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## **Sukimátem: Isabelo de los Reyes Revisited**

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## *Sukimátem: Isabelo de los Reyes Revisited*

*Erlinda Bragado*

*Wen sukimátem no adda kinaulbod kaniak, ket iturongnak iti dalan nga agnanayon.*

(See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.)

– Psalm 139

Along the highway of Bantay, Ilocos Sur, a monument of Isabelo de los Reyes stands like a solitary sentinel, seemingly a stranger among his own people. The unveiling of that monument was one of the highlights of the centennial celebration (1864–July 7–1964) of the birth of this illustrious son of Vigan.

A highly controversial figure in life and in death, Isabelo de los Reyes once said: “There is so much chaos in me for God to create another world” (De los Reyes Jr. 1996, 28). He is known today as the Father of Philippine Folklore, Father of the Philippine Labor Movement, and Co-founder of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente.

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) or Philippine Independent Church takes pride in its nationalist roots:

The Philippine Independent Church is a branch of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and was established in the Philippines in 1902 as a result of the Filipinos’ cry for freedom against Spanish oppression and their relentless drive to free the Catholic Church from the abuses and corruptions of the Roman Catholic friars for almost four hundred years. Also there was the Filipinos’ determined effort to have a Church that was truly indigenous to the Filipino culture and tradition free from the papal authority but obedient to God. (Coronado 1972, 14)

The struggle for independence and the desire to see a Philippine Church governed by Filipino bishops spurred the religious schism of

1902. Although the Catholic Church in the Philippines today does not only have Filipino bishops but also Cardinals, the rift between the two churches has remained, except for collaborative efforts on common socio-political concerns.

*Sukimátem* is an Ilocano term meaning “to examine thoroughly; search; explore” (Rubino 2000, 573). This article attempts to explore the spiritual journey or faith detours of Isabelo de los Reyes. For me, this meant taking a trip to Vigan, his hometown, where he spent his early formative years. There, I spent many hours examining archival materials, doing library research and conducting oral history. I interviewed a local historian in Vigan, some Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) priests, and a grandson of Don Belong. Looking at the corpus of monographs and articles on Isabelo de los Reyes, I tried to cross-check and sort out the historical from the apocryphal; the fairly accurate data from the tentative, incomplete ones; the confessional or denominational writings from the biased or prejudiced ones; and the highly personal portraits given by his two sons from detached presentations by historians.

Tracing Don Belong’s spiritual journey here involves a review of his life with an attempt to highlight his family background, formative years and excursions into masonry, and his exile and confinement in the Castle of Montjuich, Barcelona. It also includes a retelling of the circumstances which led to his translation into Ilocano of the New Testament books; his socio-political activities; his involvement in the founding of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and his alleged retraction.

Two converging events inspired me to pursue this research. The first was the Centennial of Philippine Independence in 1998, with its year-long tribute to our heroes. I felt that Don Belong remained an unsung hero whose significant achievements and contributions to Philippine Society had not been sufficiently highlighted. The second was the Sovereign Pontiff’s proclamation of the new millennium as the Jubilee Year of the Church. In its preparatory stage, Pope John Paul II expressed a need for a “purification of the historical memory” saying that “the church must on its own initiative examine the dark places of its history and judge it in the light of Gospel principles. . . . It could be a grace of the coming Great Jubilee” (Accattoli 1996, XV, 37).

Beyond the scholarly pursuit was a personal interest to discover the roots of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente Church, sometimes known as Aglipayanism. My paternal grandfather—a migrant from Santa, Ilocos Sur to Alcala, Pangasinan—was an Aglipayan. He died long

before I was born. His four children converted to Catholicism when they married Catholics and ventured away from home. They were kept united for some time by family reunions in Alcala which were held twice a year—during the May town fiesta and during the Feast of All Souls on November 2.

Whenever the whole family went to the nearby Catholic church to attend the morning mass, we had to pass by the *capilla* (chapel) of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente which happened to be along the way. Should we meet the old minister by the gate, the children would greet him reverently, as instructed. "*Naimbag nga bigat, Apo Padi*" (Good morning, Reverend Father). I remember how he would nod perfunctorily to acknowledge our greeting and I often wondered as I looked at his solemn face if he ever thought of us as traitors to the faith of our patriarch.

On All Souls' Day, however, when the family gathered to honor our dead, my grandmother would request the Catholic priest to bless the tombs of our departed and pray for them. She would also invite Apo Padi, the Aglipayan minister, to give his blessing and sprinkle the graves with holy water. No one ever questioned grandma's wisdom for it would have been ludicrous to debate over denominations at a time when we were supposed to commune in spirit with those who were finally resting in peace. There must have been a tacit agreement among us that one needs all the blessings he can get when he crosses the Great Beyond. My grandfather's loyalty to his religion served as the motivation for me to conduct research on Isabelo de los Reyes, co-founder of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente.

### **From Beluco to Don Belong**

Isabelo de los Reyes was born in Vigan, Ilocos Sur on 7 July 1864 to Leona Florentino, the first vernacular poetess, and Elias de los Reyes, a businessman engaged in trade and shipping.

