

Religion in the Philippines

by Jack Miller

The Philippines proudly boasts to be the only Christian nation in Asia. More than 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 6 percent belong to various nationalized Christian cults, and another 2 percent belong to well over 100 Protestant denominations. In addition to the Christian majority, there is a vigorous 4 percent Muslim minority, concentrated on the southern islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Scattered in isolated mountainous regions, the remaining 2 percent follow non-Western, indigenous beliefs and practices. The Chinese minority, although statistically insignificant, has been culturally influential in coloring Filipino Catholicism with many of the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

The pre-Hispanic belief system of Filipinos consisted of a pantheon of gods, spirits, creatures, and men that guarded the streams, fields, trees, mountains, forests, and houses. Bathala, who created earth and man, was superior to these other gods and spirits. Regular sacrifices and prayers were offered to placate these deities and spirits--some of which were benevolent, some malevolent. Wood and metal images represented ancestral spirits, and no distinction was made between the spirits and their physical symbol. Reward or punishment after death was dependent upon behavior in this life.

Anyone who had reputed power over the supernatural and natural was automatically elevated to a position of prominence. Every village had its share of shamans and priests who competitively plied their talents and carried on ritual curing. Many gained renown for their ability to develop anting-anting, a charm guaranteed to make a person invincible in the face of human enemies. Other sorcerers concocted love potions or produced amulets that made their owners invisible.

Upon this indigenous religious base two foreign religions were introduced -- Islam and Christianity -- and a process of cultural adaptation and synthesis began that is still evolving. Spain introduced Christianity to the Philippines in 1565 with the arrival of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi. Earlier, beginning in 1350, Islam had been spreading northward from Indonesia into the Philippine archipelago. By the time the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, Islam was firmly established on Mindanao and Sulu and had outposts on Cebu and Luzon. At the time of the Spanish arrival, the Muslim areas had the highest and most politically integrated culture on the islands and, given more time, would probably have unified the entire archipelago. Carrying on their historical tradition of expelling the Jews and Moros [Moors] from Spain (a commitment to eliminating any non-Christians), Legaspi quickly dispersed the Muslims from Luzon and the Visayan islands and began the process of Christianization. Dominance over the Muslims on Mindanao and Sulu, however, was never achieved during three centuries of Spanish rule. During American rule in the first half of this century the Muslims were never totally pacified during the so-called "Moro Wars." Since independence, particularly in the last decade, there has been resistance by large segments of the Muslim population to national integration. Many feel, with just cause, that integration amounts to cultural and psychological genocide. For over ten years the Moro National Liberation Front has been waging a war of secession against the Marcos government.

While Islam was contained in the southern islands, Spain conquered and converted the remainder of the islands to Hispanic Christianity. The Spanish seldom had to resort to military force to win over converts, instead the impressive display of pomp and circumstance, clerical garb, images, prayers,

and liturgy attracted the rural populace. To protect the population from Muslim slave raiders, the people were resettled from isolated dispersed hamlets and brought "debajo de las campanas" (under the bells), into Spanish organized pueblos. This set a pattern that is evident in modern Philippine Christian towns. These pueblos had both civil and ecclesiastical authority; the dominant power during the Spanish period was in the hands of the parish priest. The church, situated on a central plaza, became the locus of town life. Masses, confessions, baptisms, funerals, marriages punctuated the tedium of everyday routines. The church calendar set the pace and rhythm of daily life according to fiesta and liturgical seasons. Market places and cockfight pits sprang up near church walls. Gossip and goods were exchanged and villagers found "both restraint and release under the bells." The results of 400 years of Catholicism were mixed -- ranging from a deep theological understanding by the educated elite to a more superficial understanding by the rural and urban masses. The latter is commonly referred to as Filipino folk Christianity, combining a surface veneer of Christian monotheism and dogma with indigenous animism. It may manifest itself in farmers seeking religious blessings on their rice seed before planting or in the placement of a bamboo cross at the corner of a rice field to prevent damage by insects. It may also take the form of a folk healer using Roman Catholic symbols and liturgy mixed with pre-Hispanic rituals.

