As a public service,

THE LAUCKS FOUNDATION

from time to time calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification or understanding of issues affecting world peace. The accompanying reprints constitute Reprint Mailing No. 86.

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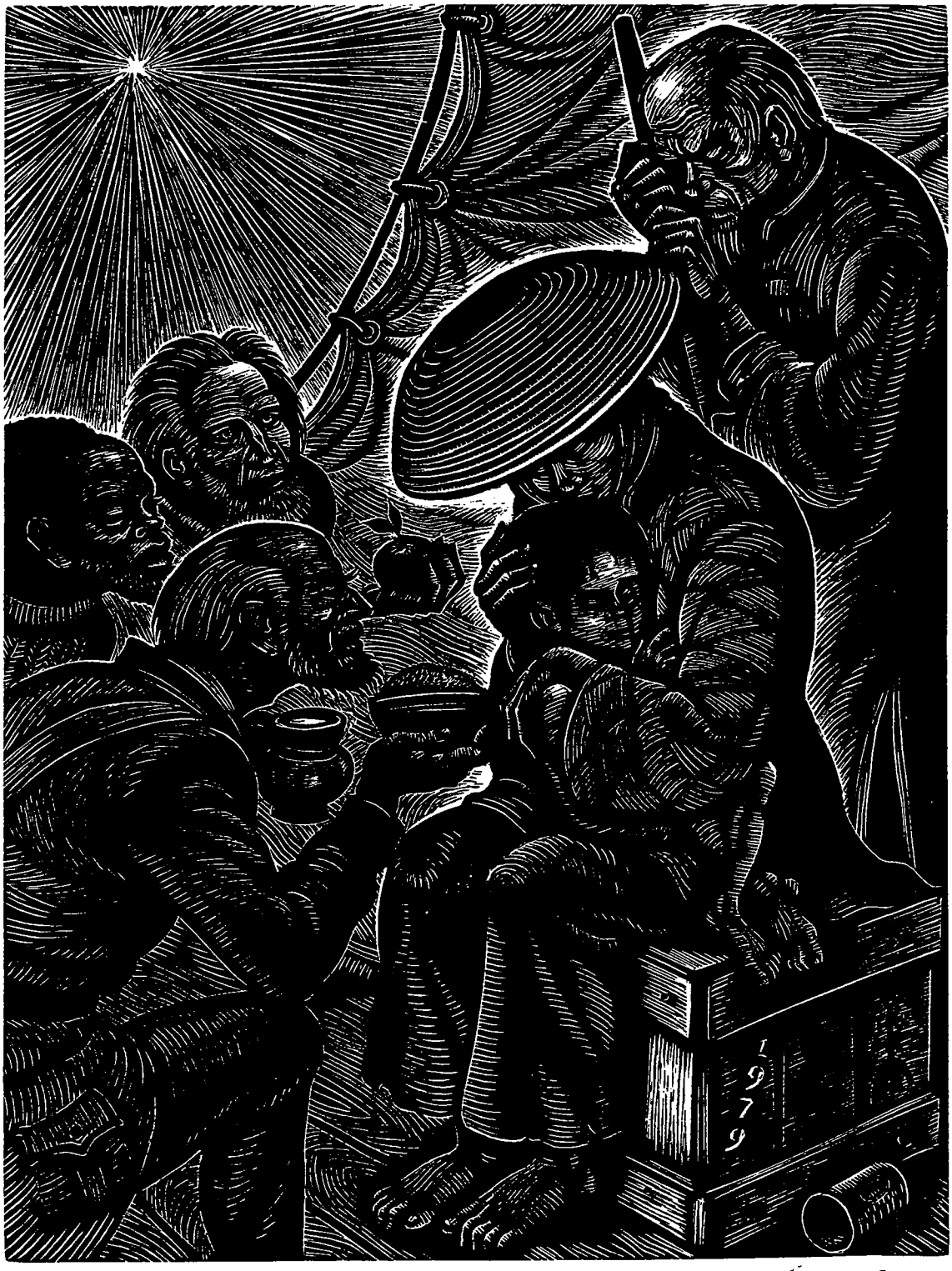
December 15, 1986

The following is from "The Ecological Age" by Thomas Berry. (The Whole Earth Papers, No. 12, Global Education Associates, 1979. East Orange, N.J.), as quoted in "Star Wars and the State of our Souls" by Patricia M. Mische, (Winston Press, Minneapolis) p.126:

."The sea and the air and sunlight, the living forms of the earth, establish a single functional planetary system, a system so unified that biologists tell us that the closest analogy to the biosphere of earth is that of a single cell. Humans must learn that they are a functional part of this single cell, that they live or die as this single cell lives or dies. The nations must learn a primary allegiance to this larger life system. It will do little good for any nation to seek its own well being by destroying the very conditions for planetary survival. This larger vision is no longer utopian. It directly concerns the hardest, most absolute reality there is: the reality of the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat....Planetary welfare is now the welfare of each nation and of each individual."



