

# Communist Party of the Philippines embraces Catholicism

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On February 18, Julieta de Lima, long-time leading member of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and head of the party's peace negotiating team, delivered a speech to a summit of major church leaders in which she articulated the CPP's open embrace of the Catholic Church and its legacy of medieval barbarism in the country.

She addressed a gathering of archbishops, bishops, religious superiors and prominent ministers assembled for the 9th Ecumenical Church Leaders' Summit on Peace to commemorate "500 Years of Christianity in the Philippines." The event was sponsored by the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) which is comprised of the powerful Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the National Council of Churches and the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines.

De Lima unreservedly adopted the language and dogma of Christianity. She approvingly quoted Pope Francis, telling the assembled bishops, "The Lord has redeemed us all, all of us, with the blood of Christ, all of us, not just Catholics."

She depicted the CPP as struggling for a "just and enduring peace," and then dressed this up in the religious fatalism of medieval canon, Thomas a Kempis, declaring "To me this means Man proposes and God disposes with the masses not only voicing the will of God but realizing it on earth."

The Catholic Church, with its dogma of redemptive suffering and its apparatus of obscurantism, is one of the most exploitative institutions on the planet. The wealth of the church and the power of the pope are the product of nearly two millennia of theft, murder, conquest and counter-revolution.

Few countries have suffered as greatly as a result of this history as the Philippines. The Communist Party of the Philippines, however, joined the assembled religious superiors in a celebration of this legacy. De Lima declared, "As we celebrate 500 years of Christianity in the country, let us strive ever harder to uphold human dignity." She claimed that the "Filipino people have adopted it [Christianity] as a redemptive and liberating moral force in the same manner as one type of society after another has adopted science and technology as a progressive factor in advancing civilization."

Ferdinand Magellan arrived in what would become the Spanish colony of the Philippines in 1521. The CPP is joining the Catholic Church in celebrating the onset of colonial rule. Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines was exercised directly through the institutions of the church and the religious orders. Five hundred years of Christianity have been five hundred years of barbarism.

The church systematically destroyed the existing native script, burning every instance they could find as "satanic." Within two generations they had eradicated it and reduced the literate population to illiteracy. The priests deliberately maintained the population in a condition of ignorance to propagate their brand of salvation and inculcate submission in the colonized.

The church relocated large sections of the population, forcing them to

reside near the new church buildings, which were built with forced native labor. They also renamed the population, compelling them to adopt "Christian" surnames. They instructed them to fear hellfire in the afterlife and the whip of the priest in this one. They compelled the male population to carry out years of forced labor.

The religious orders—Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits—confiscated land and consolidated it into vast plantations, becoming the largest landowners in the country, forcing their parishioners to pay rent for the use of the land that was stolen from them.

During periods of social upheaval, the church directed the explosive class tensions in the colony against the Chinese population, scapegoating them as "heathens." The church directly instigated repeated pogroms in which tens of thousands of long-time Chinese residents were murdered. The Catholic Church oversaw the suppression and exclusion of the Muslim population.

For all of its rhetoric of the blood of Christ, it is with the blood of the colonized that the church is covered.

When, in the 1890s, an anti-colonial revolution shook Spain's hold on the Philippines, the great thinkers and leaders of this upheaval necessarily saw their energy directed above all against the Catholic Church. Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, Apolinario Mabini, whatever their very real political limitations, were courageous and far-sighted. They sought to institute a secular government, separate church and state, and demanded the expulsion of the religious orders from the country and the seizure of church land. The church responded by overseeing the torture, imprisonment, and execution of revolutionaries.

The revolution was betrayed by the Philippine elite and brutally suppressed by American imperialism. During the ensuing war of conquest waged by the United States, some of the Filipino forces formed an independent national church, whose founding documents repudiated the Virgin birth, the existence of angels and hell, and insisted that the earth was millions of years old and that life was the product of evolution. Three million Filipino peasants and workers joined the new church. It was US imperialism that restored the hold of the Catholic Church in the country and not any deep-seated Filipino belief. Recognizing its usefulness in maintaining order, the US restored the church's lands and the power of the religious orders over the country.

The Catholic Church continues its legacy of barbarism to this day. It holds profound sway over the supposedly secular state. Not only is abortion banned in the country, divorce is illegal. Birth control is not available from government health clinics; sex education is not a mandatory subject in schools.

The church has perpetuated a medieval brutality in everyday life. It is because of the Catholic Church that sections of the population, particularly the peasantry, believe in magical amulets, dancing Sto Niño dolls, and anti-communist devotion to the Virgin Mary. Flagellants beat themselves bloody during Holy Week every year. Scores of people literally crucify themselves on Good Friday, and the local priest prays

over the nails before they are driven into the wrists of the desperately poor, who hope their suffering will secure aid from the silent heavens.

The rule of the Catholic Church in the Philippines is a marked demonstration of the fact that basic democratic measures have not yet been carried out. The country has not yet achieved secular governance, the separation of church and state, or the solution to the agrarian problem. The failure of the Philippine revolution of 1896 foreshadowed the fundamental problems of the twentieth century.