When the United States took over the Philippines in the first half of the century, the justifications for colonizing were to Christianize and democratize. The feeling was that these goals could be achieved only through mass education (up until then education was reserved for a small elite). Most of the teachers who went to the Philippines were Protestants, many were even Protestant ministers. There was a strong prejudice among some of these teachers against Catholics. Since this Protestant group instituted and controlled the system of public education in the Philippines during the American colonial period, it exerted a strong influence. Subsequently the balance has shifted to reflect much stronger influence by the Catholic majority.

During the period of armed rebellion against Spain, a nationalized church was organized under Gregorio Aglipay, who was made "Spiritual head of the Nation Under Arms." Spanish bishops were deposed and arrested, and church property was turned over to the Aglipayans. In the early part of the 20th century the numbers of Aglipayans peaked at 25 to 33 percent of the population. Today they have declined to about 5 percent and are associated with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States. Another dynamic nationalized Christian sect is the Iglesia ni Kristo, begun around 1914 and founded by Felix Manolo Ysagun. Along with the Aglipayans and Iglesia ni Kristo, there have been a proliferation of Rizalist sects, claiming the martyred hero of Philippine nationalism, Jose B. Rizal as the second son of God and a reincarnation of Christ. Leaders of these sects themselves often claim to be reincarnations of Rizal, Mary, or leaders of the revolution; claim that the apocalypse is at hand for non-believers; and claim that one can find salvation and heaven by joining the group. These groups range from the Colorums of the 1920s and 1930s to the sophisticated P.B.M.A. (Philippine Benevolent Missionary Association, headed by Ruben Ecleo). Most of those who follow these cults are the poor, dispossessed, and dislocated and feel alienated from the Catholic church.

The current challenge to the supremacy of the Catholic church comes from a variety of small sects - from the fundamentalist Christian groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists, to the Iglesia ni Kristo and Rizalists. The Roman Catholics suffer from a lack of personnel (the priest to people ratio is exceedingly low), putting them at a disadvantage in gaining and maintaining popular support. The Catholic church is seeking to meet this challenge by establishing an increasingly native clergy and by engaging in programs geared to social action and

human rights among the rural and urban poor. In many cases this activity has led to friction between the church and the Marcos government, resulting in arrests of priests, nuns, and lay people on charges of subversion. In the "war for souls" this may be a necessary sacrifice. At present the largest growing religious sector falls within the province of these smaller, grass roots sects; but only time will tell where the percentages will finally rest.

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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There is only one predominantly Christian country in all of Asia. The Philippines is approximately 85 percent Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), 10 percent Muslim, and 5 percent 'other' religions, including the Taoist-Buddhist religious beliefs of Chinese and the 'indigenous' animistic beliefs of some peoples in upland areas that resisted 300 years of Spanish colonial rule. The purpose of this lecture is to explain how a small number of Spaniards converted the bulk of the Philippine population to Christianity between the mid-1500s and 1898--the end of Spanish rule. It also discusses some of the variety of forms of Christianity practiced today in the Philippines.

Historical background:

In the 1500s, the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan encountered the Philippines while sailing under the flag of Spain in search of a western route to the East Indies, the source of the spice trade. He and his men landed on the island of Cebu in the central Philippines.

At this time period, almost nothing was known of the Philippines, and so our sources of information about pre-Hispanic societies in the country date from the early period of Spanish contact. Most Philippine communities, with the exception of the Muslim sultanates in the Sulu archipelago and Mindanao, were fairly small without a great deal of centralized authority. Authority was wielded by a variety of individuals, including 1) headmen, or datu; 2) warriors of great military prowess; and 3) individuals who possessed spiritual power or magical healing abilities.

The absence of centralized power meant that a small number of Spaniards were able to convert a large number of Filipinos living in politically autonomous units more easily than they could have, say, converted people living in large, organized, complex kingdoms such as those Hinduized or (later) Theravada Buddhist-influenced kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia and on the island of Java in Indonesia. The Spanish were unsuccessful in converting Muslim Sultanates to Christianity, and in fact warred with Muslim Filipinos throughout their 300 year colonial rule from 1521 - 1898. Nor did they successfully conquer certain highland areas, such the Luzon highlands, where a diverse array of ethno-linguistic groups used their remote, difficult mountainous terrain to successfully avoid colonization.