His passion for writing is usually attributed to his mother while his passion for women must have been an influence of his father's. At the age of six, his parents separated and he was left in the care of rich relatives, Don Mena Crisologo and Doña Felipa, the elder sister of Leona. Beluco (he was called then) received his early education from the Augustinians of the Vigan Seminary, where he developed a fascination for legends, music, religion, songs, and the history of Ilocos. His capacity for leadership and reformation surfaced early in the seminary

when he organized a student strike to protest against the friars' strict supervision and maltreatment (De los Reyes 1947, 2).

Gregorio Aglipay said of him as a student:

He was avid at the Bible but he found that the keepers of the souls at the Villa Fernandina were not in accord with it in practice nor with the behaviour of the laymen of that tiny feudal-like city of fanatics. Don Belong, even at that time, began manifesting his hatred of hoaxes. (Llanes 1949, 6)

In June 1880, at age sixteen, he went to Manila and became a self-supporting student at San Juan de Letran College. He excelled in his studies and obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts, *Sobresaliente*. It was at San Juan de Letran that Don Belong developed his extraordinary gift for writing. He wrote the prize-winning "History of the Chinese Invasion Under Limahong in 1574" which was published in the *Diario de Manila*. He was immediately employed by the publisher (De los Reyes 1947, 2-3).

Although the archives of the University of Sto. Tomas failed to yield a record of his degree as a Notary Public, his biographers assert that he studied the Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Mercantile Code, the art of judicial proceedings and drafting of public documents, paleography and anthropology at the Pontifical University.

Don Belong ventured into the field of journalism after he graduated at the age of twenty-two, a year short of the age requirement for his law practice. It was at this time that he fell in love with Josefa Sevilla y Hizon, a beautiful lass from Malabon. On June 14, 1884, Isabelo de los Reyes and Josefa were married against the wishes of his mother. It was not that Leona disapproved of Josefa, but she was apprehensive that both were too young to get married. Leona blamed her own failed marriage on youth and immaturity (Real 1972, 55-56).

Isabelo de los Reyes embarked on a journalistic venture to earn a living as well as to ventilate his reformist views. He contributed to the *Diario de Manila*, *El Comercio*, *La Oceania Española*, *La Revista Popular*, *La Opinion*, and *La Lectura Popular*. His writings earned him the label "rebel journalist." He was founder, editor and publisher of the first vernacular newspaper in the Philippines, *El Ilocano* (1889). An indefatigable researcher on Philippine history and culture, he wrote *Las Islas Visayas en la Epoca de la Conquista*; *Triunfos del Rosario Los Holandeses*; *Pre-historia de Filipinas*; *El Folklore Filipino*; and *Historia de Ilocos*.

While the other Filipino propagandists wrote their exposés of colonial abuses in the Philippines in the relative safety of Madrid, Isabelo

de los Reyes waged his propaganda war against the colonizers right in his home turf. His newspaper columns were considered subversive. After the revolution of 1896, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Bilibid Prison on 12 February 1897 together with thousands of Katipuneros. He took this opportunity to interview prisoners, compile their grievances and expose the atrocities of the friars and other Spanish authorities.

He published a report, "Sobre La Revolucion Filipina," which he presented to Governor General Primo de Rivera, hoping perhaps that the latter would be sympathetic to the plight of the Filipinos. The publication was regarded as inflammatory, and Isabelo de los Reyes was sentenced exile in Spain. He was considered too dangerous to even be allowed to visit his dying wife. When Jose, his son, broke the news of his mother's death, Isabelo wept unabashedly.

In June 1897 he was exiled to Barcelona, Spain aboard the *SS Alicante* where he was held *incomunicado* for a long period. He described his prison experience in his book *Religion of the Katipunan*, which was written "over a worm-eaten board placed on top of two earthen jars":

During those gloomy days while I, as a martyr of the Motherland, was being brought into the land of my exile, aboard the "Alicante," with my feet bound into a beam, and also while I was in grief isolated from my loved ones, alone for long months without communication with anybody, and buried alive almost unclad, suffering the rigors of winter which I was not used to, in one of the dreadful chambers of the famous castle of Montjuich, situated on the top of a mountain which was almost always covered with thick fog, shivering of cold, much rather on account of a heart full of despair. (1980, ii)

De los Reyes's confinement was to serve as a pivotal point in his life. His forced retreat served as a preparation for his future work of translating the word of God.

The Katipunan uprising ended with the Pact of Biak-na-Bato which was concluded in December 1897. Isabelo de los Reyes was included in the general amnesty and released from prison. He lived very austerely, owing to his circumstances as a stranger in Barcelona, Spain's political capital at the time. He lodged in one of the so-called anarchist's clubs when some public buildings in the heart of the city were blown up following a demonstration. The communists became scapegoats. For the third time, Isabelo was placed under arrest and imprisoned in the company of anarchists, radicals and other extremists

who taught him not only about class struggle, the ways of anarchy, socialism, and communism, but also the gospel of a new life for the workers (De los Reyes Jr. 1966, 26).

He published *La Religion del Katipunán*, written in his cold cell in Montjuich. He began translating the New Testament into Iloko for the British Bible Society. In a strange irony of fate, he learned to speak and to write Spanish while in the Philippines, and had to learn to think and to write in his native language while he was in Spain.

At one of the formal balls held by a member of the Spanish aristocracy in Madrid, Isabelo met Maria Angeles Lopez Montero, nicknamed Celuz or Geliños. She was the daughter of a retired colonel of the Spanish infantry. After a brief period of courtship, Isabelo and Maria Angeles were married on Christmas Eve, 1898.

