Uncovering Christianity's 'Dangerous Memory': Christians for National Liberation (CNL) and the Church's Revolutionary Legacy

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Abstract: This paper examines how the Christian faith bifurcated from a tool of colonial rule into an armament of resistance against foreign domination. Using Johan Baptist Metz's concept of 'dangerous memory' and Alain Badiou's understanding of militancy, it explores how Christianization inspired Christians to tread the revolutionary path toward social and national liberation. It highlights contributions of Christian revolutionaries with its apex in the founding of Christians for National Liberation (CNL), thus, continuing the unfinished 1896 Revolution. By assimilating these 'subversive memory' into the narrative of commemoration, it hopes to rescue the revolutionary legacy of the Church from colonial prejudices, desecration, and oblivion.

Keywords: Dangerous Memory • Revolutionary Church • Alain Badiou • Event • Christians for National Liberation (CNL)

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Introduction

In a short article to commemorate the five hundred years of Christianity in the Philippines, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David asks, "Why celebrate 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines? Was not Christianity a mere tool for colonial rule?" The dialectical relationship between subjugation and resistance is evident in Bishop David's comment: "The same Christian faith that the conquistadores tried to use in order to pursue their colonial purposes in our country also inspired our revolutionaries around three and a half centuries later to dream of freedom and democracy. It is the same Christian faith that eventually motivated them to defend basic human dignity of the *Indios* and to desire to put an end to tyranny and colonial rule."[1] Walter Benjamin in Thesis VI of his controversial essay *On the Concept of History* warned historians of the danger of using content of tradition as a "tool of the ruling classes".[2] As if to debunk Benjamin, Bishop David showed us that the Christian faith can be also a powerful weapon against oppression and exploitation as evidenced by the lives of church people who participated in the revolutionary armed struggle against colonial and neo-colonial subjugation.[3] This article is about how the Christian faith

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[1] Pablo V. David, "Why celebrate 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines? Was not Christianity a mere tool for colonial rule?" *CBCP News* (September 7, 2019) https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/why-celebrate-500-years-of-christianity-in-the-philippines/ (accessed 1 February 2021).

See also, Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989).

[2] Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'* trans. Chris Turner (London/NY: Verso, 2005), 42.

[3] In the 1960s, 70s and 80s church people in Latin America started doing theological reflection from the vantage point of the poor. Inspired by their lived experiences with the suffering poor, fueled by the liberating message of the Gospel, and equipped with the analytical

inspired Christians to tread the revolutionary path from the Spanish colonial period up to the present. It seeks to uncover the transformative power of 'subversive memory'. Using Alain Badiou's concept of the Faithful Subject as a 'militant-for-the-truth', this paper examines how church-people (key figures in history such as Gregorio Aglipay, GomBurZa, Hermano Pule, etc.) and the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) created "ruptures in history" which eventually opened up revolutionary possibilities, what Badiou calls 'evental sites'.[4] As political subjects, they opened up new

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tools provided by Gustavo Gutierrez's seminal book *A Theology of Liberation*, these church people confronted the structures that perpetuated oppression and exploitation and linked arms with the poor in their struggle for national liberation. Deeply rooted in the historical experiences of the poor and oppressed, these theological movements provided a new methodology of doing theology and provided an authentic way of Christian praxis. Various social movements within the church soon adopted liberation theology as a lens in analyzing oppression and marginalization and developed their own "liberation theologies". Hence, Liberation theology applied to specific contexts soon flourished. See for example Gustavo Gutierrez and Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation* (NY: Orbis Books, 2015); Christopher Rowland (Editor), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jon Sobrino, S.J. and Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J. (Editors), *Systematic Theology: Perspective from Liberation Theology* (NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Kathleen M. Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines: Faith in a Revolution* (London: Praeger, 2002); Susan Frank Parsons, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nur Masalha and Lisa Isherwood (Editors), *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014); Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008); John J. McNeill, *Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and their Lovers, Families, and Friends* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

[4] An Event is "that which interrupts the law, the rules, the structure of the situation, and creates a new possibility." Alain

creativity, new openings, and new situations contingent in time and space.[5] This paper, aims to analyze 500 years of Christianity from the perspective of 'dangerous memory'. To commemorate 500 years of Christianity, Christians may need to go back to the revolutionary legacy of the Church and to repeat/renew the task of the revolution. The unfinished revolution of 1896 necessitates a revolution of a new type: a national democratic revolution[6] which aims to dismantle the basic problems of foreign and feudal oppression and exploitation.