Magellan's arrival in Cebu represents the first attempt by Spain to convert Filipinos to Roman Catholicism. The story goes that Magellan met with Chief Humabon of the island of Cebu, who had an ill grandson. Magellan (or one of his men) was able to cure or help this young boy, and in gratitude Chief Humabon allowed 800 of his followers to be 'baptized' Christian in a mass baptism. Later, Chief Lapu Lapu of Mactan Island killed Magellan and routed the ill-fated Spanish expedition. This resistance to Western intrusion makes this story an important part of the nationalist history of the Philippines. Many historians have claimed that the Philippines peacefully 'accepted' Spanish rule; the reality is that many insurgencies and rebellions continued on small scales in different places through the Hispanic colonial period.

After Magellan, the Spanish later sent the explorer Legaspi to the Philippines, and he conquered a Muslim Filipino settlement in Manila in 1570. Islam had been present in the southern Philippines since some time between the 10th and 12th century. It slowly spread north throughout the archipelago, particularly in coastal areas. Had it not been for Spanish intervention, the Philippines would likely have been a mostly Muslim area.

'Christianization' Strategies Employed by the Spanish:

In little more than a century, most lowland Filipinos were converted to Roman Catholicism. There are a number of reasons why Spanish missionaries were successful in this attempt:

1. Mass baptism - the initial practice of baptizing large numbers of Filipinos at one time enabled the initial conversion to Christianity. Otherwise, there is no way that such a small number of Spanish friars, or Catholic priests, could have accomplished this goal. It is said that many Filipinos associated baptism with their own indigenous 'healing rituals', which also rely on the symbolism of holy water--very typical of Southeast Asian societies.

2. Reduccion policies - in areas where Filipinos lived scattered across the landscape in small hamlets, the Spanish military employed a resettlement policy that they had used successful in Central and Latin America. This policy was called reduccion, and essentially meant a forced relocation of small, scattered settlements into one larger town. The policy was designed for the

convenience of administration of the Spanish colony's population, a way for a small number of armed Spanish constabulary to control more easily the movements and actions of a large number of Filipinos. It was also designed to enable Spain to collect taxes from their Christianized converts. Throughout Spanish rule, Christianized Filipinos were forced to pay larger taxes than indios, or native, unChristianized peoples.

The *reduccion* policy also made it easier for a single Spanish Catholic friar to 'train' Filipinos in the basic principles of Christianity. In reality, the policy was successful in some areas but impossible to enforce. Spanish archives are full of exasperated colonial officials complaining about how such settlements were 'all but abandoned' in many cases after only a few weeks.

3. Attitude of the Spanish clergy in the early phase - Spanish friars were forced to learn the native language of the peoples they sought to convert. Without schools that trained people in Spanish, the Spanish friars had no choice but to say Christian mass and otherwise communicate in the vernacular languages of the Philippines. There are over 200 native languages now; it is unknown how many existed in the beginning of Spanish rule.

In the first half, or 150 years of Spanish rule, friars often supported the plight of local peoples over the abuses of the Spanish military. In the late Spanish period, in contrast, Spanish priests enraged many Filipinos for failing to a) allow otherwise 'trained' Filipino priests to ascend into the higher echelons of the Catholic Church hierarchy in the Philippines; b) return much of the land they had claimed as 'friar estates' to the Philippine landless farmers; and c) recognizing nascent and emerging Filipino demands for more autonomy and a greater say in how the colony was to be managed.

4. Adaptation of Christianity to the local context - Filipinos were mostly animistic in their religious beliefs and practices prior to Spanish intervention. In most areas they revered the departed spirits of their ancestors through ritual offerings, and also believed in a variety of nature spirits. Such beliefs were central to healing practices, harvest rites, and to maintaining a cosmological balance between this world and the afterlife. Spirits were invisible, but also responsible for both good and bad events. Spirits could be blamed for poor harvests, illness, and bad luck generally. Yet Filipinos believed that proper ritual feasting of the spirits would appease them, and result in good harvests, healthy recovery of the ill, and the fertility of women.