Isabelo de los Reyes edited *El Defensor de las Filipinas* and *Filipinas Ante Europa*, official organs of the Philippine Republic in Spain. At this stage, the war with the United States was imminent, and Spain wanted the Filipinos to fight on its side. Isabelo was made consultant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the hope that his influence would help.

While in Spain, he was commissioned by the Filipino Ecclesiastical Assembly in Tarlac to negotiate with Cardinal Nava di Bontife, Papal Nuncio to the court of Madrid for concessions to Filipino priests. The negotiation was a dismal failure.

De los Reyes returned to Manila in 1901 and founded the Union Obrera Democratica (UOD). He became its first president and editor of the organ, *La Redencion del Obrero*. The First Labor Congress was held on 3 August 1902. It proclaimed the establishment of the Philippine Independent Church. The following is an excerpt from his speech on this historic occasion:

Consulting the General Council of Democratic Labor Union, I come authorized to give our humble cooperation to Mr. Poblete upon whose initiative this demonstration against the friars is held and at the same time to declare without vacillation that from now on we definitely separate ourselves from the Vatican, forming a Filipino Independent Church.

We shall follow all the lofty inspirations of God, but not the injustices and mere caprices of men. We respect devotion to the Virgin and the Saints, but over and above all, we shall place the worship of only one God. (De los Reyes 1989)

Isabelo de los Reyes met with setbacks as the names he announced as members of the new church including its head, Fr. Gregorio

Aglipay, disavowed any connection with the schismatic church. Nevertheless, the movement found support among the clergy throughout the Philippines particularly in Northern Ilocos.

The first labor strike was held at the Fabrica de Tabacos in Malabon from 5 July to 3 September 1902. De los Reyes was severely criticized in the Dominican publication *Libertas* and was reminded of what a Christian worker ought to be:

He should remember that Jesus Christ calls the poor blessed, while the rich he compares to a camel that will more easily pass through the eye of a needle than enter the kingdom of heaven. And he should know, finally, that his labors will last no longer than the present life, and that if he bears them patiently and imitates the Divine Redeemer who lived poor and died naked and nailed on a cross, God will take them into account and repay them with a perfect happiness that will endure through all eternity. (Scott 1982, 163a)

Such an interpretation of a biblical passage must have disappointed a layman like Don Belong who had just translated and reflected on the Gospels and the Acts. A man of vision, he prophesied an inevitable societal reform:

We are at the dawn of a new era: blind is he who does not see that the twentieth century is bound to be the century of social justice. The day is coming when the wealthy and their powerful corporations shall cease to be a state within a state. In a democratic Philippines, the future of the nation belongs to the peasants and workers, because they are the most numerous class. (De los Reyes Jr. 1966, 27)

Don Belong was accused of violating a ban on organization to force the increase of wages. He was convicted and sentenced to four months in prison for sedition. The judge who sentenced him had been his friend in Paris working for the Filipino cause, but had since become an ally of the American administration.

Don Belong, however, seemed to enjoy his life in prison. When he was granted pardon by the same judge, he refused to leave and insisted on remaining inside. His cell became a virtual hotel room as many visitors poured in and offered food, bed, blankets, and other things to make him comfortable. He could even leave the prison at night and return the next morning.

The next episode of Don Belong's life involved his return to Spain during which he wrote the spiritual books of the Aglipayan Church

like *La Biblia*, *Genesis Científico y Moderno*, *Evangelios*, *Oficio Divino* and *Catechesis*.

In 1912, the widower Don Belong remarried. His third wife was Maria Lim, a good-looking Chinese mestiza from Binondo. She died in childbirth ten years later.

When Don Belong was elected Councilor of Manila and Senator (for two terms in each post), he decided to work for reforms from within. These positions enabled him to serve both offices with dedication and integrity.

A stroke paralyzed Don Belong in 1929 and his children by his second wife, Geliños (he had twenty-seven children from three marriages), found themselves involved in a legal battle over the custody of their bedridden father.

The last and bravest of the Propagandists; the Father of Philippine Folklore; the Father of the Philippine Labor Movement, and the Father of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente died on 10 October 1938 at St. Paul Hospital. According to some sources he retracted his allegiance to Aglipayanism two years before he passed away.

### **Don Belong and Masonry**

There are varied reports on De los Reyes' links with Masonry. John Schumacher (1981, 224) cites his association with Miguel Morayta:

Morayta worked actively to support De los Reyes in Madrid in 1900, and later cooperated with Aglipay when the IFI had already been founded, to make it more effective against the Catholic Church. He was, of course, grand master of the masonic Gran Oriente Español. (RRP, 319–21 and *passim*)

William Henry Scott (1982, 269) reports two incidents linking De los Reyes to masonry. The first one was in 1884 when Jose A. Ramos, the owner of *La Gran Bretaña* (a hub for Filipino critics of the colonial regime), invited De los Reyes to become a mason for he saw great potential in the latter's patriotism and anti-clerical writings. The second was when "he was caught up in a Vigan witch hunt in which a 60 year-old Filipino priest was beaten into testifying that he had been inducted into Masonry by Isabelo de los Reyes" (276).