Theologians who study the problem of history are always faced with numerous patterns of the relationships between social history, the practices of history, faith, and eschatology.[7] Doing critical history requires not only a nostalgia of the past but a critique of the present in order

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Badiou, "From Logic to Anthropology: Affirmative Dialectics," in *Badiou and the Political Condition,* Edited by Marios Constantinou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2014), 47.

[5] Ibid.

[6] The present stage of Philippine revolution is essentially the revolutionary struggle for national liberation and democracy. It is "national" in scope since it seeks to liberate the country from the dominance of US imperialism and feudal bondage. It is "democratic" in nature because it will greatly benefit the vast majority of toiling masses: the peasants, workers, urban poor, women, and middle class. The old 1896 revolution waged by Aguinaldo, Bonifacio, and the Katipunan was inspired by the ideals of European Enlightenment thinkers. The leading class of this revolution was the *ilustrado* class, hence, it can be described as a "national and bourgeois liberal revolution". However, the present national democratic revolution is led by the working class and guided by a vanguard Party, the Communist Party of the Philippines. It adheres to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as its theoretical framework in advancing the revolution. See Jose Maria Sison *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Press) and "Specific Characteristics of our Peoples' War," in *Building Strength Through Struggle* (The Netherlands: International Network for Philippine Studies, 2013).

[7] See Terrence W. Tilley, *History, Theology & Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 38-41.

to create what Jürgen Moltmann calls possibilities of eschatological liberation. If eschatology is the decisive act of God in history, then we cannot passively wait for this future but rather we must seek and strive for it. A historico-eschatological thinking "upholds the hope for God's future, and in the anticipating reflection about this future it searches for realizable possibilities to overcome misery of history."[8] And since, as Fritsch argued, that the issue of memory is always linked to the question of a future promise, then a sustained reflection on the relation between memory and promise is a matter of urgency.[9] Looking at history in this angle, our commemoration of the fifth centenary of Christianity is subsumed as a 'dangerous memory' as we strive to transform the horrors of the past into hope for the future. Dangerous memory as Metz argues, exhorts Christians to never accept societal status quo.[10] The church, then, in as far as it is tasked with praxis should become "the public witness and bearer of the tradition of a dangerous memory of freedom in the 'systems' of our emancipative society."[11] In so doing, critical historians can prevent attempts to structurally blot out the voices of resistance within the church which aims to sanitize and depoliticize the Church's role in social liberation.

Walter Benjamin in Thesis VI reminded that "articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was'. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of

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[8] Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope and History," *Theology Today* 25/3 (1968): 375.

[9] Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 2.

[10] See Daniel Rober, "Ricoeur, Metz, and the Future of Dangerous Memory," *Literature & Theology* 27/2 (June 2013): 197.

[11] Ibid.

danger."[12] Five hundred years after Lapu-Lapu, defeated Spanish invaders, are we not experiencing the same 'moments of danger' as we continue to struggle against class oppression and exploitation brought about by big foreign corporations, their local big business partners, and big landlords? For example, big foreign mining corporations continue to plunder and ravage ancestral lands of indigenous peoples (IPs) and huge agri-business plantations continue to dispossess farmers and *Lumads* (IPs in Mindanao). Are we not suffering from the same grave socio-economic and political conditions during the Spanish colonial rule? Foreign countries like China is relentless in violating our patrimony and national sovereignty. Contractualization is still prevalent which deprives workers of their right to work. Anti-labor polices continue to trample upon the dignity of work. Wages are almost stagnant while prices of basic commodities continue to rise. The social landscape may have changed, and the class contradictions may have shifted, but the relentless exploitation of the toiling masses remain undisputable.

