.

You will recall that Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit, took Jesus at His word, and carried out the Great Commission — "Go and teach all the nations." — notwithstanding their ignorance and lack of wealth and stature. Simon Peter, the illiterate fisherman, became the great fisher of men, and — as recorded in the second chapter of The Acts — after his first sermon, 3,000 souls believed and were added to the disciples. (11:41) Thus, these ignorant disciples demonstrated the great truth we sometimes ignore — namely, that a handful of men, who know what they believe and are ready to lay down their lives for it, can change the world. Imprisoned, reviled, some of them beheaded, the disciples of Jesus shook the pagan Roman Empire and turned the whole world upside down!

Spain was among the early nations to be converted, and in the 16th century, brought the Cross and the Sword to these islands. The United States, at the turn of the 20th century, brought the message of the open Bible to this country, and that is how, fifty-four years ago,

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LAUNCH OUT . . . from page 7

the United Church of Manila was born, under the leadership of the men and women we now remember and honor.

And so I come to one final point. Jesus told Peter to "launch out into the deep". Peter and his companions obeyed, and today, we know that both as fishermen and fishers of men, they would not have achieved the results they attained if they had remained in the shallow waters.

Taking Jesus at His word, obeying Him, and venturing out into the deep — this is what Christianity is all about, and this is what the founders of this Church did many years ago.

This, to me, is the meaning of our faith — to get out of the routine and the ordinary, to leave our usual way of doing things, to be open to the deepest and richest experiences of life, to follow Jesus, to trust His word, and venture out into the deep, with all its risks, its sorrows and joys, its trials and pleasant surprises. Many times, wittingly or unwittingly, we become the defenders of the *status quo*. We want to be safe and comfortable — we do not want to become controversial in anyway. And yet, come to think of it, Jesus was the most controversial figure that ever lived. How can we say we follow Him, if unlike Him, we do not want to take any risks? We do not want to dream and dare and do something that has never been done before. Specifically, we shy away from the task of challenging entrenched injustices and doing something concrete about new wrongs and iniquities.

Thus, when we go to Church, many of us, including myself, just want to sit down, listen to the sweet, heavenly music from the Church choir, followed by an inspiring sermon from the Pastor. We go home thinking this is what Christianity means. Our religion is a religion of ease and comfort. Like the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we do not wish to see and come to the succor of any bleeding, dying man on the wayside. We do not want to hear about the struggles of the poor and the oppressed, precisely because we do not want to get involved. But this kind of religion is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

When our religion becomes a religion of ease and comfort, we would do well to listen to the words of Jesus: "Launch out into the deep."

## Churches Decry One-Man Rule; Injustices

A RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE PHILIPPINE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, June 6-7, 1978, Quezon City.

WHEREAS, on August 7, 1977, Rolando Fagsao, an 18 year old Episcopalian from Bontoc was fatally shot in Basao, Tinglayan, Kalinga while riding in a private panel truck, and on September 27, 1977 George Lizardo, prominent Episcopalian farmer-businessman from Tabuk, Kalinga was also fatally shot in the same area while driving his own Ford Pick-up;

WHEREAS, until now full justice has not been done regarding these killings in spite of our people's petitions and requests sent to appropriate authorities;

WHEREAS, aside from these specific cases there have been other killings, abuses, and violations of basic human rights along the Chico River Valley area;

WHEREAS, the deterioration of peace and order in this area is related to the Chico River Basin Dam project as it was when the government ventured into this project that peace and order was visibly disrupted and military presence also escalated;

WHEREAS, the National Convention in 1976 strongly passed a "statement of concern for the suffering people along the Chico River Valley" which shows our Church's love and concern for the said suffering people;

BE IT RESOLVED, therefore, that this National Convention strongly reiterate its 1976 statement of concern and again express its concern regarding these killings and abuses and also decry the fact that until now, full justice has not yet been done regarding these cases particularly those of Rolando Fagsao and George Lizardo;

BE IT RESOLVED FURTHER, that this National Convention request those in authority to disarm the armed civilian units in Basao, Tinglayan, to facilitate the faster attainment of peace and order in the area.

A RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES FIRST QUADRENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY HELD ON MAY 21-26, 1978 IN CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY.

WHEREAS, as a church body, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines should make a clear and forthright stand on the prevailing crucial issue which confronts the Philippine society at the present time;

WHEREAS, this prevailing crucial issue relates to the suppression and curtailment of the civil and political liberties of the citizens under the domination of Martial Law;

WHEREAS, it is in keeping with the democratic tradition of the evangelical churches in the Philippines that these civil and political liberties be restored, and the machinery of Martial Law scuttled;

WHEREAS, the system of one-man rule or of total concentration of power in one man is anathema to the full growth and enrichment of a Christian community and oppressive to the challenges of a creative and responsible Christian discipleship;

WHEREAS, the President of the Philippines himself has repeatedly proclaimed that the processes of normalcy have already started, and that he is definitely committed to the ultimate dismantling of the machinery of Martial Law;

WHEREAS, most of the elected members of the IBP have come out for the lifting of Martial Law;

WHEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED by the General Assembly in plenary session, that its will and desire in this regard be duly noted and made of record — in that this church body is against the perpetuation of one-man rule in the country; that it is for the immediate restoration of all the civil and political liberties of the citizens; and that it is for the immediate dismantling of the machinery of Martial Law in the country.