Although there was no chapter of the Katipunan or of Masonry in the Ilocos Region at that time, a Spanish friar Rafael Redondo fabri-

cated charges of masonry and subversion against Isabelo de los Reyes and other prominent Ilocano nationalists and clergy in Candon and Vigan (Duque 2000, 23–29, cf. Scott 1986, 14). Fray Redondo, Vicar Forane of La Union and parish priest of the town of San Fernando, prepared a document accusing Isabelo de los Reyes of being a recruiter for Masonry (Duque 2000, 310). This false testimony led to Don Belong's arrest and incarceration in the Bilibid Prison. He was exiled to Spain not only for "propagating Masonry" but also for his "sensational *Memoria Sobre la Revolucion Filipina de 1896* wherein he denounced all the crimes of the friars" (Robertson 1958, 147).

In both cases, however, there was no indication that Isabelo de los Reyes accepted the invitation, or that he performed the initiation rites before the Filipino priest. Scott himself acknowledged that "Isabelo de los Reyes never joined any revolutionary society" (276).

In a lengthy letter of appeal sent to Wenceslao L. Retana, Deputy of the Cortes (*Deputado a Cortes*), while he was imprisoned in Castle Montjuich, Isabelo de los Reyes denied any connection with masonry:

Yo que nunca he sido masón aunque es verdad que dos veces estuvieron a punto de excomulgarme el Sr. Arzobispo de Manila y el Obispo de Nueva Segovia por algunos articulos! Yo que nunca me avergoncé de mi cristianismo y lo sostengo aún con los anarquistas! (De Achutegui and Bernad 1972, 98)

(I who have never been a mason although it is true that on two occasions the Archbishop of Manila and the Bishop of Nueva Segovia almost excommunicated me for some articles! I have never been ashamed of my Christian faith which I upheld even when I was with the rebels!)

And yet, in his book *The Religion of the Katipunán*, he explained that real worship consists of "performing good acts and practicing good customs" which he noted as "taken from the Masonic code" (De los Reyes 1980, 27). A voracious reader, he could have read this somewhere, or then again, someone could have initiated him to masonry.

I visited the Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines at San Marcelino, Manila to find out whether De los Reyes could be considered a member in the same way that Gregorio Aglipay is advertised as one of their illustrious members. According to Fr. Ruazol, "Bishop Aglipay joined the freemasonry because of its liberal philosophy, not for reason of forging a tactical alliance with the masons against the Roman Church. Freemasonry became threatening for

the Roman Church in those days because of its strong anti-friar sentiments.”

When I interviewed the Grand Secretary, Atty. Reynold Fajardo, he informed me that Isabelo de los Reyes had never joined the organization. His name was not among the members of the Filipino masonry in Madrid, 1889–1896 listed by John Schumacher (1991, 169–77).

In an article on “Masonry in the Philippines,” Leo Fischer (1958, 67) explained that masonry is *not* a secret society or sect, not even atheistic or irreligious, nor is it engaged in plots and conspiracies. He cited an American mason’s definition:

Masonry is a system of morality teaching a man that in order to live a wiser, better, happier life, he must first develop his own mental, moral, and physical faculties before he can adequately discharge his duties to God and his fellow man.

By using the tools and implements of architecture as symbols, it teaches him to utilize his time, to cultivate the cardinal virtues, to develop his intellect by education, to exercise those excellent tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, in order to approach more nearly the perfect man, as revealed in the light of the Holy Scriptures (68).

Although it can be concluded that Don Belong was never a mason, the words of Del Pilar (1893) seem to extend the parameters of masonry beyond official listing:

Except for Roman Catholicism, there is no religion—old or new, before or after Jesus Christ, all those following Christian doctrines—which rejects masonry.

All Christians scattered all over the globe, all except the popists, accept masonry and identify themselves with the masonic ideal formulated in the everlasting trilogy LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY. (Del Pilar Gatmaitan 1893, 545)

Del Pilar, a student of Canon Law and a 33rd degree Mason, knew the excommunication penalty on members of masonry from the Catholic Church. Towards the end of his life, however, an entry in the *Libro de Defunciones* of the Catholic Hospital de la Santa Cruz states that Del Pilar “received the sacraments” and later retracted. He was also given a Christian burial (Villaroel 1996, 310–13).

### **An Ilocano in Madrid: Ilocano Translation of the Gospel and the Acts**

The 1899 British Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) Annual Report shows that Rev. R.O. Walker, the Society's Agent at Madrid, who was then scouting for educated Filipinos to do translation work, chanced upon Isabelo de los Reyes who had just been released from the penal fortresses of Montjuich and Ceuta. Under Rev. Walker's supervision, Don Belong translated the Gospel of Luke, John and the Acts into Ilocano while Don Pascual Poblete wrote the Tagalog translation.

Don Belong's first assignment was the translation of the Gospel according to St. Luke. Although proficient in Ilocano and Spanish, he was not familiar with the Greek language. The method of translation was as follows:

The Filipino, under Mr. Walker's guidance, first translated direct from the Spanish version. Then the sheets of the MSS were re-translated *viva voce* into Spanish, discussed and carefully compared clause by clause by Mr. Walker with the original Greek—the Spanish language being used as the medium of discussion. In this way, extensive alterations and improvements of the first translation were effected, and the whole was rendered, it is hoped, as accurate as possible. (BFBS Annual Report 347)

It must have been a satisfactory translation, as Don Belong was once more commissioned to translate the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles into Ilocano. This he accomplished in 1900. The BFBS was evidently pleased with his work as they even recommended a bonus for him aside from the stipulated honorarium. He was paid 252 pesetas for the Gospel of St. John and 325 pesetas for the Gospel of Luke and the Acts. The Editorial Sub-Committee recommended "that Mr. Walker be allowed to pay Sr. Isabelo de los Reyes a further sum, not exceeding 48 pesetas, if he think it desirable" (#30.1.01).

