



The Church in Organized Protest Movements in Agusan Provinces: 1950-2000

*Ana Maria Belinda R. Yting**

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Caraga State University, Butuan City, 8600
Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to describe the role of the church in the organized protest movements in the provinces of Agusan from 1950-2000. It used the historical research design to analyze the primary documents that determined the goals, objectives, and programs of the protest movements. It described the type of organization and membership as well as the type of protest actions articulated by the participants which were validated through an actual interview of the participants. The study revealed that the role of the church was mainly evangelization in the light of its teachings to holistically transform the people into becoming more vigilant to the social issues confronting them. This was supported by the different programs that were the end results of Vatican II concretized in the grassroots level through the creation of the different sectoral organizations. The programs and objectives of these groups affected the peoples' level of awareness that set them in motion to organize and unite to find measures to articulate change. The study concluded that the role of the church to organize protest was to convey to the people of God their responsibility to themselves, their families, and their respective communities. It, therefore, suggested that the church continue to provide a venue for the marginalized people to express their concerns; to keep initiating and supporting programs to mobilize people for social transformation; and to maintain its stand to act as the conscience of the society which should not be misconstrued as meddling in the affairs of the state.

Keywords: protest movements, church, historiography, Agusan, theory of struggle

* Corresponding Author
Email: aryting@carsu.edu.ph

1 Introduction

Protest movements arise when there is a profound discontentment with the existing policies and programs of the government and its agencies. Many consider protest actions as an effective means of mobilizing the government to function in accordance with the principle that the government exists for the common good of the majority.

One of the recorded mass protests was the First Quarter Storm that took place from January to March of 1970 (Lacaba, 1982). It was a period of unrest in the Philippines that was composed of a series of heavy demonstrations, protests, and marches against the government. This happened two years before the Philippines was placed under martial law (I.V. Moran, personal communication, February 28, 2001).

At the time of the First Quarter Storm, the province of Agusan and the city of Butuan launched their protest action. Organizing protest was not new to the people of Agusan and Butuan City because, during the Spanish occupation, they launched protests against the Spanish authorities. First was the protest of the Caragans against the local Spanish Administration in the 18th century when the local people were conscripted for the force labor as mandated by the Spanish administration during that time. The people protested against the recruitment because their absence had an adverse effect not only to their respectively family but also to the community since it will disrupt the agricultural production. Second was the support of the Agusanons to the Katipunan Government of Aguinaldo, which led to the hoisting of the Philippine Flag on January 17, 1899 in Butuan (Schreurs, 1991).

Moreover, in the third quarter of the 20th century, there were social action groups that were created to protect the natives of Agusan against the growing changes in the province brought by the logging concessions. The tri-people of the province composed of the Lumads, Muslims, and Christians convened to work towards the preservation of peace as well as their culture not only for Agusan but also for the entire Mindanao. It was at this point that the First Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) was held from November 17 to 20, 1971 to create a church structure in Mindanao and Sulu that would meet the demands of the times (A. Saniel, personal communication, September 4, 2010; Gonzaga et al., 1971). The role of the clergy, the religious, and the laity was clearly defined in the structure of the church to articulate its social teachings. It designed the means on how to educate the clergy, the laity, and the people from all classes of society to become responsible and participative citizens. It was also desired to create a community that would be aware of the social issues to achieve consensus to social actions and to make the church a worshipping and serving community.

The church can often be seen as behind in almost all important events that desire for social changes. This leads one to ask why the church is always behind in movements for change. The presence of the church people in all social actions was evident to the point of putting their lives at risk to seek reforms. This was shown during the local version of the People Power revolution in 1986 when nuns and priests were the rallying force of the people to overthrow the Marcos regime (I.V. Moran, personal communication, February 28, 2001).

The Summary of Human Rights Violation reported that the widespread resistance and protest movements that happened in the province were the response to issues regarding oppression, militarization, and poverty amidst the abundance of resources in Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur. Daral (2002) cited that the protest actions in the two provinces of Agusan in the 70's were activated by the issues of poverty, hamletting, militarization, declaring villages as no man's land, unfair labor practices, alienation of the tribal people from their ancestral domain, and the disappearance of villagers. The unrests were caused by the growing disparity between the rich and the

poor, the displacement of the Lumads from their ancestral lands, and the violation of human rights (Lingkod Tao-Kalikasan in the Service of the Human-Earth Community Secretariat for an Ecological Sound Philippines, 1983; Makinasudnong Alyansa alang sa mga Mag-uuma sa Agusan-Surigao, n.d.; Regional Situationer, 1985; Silva, 1979)

Further, in the 1960's, when the farmers of Luzon and Visayas encountered an increasing difficulty in meeting their daily subsistence, Mindanao became the last frontier for migration. Thus, the tribal people were forced to share their lands to the migrants. As the migrants increased in number towards the 70's, the issues of unclear description of the forest zone and the domainable lands emerged. The Lumads lost some of their ancestral domains and were pushed farther to the hinterlands. It was during this time that land grabbers, logging concessionaires, and multinational agribusiness victimized the tribal people. The natives experienced humiliation of their culture and eventually lost their means of livelihood (Boudreau, 2001; Philippine Repression and Resistance, 1981; Tri-people Consortium for Peace, Progress, and Development of Mindanao [TRICOM], 1998).