The Church's revolutionary legacy: uncovering 'dangerous memory'

The German political theologian Johann Baptist Metz warned us of a 'crisis' afflicting Christianity today. Metz maintained that the gospel remains a powerful force that inspires and motivates people to follow the path of discipleship. The problem, however, lies in the person charged with proclaiming the gospel message. Reflecting from his own context, Metz calls this the 'crisis of the

[12] Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'* trans. Chris Turner (London/NY: Verso, 2005), 42.

subject'.[13] As Kirwan correctly pointed out: "Christianity has become 'privatized bourgeois'."[14]

An antidote to this 'crisis of the subject' is to remember the forgotten history of the victims. The source of this 'dangerous memory' is no other than the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[15] By uncovering the subversive social memory of the 'suffering others' deeply embedded in their collective history, the subject of suffering can stand up "against the modern cynicism of power politics."[16] Our shared memory is not divorced from the various social forces at work in society. Memory is transmitted through 'narrative' conveyed in particular historical, social, and political context.[17]

History is not devoid of contradictions. As Marx once declared: "The history of all hitherto existing human society is the history of class struggles."[18] Class struggle[19]

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[13] Michael Kirwan, "Awakening Dangerous Memories," *The Way* 47/4 (October 2008): 26.

[14] Ibid. 27.

[15] For a detailed discussion on the power of dangerous memory in the life of Jesus and how he challenged Roman empire, see Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 126-8.

[16] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (NY: Crossroad, 2007), cited from https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understand ing/we-can-only-move-forward-if-we-acknowledge-dangerous.

[17] Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 6-14. See also Chapter 6, "The Power of Narrative".

[18] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2015), 2.

[19] Marx believed that antagonism between social classes is the dominant contradiction in society. However, this does not mean that the oppression experienced by marginalized "groups" (women, colored people/immigrants, including mother nature) are less significant. Gender oppression, racial discrimination, the dispossession of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, and environmental plunder should not be detached from class exploitation. Women, people of color, and the environment can never be truly free in a class

is a major engine that propels history and society to move forward in a dialectical, upward, spiral movement. Five hundred years after Lapu-Lapu defended Mactan, the history of the Filipino people is replete with an unrelenting panorama of revolutionary armed resistance against colonial and neo-colonial subjugation. The event of 1872 made a deep and lasting impression on the minds and hearts of the Filipino people. On this fateful day, three priests, Fathers Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora (GomBurZa) were executed in Bagumbayan for allegedly instigating the Cavite mutiny that occurred in January 1872. The Governor General at that time, Gov. Rafael de Izquierdo accused GomBurZa, together with some lawyers and laymen as "principal authors and instigators of the insurrection…"[20] Izquierdo, in one of his letters insisted that the head of the revolutionary government would be "with great probability, almost certainly, Fr. Jose Burgos or Fr. Jacinto Zamora, priests of the parish of San Pedro of Manila."[21] The three priests maintained their innocence after a hasty trial. But as the Jesuit historian John Schumacher pointed out, even before the formal hearing, they were "presumed to be guilty of some complicity in the revolt…"[22] However, their real 'crime' was that they

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society. Class abolition is a prerequisite to genuine social liberation. For a detailed discussion on the primacy of class struggle see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Retreat from Class: A New "True" Socialism* (London/NY: Verso, 1998), especially Chapter 2: "The Journey to the New 'True' Socialism: Displacing Class Struggle and the Working Class, pp 12-24 and Chapter 6: "Politics and Class", 90-101. For a critique of "cultural turn" and "identity politics", see Teresa L. Ebert, "Rematerializing Feminism," *Science & Society* 69/1 (January 2005): 33-35, see also Ebert, "The 'Difference' of Postmodern Feminism," *College English* 53/8 (Dec. 1991): 886-904.

[20] See John N. Schumacher, "The Cavite Mutiny: Toward a Definitive History," *Philippine Studies* 59/1 (March 2011): 64.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 63.

had been vocal in their criticism of the friars and had openly worked for the improvement of the lot of the Filipino clergy[23] and people.

