

A CRITICAL-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS UNDER MARTIAL LAW
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

By

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ABSTRACT

Philippine Church history is a history of conflict with the political authorities from the time of Spanish colonization to EDSA II. This paper is an effort to understand the Church in the Philippines specifically the history of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines as it engaged in political issues during the period when civil and political rights were curtailed by the political authorities that swore to protect and defend democracy. This thesis is a critical-historical analysis of the church-state relations under Martial Law from the perspective of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

This research seeks to understand the Philippine church-state relations under Martial Law and offer a critical analysis of how the United Church of Christ dealt with the Marcos Martial Law regime. It presents a segment of the history of the UCCP by analyzing the official actions, statements, and other documents of the Church produced during the period. Subsequently, it asks whether these actions, documents, and resolutions were abetted by political events or were inherent in the way Christian witness and ministry were practiced by the UCCP.

During the First Quadrennial General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) on 21-26 May 1978 in Cagayan de Oro City, the Assembly approved a resolution calling for the lifting of Martial Law. The resolution strongly stated that the UCCP is "against the perpetuation of one-man rule in the country; that it is for the immediate and full restoration of all civil liberties of the

citizens; and that it is for the immediate dismantling of the machinery of martial law in the country.” Earlier when Marcos declared Martial Law, the leadership of UCCP was willing to give Pres. Marcos a chance hoping that his Martial Law would restore peace and order and put an end to social injustice.

This research attempts to discern the seeming ambivalent position of the Church on a very significant issue and understand the basis for the changing stand of the Church. The research focuses on the historical events that transpired in the Philippines within the period between 1972-1981. Particularly, the study looks into following areas, namely:

- (1) The declaration of Martial Law in 1972 and the reactions of the UCCP;
- (2) The period of constitutional authoritarianism which legitimized the Marcos one-man rule that the UCCP in 1978 rejected as an anathema to the Christian faith; and
- (3) The formation of the human rights program of the UCCP in the context of Marcos’ religious policy.

The research analyzes the Martial Law period from the point of the leadership of the UCCP. The writer is aware that the resolutions, statements and programs were products of a specific historical context. This enables the researcher to look at a familiar document of the Church from a different point of view by taking into account the political events that were unfolding when the document was produced.

Furthermore the research shows that the actions, statements, and resolutions of the Church were not just a reaction to the objective conditions, i.e., the political events and Marcos policies, but a response coming from its rich theological foundations. It shows that the actions of the Church were based on a solid reformed-evangelical tradition as reflected specifically in the UCCP Statement of Faith.

The researcher in the course of his study has encountered limitations and recognized that this area of Protestantism in the Philippines still remains unexplored, thus requiring further research. In this connection, this researcher puts forth the following recommendations:

- 1) That the Minutes or Journal of the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the United Church of Christ and Minutes of the Executive Committee should be kept in a safe place to stop from deterioration and to reproduce copies, scanned or microfilm, to be used by researchers;
- 2) That a library and archive be setup by the UCCP;
- 3) Those other denominations should also be studied to have a total perspective on this area of church-state relations under an authoritarian politics;
- 4) That a similar study from the point of view of the local church be done to shed light on how the statements, resolutions and programs of the General Assembly were received and understood;

5) That study in the area of systematic theology be conducted to help shed light in the kind of theology that the UCCP professed during this period;

6) That the Church start documenting and recording the accounts of the diminishing number of actual witnesses during the Marcos era; and

7) That the Church establish an office of church history and train a full-time historian/archivist to be responsible for keeping documents, pictures, records, etc., and to designate buildings, landmarks, and anything that preserve and tell the history of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Finally, the writer hopes that this study of the history of UCCP would be edifying to the whole Church as she continues to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness to Christ in an era of democratic space.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table	Page
Title Page	i
Approval Sheet	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	x
Chapter I	
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Significance of the Study	3
Methodology and Limitation of the Study	7
Chapter II	
A Short History of the UCCP before Martial Law	10
The Coming of the American Missionaries	10
The United Evangelical Church in the Philippines (1929)	15
Japanese-Sponsored Evangelical Union and Post-War Reconciliation	16
The Founding of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)	18
UCCP Ecclesiastical Government	19
The UCCP before Martial Law	21

Chapter III	The Declaration of Martial Law and Church Response	33
	Church Perception of the Situation Before Martial Law	33
	President Marcos declares Martial Law	36
	Strange Silence in the Church	40
	The Church Critical Collaboration	46
	The NCCP Incident	54
	Impact of the NCCP Raid	61
Chapter IV	The Church and Constitutional Authoritarianism	64
	Attempt to Legitimize Martial Law	64
	Elections Under Martial Law	68
	Opposition to Martial Law	70
	Human Rights Violations	77
	Wednesday Forum: An Emerging Protestant Response	81
	A Church Rejected One-Man Rule	86
Chapter V	Aftermath of the 1978 General Assembly	95
	Religious Policy Under Martial Law	95
	A Fledgling Human Rights Desk of the UCCP	101
	The Human Rights Committee of the UCCP Created	102
	The UCCP Statement of Faith	108
	The Lifting of Martial Law	111
	Response from the UCCP	114
Chapter VI	Summary and Conclusion	118

Summary	118
Conclusion	123
Recommendations	125
Bibliography	128
Appendix 1. Letters	137
Appendix 2. Statements and Resolutions	148