The legacy of Spanish conquest and colonial rule in the Philippines, as is true of all colonial attempts to 'master' or manage indigenous populations, is mixed. On the one hand, Spanish clergy were very destructive of local religious practices. They systematically destroyed indigenous holy places and 'idols', or statues and representations of indigenous spirits, gods or goddesses. They also tried to stamp out all examples of native scripts and literature for fear that Filipinos were using exotic symbols to foment rebellion. The Spanish also imposed new 'moralities' on Filipinos by discouraging slave holding, polygamy, gambling, and alcohol consumption that were a natural part of the indigenous social and religious practices.

At the same time, Hispanic rule left a legacy of syncretic, rather than totally destructive, elements. Spanish clergy introduced some very European features of Catholic practice that blended well with indigenous ritual practices. Spanish Catholic priests relied on vivid, theatrical presentations of stories of the Bible in order to help Filipinos understand the central messages of Christianity. Today, this colonial legacy lives on whenever Filipino Catholics re-enact through religious dramas the passion of Christ, or Christ's martyrdom, during Holy Week.

Other Filipino ceremonies also mark the Christian calendar, such as during the rituals surrounding death. Death is always an occasion that marks a society's traditions, and in the Philippines funerals are usually accompanied by somber village processions and music, essential parts of Roman Catholic ritual practice. Filipino indigenous religious beliefs traditionally celebrated rice planting and harvesting times, the death anniversaries of departed ancestors, and these have been blended in meaning and timing with Catholic rites such as All Saint's Day and Fiesta de Mayo. In this kind of religious syncretism, blending the rites and meaning of two totally separate societies, the outcome is often a surprise rather than a foregone conclusion.

On October 31, for example, children in rural villages in the Philippines often go house to house asking for small sums of money--a traditional almsgiving. Filipino families also spend much of the evening visiting their ancestral graves, showing respect and honor to their departed relatives by feasting and offering prayers. In contrast, American children honor October 31 as 'Halloween', or the night of the dead, going house to house and asking for treats. Christian families in the U.S. do not consider this occasion a time to 'visit' and feast with their departed ancestral or kindred spirits. In the U.S., the proper time to 'visit or honor the departed spirits' is Memorial Day at the end of May. In the U.S., too, it is considered unseemly to 'feast' or celebrate one's dead relatives by having picnics in cemeteries.

Similarly, Filipinos set up small altars and chapels decorated with flowers in the spring during the Fiesta de Mayo, or festival of May 5 (traditionally a Mexican holiday celebrating their revolution). Every Catholic town in the Philippines celebrates an annual barangay, or 'barrio', fiesta in honor of their patron Catholic saint. During this period, there are large processions and parades throughout the town, with the saints, the mayordomo or sponsor of the fiesta, and school children marching through the settlement to band music or music played on a videocassette. In addition, each family visits other neighbors and relatives to share home-cooked, special 'feast' foods during the fiesta. In many coastal or riverine communities, fishers celebrate by carrying the image of the patron saint on boats in a fluvial procession to bless the waters and fish. The sacred days of the Roman Catholic calendar also affect traditional livelihoods. For example, Good Friday, the day Jesus Christ was crucified, even today is considered a 'taboo' day for fishermen. It is an omen of terrible fates, and fishers fear for their lives if they go out fishing on that day. In the past, every Friday was deemed to be a risky day to go fishing, but these beliefs have been modified over time.

The Roman Catholic emphasis on godparents became known as *compadrazgo*, which celebrates the alliance of two families in marriage. The godparent institution is a common and important institution in countries like the Philippines (and Malaysia) where marriages traditionally were arranged between families. In these areas, long before the advent of Islam or Christianity, it was considered customary and desirable for the heads of two friendly families to cement their 'alliance' by arranging an appropriate marriage for their children--in many cases while their children were still very young. The goal of such arrangements was to ensure that each family's child (and eventual married couple) would always have concerned advice and support from all of their affinal (or in-law) relatives as well as blood relatives so as to enable them to establish themselves firmly in the future.