The execution of GomBurZa fanned the flames of rebellion and ignited the nationalist aspirations of the Filipino people. It infuriated the educated *ilustrado* class who demanded reforms and justice. It solidified the commitment of the poor peasants to continue the armed resistance against Spanish domination. Rizal was ten years old when he and his elder brother Paciano witnessed the public execution. Rizal would later narrate the impact of the death of the three priests in his life. In a letter sent to Mariano Ponce on April 18, 1889, Rizal wrote:

> Without 1872 there would today be no Plaridel or Jaena or Sancianco, and those brave and generous colonies of Filipinos in Europe would not exist. Without 1872 Rizal would today be a Jesuit and instead of writing Noli Me Tangere would have written something quite different. The sight of such injustice and cruelty aroused my imagination even as a boy, and I swore to dedicate myself to the task of someday avenging the fate of these victims.[24]

Indeed, the event of 1872 created a rupture which interrupted the order of things (the 'order' imposed by the colonial masters to the natives) thereby opening up revolutionary possibilities. The Cavite mutiny marked the beginning of a new stage of escalating unrest and a new stage in the growing consciousness of a separate

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[23] For an in-depth discussion on the "Secularization and Filipinization" of the clergy, see Renato Constantino, *A History of the Philippines* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 122-5.

[24] Cited from Floro Quibuyen, "Towards a Radical Rizal," in *Philippine Studies* 46/2 (Second Quarter 1998): 151-183.

national identity.[25] As the historian Teodoro Agoncillo famously observed: "…nationalism among Filipinos emerged on that fateful morning of February 17, 1872."[26] Decades after GomBurZa's execution, Fr. Gregorio Aglipay and Isabelo de los Reyes would amplify the secularization movement started by GomBurZa and establish a truly Filipino church, the *Iglesia Filipino Independiente* (IFI).

Gregorio Aglipay was ordained priest in 21 December 1889 in Manila. When the Revolution broke out in August 1896, he was coadjutor in San Pablo, Laguna and was reported to be giving aid to Filipino revolutionaries. His trusted friend, Simeon Mandalac stated that Aglipay had thirty men "apparently employed as carpenters who in reality were revolutionists in touch with Katipunan." These men saved the forces of the insurgent General Makabulos from annihilation at the hands of the Spanish General Lachamber.[27] At the height of the Philippine-American War, Aglipay organized his own band of guerrilla group in his native town of Batac, Ilocos Norte where many of his fellow Ilocanos joined to defend their land from American invasion. Apparently, Fr. Aglipay won the trust of his fellow Ilocanos because first, he was a priest, and second, he was a native of Ilocos Norte. Bishop Hevia Campomanes, testifying before the Philippine Commission in Manila on 7 August 1900 said that Aglipay was then "in Ilocos Norte at the head of the large body of insurgents in the mountains."[28] The Jesuit

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[25] Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (QC: Tala Publishing Services, 1975), 142-43.

[26] Teodoro Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People 5th Edition* (QC: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1977), 137.

[27] Pedro S. Achutegui SJ and Miguel A. Bernad SJ., *Religious Revolution in the Philippines: The Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay 1860-1960 Volume I from Aglipay's Birth to his Death: 1860-1940* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1961), 36.

[28] Ibid, 122-23.

historians Achutegie Bernad believes that more than a religious crusade, Aglipayan movement was a revolt against socio-political order of things:

> The Aglipayan movement, both before and after the formal consummation of the schism, did not begin with an attack on the Catholic doctrine or on Catholic morals or on Catholic liturgy, but with a repudiation of the authority of the Catholic bishops and parish priests on the score of their nationality. The men who waived their bolos in the Cry of Balintawak, and those who took up arms in the subsequent fighting, were Filipinos who wanted to get rid of two things: the political domination of Spain and the socio-political ascendency of the friars. Thus, the Aglipayan movement initially was not a revolt against the Catholic Church as such but against a socio-political order of things in which the Catholic church, as an external organization, was involved.[29]

Another interesting and prominent figure that became an insurgent-icon in Quezon was Hermano Pule or Apolinario de la Cruz, a son of devout Catholic peasants. He went to Manila in 1839 hoping to join a monastic order but his application was rejected because he was an *Indio* (native). Enraged by the racial discrimination he experienced from the hands of the friars, he founded the *Cofradia de San Jose,* a lay movement which quickly attracted followers in Tayabas, Laguna, and Batangas. The church labelled his brotherhood as heretic and a seditious organization. Consequently, the clergy ordered the dissolution of the brotherhood and its expulsion from Lucban. Spanish authorities were suspicious that the confraternity was used for political ends, i.e., to overthrow Spanish rule in the country. This led to the outlawing of the *cofradia* in

[29] Ibid, 235.