Poverty then became prevalent and the living conditions of the people were rapidly deteriorating. Philippine Repression and Resistance (1981) reported that people in the urban areas had difficulty in making both ends meet because they were not receiving the minimum wage as required by law. According to the National Statistical Coordination Board (2013), Agusan province belonged to the top 40 poorest provinces in the Philippines. The poverty incidence triggered some social problems such as oppression, violation of basic human rights, and growing malnutrition.

The Task Force Detainee of the Philippines [TFDP] (1999) reported cases of human rights violations against the political detainees in some parts of the Philippines. These situations were also evident in Agusan del Sur and in some areas in Butuan where reports of widespread village massacres, hamletting and villages declared as "no man's land". These situation were brought about by the massive militarization in the Agusan Provinces.

Church groups like the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Council and Social Action Group were organized to respond to the social issues prevalent in the Agusan province. Nuns, priests, pastors, and lay ministers became the defenders of the rights of the people. These church leaders stood up for their advocacy as defenders of people's rights because they themselves were victims of abuses. It was not unusual to hear accusations that the church intervened in the affairs of the state and was regarded as subversive by the government. In fact, in 2005, the police raided the convents of the Missionary Sisters of Mary and the Religious of the Good Shepherd in Butuan City because they were suspected to be supporters of the rebel group.

The research environment of this study is the province of Agusan which is a part of Region 13 known as the Caraga Region (Fig. 1), located in the Northeastern part of Mindanao. Caraga Region is composed of four provinces, namely: Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Agusan del Norte, and Agusan del Sur. Agusan del Norte has a land area of 2,590.3 square kilometers, encompassing 12 towns. Its capital is Butuan City. It is bounded by Surigao del Norte in the North, Surigao del Sur in the East, Misamis Oriental in the West, and Agusan del Sur in the South.

Agusan del Sur on the other hand has a land area of 8,965.6 square kilometers; Agusan del Sur, with 14 towns. Its capital is Prosperidad, known as Baba by the local people. It is bounded in the North by Agusan del Norte, in the South by Compostela Valley, in the East by Surigao del Sur, and in the West by Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental.

During the Spanish occupation in the Philippines until 1911, Agusan was part of Surigao, known then as Caraga District. In the same year, the Philippine Assembly

formulated Republic Act 1693 which created non-christian provinces because there were many tribal people who were not yet converted to Christianity. Thus, Agusan was separated from Surigao. In June 1967, Philippine Congress approved Republic Act Number 4979. The law divided the provinces into Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur which took effect on January 1, 1970.

Majority of the Agusanons use Cebuano as their medium of communication, but some tribal people take pride in using their native dialect. About 1.5% speaks Tagalog, although a good portion of the population understands and communicates in Tagalog. Majority of the people in the province speaks English. Its population is 89.9% Roman Catholic. Other religions include United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Iglesia ni Kristo, United Church of the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam. Prevalent in the province are several cults whose members consider them as their religion.

This study aims to document the events in Agusan during the protest movements. Most of the documents on protest movement were destroyed by those who possessed it to avoid implications of being subversive. The researcher felt the need to get the data of these incidents from people involved in the protest movement who are still available to tell what really transpired in the province of Agusan from the martial law to the post martial law eras. Likewise, this study aimed to let the people understand and appreciate the role of the church in Agusan during those period wherein several protest were articulated in order to end the martial law era. This study could provide information on the true state of the province of Agusan from the 1950's at the height of the logging industry to year 2000 when Agusan was listed as number 44 among the poorest provinces in the Philippines.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory that social justice is an integral part of evangelization. Human dignity is at the heart of church teachings. Filipino theologians called the theology in the quest for justice as the "theology of struggle," which aims to improve the social conditions of the people as reflected in *Vatican II*, in the five great encyclicals, and in *Justice of the World*. (Youngblood, 1990)

Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) maintained the idea that the church speaks out on social issues to teach the correct social principles and ensure class harmony. It pointed out the economic and social conditions of the working classes and suggested the formation of trade unions and collective bargaining agreement between the employers and employees. It further helped to understand that the church is not supporting the communist idea of no private ownership or the concept of the socialists that the state must control the means of production. It furthermore stressed that the essential reason for those who engage in gainful labor undertakings is to satisfy the basic needs, procure properties, and retain them by individual rights as their own.