Fritz Eichenberg

The Year of the Child

(Reprinted from a wood engraving by Fritz Eichenberg, with his permission, and with the permission of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Hof van Sonoy 15-17, 1811 LD Alkmaar, Holland)

AFTER MARCOS

Toward A Just Reconciliation

(Reprinted with permission from Sojourners, Box 29272, Washington, D.C. 20017)

THE PHILIPPINES' POST-MARCOS CHALLENGE

AN INTERVIEW *with* FR. EDICIO DE LA TORRE

Mennonite Central Committee: **How did you survive being imprisoned for nine years under former President Ferdinand Marcos, and how did your faith help you?**

Fr. Edicio de la Torre: It's always difficult to talk of one's faith and how one survives. As you say, I survived, and people immediately hasten to say, "It must be his faith." I guess it must be too. But if you ask me right now, I'm not quite sure what precisely made me survive.

Was I specifically faithful and religious during all those years in prison? I think so, but not only so. At various times in your life, in prison or in the struggle, when you cannot hold fast to any other person, thing, movement, or fact, but just yourself, you stand up and ask yourself, "Do you know what you are, and is this worth it?" If you believe in the life beyond physical death, you ask, is it something that you can look to with some joy and some quiet pride? If you relate those feelings to faith, which I think we should, then it was faith and religion that helped me survive.

For me, the privilege of being in prison and my survival of that experience were related to the fact that, compared to many other prisoners, I never lacked friends. I was always aware that there were a lot of people who knew I was in prison, who were waiting for me to get out, who were working to get me out, and who, even when I was inside, were giving me a lot of work to do—which is good for one's sense of self-worth. Whether it's giving inspiration or counsel or even technical advice, it's good when someone asks something of you and you can give. I never felt that I was out of the living movement. It just was a different assignment.

All situations have their limitations, and all situations have their possibilities. What matters is that you have a sense that you are not isolated from all the rest. If you are part of a movement, each one does his or her thing and the whole thing builds up to something. So long as you can relate to that and you know that the others relate to you, the meaning of your life is not reduced to what you personally do, or what you personally see, but what the whole group is aware of. That, I think, is the most succinct and most adequate explanation of being and believing and surviving for me. I've never felt alone. You know, that was the slogan for Ninoy [Benigno Aquino]: *"Hindi nagiisa ka!"* ("You are not alone!").

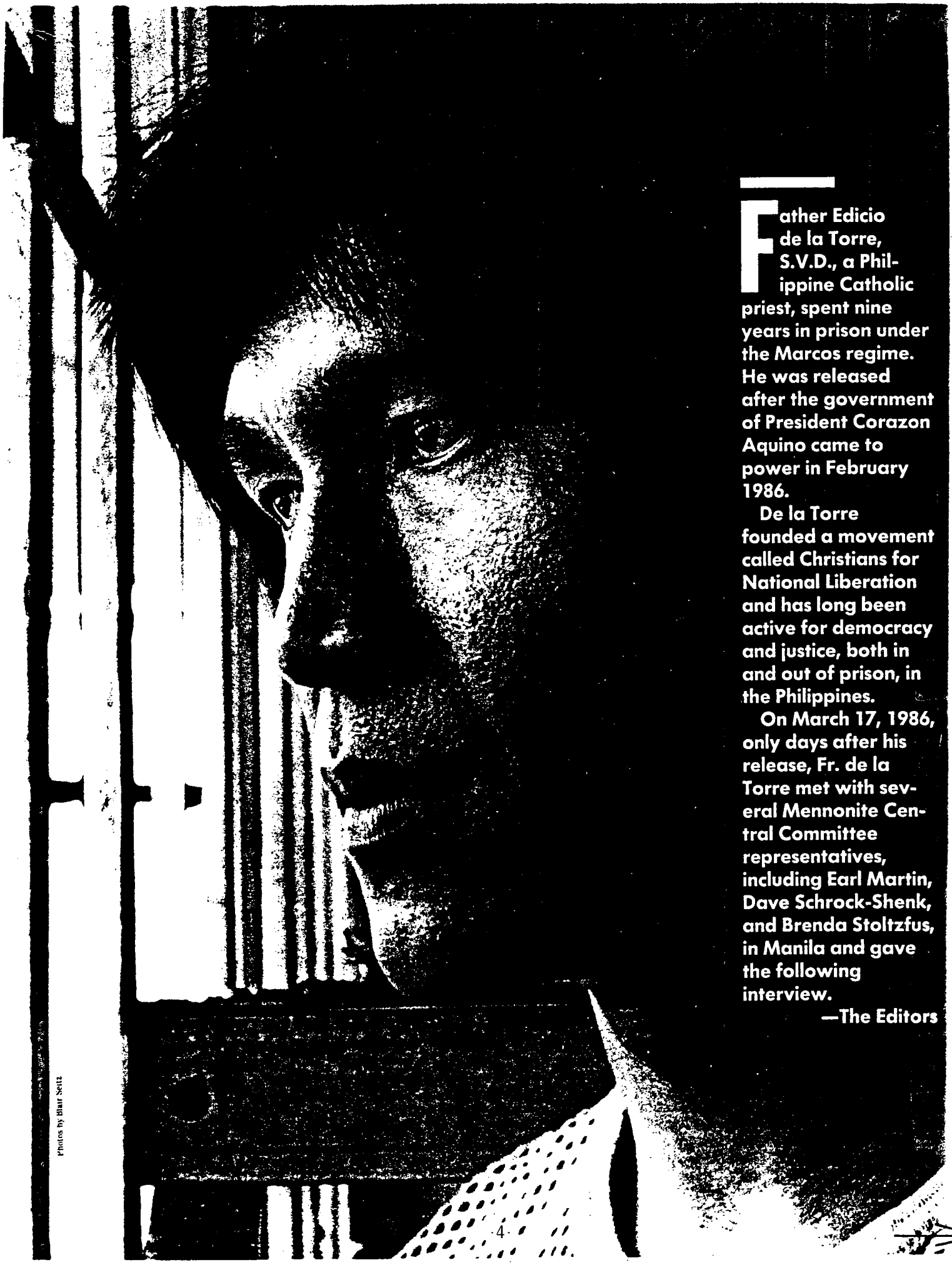
What is your opinion of the recent Philippine revolution, and what do you see in the future for the Aquino government?