In a letter written to Fr. Miguel Saderra Masó, S.J. on June 18, 1929, Senator Isabelo de los Reyes wrote the monetary equivalent of his fees:

To me they paid 170.00 [?] Spanish *duros* for the Gospel of St. Matthew, the same for St. Luke, but a lesser fee for St. John and St. Mark. They gave less importance to the Gospel of St. Mark, though it actually was the most original and the most faithful. (De Achutegui and Bernad, 1960, 268)

A *duro* is said to be a five-peseta coin (Webster 1988:68). The estimate could have come from faulty memory. Not even the Primer on

*Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas* gives the equivalent of the Spanish *peseta* to the Philippine peso in 1900.

According to Kathleen Cann of the Department of Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, a shift in administrative responsibility in translation work took place in 1901. By that time the BFBS and the American Bible Society (ABS) had decided to divide the work in the Philippines between the two societies, and the latter took over the responsibility for the Ilocano translations. The ABS representative in Manila, Jay Goodrich, had already supervised a translation of St. Mark's Gospel, done by Simplicio Mendoza and Ygnacio Villamor. Mr. Goodrich therefore supervised the continuing translation work of Isabelo de los Reyes—the published revisions of John and Acts—and they went on to complete the New Testament which was published by ABS in Manila in 1903.

In 1901, Isabelo was requested to translate the Gospel according to Matthew. This translation was criticized by Rev. H.F. Miller, a representative of the BFBS in Manila, claiming that the work was inaccurate as “there is a difference between the North and South dialects of that province; and there is a great need that we publish only translations prepared by the many good men now available” (Minutes of Editorial Sub-Committee, 1900–1927 #s 29 and 30). Following this was another entry in the same minutes on September 16, 1902:

De los Reyes has just sailed for Manila, taking with him his MS. of Matthew. It is his own, as no payment has been made him for it. It will need much revision by one acquainted with Greek and Ilocano, but Isabelo is a capable man to work with in translation (#30).

In Manila, Isabelo revised his translations of St. John's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and translated the remainder of the New Testament under the direction of Jay C. Goodrich (Darlow & Moule 1903–1911, 789).

Isabelo de los Reyes completed his translation of the New Testament into Ilocano in five years' time—following the formal correspondence method. He single-handedly translated the Gospel of Luke in a year's time (1899), and the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles in the same year (1900). This was no small feat. According to the Philippine Bible Society, the revised edition of the Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible was promulgated only in 1987.

The Ilocano popular version of the Bible adopting the dynamic equivalence approach in Bible translation, was fifteen years in the

making—five years for the New Testament and ten years for the complete Old Testament and New Testament. It was an interdenominational work of five members, two from the Roman Catholic Church, one from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, one from the United Methodist Church and one from the Aglipayan Church. An expert from the United Bible Societies Translation served as consultant and coordinator.

### **The Retraction Document and His Last Years**

Two years before he died, Isabelo de los Reyes allegedly signed a formal retraction prepared by Fr. Louis LaRavoire Morrow. The English translation is as follows (De Achutegui and Bernad 1960, 505):

I, Isabelo de los Reyes, in full possession of my senses, and of my own free will, hereby declare that, as I was born a Catholic, I also desire to die a Catholic. I profess all the doctrines which the Roman Catholic Church professes and teaches. If in years past I have written against the church, it was in moments when I was blinded by passion; I now beg pardon for it. I beg the authorities of the Catholic Church to grant ecclesiastical burial to my corpse. Manila, Philippines, 14 September 1936.

Isabelo de los Reyes

Three of the eight witnesses were Isabelo's children: Fausto and Nieves de los Reyes, and M. Isabelo Angeles of the Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. According to Frs. De Achutegui and Bernad, there were already indicators in his later years that showed his change of heart: he allowed his children to be baptized as Catholics; he sent his daughters to Catholic schools; he sometimes joined Marian devotions at Sto. Domingo Church; he requested for a solemn enthronement of the Sacred Heart in his house; and he established cordial relations with the Catholic Church (1960, 502–4). Indeed, should these be taken as incontrovertible evidence, then the prodigal son had finally returned.

However, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente ministers whom I have interviewed rejected the idea that Isabelo had retracted. An Aglipayan minister claimed that even if there were such a document, it must have been signed under intense pressure from his daughters who were nuns, or at a moment when he was no longer in full possession of his faculties.

Retractions of famous people like Rizal, Del Pilar, and Quezon are highly controversial issues and favorite subjects of debate. One camp

would insist on the authenticity of the document while another camp would claim deceit and forgery. A retraction document serves not only as a trophy, a symbol of triumph to one group but also a betrayal of a cause to another.

Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr., who later became the Obispo Maximo of the Philippine Independent Church, claimed that after his father's last stroke, he was told to "make certain that he would not have a Roman Catholic funeral, as the whole country was aware that he did not belong to that church" (Whittemore 1961, 161). Furthermore, his father reassured him that he would never retract Aglipayanism (De Achutegui and Bernad 1960, 507).

Obispo Maximo de los Reyes, Jr. wrote a strong repudiation of his father's retraction and appended a transcript of the Court of Appeals to support his claim. The Jesuits De Achutegui and Bernad refuted the argument on the alleged decision of the Court of Appeals cited by the Bishop as "merely the dissenting opinion of Justice Horrilleno...not the decision itself" (428b). In fact, the judgment regarding the petition of Bishop de los Reyes against his sister for the custody of their father Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr. revealed that six justices concurred with Justice Moran's decision against the petitioner with only two dissenting opinions from Justices Horrilleno and Albert (436b).

Why is a formal written retraction important to the Catholic Church? Canon Law states that "Christ's faithful are bound to preserve their communion with the church at all times, even in their actions" (89,#1). The document *Lumen Gentium* teaches accordingly:

They are fully incorporated into the society of the church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accepts her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and through union with their visible structures are joined to Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishop. (LG 14b)

However, the same section of the document cautions the faithful that mere membership in the Church or being a Catholic is no guarantee of salvation. What is essential is to be animated by the Spirit of Christ, to persevere in charity, and to respond to the special grace of Christ.

Did he or did he not sign the retraction document? How should this be interpreted in the context of his life?

In the life of Don Belong, several incongruities can be cited. He was already an Aglipayan when he married his third wife in Catholic rites. He gave this explanation:

It is true I am an Aglipayan, I respect however, the religious beliefs of my family. My wife, Maria Lim, and I were married at the Aglipayan Church. I could not but respect her wishes. So I called Fr. Javellanos of Tondo who married us for the second time.

How could I deny her request? That was the only way I could make her happy on her death-bed, but for the peace of her mind I would consent to anything. (Llanes 1949, 36)

His own family manifested an ecumenical achievement of "unity in diversity." Four of his daughters were nuns—Elisa joined the Franciscan Missionaries, Angeles became a Benedictine Sister, Elvira entered the Carmelite convent (although according to Atty. Elias de los Reyes, she left the convent) and Cresencia joined the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. A son became the Obispo Maximo of the Aglipayan Church. There were Shintoists, and even atheists in De los Reyes's family. He taught his children to respect each other's beliefs.

According to Jose Llanes, most of the children by Isabelo's third marriage were baptized in the Catholic Church first, and then in the Independent Church. They received two names like Cresencia Manila, Estanislao Vigan, Nieves Matibay, Leon Puso and Iluminada Langit (34).

In his article, "A Son Remembers," Dr. E. E. de los Reyes states that:

all religions are good as long as it believes in God. I respect the opinion of my children as they are old enough to know what is good and bad for them. It is like enrolling your children in different schools with different uniforms. After they graduate you always come to the conclusion that they all gained knowledge. This is the same thing in religion he said. Its doctrines might vary, but all point to one thing – belief in God. After all, according to him, whether we are Christians or Mohammedans, we are all children of God. (27)

Perhaps the example of Isabelo de los Reyes can teach us to distinguish the essential from the peripheral, the spirit from the letter of the law, the unity of faith from the divisiveness of the denominations.

From a wealth of literature written by and on Isabelo de los Reyes, I have chronologically arranged his writings and the significant events in his life. Unless otherwise specified, most of the data in the following chart and in his biography are taken from the English translation of *El Folk-Lore Filipino* by Salud C. Dizon and Maria Elinor P. Imson (1994, 19), *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain and Other Essays in Philippine History* by William Henry Scott (1982, 246–83) and *Religious Revolution in the Philippines* by Fr. Pedro S. De Achutegui and Fr. Miguel A. Bernad (1960, 1:165–73 and 1966, 2:97; 150–54; 453–56).

Significant Events in the Life of Isabelo de los Reyes	Year	Literary Contributions
Birth in Vigan, Ilocos Sur	July 7, 1864	
Parents' Separation		
Early Education at Vigan Seminary	1870	
Studied at San Juan de Letran College, Liberal Arts Major	1880	
Published articles in Manila Newspapers	1882	<p>First Article Published: "La Expedicion de Limahong contra Filipinas"—<i>Diario de Manila</i></p> <p>Contributor to newspapers like <i>La Revista Popular</i>, <i>La Oceania Española</i>, <i>España Oriental</i>, <i>El Comercio</i>, <i>La Opinion</i> and <i>La Lectura Popular</i></p>
Married Josefina Sevilla	1884	
Graduated from UST as a Notary Public	1886	
Published <i>Las Islas Visayas en la Epoca de la Conquista</i>	1887	<p><i>Las Islas Visayas en la Epoca de la Conquista</i> (The Visayan Islands at the Time of Conquest) 1st Edition</p> <p><i>Ilocanadas, Cuentos Filipinos</i> (Ilocano Anecdotes, Tales from the Philippines)</p>
Garnered a silver medal at the 1887 Madrid Exposition for his literary works on "Folk-Lore Filipino" (Filipino Folklore)	1888	<p><i>Los Triunfos del Rosario los Holandeses en Filipinas</i> (The Triumph of the Rosary or the Dutch in the Philippines)</p>