Christianity in the Philippines Today:

Christianity in the Philippines today, unlike during the Spanish period, is a mixture of nationalistic efforts by local peoples to 'Filipinize' Roman Catholicism and the efforts of a variety of Protestant missionizing successes. In the American colonial period, 1900-1946, a lot of Protestant teachers and

missionaries came to the Philippines to 'purify' what they viewed as the incorrect or 'syncretic' characteristics of charismatic blends of Filipino Roman Catholicism. The Aglipayans were among the first to try to Filipinize Roman Catholicism and were popular in the early part of American colonial rule. The Iglesia ni Kristo is another Filipino-founded sect that has found strong support among well-to-do Filipinos.

In remoter parts of the Philippines, where Spanish colonialism and Roman Catholicism never penetrated until the beginning of the 20th century, a variety of Christian missionaries compete for new converts. Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses typically go door-to-door, spreading the specific messages that their sects support. In traditional, staunchly Roman Catholic areas, their missionizing efforts and attacks on syncretic forms of Roman Catholicism are often unwelcome. In areas where Roman Catholicism is still fairly recent, the missionaries carry messages that are more carefully listened to by local Filipinos. What was once a truly Roman Catholic country in terms of the population has given way to a variety of forms of Christianity.

In the Luzon highlands, for example, where many indigenous ethno-linguistic groups resisted Spanish rule, Roman Catholic or Anglican priests today have a fairly comfortable accommodation with indigenous forms of ritual and belief. Local peoples follow traditional customs related to burial rites, but often invite Christian priests to celebrate the last rites or formal burial rites in addition. The advantage of this kind of syncretism is that people's beliefs and support for their traditions are not lost, but simply accommodated with beliefs and practices associated with the newer religion. Many recent Protestant missionaries, in contrast, fail to recognize the value of supporting indigenous customs, and simply attack local religious practices as evil. Their meager success in attracting converts speaks to the need for understanding the context in which American religious practice can flourish.

Most recently, 'El Shaddai' is a fundamentalist Christian movement within Roman Catholicism in the Philippines that has attracted a large number of converts, both in the Philippines and among Filipinos working abroad. Like charismatic fundamentalist Christian sects in the U.S., the El Shaddai movement, led by 'Brother Mike' Velarde, relies on 'healing' rites, mass congregations, and radio and t.v. appearances and broadcasts to appeal to a large number of people seeking messages and solutions to their poverty or problems. In the rallies in Manila that are broadcast throughout the Philippines by the media, vast numbers of Filipinos seek redemption or a better life by listening to what is essentially 'Filipino' gospel. Filipinos of all walks of life attend these rallies, sometimes to have their passports blessed so they can more easily attain jobs abroad that will help their families, and sometimes to have their bank books blessed so they can more easily save money. In any case, they, like many Americans who become enamored with t.v. evangelists, are looking for messages that promise not only salvation in the afterlife, but a better living standard in this life. Religious belief, as always, is based on the ability of a religion to offer answers to the questions, concerns, and needs of people in different cultural and economic circumstances.

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From the Viernes Santo of San Pablo to the A POINT OF AWARENESS

by Preciosa S. Soliven

Dating back to our 16th century Spanish heritage, the Philippines has treasured the events of the Holy Week (Semana Santa) which recalls the holy passion and resurrection of Our Lord. Thus, were born the famous Holy Week processions all over the country. Even the days of the Holy Week are referred to by Filipinos as Lunes Santo, Martes Santo, Miercoles Santo, Jueves Santo, Viernes Santo, Sabado de Gloria and Domingo de Pascua.

Quoting one of our UNESCO Commissioners of the Culture Committee, Corazon S. Alvina, "Is there a Catholic Filipino who has no memory of - and some measure of affection for - procession? I don't think so. Many Catholics often sacrifice, express devotion and proclaim their faith by participating in processions through the years, in honor of the Nazareno, in recollection of the events that lead to La Naval or that marks the finding of the Holy Cross, or Holy Week that culminates in Easter Sunday's joyful Salubong." In praise of the Samahan ng Pasyon So far, I have witnessed the lengthy processions of Tabaco, Albay, Angeles, Pampanga and Bantayan island of Cebu. I am sure that most of the major cities in the country also gather together the old holy statues heirloom of their leading families to make up these processions honoring the Holy Sacrifice of Our Lord to redeem mankind.