One of the problems that some of those on the Left, including Christians, faced when this "snap revolution" happened in February was the inability to rejoice in it. They thought, "It's not quite what we want. It's not *the* revolution."

That's true, it's not *the* revolution. There's hardly any social content to it. It's very traditional, in fact. It's a coalition government, but not the democratic coalition government we wanted that would have the Left represented as a majority. This government is even trying to "excommunicate" the Left as a minority partner. And it has very few social revolutionary goals. So why relate to it?

We have a Filipino proverb that says, "The one who is quick to seize opportunities will always defeat someone who patiently plods and is very diligent over the years." That has happened in a sense. The people who worked very hard, who gave much more blood, were planning something for a decade. And now, suddenly, something happened. And they said, "What happened?"

Two days before I was released from prison, a key leader behind the scenes of the reform movement in the military said to me, "Ed, sorry we got your revolution from you." I said, "It's OK, just pursue it." And then he said, "Sorry we can't get you out yet, but if you do get out, don't rock the boat." And then he added, "Couldn't you invite your friends up in the hills to come down and dance in the streets with us?" I replied, "How will they come down to dance? You're not even letting me out to dance."



Photos by Blair Seitz

Father Edicio de la Torre, S.V.D., a Philippine Catholic priest, spent nine years in prison under the Marcos regime. He was released after the government of President Corazon Aquino came to power in February 1986.

De la Torre founded a movement called Christians for National Liberation and has long been active for democracy and justice, both in and out of prison, in the Philippines.

On March 17, 1986, only days after his release, Fr. de la Torre met with several Mennonite Central Committee representatives, including Earl Martin, Dave Schrock-Shenk, and Brenda Stoltzfus, in Manila and gave the following interview.

—The Editors

But now I'm out and dancing. The other day I was talking to members of the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy. Some were very grim at first. They said, "This government has no anti-imperialist program. This democracy is not really democratic." I said, "Make yourself into the Nationalist Alliance for *Joy*, Freedom and Democracy. Have some sense of joy. Come on, we were a part of this!" Afterward they said, "Yes, why not, we should rejoice, even if others are trying to exclude us from the party." There would be something biblical about that too—the last to become first again!

Now what is the image to describe this revolution? It's a premature baby. That really captures succinctly what I feel about it, and the ambiguity the Left has about it. It's a baby that was born before its time, smaller than what we expected, and not as beautiful and well-formed as we dreamed of. That's why we can't be quite sure whether we are part of its parentage.

The Philippine revolution is a premature baby. But it's viable, I think, given proper intense care. That is the reason for some joy and optimism, while at the same time a call to hard work within and without.

Let us look at this premature baby. What child is this? And whose child is it? President Cory Aquino and her group can't even decide if what came into being is a revolutionary government. This thing came into being through a mixture of "people's power," some form of electoral legitimization, and some form of military rebellion. Put them all together and it's a revolution. If you examine them separately, it is not. But that is one of the key elements for explanation.

The revolution is an example of synergy. Synergy means that the whole is bigger than the simple sum of conscious parts. You total them arithmetically, and they don't add up. But if you put them together, you cannot reduce the analysis to the elements, because they came together at a certain time and exploded with a power beyond our calculations.

If one is religious, the revolution is a time of special grace—*kairos*. If one is even more religious, it's the work of the Holy Spirit, because you cannot explain it. And if one is political, it must have been scripted by the CIA. That was the range of explanations I had anticipated.

The Holy Spirit explanation means there is one mysterious, almighty force that governs all these things, and we all played our roles without knowing we were following a script, which up to now cannot be unfolded because either way it's up there in the heavens or shredded in some machine at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. But no, there is no one single Holy Spirit or Scenario Builder way up there. Everyone tried to write a script, but reality, or life, or history, has its way of catching us by surprise.

It is revolution. It's rapid, it's unusual, it's new. It's not quite the big one, but why begrudge it, and why not be thankful for life's little blessings when they come, especially when they come sooner and they cost less? Maybe they also promise less. Then adjust your expectations.

I think it's easier to feel this as blessing when you are one of the beneficiaries. I came out from prison sooner than expected, so I rejoice. I can understand the hesitation of those who did not share this feeling. But the baby needs care. It is important that those who spent the long, sleepless hours preparing for and nurturing that birth recognize it when it comes sooner than they had planned and with many other parents than were supposed to be involved.