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		<p><i>Articulos Varios Sobre Etnologia, Historia y Costumbres de Filipinas</i> (Various Articles on Philippine Ethnology, History and Customs)</p> <p><i>Tipos y Cuadros de Manila</i> (Manila Types and Sketches)</p>
Owned his own printing press	1889-1897	
Founded the Philippine's first vernacular press, <i>El Ilocano</i>	1889	<p><i>Historia de Filipinas</i>, vol.1 (Prehistoria)</p> <p><i>Prehistoria de Filipinas</i></p> <p><i>Las Islas Visayas en la Epoca de la Conquista</i> 2nd edition</p> <p><i>El Folk-Lore Filipino</i></p>
	1890	<p><i>Historia de Ilocos</i> (A History of Ilocos) first serialized in <i>El Ilocano</i></p> <p>Editor of <i>La Lectura Popular</i></p>
	1894	Founded <i>El Municipio Filipino</i>
February 13—arrested and jailed in the Bilibid prison	1897	Wrote <i>Memorias Sobre la Revolucion Filipina</i>
June—Josefina died before his deportation		
Deported to Spain and incarcerated at the Montjuich Castle in Barcelona		
Released in accordance with the terms of the Pact of Biak-na-Bato		
Appointed <i>Consejero del Ministerio de Ultramar</i> in the Spanish Cabinet	1898-1901	

December 24—Married Srta.  
 Maria Angeles Lopez  
 Montero, a Spaniard

	1899	<p><i>La Religion del Katipunan</i></p> <p><i>Ti Nasantoan a Evangelio...Kas insurat ni San Lucas</i> (St. Luke's Gospel)</p> <p>Republished <i>La Sensacional Memoria sobre la Revolucion Filipina</i></p> <p><i>El Defensor de las Filipinas</i> (editor)</p> <p><i>Filipinas Ante Europa</i> (Source: Scott [1982]. A Minority Reaction to Imperialism 12)</p>
<p>Edited nationalist periodicals <i>El Defensor de Filipinas</i> and <i>Filipinas ante Europa</i></p>	1900	<p><i>Ti Nasantoan a Evangelio...Kas insurat ni San Juan</i> (St. John's Gospel)</p> <p><i>Daguiti Inaramid daguidi Apostoles...</i>(the Acts of the Apostles) (Source: Darlow &amp; Moule: 789)</p> <p><i>Independencia y Revolucion</i> (Independence and Revolution)</p> <p><i>La Religion del Katipunan o sea la Antigua de los Filipinos</i></p>
Repatriated to Manila	1901	
Left for China and Japan	1902–1903	
<p>Founder and first president of the Union Obrera Democratica (UOD)</p> <p>Organized First Labor Congress in August 3</p> <p>Proclaimed the establishment of the Philippine Independent Church</p>	1902	<p><i>Ti Nasantoan a Evangelio...Kas insurat ni San Mateo</i> (St. Matthew's Gospel) (Source : Minutes of Editorial Sub-Committee 1898 and 1900–1905)</p> <p>Published <i>El Grito</i></p>

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Organized First Labor Strike and  
was imprisoned

	1903–1904	Published the fortnightlies: <i>La Iglesia Filipina Independiente, Revista Catolica, La Redencion del Obrero</i> (The Workers' Redemption)
	1903	<i>Ti Nasantoan a Evangelio...</i> <i>Kas insurat ni San Juan</i> (revision of his previous translation)  <i>Daguiti Inaramid daguidi Apostoles...</i> (revision of his previous translation)  <i>Ti baró á tulag wenno ti baró á Testamento</i> (The New Testament. Previous translation of the Acts. The remainder was translated by him under the direction of Jay C. Goodrich)
Sailed for Spain where he worked in Barcelona as Juror of the Spanish government	1904–1908	
	1904	<i>Doctrina y Reglas Constitucionales</i> (DRC)  <i>Ang Comediang Tagalog</i>
	1905	<i>Catequesis de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente</i>  <i>Catecismo de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente</i>  <i>El Partido Republicano de Filipinas</i>
	1906	<i>Oficio Divino de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente—Primera Parte</i>  <i>Oficio Divino de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente—Segunda Parte.</i>

		<i>Culto eucarístico o misal basado en lo que realmente practicaron nuestro Señor Jesucristo y sus santos Apostoles</i>
		<i>Lecturas de Cuaresma para la Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Lenten Readings for the Philippine Independent Church)</i>
	1908	<i>Biblia Filipina (Filipino Bible)</i>
Returned to Manila with his Spanish wife and children	1909	<i>La Religion Antigua de los Filipinos</i>
Wife Died in Tokyo Hospital	1910	
Married Maria Lim, a Chinese	1912	<i>Ang singsing nang dalagang marmol; manga nangyari</i>
Twice elected councilor of Manila	1912–1919	
Twice elected senator of the first senatorial district which comprised the Ilocos Provinces	1922–1928	
Devoted the last years of his life to religion and writing		
Stricken ill with paralysis	1929	<i>Edited: Libro de Oraciones y enseñanzas de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente, por Mons. Gregorio Aglipay</i>
	1930	<i>La libre razón descubre los grandes absurdos del Catolicismo; controversia religiosa entre Aglipayanos y Catolicos (Freedom of thought reveals the great absurdities of Catholicism; the religious controversy between the Aglipayans and the Catholics)</i>