Forty years after the release of *Rerum Novarum*, however, Pope Pius XI issued the *Quadragesimo Anno* on May 15, 1931 when the world was in the state of economic crisis. *Quadragesimo Anno* supported *Rerum Novarum*, but it emphasized the demands brought by political and economic changes of the times (XI & Lieshout, 1931). It further pointed out the economic system of the period and how it divided society into two classes. The first class referred to those who had all the material wealth while the second classes were those who did not have the wealth which constituted the working men. Those who were less fortunate were oppressed by poverty and struggled to escape from the plight. Such conditions prompted the church workers to look for solutions, and the encyclical letter taught human kind new approaches to social problems.

In response to Popes Pius XI and Leo XIII's encyclicals, upon its establishment in 1967, the Diocese of Butuan/Agusan introduced the Social Action which was among its

first apostolates. Commitment to social action within the Catholic Church was reflected in the encyclical letters, the *Rerum Novarum* (Pope Leo, 1891) and the *Quadragesimo Anno* (XI & Lieshout, 1931) (I.V. Moran, personal communication, February 28, 2001).

The policy changes advocated by Pope Paul VI in 1960 indicated a shift in the social action orientation of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches in the Philippines. Emphasis on social justice as an integral part of evangelization received attention in all religious sects. Encyclicals such as *Pacem in Terris* and *Mater et Magistra* by Pope John XXIII; *Populorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI (1967), and the other encyclicals by Pope John Paul II, together with the documents the Second Vatican Council produced in 1962-1965 and several synods and convocations of bishops have all underscored the Catholic church renewed commitment to human rights freedom and social justice (Catholic Church, 1961; Pope, 1967; Terris, 1963; Youngblood, 1990).

On the other hand, Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* called for involvement in human development and social changes. The Second Vatican Council meeting in October 1962 encouraged the involvement of priests in social action and justice. Liberation Theology in Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* looked into the inequitable distribution of wealth as the reason for misery and oppression of the poor and stressed the importance of people in taking control of their own destiny (Flannery, 2001; TFDP, 1999).

Human dignity is at the heart of church teachings. According to Pope Paul VI (1967), the Church has 2 functions in society: (1) to enlighten people to understand the truth and to find the right direction to follow and (2) to make people participate actively and effectively in the transformation of society since the church denounces injustices. On the other hand, on July 9, 1970, the Bishops of the Philippines issued a statement which defined their role in moral leadership, signifying their stand to fight for injustices and denounce the evils of society (Fabros, 1988).

The *Justice in the World*, product of the World Synod of Catholic Bishops in 1971, explained why the church considered her role in providing justice and spiritual/moral teaching to humankind (Bishops, 1971). It also explained that violence and oppression contradicted the plan of God and because of this, the church took it as her task, through the gospel, to put morals in the actions of humankind. Furthermore, the church's mission to redeem the human race and liberate people from oppressive situations was within church teachings.

Moreover, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) worked against oppression and violations of human freedom. In his speech during the Golden Jubilee of Cosmopolitan Church in 1983, Narciso Ramos, one of the founders of the church, cited the historical and nationalistic implications of the separation of the UCCP from the Methodist Mission Board in 1933 :

"Those who walked out not only staged the protest against immorality and injustice but made history in the religious evolution of the Filipino people. It marked the beginning of an indigenous Protestant movement in the Philippines, which added meaning to the political emancipation of our country." (Cosmopolitan Church, n.d.)

Since its foundation, the UCCP took on a prophetic ministry that was political in nature, displaying love for God and country. This endeavor continued long after the liberation, seeing itself at the forefront during the Martial law era in the 70's and went on in a span of 56 years wherein the thrust of the Church was on good governance. The Church continued to strengthen individuals towards spiritual maturity and its leaders called on its members to go back to their heritage to liberalize spirituality where the leaders envisioned it to be a catalyst for social transformation and liberation, having

a preferential option for the poor and the victims of injustices (Cosmopolitan Church, n.d.).

In the bulletin *Power and Ecumenical Movement in the Philippines*, George O. Buenaventura mentioned that the idea of the Filipinos towards mass movement was called the power from below. It featured protest actions of the country spearheaded by the church leaders and wrote:

Both revolutions were ecumenical. Christian churches, schools and institutions, as well as Muslim communities joined the rally for the ouster of two popular presidents of the country. In our common desire for justice and peace, our ecumenicity was exercised. In the people's search for freedom and fullness of life, power from below which I consider as 'the foundation power' shakes the whole structure and subverts conventional ways of seeing and living. "God drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power" (Luke 1 : 52, CEV) (Buenaventura, n.d.).

In his book, *Marcos Against the Church*, Youngblood (1990) cited the deliberation of *Vatican II* and the International Catholic and Protestants convocations to have a profound effect on Philippine churches but had contributed to increasing church-state conflict during the Marcos regime. The Church that emphasized social justice contradicted the development programs and national security concerns of the Marcos government. This only showed the unity of the religious organizations in working towards a common aspiration and in preserving human dignity and social justice.