Let us pray that those who have the right and privilege to forgive will find the grace to forgive.

In politics, unlike in biology, multiple parentage is possible. When we were watching this event on television and hearing of it on the radio, a Muslim military officer told us an Egyptian proverb that says when a fat bull falls, a thousand knives come out, each one claiming to have inflicted the final blow. And perhaps the latest ones to come out are the biggest, when actually the bull started to die from a thousand previous cuts.

The other proverb I know is "Success has a thousand parents, and failure is an orphan." And this success will have more than a thousand parents claiming parentage. In fact, for a while Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Gen. Fidel Ramos claimed they were the principal parents. At that time I said they were just midwives. Now I'm willing to grant that they are also part of the parents. Cardinal Jaime Sin claimed to be a parent. Initially I said no, he just baptized it! But then I said yes, he could also be a parent. In politics you don't have to be married to be a parent.

The problem that faces me and many others is this: Is the Left part of its parentage? Most others say no. And they excommunicate us. That's a problem that shouldn't be surprising. The problem is when we excommunicate ourselves and say, "That's not my child. Someone else fathered that or mothered that. And I'm not going to have anything to do with that. I'll wait for the next baby." In the meantime this baby is all we've got. It's already here, it has some promise, and it needs some loving care. And better that it be nurtured by those who have cared with much love before than those who have just discovered parental courage now that there are fewer risks, or by those who speak truth now only because the old lies are so transparent.

Now what is this premature baby? What is its shape? What can we do about it? And what is the role of its rich North American uncle who's going to send it all kinds of goodies from abroad?

As for the shape of this baby, so far I like its head—Cory Aquino and the people around her. Like any head, it's full of ideas. If you push the analogy further, it's got a right ear and a left ear into which you can whisper. Its mind is still unformed. There are some ideas that are already clear. You hear them at rallies and campaigns and decrees. There are some that might still come out sounding good. There are some you worry might not sound so good. But so far it's something that we can live with, and something that we can help influence. So much for the baby's head.

The body is the thing that concerns us—the body politic. Unlike the biological body, this body is not quite organized into sub-organs, territorial or sectoral. It seems to be simply coming together as an event, like rallies of five million people at Luneta Park or Edsa Boulevard. "People's power" is not very clear. It's only when it happens that you see it.

So there is a need for more solid, more permanent, more institutionalized organizations. And Cory has told us to organize at all levels—people's consortative, territorial, and sectoral committees. Committees are not representative unless there are organizations that will struggle to be on those committees. It calls for a lot of hard work.

But now we can do something about it without ending up in prison or being killed or abducted. We can do it immediately, especially in urban areas. I tell friends we can still be arrested, but now with proper warrants. We might be able to file for bail, we might not disappear suddenly, but don't expect an easy path. Political organization of the people, when it becomes threatening, will always produce some action and harassment from those who do not want that body to really develop. But then, when you have faced bigger risks before, you can easily face these lesser risks now. But there is no easy path.

The problem with this body is that it has a very big right arm. The "new" armed forces of the people is the only organized part of this body that has survived the previous one. In fact I suspect it's a transplant from the previous body and that it's not really a part of the new army. It's very big and rather fearsome.

What worries me is that this new premature baby has no left arm! There's a little bit of a left arm, perhaps, made up of some

Social Democrats and some ex-detainees like myself. But it's a very small arm just now. The left arm has no intentions or ambitions right now of realistically linking to the head, just to the body, because that is the source of our strength. Besides, the Left had no plans of replacing heads until maybe the late 1990s. Our job now is to organize the body and develop the left arm.

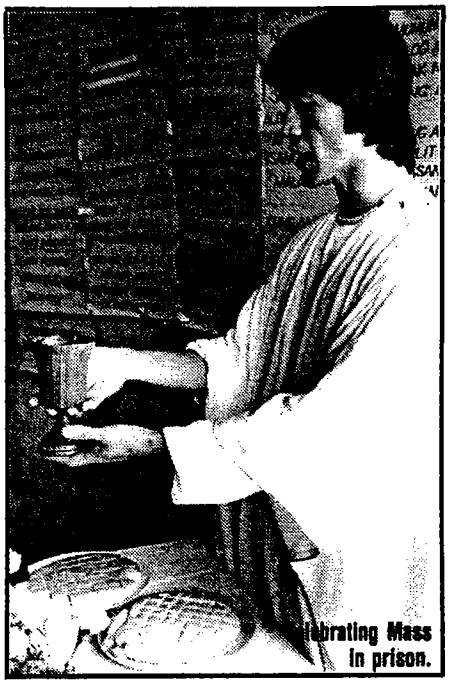
There's a lot of nurturing and caring needed, not just in fostering the growth of the left arm in the form of leftist parties or movements but also nurturing that head by whispering the proper words in the left ear. The other side keeps whispering, like Satan, "I will give you all the riches you need, $1 billion in a mini-Marshall Plan, if you will only cut off that left arm." And that voice is also telling the right arm, "Make sure the head doesn't get out of hand. I will give you even more millions, and it will pass faster through Congress, if you cut off that left arm. And if those left people whisper too much and that head listens too long, maybe we'll have to cut off that head also."