July 1841. Defiant, Pule and his followers led a stronghold of armed followers in the mountains. The *Cofradia* became a symbol of native resistance to Church and State. Eventually, Pule was captured and was brutally executed by Spanish authorities—his dismembered body parts were exhibited throughout Tayabas province. He was hailed as the 'king of Tagalogs.'[30]

The *cofradia* uprising may have been poorly organized and ideologically backward or bankrupt, having no solid grasp of the root causes of socio-political-economic problems. These are typical of peasant movements led by self-styled messiahs. But these movements are definitely rooted in revolutionary tradition. As Renato Constantino would later comment:

> these movements deserve serious attention because of their capacity to enlist devoted support of the masses and because their goals, however inadequately formulated, were reflections of popular grievances and aspirations.[31]

The Christians for National Liberation: Continuing an Unfinished Revolution

In an effort to continue and sustain the subversive memory *of the past* and to live out their life of prophetic discipleship *in the present*, Christians had to engage in more radical ways of expressing their life of prophetic discipleship. The Christians for National Liberation (CNL) was born in the most turbulent, brutal, and repressive President Marcos dictatorial regime. Calling

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[30] Constantino, 135-36.

[31] Renato Constantino, *A History of the Philippines: From the Spanish Colonization to the Second World War* (NY/London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 349.

themselves "Christians and Revolutionaries", CNL members were forced to work underground (UG) when Martial Law was declared by Marcos in 1972. Many priests, religious nuns and brothers, and lay leaders joined the armed resistance in the countryside. For CNL members, this is the highest expression of loving God and loving one's neighbor.

The unfinished 1896 revolution of Bonifacio and the Katipunan necessitates a sustained and protracted people's war against continued foreign domination, the concentration of lands to a few landed gentries (land monopoly), and the prevalence of elitist or *Ilustrado* politics. The present national democratic revolution is a continuation of the1896 Philippine Revolution but is essentially of a 'new type'. Jose Maria Sison, in his essay *Specific Characteristics of our People's War* discusses the new characteristics of this revolution: "It is no longer part of the old bourgeois-capitalist revolution. It is part of the proletarian-socialist revolution which has emerged since the first global inter-imperialist war…"[32] The triumph of the national democratic revolution is assumed to pave the way for a socialist construction of society.

Unearthing the 'dangerous memory' contained in the rich revolutionary tradition of the Church entails a commitment to repeat the task of the revolution. It is not to fetishize nor mummify the past achievements of Aglipay, GomBurZa, and others. To repeat here means to learn from past mistakes, rectify errors, and carry on incessantly and relentlessly the goals of the national democratic struggle. It is to reframe Bonifacio's revolution "within the new constellation of global capitalism while embracing the most clear-sighted analysis of ideology available to us that connects

[32] Jose Maria Sison, "Specific Characteristics of our People's War," in *Building Strength Through Struggle* (The Netherlands: International Network for Philippine Studies, 2013), 181.

Bonifacio's struggle with contemporary struggle of the Filipino people. It is to situate him and his Katipunan within the materialist analysis of history provided by Marx."[33] It is in this historical conjuncture that the Christians for National Liberation was born. E. San Juan narrated how the political awakening of church-people happened in the early '70s:

> It is at this conjunctional stage of economic deterioration and political repression, begun in early 1972, that the Philippine churches, in particular the clergy and the nuns of the Roman Catholic Church, underwent a transformation still going on, unprecedented in its over three hundred years of institutional conservatism. Priests, nuns, and lay workers began integrating with the masses in social action programs launched in the sixties, parallel to the resurgence of nationalist demonstrations by workers, students, urban slum dwellers, and peasants. One fruit of this convergence was the formation of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) in February 1972.[34]

The founding of the CNL, then, signifies the culmination of a democratic and popular movement in the Church which, according to San Juan "traces its genealogy to the schismatic nativist and nationalist impulses of the 1896 revolution."[35] It is worth mentioning that the founding of CNL on February 17, 1972 coincided with the centennial celebration of GomBurZa execution, a historic event that ignited the revolutionary fervor of church-people. Inspired by the heroic courage of the three priests, the founding members of CNL vowed to serve the

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[33] Gerry M. Lanuza, "Introduction to Salita ng Sandata: Bonifacio's Legacies to the People's Struggles," (QC: IBON Books, 2013), x.