On the other hand, the clergy created activities patterned after the development of the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua. Similarly, church workers also became the forerunners of the reform movements. They encouraged the creation of social action centers and made the focal point to demand reforms from the Marcos government. Protests in seeking reforms came in different forms such as rallies, strikes, prayers, candle lighting, and propaganda (TFDP, 1999).

There were instances that, out of frustration, people made use of other means to articulate change by creating underground movements which became widespread in the province. Some of the clergymen went underground. Some of them, however, returned to the preaching profession while others remained missing that nobody could tell their whereabouts.

In its articulation of the protest movement, the major role of the Church can be summed up in three P's: *Pera*, *Printa*, *Pagkain* (money, printing, and food). The Church had the means and capacity to provide the three P's for the movement to function. The clergy, however, encountered problems such as tribal disunity and reconciliation of the interests of the Christians in the lowlands and the interests of the Lumads in the hinterlands. There was also the call for cooperation of the tri-people (the Lumad, the Christians in the lowlands, and the Muslims) in the province.

Dissatisfaction was one of the causal factors of protests. There were times that the labor sector of the provinces of Agusan hesitated to participate in protest movements because the participation of the people in such would mean losing their jobs. People valued so much whatever work they could have because there were very few job opportunities in the province.

This study focused on the protest movements in Agusan province and the role the Church played in protest actions. It is limited to the year 1950 to 2000, as the province of Agusan had its economic prosperity in the 1950's. The five decades provided a thorough background of the development of the province of Agusan. The following groups were identified to have participated in the protest actions such as the Justice and Peace Groups (JPAG); Surigao-Agusan Workers Solidarity (SAWS); Task Force Detainees

of the Philippines (TFDP); Center for Research of the Peasants Services (CROPS); *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU); League of Filipino Students (LFS); Promotion for Church People Response (PCPR); *Babae Kaniadto ug Karon*; Women for the Ouster of Marcos, and *Unyon ng mga Manggagawa* (UMAN). These groups represented the labor, students, and youth, church and human rights advocates.

The role played by the church in the protest movement in Agusan Province is being deliberated in this study in the light of the Vatican documents and liberation theology in relation to the socio-economic condition of the Agusan Province. As illustrated in figure 2, the Church involvement as the dependent variable can be affected through these two independent variables.

3 Research Design and Methodology

The study used the historical research design to determine the development of the protest movements in the province of Agusan. It further sought what occurred in the past to have a better understanding of the role of the church in the protest movements and an appreciation of what transpired in the past that could be attributed to what is enjoyed or suffered in the present.

In order to facilitate the collection of data, the researcher used two (2) interview schedule. One (1) was for the non-clerical participants and observers of the protest movements; while another set of interview guide was used, for the participants and observers in the protest movement. These tools were translated in the vernacular.

The researcher gathered all the documents of the events and development of the protest movements from the organizers of the movements, the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Agusan and Butuan. She also interviewed the leaders and participants of the movements who provided vital information that enlightened her to understand why such protests took place in the province of Agusan.

There were some problems encountered in the collection of data that hindered her from finishing the research promptly. The documents on protest movements from 1950 to 1970 were rare because there were only few incidents of protest action during those years. Likewise, the documents on protests against the Marcos regime were destroyed because they were considered subversive. She also had difficulty in interviewing the sisters of the Missionary Sisters of Mary and the Religious of the Good Shepherd after local police raided them in 2005 on the grounds of giving support and protection to NPA members.

4 Discussion

4.1 Protest Action in the Context of Theological Perspective

In the 1960's, the role of the clergy towards the congregation took major changes. From ordinary evangelization and establishment of settlement done by the early Spanish missionaries, the church anchored its actions and programs basically on the Second Vatican Council, Encyclicals, and documents of the Synod of Bishops. Church people based their involvement in contemporary social issues from these documents.

The Church of Mindanao initiated to popularize many of the currently acceptable theological concepts and pastoral programs. Bishop Carmelo F. Morelos (personal communication, September 4, 2010) explained that this was because most of the Catholics that settled in Mindanao were migrants, who had the tendency to look towards the future; thus, they were receptive to change for the betterment of their lives. On the other hand, Gaspar (1997) added that the church of Mindanao was the first to set up the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) that spread throughout the region and became

an instrument to mobilize people in the articulation of justice and peace issues during the martial law regime. The creation of the BEC had its roots in Vatican II, reflected on the March 26, 1967 *Populorum Progressio* of His Holiness, Pope Paul VI. This encyclical called for the people to be sensitive of the needs of their community and to be duty bound to promote solidarity for the benefit of every member of the community.