There is no aid without strings attached; I have no illusions about that. But there are strings you can live with, because you can pull them both ways. And there are strings that you cannot live with, because they tie you by your neck. So we must distinguish between these strings and see what we can live with.

In March a group of people concerned about the Philippines had a meeting in Philadelphia. We decided on three priorities. First, we agreed that U.S. military aid should be converted to humanitarian assistance for the victims of past repression. Second, on the question of the U.S. bases, there is some debate about whether we should call for withdrawal of just those bases, or whether we should call for withdrawal of all foreign military bases in Southeast Asia. And third, we are calling for Filipino control of Filipino resources, including land and the multinational corporations. What are your reflections on this?

That's the difficult area of the "nationalist agenda" vs. the "democratic agenda." My own feeling is that at this moment the principal agenda is the democratic agenda, which I call the agenda of moving from limited, elite democracy to a broader, popular democracy. This would take the form of a more plural, multiparty system, including the parties of the Left. More important, this would move toward the institutionalization of people's organizations in the form of committees that are recognized by the government as direct and relatively autonomous expressions of the people's will and power. That, in turn, serves as the base for a nationalist agenda.

I feel that a nationalist movement in the Philippines should be a cross-class coalition. Many of the initial voices in the new government are still very narrowly based—some are members of the old elite but nationalist, some of the middle class, and, of course, some of the working class. It's still a very fragile coalition, and it has no political force yet. We should get a plurality of political parties and movements that take a strong nationalist position and can



...ebrating Mass in prison.

support or pressure government to adopt a more nationalist stance. Obviously, together with that development, we'll immediately interact with whatever support in the United States there is for the popular democratic project and the nationalist project.

What do we ask of North American Christians? As for the subject of military aid, we all call for heaven, the ideal world. We would prefer that all aid go for social and economic programs. Maybe the military aid proposal of the United States could be tied partly to the Aquino government's human rights commission work on military abuses. The punishment, the reform, and the reduction of size of the military based on the commission's work could be a good handle for reducing military aid, or at least tying human rights conditions to it.

Now what about U.S. military bases? Should supporters of Philippine democracy call for U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines or for the removal of all foreign bases from Southeast Asia? People dealing in geopolitics say that if the United States withdraws from the Philippines, then what about the Russian base at Camranh Bay in Vietnam? That's a very complex question. It depends on your constituency.

People who debate within the Left will say, "This evenhandedness is petty bourgeois! You must distinguish between a socialist interest and a nonaligned interest." That is an internal debate among the Left which is valid, but I presume your constituency is the broader middle. There, I feel, you are safest to say, "Let us get the bases out, and if you feel uncomfortable with us getting just one superpower out, let's get everyone out." I am rather pragmatic about these matters, though I share your dream: no bombs, no war, just the kingdom.

Third, what about Filipino control of our own resources? Again, we would like a purely independent baby that will just have arm's-length relationships, meaning trade relationships. But even socialist countries that start out trying to develop a more autarkic economy realize that there's no economy in this world that can be so self-sufficient, because of limited natural, human, or technological resources. So you have to make your choices.

So do we want Filipino control over our resources? Of course, just as I'm sure you want control over your resources. But how do we move from this kind of dependence, or one-sided interdependence, toward a more manageable interdependence? We have to start where we can.

Do you see a need for reconciliation in Philippine society, and what is necessary for reconciliation now that Marcos has fallen?

Ah, reconciliation. This is a big problem. The concept is good—reconciliation with justice—but justice has an element, or undercurrent, of vengeance. Reconciliation, especially with the late-comers who want things to be normal again without a settling of accounts, means a kind of "forgive and forget" attitude.

How do we handle reconciliation and justice simultaneously? First, let's consider if someone you know has committed an injustice and has sinned, comes to you and says, "I'm sorry, I recognize I did something wrong. I'm asking you for forgiveness. Will you forgive me?" At that moment the challenge is for us to be able to find that grace, which is divine, to forgive, prior to the settling of the grievances. By definition, forgiveness is given beforehand. All it asks for is a confession of guilt and a call for forgiveness.

Second, I feel that forgiveness is the privilege of the victim. We will not forgive for someone. Let us say that someone in the reform movement of the military comes and says, "I joined the reform movement because at a certain point in my life I had followed orders too faithfully and too often and 'salvaged' [killed] a lot of people." He will not say that for public consumption, but he will admit that he killed certain people. And he says at a certain point,

"Sobra na, tama na!" "It's too much, and I refuse to follow the next order." So I say, "Brother, you are safe."

But what happens now to the family of those he has killed? I cannot forgive him for them. But I can help set up a meeting between them. Let us pray and hope that those families who have the right and privilege to forgive will find the grace to forgive him. Then, if these people are genuinely repentant, they will use the grace given them from that forgiveness to make restitution and offer penance.

That is the only way to approach a just reconciliation, safeguarding mental, human, and Christian values and, at the same time, acknowledging the realities of human wickedness and folly and deviousness. This is the mixture that I call biblical politics, reflecting a simplicity of heart, like a dove, and assessing the deviousness and labyrinthine ways of the human mind, like a serpent. To be both as simple and forgiving as one is given the grace to do and to be at the same time politically clever and cautious as we have to be to live within a historical world—that is the problem of any movement for reconciliation.