		<i>Memoria Sobre los Productos Comerciales de Filipinas</i> (n.d.) (Monograph on Philippine Commercial Products) <i>Teogonia Ilocana</i> (Ilocano Theogony) n.d.
	1932	<i>Catedra o sermonario de la Iglesia Filipina Independiente</i> (ed.)
Died at St. Paul Hospital at the age of 74	10 October 1938	
	n.d.	Poems: <i>Paangsina</i> (Separation), <i>Dua Dua A Puso</i> (Doubtful Heart), <i>Carmen Favis, Adios, Rosario</i> (Goodbye, Rosario), <i>Bagbaga</i> (Advise), <i>Da Dongguial ken Namicqui</i> (Dongguial and Namicqui), <i>Pannakaal-lilao</i> (Deception) Source: R. Duque and N.G. Tiongson (1994, 583).

### Avenues for Further Research

Researchers and graduate students will find in the writings of Isabelo de los Reyes a rich field for exploration not only in religious studies but also in history, political science, and literature. Ambeth Ocampo featured *El Folk-Lore Filipino* in his column on Folklore, folk beliefs and customs (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 March 2000, 9). More scholars are encouraged to read, translate, analyze the works of Don Belong, and publish their research so that we may better understand and appreciate the author's contributions to Philippine society and culture.

Since very little is known about his life and activities in Spain, there is a need to trace documents about him in the public libraries of Madrid, Barcelona, Vienna and Paris, where, it is said, a good number of his writings that are no longer available here could be found. Fur-

ther research should be conducted on this period of his life which might yield more insights on his years of exile.

A fitting tribute to Isabelo de los Reyes, in preparation for the coming centennial of the Philippine Church, would be a large-format book on the highlights of his life, including excerpts from his famous works and pictorial documents. In the spirit of the Jubilee Year, both the members of the Catholic Church and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, together with the remaining descendants of De los Reyes, can collaborate in producing this book through a sharing of resources.

The life and contributions of Isabelo de los Reyes should be included in our history books, particularly in the Ilocos Region. Even the natives of his hometown, Vigan, do not know his role and contributions to Philippine culture as well as the War of Independence.

Librarians and directors should be able to provide better access to archival materials. The most organized and researcher-friendly among the libraries I visited was the UST archives. There are catalogues which list the documents, microfilm viewers that work, and an airconditioned reading room. The Records Management and General Services of the National Library have documents from pre-Spanish to post-colonial periods. There are computer units where one can view CD ROMS which are mostly on sixteenth century documents and also on nineteenth century materials, but more funding may be needed to microfilm the historical documents that are still kept in bundles. The library of St. Andrew's Seminary has a very good collection of titles on Isabelo de los Reyes, Gregorio Aglipay, and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. Unfortunately, the materials that I needed are in microfilm and their microfilm viewer was out of order. I was informed that there was no immediate plan to have it repaired due to budgetary constraints.

The Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila provided me only with a photocopy of the retraction document, but did not allow me to look at the original document. It would be interesting to find out why researchers are suddenly forbidden access to retraction records. I know that some clergymen have already examined and published other retraction documents kept at the Archdiocesan Archives, like those of Rizal in Fr. Jesus Ma. Cavanna's book "Rizal's Unfading Glory" (1983); Fr. Manuel Gracia's article in the *Philippines Herald* (1950) and the retraction of Isabelo de los Reyes in Fr. Pedro de Achutegui and Fr. Miguel Bernad's *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*.

## Conclusion

The symbolic opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, Rome and the Holy Door of the Manila Cathedral inaugurated the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. We were reminded on Christmas Eve that Christ is the door that leads into salvation and through Him, "grant that no one may remain outside his embrace of mercy and peace."

On October 31, 1999, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg, Germany. The statement can be considered a major breakthrough in ecumenical dialogue and appropriately ends with a prayer: "We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward in the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 November 1999, 111). Prior to this event on 6 June 1989, Pope John Paul II declared during a visit to Copenhagen, that "excommunication ends with the death of the individual" (Accattoli 1998, 198).

When Isabelo de los Reyes received a copy of the New Testament in Madrid, he read it with joy and concluded that "religion was not wrong, but the Church of Rome" (Ruiz 5). He announced to the members of the Union Obrera Democratica on August 3, 1902 that "if the Pope acknowledges his errors and grants canonical appointment to the bishops thus designated, they will make peace with him; otherwise, they will have to go without him" (Salamanca 1984, 86). Pope Paul VI gave an appropriate response on 6 September 1963 (Accattoli 1998, 22):

We speak now to the representatives of the Christian denominations separated from the Catholic Church, who have nevertheless been invited to take part as observers in this solemn assembly...If we are in any way to blame for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness and ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief endured during the long series of dissensions and separations.

In celebration of the Year 2000 as Jubilee Year, the Catholic Church in the Jubilee Song proclaimed that year to be a season of grace, "a time of joy, a time of peace, a time when hearts are then set free, a time to heal the wounds of division..." The biblical teaching on the Jubilee Year is expressed beautifully in what has now become our liturgical anthem. After tracing the journey of Isabelo de los Reyes and

trying to find out the cause of the wounds of division, I must say, with apologies to the English bard, the fault dear Brutus is in the singers, not in the song.

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