Since it was easier for the church workers to create small groups among the masses that later transformed into grassroots movements, BEC members were the common people. Furthermore, Pope Paul II expressed the idea of creating a new structure in the church that would meet the modern demands of the people. The same encyclical maintained that the development of people lies in the spirit of solidarity.

It was the BEC that condemned the implementation of martial law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos and publicly requested to end it. The Mindanao Church, on the other hand, initiated the development of a program to respond to the issues of society's marginalized sectors that included the peasants, fisher folks, workers, urban poor, the Lumads, and the detainees; among those who became famous was Karl Gaspar. Gaspar pioneered the concept of becoming the Church of the Poor and the oppressed. Because of this, most of the community-based action programs were focused on the poor and the oppressed. Hence, the different sectoral and pressure groups, created during this decade, focused on the needs of the marginalized sectors. These groups became the instruments for the people to be more articulate in expressing their desires and aspirations as a community. Their action programs, however, need not be political.

C.F. Morelos (personal communication, September 4, 2010) cited the role of the church in the articulation of social issues based on the precept of reservation of human life and human dignity, not on political aspects, especially on partisan politics. Accordingly, the church based its involvement in Vatican Council II where the church people were the members of the same human family. Because of this, everyone had a shared responsibility to one another of giving love and promoting equality. That is why the church believed that poverty and the absence of a venue for ordinary people to participate in the affairs of their community kept them from attaining their basic and civil rights (Gaspar, 1997).

Unless they will serve first the people of God, the clergy and the church leaders cannot lead the people and be servants of Christ. They have to know the people and act as ministers of God's word. Furthermore, Synod of Bishops (1971) maintained that the church not only preached conversion to God, but also acted as the conscience of humanity.

On the other hand, the Bishops, as leaders of the diocese, looked at the Church of Mindanao as one that acted in unison and promoted plans to develop the level of awareness of the people and elicited responses to the prevailing social issues.

During the 1971 Constitutional Convention, the Bishops of Mindanao and Sulu came up with a pastoral letter encouraging people to respond to concerns, deliberate their responsibilities in their respective communities, and determine their part in human development. Moreover, the church sought answers from the new structure of the churches of Mindanao and Sulu that led to the organization of the first Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC I), and the formulation of the guidelines for the building and growth of a Christian Community in Mindanao-Sulu (Gonzaga et al., 1971).

In the conference, the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) was one of the proposed programs in creating a basic group that would allow people to develop the concept of *conscientization*. In the same manner, it became an instrument of coordinating faith-response in the lower level, which provided bible reflection sessions and training seminars for social awareness. These growing consciousness and social awareness made people become more articulate and vigilant of the actions and programs of the government.

When government programs failed to alleviate poverty, unemployment, and agrarian

issues, the Church responded by creating the Social Action Center, which was primarily a social organization for the educational formation of the people and leaders of the community, geared towards total and integral human development. Social Action Center activities included the promotion of farmers and workers' union, self-help organizations, small scale industries, housing development, and urban-slum renewal (Bishops, n.d.). These activities were the same social issues reflected in almost all the sectoral organizations created in the height of the Martial Law era.

The Social Action Center of the Diocese under the management of Fr. Antonio A. Sanieel ceased operating in the middle of 1980's because of the difficulty in obtaining funds from Germany; in the late 1990's, however, the Missionary Sisters of Mary revived it in the late 1990's. MSPC I focused on community development and the creation of a new church in Mindanao and Sulu; MSPC II of 1974 faced the martial law era; hence, issues such as militarization, oppression of the Lumads, harassment, and other human rights violations were discussed. As a result, the representatives proposed the creation of a support group to the grassroots movements (farmers, laborers) which should come from the marginalized sectors. The grassroots movement became a part of the program known as "building self-sustaining communities" to make people cooperate in building their community as part of their responsibility to others. Likewise, it promoted people's autonomy geared towards a self-governing community so that people would not rely on the assistance from the government (C.F. Morelos, personal communication, September 4, 2010).

In the 1977 MSPC, Bishop Carmelo F. Morelos stressed for the strengthening of cooperation and coordination among the people. The conference proposed that the church establish the different related and/or satellite programs, like Alay Kapwa, that emphasized the sharing of one's treasures, and the Conference on Justice Development that aimed to form right attitudes toward the Muslims and cultural minorities and to involve these communities to help conscientize their own people. In addition, Morelos explained that in connection with the conscientization programs, the diocese created an office to aid the Lumad communities that facilitated the alliance of all cultural communities. Furthermore, the Community Based Health Program was also introduced to cater to the health needs of the rural people from available local community resources. The issues discussed in the MSPC's were still related to the hindrances of the people to attain development due to martial law. This was the reason why the 1980 MSPC publicly renounced the martial law regime and called for President Marcos to lift it (Bishops, n.d.). Since its formation in 1971, the MSPC continued to meet every three years, with Butuan having its share of hosting the event in 1989. During this conference, the discussions gave emphasis on the BEC, called the evangelizer toward the year 2000 (Bishops, n.d.).