Leon Trotsky, in his perspective of Permanent Revolution, demonstrated that the global development of capitalism meant that the national and democratic tasks of the revolution would be completed not by the capitalist class, but by the working class. In carrying out these measures, the working class would be compelled to infringe upon capitalist property relations and would thus implement socialist measures as well. The revolution could not remain within the confines of the nation-state; its survival required the spread of socialist revolution internationally. It was this perspective of Permanent Revolution that was adopted by Lenin in April 1917 and that served as the organizing program of the October revolution.

Stalinism was the betrayal of the October Revolution and not its continuation. In the defense of their growing set of privileged interests, sections of the bureaucracy led by Stalin put forward the nationalist perspective of building “Socialism in One Country.” In furtherance of this perspective, they rehabilitated the old Menshevik perspective, rejected by Lenin and Trotsky, that in countries of belated capitalist development the tasks of the revolution were exclusively national and democratic in character, and not yet socialist. A section of the capitalist class, therefore, would play a progressive role and should be sought out as allies. In this way, the Stalinist bureaucracy used Communist Parties around the globe to conclude deals with sections of the ruling elite.

The predecessor of the CPP, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), was founded on the program of Stalinism in 1930; the CPP continued its legacy. Both the PKP and the CPP subordinated the struggles of the Filipino masses to the interests of the capitalist elite. Since the revolution of 1896, however, the Filipino bourgeoisie entirely abandoned its democratic tasks. The property interests of capitalist class in the Philippines lay in the defense of the large landed estates and the rule of the Catholic Church. The PKP and CPP tail-ended this orientation. Thus, while the CPP claims to be carrying forward the “unfinished revolution” of Andres Bonifacio, they have in fact abandoned the militant anti-clericalism of the revolution of 1896 and have embraced the Catholic Church.

When workers and peasants first come around the revolutionary party in any country, they bring with them their illusions, prejudices, and misconceptions—including superstitions, racism, and religious beliefs. The task of the party is not to adapt to these backward conceptions, but to patiently explain to the masses a scientific, materialist understanding of the world.

The Stalinists, however, do not fight for the interests of the working class, but rather of the bourgeoisie. The party has thus gone out of its way to reinforce the religious beliefs of the working class and peasantry and to paint the church as a liberating force in society. It has subordinated the interests of workers to the needs of the Catholic Church.

This has impacted every aspect of the party’s work. For decades, in an effort to retain support within the church, the party disciplined young female cadre who were accused of premarital sex, which the party leadership termed a “bourgeois deviation.” The CPP refused to distribute birth control at its “revolutionary health clinics.”

The front organizations of the party routinely stage political dramas based on the passion of Christ. They regularly direct workers to join masses held in Catholic churches as acts of protests. They stage candle-lit religious processions.

A core member organization of the National Democratic Front of the CPP is the Christians for National Liberation (CNL). There are CNL units in the party’s New People’s Army (NPA) which issue regular statements. In December 2018, an NPA unit of the CNL issued a statement, “on the anniversary of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ,” celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding the CPP.

This religious opportunism saturates the party to its highest levels. The youngest child of founder and ideological leader of the CPP, Jose Maria Sison, was baptized into the Catholic Church by Cardinal Sin himself, long time head of the church in the country. Leading members of the elite stood as godparents, including a senator and a future vice president.

The CPP’s utter abandonment of materialism and groveling embrace of the Catholic Church is an integral component of its alliances with a section of the ruling elite. It reveals that there is no depth to which the party will not descend.

This was made clear in the final paragraph of De Lima’s speech. She told the assembled religious leaders that “we do not foreclose the possibility that Duterte is struck by lightning like Saul on his way to Damascus and agrees to resume peace negotiations because of the miraculous combination of prayers for and advocacy of peace by the people and the irresistible demands of the rapidly worsening crisis of the ruling system.”

The CPP enthusiastically supported Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte during his rise to power. They sought to integrate themselves into his administration, while he oversaw a war on drugs that killed thousands of poor Filipinos. When the talks finally broke down, the party denounced him as a “fascist.” De Lima publicly admitted at the religious gathering that the party was now resuming “backchannel discussions” with the Duterte administration, and was relying on the “miraculous” power of “prayer” that Duterte might have a conversion.

De Lima is the wife of Jose Maria Sison. Sison repeatedly shared her speech on Facebook, including her quote about praying for Duterte’s conversion.

Stalinism is the betrayal of everything that Marx stood for and the entire history of Marxism. Reading the party’s open embrace of Christianity and colonialism is nauseating. It is worth remembering what Marx himself wrote.

In 1847, in response to the “Christian socialists” of the *Rheinischer Beobachter*, who claimed that Communism was the realization of the “social principles of Christianity,” Marx wrote,

“The social principles of Christianity have now had eighteen hundred years to be developed ...

“The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of antiquity, glorified the serfdom of the Middle Ages, and are capable, in case of need, of defending the oppression of the proletariat, even if with somewhat doleful grimaces. The social principles of Christianity preach the necessity of a ruling and oppressed class, and for the latter all they have to offer is the pious wish that the former may be charitable. ...

“The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submissiveness and humbleness, in short, all the qualities of the rabble, and the proletariat, which will not permit itself to be treated as rabble, needs its courage, its self-confidence, its pride and its sense of independence even more than its bread.

“The social principles of Christianity are sneaking and hypocritical, and the proletariat is revolutionary. So much for the social principles of Christianity.”

So much as well for the Communist Party of the Philippines and its embrace of the barbaric heritage of the Catholic Church.



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