[34] E. San Juan, *Crisis in the Philippines: The Making of a Revolution* (MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1986), 34.

[35] Ibid, 36.

people "along the narrow path to national liberation and democracy."[36] Several social factors helped to mold the political consciousness of church-people in the '60s and '70s which propelled them to actively participate in the people's struggle. San Juan enumerated a few:

> It was catalyzed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the rise of liberation theology coeval with the formation of "base communities" in the mid-sixties; the 1968 affirmation by Latin-American bishops in Medellin, Columbia, of their "preferential option for the poor"; and the examples of Camilo Torres of Columbia, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, and Ernesto Cardenal of Nicaragua. Gustavo Gutierrez's book Theology of Liberation (1971), as well as the writings of Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970) and others, were also influential in redefining a "living theology" as situational and contextual, a pilgrim theology of the event which affirms that salvation is specifically for the poor, the lowly and helpless.[37]

It should be noted that prior to Vatican II, the Philippine church, influenced by papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and *Quaragesimo Anno* in 1931, was already engaged in social action programs through its various apostolates and outreach programs with workers, farmers, and urban poor sectors. This is also evidenced by the burgeoning of lay organizations and movements particularly Basic Christian Communities (BCCs).[38]

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[36] From an unpublished manuscript "History of CNL". See Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong & Jerry D. Imbong, "Emancipatory Faith: Reflections on Alain Badiou and the Christians for National Liberation," *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XXI/1 (April 2017): 63.

[37] San Juan, 36-37.

[38] See also the study of Karl Gaspar on the BCC and MSPC in Mindanao, including the struggle against injustices and oppression during Marcos days Karl M. Gaspar, "Basic Ecclesial Communities In

However, church-people's attitude and engagement toward socio-political issues and at the same time their involvement with people's organizations would also vary. Moreno categorized at least three groups: conservative, moderate, or progressive. 'Conservatives' are those who supported the status quo (in the 70s they supported Martial Law). They also constitute the most reactionary faction within the church. The 'progressives' were "…supportive of groups that struggled for political liberation."[39] CNL became the church sector in the underground Left that was engaged in the mobilization of church personnel and resources in aid of the armed revolution waged by the revolutionary Left, and in the transformation of churches around national democratic principles. CNL, as an allied organization of the National Democratic Front (NDF) is "the most organized and extensive ideological group that offered a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist framework for social transformation."[40] In its 1983 program, the CNL has reaffirmed its allegiance to the principles of the National Democratic Front emphasizing the people's participation in fulfilling the Christian imperative of revolution. It asserted that the church-people's involvement in the revolution is a "historical expression of our vocation to help build God's Kingdom. It is the political incarnation of our Christian faith at the present stage of Philippine history."[41]

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[39] Antonio F. Moreno SJ, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Post-authoritarian Philippines: Narratives of Engaged Citizenship* (QC: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 42.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Cited in E. San Juan, 38. It should be noted that in the late '80s up to the early 90s, the Philippine Left under the leadership of revisionist, reformist, and opportunist Party leaders committed grave errors which led to the killings of suspected "infiltrators" within the movement. These ideological, organizational, and political errors

The Christian revolutionary as 'militant-for-the-truth'

Metz acknowledged the inevitability and necessity of using armed resistance in the midst of grave injustice, oppression, and exploitation:

> When Christian love becomes active in society as an unconditional desire for justice and freedom for others, circumstances can arise in which this love needs to use revolutionary means. Where the social status quo contains as much injustice as may arise by overthrowing it by revolution, then a revolution—for justice and freedom for 'the least of the brethren'—may not be prohibited even in the name of Christian love.[42]