It is worth noting that, in October 1962 after the Second Vatican Council, there was a change in the attitude of the church towards social issues as it encouraged the involvement of the priests in social action and justice. The encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII in 1963 advocated for change and called for church involvement in human development and social justice. Pope John XXIII's teachings on World Peace stressed that every individual is a person with rights and duties. The Pope stressed that, to be well ordered and productive, human society must consider every human being to be endowed with intelligence and rational mind to make him/her capable of self-determination. He also added that people must enjoy their economic and political rights, be given a decent job and just wages to secure his/her own life and the lives of his/her family.

In relation to the economic rights of every individual is the right to one's property and production of goods. Pope John XXIII believed that these rights would strengthen family life which would result in peace and prosperity for the state. Moreover, the

same encyclical letter revealed that the dignity of the human person includes the right to participate in the affairs of the state and in the decision making process of the government.

The 60's was the time for the active involvement of the church to social issues because of the conceptualization of Liberation Theology which the Filipino theologians called the Theology of Struggle that revoked political repressions. Adapted by the Filipino theologians, the concept promoted deeply the issues on political repression and human rights violation. This was inculcated in the minds of the theologians after the Synod of Bishops in 1971 that produced the document *Justice in the World* and declared the actions for justice and participation in the transformation of the world as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from oppressive situations. Furthermore, it renounced the unjust system and the restriction of the rights of individuals as a contradiction of the teachings of Christ. Moreover, it also demanded for a unity of purpose by the world society of human beings for advancing towards a more humane society where the present situation is viewed in the light of faith. In this sense, the church involvement to renounce the evils brought about by the martial law regime was a gospel-based action. The programs the MSPC proposed defined the extent of the church involvement parallel to what was proclaimed in the document *Justice of the World* (Bishops, 1971).

In addition, the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* provided a scheme on how the church people must work towards the development of people. Pope Paul VI (1967) enunciated the need to be aware of the miserable condition of the poor, the oppressed, and those whose rights had been violated or curtailed to make the church people respond to the needs of their fellowmen. The encyclical pointed out the roles of the church to the world and of the early missionaries in spreading the works of Christ, and the duty of the present generation of promoting and preserving what the early missionaries had achieved. It also called for solidarity in facing the social issues such as war against hunger, violence, materialism, racism, and division of people. Thus, *Populorum Progressio* called people to be the apostles of development. Because they articulated the social issues, leaders and workers were accused of supporting the leftist group. Based on the teachings of the gospel, the Church always advocated non-violent means in seeking for reforms (Pope, 1967).

Moreover, in his 1891 *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII abhorred the application of the ideologies the leftists were advocating. He renounced the socialist concept of achieving equality between the rich and the proletariat by doing away with private possessions. He questioned the Marxist theory that revolution is caused by economic instability and the dissatisfaction of the people to attain material possessions, and did not support the communist's ideology of the state in controlling the factors of production, but considered the condition of the working classes in the light of benevolence. Furthermore, *Rerum Novarum* proposed to the government to create programs to protect the laborers by giving sufficient wages and excellent benefits that are tantamount to equitable division of goods. The dissatisfaction of the workers resulted to strikes and rallies that caused upheaval in trade and commerce and in the general interest of the state.

Although Catholics started the movements to articulate the desired reforms, the Protestants, Muslims, and members of other religious affiliations joined and participated in the call for reforms. Vatican II encouraged ecumenism and collaboration at all levels. The November 1972 ecumenical commission meeting concluded that it is at the level of the local church that the spirit of ecumenism must find concrete expression. Because of this, the diocese of Butuan started to hold ecumenical masses celebrated mostly in public grounds (TFDP, 1999).

The ecumenical movement gained its momentum in the martial law era. Several

movements were created to respond to certain prevailing issues that developed into a partnership of the different sects. Theology Instructor Ella Mae Romano (personal communication, September 11, 2010) identified the Justice and Peace Group (JPAG) supported by the social action center which called for the release of political prisoners and finding of the victims of salvaging. On the other hand, the United Christian Church of the Philippines (UCCP) became a partner of the Catholic Church in supporting protest actions. The collaboration resulted in the creation of the Church Military Liaison for the Diocese of Butuan to become an instrument in expressing issues with the Catholics, the Aglipayans, and the Protestants. Likewise, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines established in 1974 the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) to provide moral and spiritual support to political prisoners and work for their just trial and speedy release (TFDP, 1999).

Buenaventura (n.d.) commented that, in the Philippines, power and might can be challenged peacefully through courageous and organized ecumenical movements. The history of the Philippines proved that people from all walks of life were able to topple down two popular and powerful leaders in the cases of Presidents Ferdinand E. Marcos and Joseph Estrada.

