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Peacebuilding and Engaged Citizenship: The Role of the Diocese of Bacolod

Antonio F. Moreno, S.J.

In several instances in the restoration of Philippine democracy, the Catholic Church actively played crucial roles. In the postauthoritarian period, both the Church and civil society have struggled to respond to new complexities that have emerged. In this new context, this article examines the role of a local church (the Diocese of Bacolod) in strengthening democratization. Despite the failure of the peace process, this church was able to make inroads to peacebuilding. Its synergy with civil society organizations enhanced greatly its resolve to work for peace, although this thrust was affected by internal conflicts. The local church was a crucial actor in the formation of a constituency of peace that translated itself in engaged citizenship. But this engaged citizenship must be sustained in everyday life.

KEYWORDS: *engaged citizenship, Catholic Church, peace zones, Negros Occidental, Bishop Fortich*

Do not be afraid and take a chance on peace. Our longing for genuine and lasting peace . . . is not a disappointment . . . We will continue to cry to high heavens. . . . We will work for peace in the manner of a courageous and united action.

—Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich, 1987

Positing the Catholic Church as a crucial actor in postauthoritarian citizenship-building is a relatively new field in democratic studies. Although in several cases in the 1970s and 1980s the Catholic Church was engaged aggressively in democratic transitions, it seems by and large to be experiencing political retrenchment in the new democracies (Stewart-

Gambino 1992; Borer 1998). The case of the Philippine Church tells a different story. In the post-Marcos period, it continues to be engaged in the public sphere. This article narrates and analyzes the experience of a local church, the Diocese of Bacolod in Negros Occidental in the western Visayas, particularly its involvement in peace issues and citizenship building. For the people in this local church, citizenship in a situation of sustained armed conflict and lack of human security meant that they had to fight for peace and development. In doing so, the violence perpetrated by both the military and the armed Left allowed them to reclaim their sense of citizenship, although this also meant engaging in contentious politics, as competing groups had various definitions of peace and how armed conflict ought to be resolved.

This topic inevitably touches on church-state-society relations in Negros. Although several have attempted to describe and analyze their dynamics, very little is written about the church-civil society nexus and how citizenship is a pathway to the democratization of state and society. Lopez-Gonzaga (1991) provides some historical material on the increasing opposition against the state, particularly those coming from organized groups and the Left. Rutten (1996) also looks at this issue and offers an explanation as to why peasants supported the revolutionary movement in Negros. McCoy (1991), Yap (1998), O'Brien (1992, 1994), and McCaslin (2000) examine the church's increasing dissociation from the state, largely during the martial law period (1972–1986) and partially during the Aquino administration (1986–1992). These writers give us insights as to why and how church leaders and Christian communities became more involved in the struggles of ordinary people in Negros and consequently withdrew their support from the state. Briones (1998) comes close to the subject of this article when he investigates, in the light of political psychological variables and processes, the role of the local church in the emergence of the Cantomanyog peace zone in Negros. Nonetheless, in general, the body of literature glosses over the church-civil society nexus and the importance of engaged citizenship in a democratizing polity.

This article seeks to fill the gap by shedding light on the complexities surrounding the local church's critical engagement with civil society and its roles in strengthening citizenship in society. In particular, it

addresses these questions: (1) What was the role of the local church in strengthening peace and citizenship? (2) How was citizenship exercised, asserted, and claimed by the stakeholders of peace? (3) With what opportunities and issues did the local church engage in the course of its involvement? I argue that the local church's capacity to make a difference in strengthening citizenship is dependent largely on its internal organizational dynamics (i.e., interaction between its leaders and members) and its synergy with civil society organizations.

This article is divided into five parts. Part 1 defines the two key concepts: the local church and citizenship. Part 2 situates historically the Diocese of Bacolod and the role of Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich. Part 3 reviews the factors that were crucial in the transition of the diocese. Part 4 examines the peace movement, particularly the peace zone in Cantomanyog, in Negros Occidental. Part 5 concludes the discussion.

The Local Church and Citizenship

Two key concepts are important in this study: the local church and citizenship. The local church refers to a geographically bounded ecclesial location containing parishes, associations, chaplaincies, institutes, diocesan congregations, chapels, chapel-based movements, groups, and other units that juridically belong to one entity under the resident diocesan bishop who is accountable primarily to Rome. In some cases, church organizations are transparochial, transdiocesan, or even transnational; that is, they are not confined within particular parishes or dioceses. In a way, some are part of civil society, the public realm between the state and household, but insofar as they are beyond the state (e.g., linkage with the Vatican), they no longer form part of civil society. Since they operate with the approval of the resident bishop within the diocese, they technically belong to the local church. These church groupings, however, are not above ethnic, gender, and class differentiations. For instance, given the church's characteristically male-dominated leadership, there is less consciousness to take on board women concerns and interests. Nonetheless, there are pockets of participatory spaces (e.g., Basic Ecclesial Communities, mechanisms of consultation and representation) particularly within the local church that make possible a certain degree

of collective discourse and action. There are likewise doctrinal underpinnings provided by Catholic Church tradition and ideas of the Second Vatican Council that enable participation of lay people, local churches, and communities (Klaiber 1998). These participatory spaces and doctrinal bases become avenues for public involvement not only by the Catholic Church leadership but also by those at the fringes of its ecclesial society.