Tomorrow, Good Friday, I shall witness the famous Viernes Santo procession of San Pablo, Laguna which official statistics record as being attended by half a million participants. The efforts of almost 50 old families, united in the Samahan ng Pasyon, who have looked after the sacred monuments depicting Our Lord's passion, crucifixion and resurrection is most laudable. Led by the heirs of Don Arsenio M. Escudero and the heirs of the following: Antonio Manuel Vda. De Magcase, Doña Leonila F. Almeda, Atty. Antonio Azores, Col. Antonio Roño, Dante T. Reyes, Ceferino Ambray, Doña Purification Eubinag, the Nepomucenos as well as other prominent families make up this non-stock, non-profit association. Like Imelda Cojuangco's Confradia de Intramuros which yearly leads the Marian procession for the Feast of the Immaculate Concepcion, they help keep alive the nation's spiritual devotion that helps greatly in uplifting the people's hope over and above the many crises of the country.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself praises the benevolence of the Samahan ng Mahal na Pasyon, "The spiritual aspect of the individual is oftentimes at risk of being disregarded because of the prevailing materialistic world. The efforts of SMP to preserve religious traditions and artifacts greatly contribute to enhance spiritual awareness and reawaken our spirit to the highest and noblest of universal values and virtues."

As the UNESCO Secretary-General for the Philippines, it is with great pleasure to point out that UNESCO upholds the attempt of each nation to keep the flame of their cultural heritage alive. In its 31st General Conference last October, UNESCO related these cultural mementos to the economic upliftment of the poor who usually work on the handicraft souvenirs sold to the tourists in culture sites of the country.

For the Philippines, UNESCO has honored officially five sites in the country and included them in the list of cultural world heritage: Intramuros and baroque churches, Vigan, Tubataha Reefs,

underground river of Palawan and the Ifugao Rice Terraces. This has brought in various experts to help preserve the sites. This year UNESCO launched the awards for the Intangible Heritage of the world. The Hudhud chants of the Igorots won one of the ten prizes. The Holy Week procession may be classified as an "intangible cultural heritage" of our country.

Mrs. Alvina, also a director of the National Museum, explains the origins and significance of our religious celebrations, "During the early years of the Spanish evangelization of the Philippines, the three feasts 'of consequence' were the feast day of the town's 'pintakasi' or patron saint, Corpus Christi and Holy Week. Each feast was highlighted by a procession. Through time, it has engendered a culture peopled by crafts-people who make carrozas; who carve santos and enliven their flesh and dress them in exquisitely embroidered satins and velvets, who mold candle sticks; who arrange flowers; who light up the carrozas - these are acts of contrition, belief and affection for their faith." The San Pablo procession closely resembles that of Sevilla, Spain. It has not been easy for Ado Escudero and the Samahan to keep going the religious Holy Week celebration highlighted by Viernes Santo and Domingo de Pascua. However, his creative zeal for the beautiful and dramatic presentation, particularly for Our Lord, are factors that no one can put down, not even the church prelates who consider the procession of the valuable antique statues frivolous. Ado described to me the faith of the farm folks on Easter Sunday, as well as the ardor of the local and foreign visitors who flock to San Pablo specially during Good Friday, "It will bring tears to your eyes to see the humble farmers make the Easter Sunday pilgrimage as early as two in the morning to witness the sunrise meeting of the Resurrected Lord and the Blessed Mother. The farm folks attribute the yearly miracles of their bountiful harvest to the Resurrected Lord."

The elegance and richness of the San Pablo carrozas resemble the heavy silver pasos or caros (floats) of the world famous Holy Week processions of Sevilla, Spain. In contrast, however, these processions in Sevilla are held daily from 6:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. from Holy Monday to the morning of Sabado de Gloria. The holy silver floats are owned by 23 parish churches.