In its 97 years of existence, the UCCP whose thrust is on good governance maintained its work against immorality and injustices, and envisioned to create a church to be a catalyst for social transformation and liberation (Cosmopolitan Church, n.d.).

Finally, the role of the church to organize protest movements was mainly on logistics that involved the support of the three P's - *pera*, *printa*, *pagkain* (money, print, and food). The grassroots movements articulated by the common people were in dire need of resources in which the church provided the linkages with other partners. Material assistance, however, was not sufficient without the moral and spiritual support of the church clergy and leaders. In fact, violence by the authorities was thwarted because of the mere presence of the clergy, the nuns, and the church workers and this will always remain the duty of the church to protect its flock (C. F. Morelos, personal communication, September 4, 2010).

4.2 Collaboration between the Church, the Government, and other Stakeholders

In order to respond to the needs of the entire Mindanao Island, church leaders constantly conceptualize programs. But the biggest problem of Mindanao is to bring about peace and solidarity among the Muslims, Christians, and Lumads or the Tri-people. Almost every Mindanawon believed that, unless peace and security issues would be first solved, there would be no concrete solutions to the social problems in the island.

The promotion of Muslim-Christians dialogue and tri-people movement for solidarity was a significant measure to bring about peace in the island. Because of this, in 1996, the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC) was created; since then, it has been spearheading community consultations and dialogues. Among its adopted programs is the yearly weeklong celebration of Mindanao Week of Peace (MWP) every last week of November to December 1 (C. Clase, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

Mindanao Week of Peace (MWP) started as a local celebration in Zamboanga City initiated by the Peace Advocates of Zamboanga City or (PAZ). PAZ was headed by Fr. Angel Calvo (Claretian). In 1999 recognizing the importance of the celebration, BUC adopted it for the whole Mindanao. The MWP is a celebration of ecumenical prayer among the TRI people, dialogue between the different sectors of society, and other pertinent activities that are significant to respond to issues of the community. Despite being subjected to several prejudices and mixed feelings of the Mindanawon who were

exasperated with the constant war and bombing in Central and Southern Mindanao, several towns and parishes joined the celebration (C. Clase, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

The Bishops and Ulama of Mindanao anticipated that MWP may promote people awareness of the need to work together to attain peace in the entire island. The MWP became a venue for the different sectors such as the academe, media, religious leaders, senior citizens, youth, government officials, NGO's, military, PNP, MNLF, MILF's and others to meet together, discuss, and respond to issues so as to find solutions, if not to alleviate them (C. Clase, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

The effort to bring all the sectors of society in one forum caught the attention of the government. Because of this, in November 26, 2001, President Gloria Arroyo signed Proclamation Number 127 which superseded Proclamation Number 408, dated November 3, 2000. Hence, under Proclamation No. 127 all concerned government agencies and instrumentalities including government owned and controlled corporations and members of the private sectors and civil society based in Mindanao are encouraged to participate in MWP.

In cooperation with the BUC in Agusan and Father Saturnino Urios University, the Diocese of Butuan started celebrating MWP in the year 2000; since then, the MWP had been celebrated yearly. The celebration evolved from just merely ecumenical prayer service among the tri-religious leaders to the involvement of the different government agencies, especially the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police that are tasked to preserve peace, order, and security.

The activities would start with ecumenical religious service followed with an open forum. The open forum includes present issues and social problems of the province. During the open forum, pertinent questions may be addressed directly to the proper agencies and authorities in the hope that a consensus might be achieved through an agreement or a formulation of a new policy. Students, on the other hand, are enjoined to take part in the activities, like the slogan and poster making contests. The celebration which started with just few stakeholders is presently a big celebration collaborated by the different tri-people and the local government of Butuan and Agusan.

Why celebrate Mindanao Week of Peace when there is no real peace in the island? According to Fr. Clase:

"Mindanawons are celebrating it together with our religious leaders not because we already have peace in Mindanao, precisely because we do not have it. Instead peace is our dream."

Now, MWP is being celebrated in all the parishes not only of Agusan provinces but also of the Caraga Region.

5 Conclusion

The organized protests that transpired in the Province of Agusan from 1950 – 2000 were articulations of the people to respond and prompt changes on the different social issues that affected them. The church on the other hand, reformed its programs into getting more involved to the lives of people. It introduced a family-based approach of evangelization that transformed the people holistically. Such programs resulted to the awakening of the people and made them aware of their conditions. Their awareness prompts them to take measures to trigger social change. The church influenced the people to take a united action to attain development independently. Contrary to some beliefs, the church did not encourage the people to go against the government but instead, its teachings awakened them to respond to the different situations that confronted them. Thus, it mobilized the people to bring an end to the social indifferences to the issues.