This was somehow affirmed by the Marxist Dominican priest Pedro Salgado who defended the revolution in his controversial book *Ang Kristiyanismo ay Rebolusyonaryo*:

> Ang rebolusyon ay di likas na masama. Ang kanyang layunin ay ang pagbabago ng anyo, kalagayan at balangkas ng isang mapang-aping lipunan. Sa katunayan, ang rebolusyon ay kailangan upang ang kayamanan at kapangyarihan ng bansa ay matatamasa di lamang ng iilang tao, kundi ng lahat ng mga mamamayan.[43]

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prompted Jose Maria Sison and other party cadres to initiate the "Second Great Rectification Movement" (SGRM) which aimed to repudiate and rectify these errors. For a detailed historical evolution of Modern Revisionism and the SGRM, see the collected works of Jose Maria Sison in *Defeating Revisionism, Reformism: Selected Writings, 1969-1974,* (The Netherlands: International Network for Philippine Studies, 2013).

[42] Ibid, 41.

[43] Pedro Salgado, OP, *Ang Kristiyanismo ay Rebolusyunaryo* (Quezon City, 1989), iii (English translation: "The revolution is not inherently bad nor evil. Its goal is the change the face, condition, and

Furthermore, Salgado highlighted the gallantry of those who took arms in order to build a more just society and advance the common good:

> Kasaysayan na rin ang makapagsabi na ang pakikipaglaban ay di ipinagbabawal ng kristiyanismo, kung ito ay kinakailangan. Pinapayagan niya, halimbawa, ang digmaan kung ito'y para sa kapakanan ng bayan. Kahit libu-libo pa ang mamamatay at maraming ari-arian ang mapipinsala, tinatawag na bayani ang mga humahawak ng armas para sa kabutihan ng bayan. Sila'y ginagawa pang mga huwaran ng mga mamamayan.[44]

According to Badiou, the task of *political subject* is to pursue and inscribe the Event in time and space. This 'militant figure' who is "specifically located in the contingency of the situation" makes the ultimate decision of actualizing the truth of an event, i.e., "a revolution whose immanent declaration concerns the equality of all, thus denying the 'natural' division of classes… by disconnecting specific, anonymous and generic part of the situation from its unequal mode of representation."[45] Hence, a subject's fidelity to the Event of truth is manifested according to the decision one makes, i.e., how

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structure of an oppressive society. In truth, the revolution is necessary so that wealth and power in society will be equitably shared by all members in society.")

[44] Salgado, 18. (English translation: "History tells us that the Christian faith does not prohibit the people in defending and fighting for their rights, especially if this is necessary. There were instances where the Church allowed the use of war if this is for the good of the country. Thousands of people of people have died and properties were destroyed because of armed conflicts. Those who took arms to defend their country are called heroes or martyrs. In most cases, they become role models.")

[45] Bruno Besana, "The Subject," in *Alain Badiou Key Concepts* edited by A.J. Barlett & Justin Clemens (Durnham: Acumen, 2010), 43.

she acts via a series of faithful decisions with which it incorporates the event in the situation.[46]

An Event (the New) can only take place upon its violent rupture from the Old. The New can only be actualized so long as the Subject as 'militant-for-the-truth' remains faithful to its task of courageously pursuing and inscribing the Event "within the particular world".[47] The Subject then, constitutes the main figure in a politics of emancipation. A political Subject emerges the moment she executes decisive political actions (intervention): a "radical rupture of an oppressive political order."[48] Badiou gives examples of such Events: the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution led by Mao Zedong, the Paris Commune, and the May 1968 revolt in France.

However, in order for an Event to be considered 'political', it must first be a collective effort, i.e., subjects must "collectively work to bring about an intervention."[49] Second, a political event must affect the political state of affairs by challenging the status quo. The goal is to concretely inscribe the new possibility in actual social settings but outside the machinery of the State. As Badiou suggests: "We will have to create something that will be face to face with the State—not inside the State, but face to face with it."[50] Badiou asserts that the problem of the State emerges when a political truth procedure merges with power under terroristic conditions.[51] By State, Badiou categorically refers to the bourgeois State

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Imbong, 53.