The principal street routes where the procession passes are cordoned off on one side of the street. Parallel to this are four rows of seats reserved for people who would like to watch the major part of the 12-hour procession. My husband, Max and I were fortunate to buy two tickets from the hotel concierge of Alfonso XIII Hotel. Families by tradition, reserve and pay for the privilege of reserving blocks of seats for relatives and friends. Ladies wear elegant black dresses with knee-length black lace mantillas held by high tortoise combs. To break the long hours of watching they take a drink at the numerous cafes nearby.

Meantime, anyone is free to watch the San Pablo procession. The families who own the heirloom statues spend willingly to light and decorate their caros (floats). They also maintain the quality of the velvet robes which are works of art with their gold embroidery and sparkling crowns. The 10th anniversary of the Mt. Pinatubo hidden temple shrine. Right after spending Sabado de Gloria in San Pablo, we shall drive up to Palan, San Marcelino in Zambales. Here on the 60-foot high hill of the Mt. Pinatubo Hidden Temple Shrine, considered as an open-air basilica, is where we welcome the 10th Easter anniversary of the mystical shrine. Together with me will be Zambales Governor Vicente Magsaysay, who with our symbolic hermano mayor SBMA Chairman Tong and Daisy Payumo and the Shrine Foundation president Captain Fil Salonga, will cut the ribbon to the new cement downhill road that has just been constructed with the help of DAR, DPWH and the province of Zambales.

The Trinity of Shrines was requested by the Holy Ones to raise the hopes of Filipinos during three national disasters: first, the devaluation of the Negros sugar production in the world market causing famine among the farmers. This is marked by the shrines at Hacienda Faraon and Hacienda Tamsi. Second, the EDSA revolution which historically ended the dictatorship of the late President Ferdinand Marcos. The Operation Brotherhood Montessori school sanctuary with its 23 holy monuments and murals is landmarked by the Greenhills Shrine Avenue. It is on the corner of Eisenhower and Annapolis Streets. Third, the Mt. Pinatubo volcanic eruption which devastated three provinces and drastically changed the world atmosphere. The Mt. Pinatubo Hidden Temple Shrine at sitio Palan, San Marcelino marks it. Divinity descends at the Easter Shrine of Mt. Pinatubo for humanity to ascend. What is the 21st century evolution of celebrating Holy Week as shown by the holy ones' creation of the Mt. Pinatubo Easter Shrine?

While the country follows the Sorrowful Mater Dolorosa (Sorrowing Mother) and Santo Entierro (Jesus in the Sepulcher) tomorrow, Good Friday, Our Lord with His blessed Mother as His "personal associate" wants the faithful to focus on our hope for a new life, powered by His Resurrection. While the traditional holy images are dressed in earthly splendor befitting man's idea of royalty, their robes in the shrine have no embellishment nor do they wear crowns or scepters.

Our Lord and Blessed Mother are in blue with golden capes blowing in the wind. To show the sign of divinity and humanity at the same time, Our Lord holds up a plain golden cross in blessing. Our Mother, on the other hand, holds up the golden chalice of spiritual nourishment marked by the blue Star of David and a lighted blue candle symbolizing God's illumination. They look so alive. Gentle and affectionate they smile lovingly at the onlooker. These differ much from the rigid and unsmiling holy statues in churches. After all the Trinity of Shrines are designed by the Holy Ones as gifts to the nation and the whole world. Ang bagong anyo ng pagkabuhay Halina tayo sa Dambana ng Pagkabuhay! Mahal kong kababayan, inaanyayahan naming kayong magtipon na naman sa dambana ng Mt. Pinatubo Hidden Temple Shrine. Pinagdiriwang natin ang muling pagkabuhay ng ating Hesu Kristo. Masdan n'yo Siya kasama ng Mahal na Ina! Buhay na buhay, makapangyarihan at ngumingiti sa ating lahat. Dito nais nilang makita ninyo ang bagong anyo ng Pagkabuhay.

Mabuhay na sanang muli si Hesu Kristo sa ating kalooban at isipan! Mabuhay Siya sa ating bayan. Siya ang magbibigay ng wastong katahimikan. Siya lang, sa pamamagitan ng ating dalangin, ang makakapagdulot ng pagkakaisa ng bayan.

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