People ask me, "Fr. Ed, how will you bring back your nine years in jail?" Well, those nine years were not lost; but still there were some losses. I remember Gandhi facing, I believe, a Hindu, an Indian who had killed a Muslim in a riot, who said, "I set fire to a Muslim house and I know I roasted them alive. But now I know I have done wrong. I ask your forgiveness." Gandhi said, "Obviously, I can forgive you, but how do we now make an effort of restoring your sense of wholeness and being saved?" Eventually they found a Muslim orphan baby, and Gandhi said to the man, "Raise him as your child. Raise him as a Muslim. Maybe that way you can recover your wholeness."

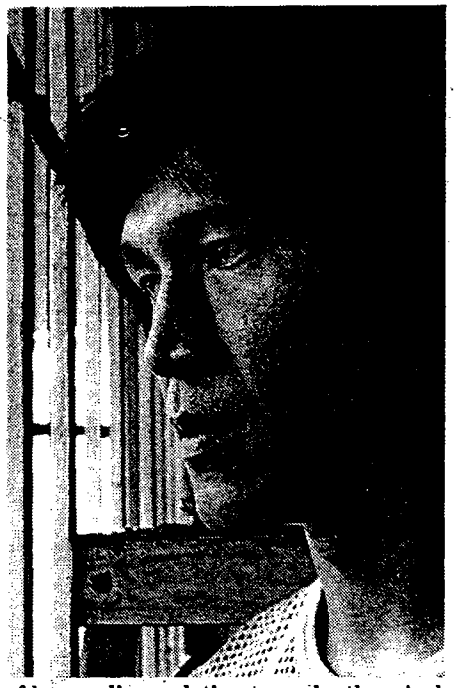
I think something like that would have to be worked out in the Philippines. That's possible, perhaps, to do on an individual basis. Can you imagine it on a societal, massive level? But that kind of ministry is possible and needed. A lot of those in the struggle, who perhaps are not as tempered through the process of suffering and thought and life, might not find it easy to do that.

People say to me, "Fr. Ed, to forgive is divine. God is lavish, forgiving everyone. If God discriminates, God wouldn't be God." But why are people in hell? They can't accept the forgiveness. They can't forgive themselves. So the very punishment is precisely that: They cannot believe in their hearts that they can be forgiven. They hate themselves so much and do not believe that someone can be so good as to accept them even after all they've done.

It's a very deep question, but it's part of the reality we have to live with. It's hard enough at the personal level. It's also hard on the social and political level.

In my case prison was not really that draining or negative. But I remember there was a forum where I was with many detainees, less-known people, heavily tortured. When they were discussing this, I was close to crying. And then I said, "I can laugh and even casually converse with some soldiers; but, my God, this worker whose brother was killed, this one whose wife is missing...who am I to talk to them of reconciliation?"

This big project of kingdom and social transformation is part of our reality, but there is also the intense and smaller drama



of human lives relating to each other. And the trick is not to separate the two, but to interrelate them, giving them their proper time and method.

It's a very challenging and difficult job, and we haven't even discussed these matters with all the ex-detainees. I know a lot of them are in more difficult circumstances than I am. They're unemployed; no one is going to give them a job soon. Their families are still in shambles. They have missing people, and they know that some of their torturers and captors are now riding high on a new popularity in the "new" military.

How can you have a genuine reconciliation, and yet avoid having premature and unnecessary conflicts within this fragile coalition that could very well be in danger of some "*contras*" loyal to Marcos from Hawaii? That is the difficult field of politics. A moral training for that must be more sophisticated, more long term, and yet more intense, because it is much harder than the already hard job of forming personal consciences for interpersonal ministry.

What reflections would you offer on liberation and the movement for democracy in the Philippines, after spending nine years in prison and much work in the movement?

It's very hard. Sometimes I tell myself I should not have learned all these things. Before, it was so simple. I thought liberation was simply this: The world is sinful, it's been redeemed, and God has promised the kingdom. And the people will make history, and that's it!

But in fact it's very complicated. You become more modest and less dogmatic. You realize there's no one person who can be in charge of all these things, so we need to work together. Each one has something to contribute, some more dramatic, some less dramatic.

The challenge is to grasp the complexity and richness of all this, and at the same time, realize two things: first, the need for a more conscious relatedness among us, so that we know that the advance here, the advance there, the setback here, are all part of one movement internationally. Certainly frontiers, whether political, national, or cultural, are present. But they are ultimately secondary to the basic oneness of our common struggle to create a better world, a better earth, including our clashes and quarrels over what, in fact, constitutes that better world.

Second, the challenge is to become clearer at every moment of one's life, as a person and as part of a group, about where we can maximize our contribution at each stage. All of us can sit back and dream the big visions and fantasize about our moment of glory at center stage, but one has little control over that. What matters is that you understand yourself at a given moment, with your resources, skills, weaknesses, and strengths and say, "This is the historical moment. This is where I am. This is where I am rooted. This is where I am assigned. This is what I either chose or have been sent to. What can I do best at this point, given this larger picture?" Then pour yourself there. And after a moment, you sum up, and then you reaffirm yourself.