Of theories on citizenship there are many; at times, they compete with each other. The practice and understanding of citizenship can be classified into three schools of thought: (1) individual rights as provided for by the state (liberal), (2) community belonging and the primacy of the common good (communitarian), and (3) the exercise of rights and responsibilities (civic republican) in a deliberative process (Jones and Gaventa 2002, 5). Increasingly, for many scholars what appears to be a basic understanding of citizenship is that it is a recognition of a legal status (comprising affiliation, rights, and obligations) *and* active participation which often is shaped by class and gender relations, political identities, ethnicities, and other such factors (ibid.).

Active participation means that people become actors of their communities; that is, they become capable of deciding, acting, and claiming spaces of their own collective aspirations. Participation in this sense goes beyond the assertion of rights and exercise of responsibilities. Indigenous peoples, when asserting their ancestral claims, do exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the land, but when they occupy the contested ancestral domain they need to participate in the scheme of their development if their citizenship is to be pursued. Similarly, for environmentalists protecting the remnants of their forest reserves, they exercise their rights and responsibilities; but beyond protests, they need to regenerate proactively their dwindling forests as citizens of their locality. In both cases, the citizens not only demonstrate their sense of belonging to a community, exercise their rights and responsibilities, but they are also actively engaged in the realization of their collective aspirations.

This idea of citizenship appears to be the story of the peace movement in Negros and the emergence of the peace zone in Cantomanyog. The church and civil society organizations' roles in this movement did not

simply consist of rights advocacy and exercise of responsibilities, but involved the creation of enabling mechanisms for people to participate in their development scheme. Engaged citizenship, then, involves a claim of one's status and active participation in the community, nation, and even in the global sphere to attain collective aspirations. In the absence of any political affiliation and bereft of any political rights and responsibilities, a person is not a citizen but merely a denizen without political entitlements and duties (Taylor 1998, 12). Thus, citizenship distinguishes actors from mere inhabitants or beneficiaries.

The Catholic Church in Negros and Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich

As in most places in the Philippines, Catholics in Negros Occidental are quite dominant, accounting for some 87 percent of the province's inhabitants (PPDO-NO 1998, 7). The province of Negros Occidental is known as the sugarland of the Philippines. Since it became part of a global enterprise in the midnineteenth century, it has maintained a semifeudal agrarian structure in a generally monocrop economy, which largely remains so to date. For the most part, the inhabitants of Negros have had to come to terms with "a long history of land dispossession, exploitation and repression" (Yap 1998, 281). The Catholic Church leadership in Negros Occidental, with few exceptions since the time of the conquest, has not only been identified with wealthy landowners but also benefited from its alliance with the landed gentry (Lopez-Gonzaga 1987). The sharp decline of the global price of sugar in 1984 and 1985, coupled with the cartelization of the industry through the National Sugar Trading Corporation (NASUTRA) and the Philippine Sugar Commission (PHILSUCOM) under Roberto S. Benedicto, a known Marcos crony, caused severe starvation and malnutrition in the province (Lopez-Gonzaga 1991, 98–103).¹ In this context of impoverishment amid plenty church-state-society relations in Negros were framed (McCoy 1984; O'Brien 1994). Particularly after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), increasingly the Catholic Church leadership would distance itself, by and large, from the wealthy landowners and the governing elite of Negros who were often protected and supported by the state.

The appointment of Msgr. Antonio Y. Fortich as the third bishop of the Diocese of Bacolod a couple of years after the Second Vatican Council was an important landmark in the reform of the church in Negros Occidental. Fortich in the 1960s promoted Barangay Sang Virgen (Virgin of the Barangay), a local devotional Marian organization dominated by the poor, and the Cursillo movement which captured the hearts of many rich *hacenderos* (owners of huge estates). Ironically, most of these rich hacenderos had lobbied the Papal Nuncio for the appointment of Fortich as Bacolod's bishop (O'Brien 1994, 37). The news of his appointment was met with a sense of euphoria particularly by the rich. When he started speaking out against unjust labor relations, many of the rich hacenderos disengaged from him, although some of the elite pursued his vision. His relationship with Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos was congenial in the early years of his episcopate. President Marcos offered him a loan of US\$340,000 for the sugar milling factory in Daconcogon, which remains functional at present (Fortich 2001). Nonetheless, Fortich's appointment had a specific mission from the pope. The Papal Nuncio intimated to him on the day of his episcopal ordination on 24 February 1967 that Pope Paul VI appointed him as bishop "to do something for the poor of Negros" (O'Brien 1994, 37–38). Clearly this was a result of the Second Vatican Council's concern that the Catholic Church face squarely social issues afflicting the poor and suffering.