[48] Antonio Calcagno, "Alain Badiou: The Event of Becoming a Political Subject," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34/9 (2008): 1052.

[49] Ibid, 1059.

[50] Badiou, "Affirmative Dialectics", 9

[51] Alain Badiou, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism: Alain Badiou in conversation with Peter Engelmann* translated by Susan Spitzer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015), 48.

where the political leadership is profoundly corrupt, anti-people, anti-poor, and ill-bred and inept as well.

The revolutionary as a militant-for-the-truth is the *embodiment* of the revolutionary project for the Event necessarily enables the *inexistent* to come forth. She, together with the *inexistent* of society: the peasants, workers, urban poor, *Lumads* and indigenous peoples, women, etc. emerges or comes to the fore constituting the collective subject. The evolution of the collective subject, or what Badiou calls 'soldiers of the revolution', is the "formal visibility of the spirit of war".[52] The figure of the revolutionary-soldier reverberates with CNL as "the revolutionary organization for Christians, serve as the herald of the New in the Philippines."[53]

Interestingly, Badiou uses the image of Paul as an exemplary figure of the militant-for-the truth. For his part, Edward Pillar situates the figure of Paul, his ministry, and his preaching of the gospel within the socio-political and cultural context of "Imperial Thessalonica" which describes as "thoroughly in the grip of Roman imperial authority."[54] Pillar's main argument is that from a Pauline perspective, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a form of usurpation of Rome's claims to power.[55]

In the same manner, Badiou posits the idea that Christ's resurrection constitutes an Event (a rupture, an epoch-breaking opening) in the life of Paul and the early Christians. According to Badiou, Paul's pronouncement that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" makes him no less than "the inventor of

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[52] Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants, Trans. with a foreword by Bruno Bosteels,* (NY: Verso, 2012), 34-5.

[53] Imbong, 72.

[54] Edward Pillar, *Resurrection as Anti-Imperial Gospel: 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10 in Context,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 3.

[55] Ibid, 4.

revolutionary form of subjectivity."[56] This in turn made Paul indifferent to the state of situation, to the Roman State. Hence, Paul's subjectivity constitutes a necessary distance from the State.[57] This made Paul at par with other revolutionary figures: "Paul as the militant, the practical organizer of revolutionary cells, the Lenin of the early Christian movement… whose thought and practice is oriented to, and founded upon, an event…"[58] This 'theological turn' in philosophical discourse paves the way for what Lamb calls a materialist politics of subjective truth.[59] The Event sustains political subjects and "gives them ontological coordinates of a stance *for* something… a positive theological stance… which helps to clarify how sharp Christianity's stance is." This materialist Christian theology contains within it "an irreducible revolutionary possibility that ruptures with the predetermined coordinates of the world and offers an entirely new kind of political subjects altogether."[60]

Conclusion

This paper begins by establishing a link between key revolutionary figures in history and their struggle for liberation from colonial rule with the Christians for National Liberation's struggle for social liberation under a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Using the image

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[56] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* translated by Ray Brassier, (CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

[57] Ibid, 15.

[58] John Barclay, "Paul and the Philosophers: Alain Badiou and the Event," *New Blackfriars* 91/1032 (March 2010): 173.

[59] Matthew L. Lamb, *Theology Needs Philosophy: Acting Against Reason is Contrary to the Nature of God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 2.

[60] See John Milbank, Slavoj Zižek, & Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2010), 2.

of the revolutionary as militant-for-the-truth, the paper argues that CNL members allow for the emergence of the inexistent in society thereby forming a collective subject that challenges the political situation. What unites this broad alliance of faith-based Christian communities is first, their desire to create Evental sites that will pave the way for a worldly emancipation of humanity and, second, the 'dangerous memory' that they collectively share with the victims of society both past and present. By assimilating Metz's 'subversive memory' into the task of emancipatory politics, the paper is able to resurface the obscured revolutionary legacy of the Church and freed it from colonial prejudices, desecration, and oblivion. In so doing, the paper is able to offer an alternative narrative and church praxis that is both radical and faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

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