It's like pronouncing vows in the religious order. You have a novitiate—you think of yourself, you assess yourself, and then you try to gather yourself as much as you can, so that when you commit yourself you are not just committing a part of you, but all of you. Then after a while, you review and reaffirm your vows. And then you reaffirm them again.

Sometimes you can change, just as, in a sense, I have been changing my vocation. I don't see myself anymore in traditional, institutional ministry. So many things have changed in my life. I see more meaning and more need for me here in this people's movement.

You can accept the less visible tasks as long as you have no illusions about yourself and therefore have no false need for heroism or things that are more personally satisfying. That's the discipline of being part of a historical, popular movement toward the coming of the kingdom. □

August 28, 1986

(This letter, reprinted here with permission of the author, appeared September 9, 1986 in the Wall Street Journal under the title "Technological Hubris". It was a reply to a WSJ editorial of August 28, 1986)

Letters to the Editor
The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty St.
New York, N.Y. 10281

To the Editor,

Your August 28th editorial on the Chernobyl nuclear disaster makes some good points. But it also fosters some serious misconceptions. It is true that the Soviet graphite reactors can be used to produce plutonium for weapons, analogous to our N reactor at Hanford, Wash., a graphite weapons reactor that also produces steam for civilian electric power. Incidentally, we believe the N reactor is also inherently unsafe, and particularly vulnerable to fire. But to argue that the accident happened "only because Soviet power reactors are designed also to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons" is to stretch the point too far. The Soviets chose the graphite pile reactor in the 1950's not only because they wanted plutonium, but also because they didn't have the capability to fabricate the large pressure vessels needed for the light water reactors typical in the West.

What's more, your point that "U.S. power plants are especially designed not to produce plutonium" is labored. Thankfully, the U.S. has eschewed civilian plutonium reprocessing. But that decision has come against the desires of the nuclear industry and the current administration, which supported both commercial reprocessing and the Clinch River breeder reactor project. Breeder reactors are specifically designed to make plutonium.

You err in your statement that the Soviet plant had no containment. The drawings make it clear that the plant had a containment, similar in many respects to some of the containment structures on General Electric boiling water reactors (BWRs). More important, the forces unleashed by the Chernobyl appear to us to have been sufficient to breach any U.S. containment, including the large, dry containments that surround some of our pressurized water reactors. Valery Legasov, head of the Soviet IAEA delegation, told the meeting in Vienna that "no containment" could have survived the Chernobyl blast.

Could a power burst and steam explosion such as the one that ripped the top off of the Chernobyl reactor happen in western plants? Pierre Tanguy, nuclear safety director of Electricite de France, told NUCLEONICS WEEK that the USSR has launched an extensive research program to find out what exactly happened in the Chernobyl core. "That could be interesting for other reactors, too, especially for BWR's," Tanguy said.

I fear your editorial falls into a trap which Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn) recently warned against: technological hubris. The Soviet nuclear plants are inherently dangerous. Unfortunately, so are ours. Our plants also make too many demands on operators, requiring them to make literally life-and-death decisions in a matter of seconds. Russia bashing won't cure that situation.

Sincerely,

Kennedy P. Maize
Senior Energy Analyst
Union of Concerned Scientists, Washington

commonweal

LAMENT FOR CHERNOBYL

OVER TWO centuries ago, the great Hasidic master, the Baal Shem Tov (d. 1760), asked his disciple, Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl (d. 1798), why in the prayer sequence known as the Lamentations at Midnight, both the names Rachel and Leah were included. Rabbi Nahum replied that what Rachel effects with her joy, Leah effects with her tears.

The anguish that has descended on the Ukraine, and Chernobyl in particular, since the midnight explosion at the nuclear power station on April 26 is likely to remain for years. Its relief may only be effected by the tears and lamentations of many Leahs, many Rachels, over many generations, and across many borders.

The Chernobyl disaster has reconstituted a seemingly limitless series of questions and concerns — from the scientific, to the political, to the psychic. What is a foolproof nuclear reactor? What are the bonds of human community in the atomic age? Who controls *the* "power," and do they really "control" *it*? Will Chernobyl's children's children curse April 26 as the real April Fool's Day? Will spring ever be the same in the Ukraine?

Outside the human tragedy that has enveloped the victims of Chernobyl, that makes sleep uneasy in Kiev, Poland, and the Northern Hemisphere, two questions are likely to have the most intense half-lives for Americans. Can nuclear energy be safe? And, will we ever be able to trust the Soviets?

The U.S., it must be remembered, has more operational nuclear reactors than any country in the world (98 of a total of 375), and twice as many as the Soviet Union's 50. Although most U.S. reactors are of differing and supposedly safer designs than the Chernobyl plant, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) estimates there is a significant possibility of a nuclear meltdown in the U.S. in the next twenty years. This is even less encouraging when one is reminded that the Ukrainian Power Minister, Vitali Sklyarov, boasted in *Soviet Life* last February that "the odds of a meltdown [at Chernobyl] are one in ten thousand years."

The cleanup after the partial meltdown at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island is another disquieting element of the safety question. Although that "incident" was well contained as compared to Chernobyl, the cleanup still continues seven years after the accident. It will take another three years to complete, at a cost exceeding a billion dollars. The cleanup at Chernobyl may take even longer.