The church was influential in mobilizing the people. It continued to provide civic and political education to the community and venues for dialogue so that the marginalized people can have access to express their concerns. The programs of the church made people realize that people power can be a catalyst for change. Citizens should refrain from being indifferent to the society and continue to be vigilant to safeguard democracy as what their ancestors had done for them and be able to preserve democracy for posterity.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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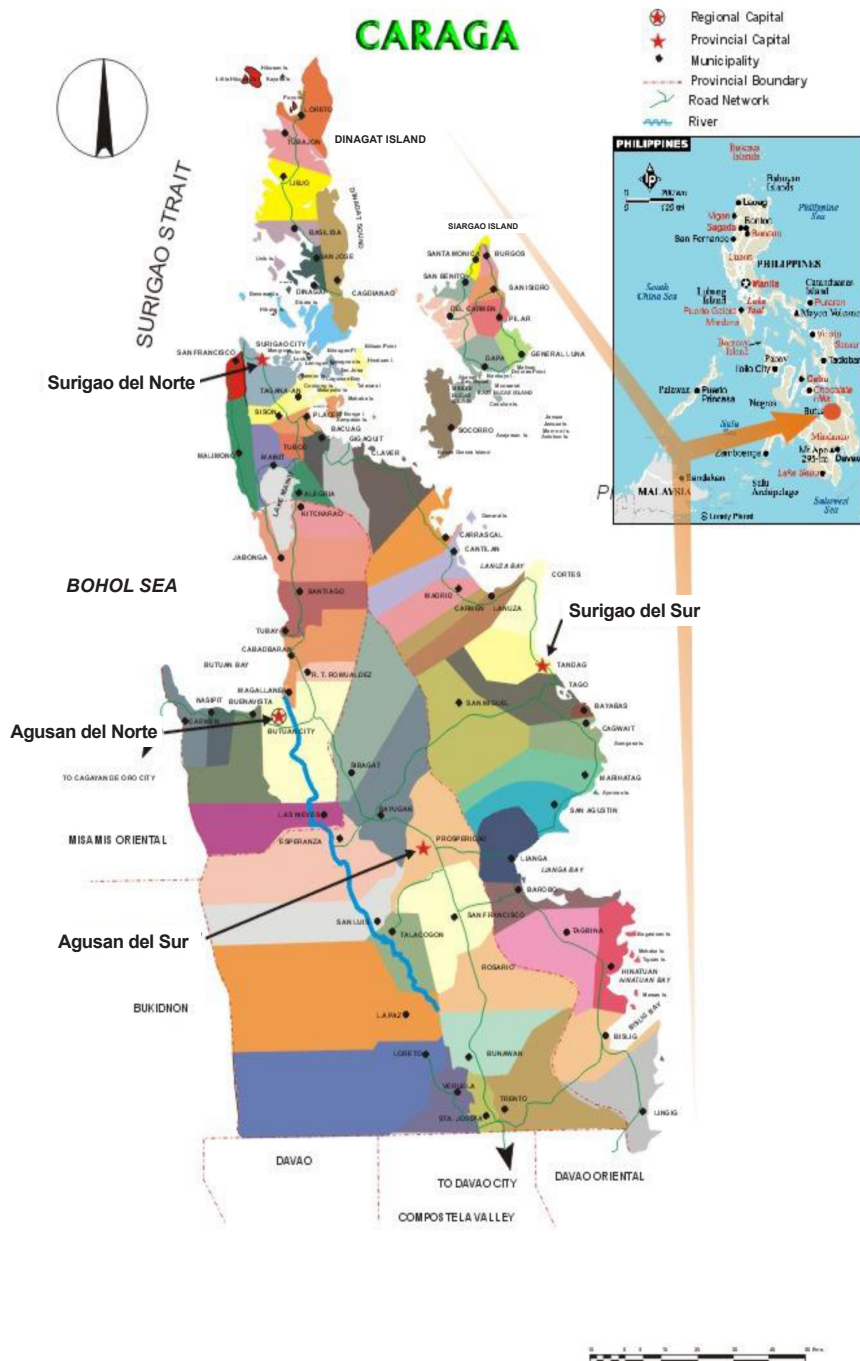


Fig. 1: Map of Agusan Provinces, Caraga Region.

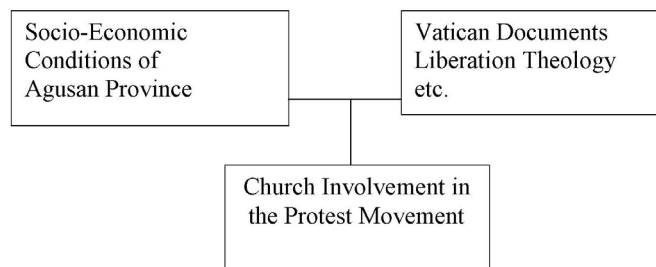


Fig. 2: Conceptual Framework