Thank our atoms, most nuclear reactors will probably not explode. But they will wear out. Like us, they move intrepidly toward retirement. But herein lies another safety problem. According to the Worldwatch Institute, a Washington-based research organization, hundreds of nuclear power reactors will be taken out of service in the next thirty years. But, since nuclear reactors only came on line thirty years ago, no country has adequately prepared for this decommissioning. To protect public health from radiation that accumulates during nuclear plant operations, retired reactors must be cleaned up, dismantled, and buried, all in such a way as to keep their wastes from contaminating the soil and the water for tens of thousands of years. At present, according to Worldwatch, no country is technically prepared for this job, let alone ready to assume the staggering costs. In the last decade, the economic burden of burying low-level wastes in the U.S. has increased more than tenfold.

The prices of nuclear power are clearly multiple. To construct, maintain, and finally dismantle such plants is neither cheap nor without danger. As we have learned from Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, the possibility of operational error or design failure is real. The conclusion must be faced: the final cost of nuclear power may be seemingly endless investment and eternal vigilance. Is it worth it?

The Soviet handling of the Chernobyl meltdown forms the nucleus of the second question. It has produced a political windfall for the West. How can anyone possibly trust the Soviets? They didn't warn anyone about the fallout, not their own people nor their allies. Is this Gorbachev's new straightforwardness? We should discuss arms control with such cold dissemblers? Nyet!

What the Chernobyl disaster has made clearer than ever before, however, is that we indeed inhabit a global village. What is more, the case of 84,000 people forced to abandon their homes is nothing compared to the social disruption that would befall a metropolitan area struck by a similar nuclear catastrophe. And what if the accident involved not simply a power plant, but a weapon *designed* to be destructive?

The release of scientific information from Chernobyl has been infuriatingly slow and incomplete. But with it and our wagging finger at the Kremlin has come the realization that everywhere is Chernobyl. The Ukrainian officials' ineptness and Moscow's refusal to sound the alarm are more than the effects of a closed totalitarian regime. Although these cannot be minimized, they alone do not account for the human condition's unwillingness to expose its mistakes gracefully. When a nuclear accident occurred at Tsuruga, Japan, in 1981, it was not disclosed until radioactivity was detected six weeks later in a nearby bay. And when a fourth NASA rocket failed over New Mexico in April, it was not announced publicly until the following month. There is something of the Waldheim syndrome at work in all of us. Thus, the Department of Energy (DOE) is reluctant to hold government nuclear reactors and facilities to the same standards required for commercial plants, fearful lest such standards might force the closing of a number of DOE and Department of Defense facilities. Can we afford such a double standard in light of Chernobyl?

The most desirable effect of Chernobyl would be twofold. First, nuclear safety would be enhanced across the board and around the world. The Union of Concerned Scientists has suggested a number of worthwhile improvements in this regard for the U.S., many of which are intended to motivate the NRC to become an agency geared to the safety of the citizenry. The *Economist* recently noted that simpler and safer nuclear reactors — such as Sweden's process-inherent ultimately-safe reactor, which uses a boron-in-water solution to immerse a

nuclear reactor and shut it off automatically if there is a malfunction — are now available. If the modern world's course must be a nuclear one, a question that arises again from the ashes, it must be the safest one imaginable. (The same issue of the *Economist*, March 29, reported that "the nuclear power industry remains as safe as a chocolate factory." Don't tell them that in Hershey, Pennsylvania!)

The second necessary effect of Chernobyl must be for greater candor in these matters from the Soviet government, and from all governments. The USSR has belatedly agreed to supply the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency with daily reports on radiation levels at Chernobyl, and to go to Vienna "as soon as possible" for a "post-accident analysis." The world must know exactly what happened at Chernobyl. There is some reason to believe eventually it will. The Russians cannot stonewall a united world opinion. And the hope is they will be forced to make concessions in other vital areas to recoup their devastating loss of face. Already they have stated that they have no plans at this time to resume nuclear weapons testing, and have reiterated their openness to on-site inspection and the installation of seismic devices for verification of a testing agreement (*New York Times*, May 9).

At the recent Tokyo summit, the seven industrial democracies likewise urged the early elaboration of an international convention committing all parties to report and exchange information in the event of nuclear emergencies or accidents. Five days before Chernobyl there was another small hint of progress. The Soviet Union and forty-two other countries met in Geneva to establish guidelines on liability for nuclear-powered satellites that fall to earth.

Yet while these two areas under consideration may provide some eventual, nonvolatile silver lining to the cloud of Chernobyl, a third question remains to unsettle our consciousness. It was a Ukrainian official, assisting in the relocation of the 84,000, who voiced it, one Ivan Plyushch of Kopelovo: "If this has all happened in peacetime," he said, "can you imagine what it would be like in war?" And this did not even include mention of the cancer complications his people and countless others may learn of in ten to forty years. What then? We can scarcely imagine the depth of lamentation. But perhaps we have a presentment in Rabbi Nahum, and in a poem Pasternak wrote thirty years ago, "When the Skies Clear":

I'll hear your long Mass all my years
For there's a trembling in my soul. . . .

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