Bishop Fortich not only challenged the local and national governing elite to address the growing social inequality in Negros, but he also sought to address the issues that bred armed violence. At the same time, he was critical of the armed hostilities brought about by the conflict between the military and the revolutionary Left. Peace in his view meant not only the cessation of hostilities but also the transformation of governing institutions and social structures that brought about social inequality and exploitation. As will be shown in this article, one of his main contributions to the Diocese of Bacolod and Philippine society was the promotion of peace and social justice, an endeavor that was only partially successful because today acute social inequality and armed violence persist in Negros.

The Vatican-sponsored Rural Congress in 1967 (inspired by the papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio*) was a critical watershed in the life of the diocese because it enabled the local church to turn its gaze on social issues and sought ways to alleviate the lives of the poor (O'Brien 2002, interview). Held a year before the Latin American Medellin Conference, the Rural Congress suggested that the reforms in the Diocese of Bacolod were relatively ahead of the times.² Various programs and initiatives arose directly or indirectly in the wake of the Rural Congress: the land transfer of agricultural church lands in Himamaylan; the creation of the Social Action Center (SAC), which was headed by then Fr. Luis Jalandoni; the establishment of the Dacongogon Sugar and Rice Milling Cooperative, the Rice and Corn Cooperative, and the Kaisahan (United) Farm Settlement Cooperative in Candoni; the setting up of a cottage industry of cheap clothes for workers (Rainbow Sewing Foundation); the launch of TV and radio stations; the emergence of Khi Rho, a movement of Christian students; the formation of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) through Fr. Edgar S. A. Saguinsin and Fr. Hector Mauri, S.J., after initial attempts to organize laborers through the Federation of Free Workers (FFF) failed; the establishment of the diocesan Legal Aid Office; the Labor Union Education Project; the setting up of credit unions; and the issuing of a pastoral letter safeguarding the rights of workers ("Primer: Basic Christian Community" 1989; O'Brien 2002, interview). The Columban missionaries who had contacts with the Maryknollers initiated the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in Negros in the early 1970s (Empestan 2001, interview).³ The New People's Army (NPA) was already operating in Negros in 1969, the first of its expansion outside of Luzon (Rutten 1996, 119).

Latin American Liberation Theology provided the ecclesiological framework of BCCs in Negros. Considering the former's predilection for Marxist analysis, evidently some elements of the local church and the Left were working on parallel directions. Emmanuel Yap (1998, 285) summarizes the dilemma of the marginalized peasants and workers in this way:

Under extreme exploitation, repression and military abuse, and with hardly any place to seek refuge, embattled peasants and workers were forced to confront their continuing marginalization. They sought support and established alliances with sympathetic groups and institutions. Thousands joined the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) organized by the Catholic Church. But the state, with planters' prodding and support, used more force and violence to contain the peasantry and harass even Church leaders.

Thus, in Negros, as in the case of several countries in Latin America, the rise of the insurgency movement correlated positively with the progressive politicization of the local church.

When the underground Left was on the rise in the mid-1970s and 1980s, the church was also increasingly becoming politicized. Economic exploitation and political militarization, coupled with mobilizing skills of the Left, swelled the ranks of the armed NPA regulars in the province (McCoy 1984). A former cadre of the underground Left told me that, at the height of the insurgency campaign prior to the underground movement split in 1990s, the armed regulars of the NPA controlled five organizational districts in Negros. Each district had one company, about 80 to 120 armed combatants, excluding underground noncombatants, above ground sympathizers, National Democratic Front (NDF) cadres, and active card bearing members of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The NPA was particularly strong in Candoni, Hinoba-an, Ilog, Cauayan, Kabankalan, and Sipalay (the so-called CHICKS area) in southern Negros. Allegations about the Left's infiltration of church organizations and establishments, and use of its resources, abound even up to the time of the diocesan congress in 1993. These allegations, however, were not formally investigated and, hence, no verdict was given regarding the case.

Although Bishop Fortich and other key Catholic Church leaders maintained their position against the armed rebellion of the Left, some members of the clergy left the church and joined the underground movement, while several clergy and lay leaders were sympathetic to their cause.⁴ In postauthoritarian Negros the Left continued to have some influence in the local church. The strength of the Left somehow

factored in the church's social and political involvement. The rifts within the CPP in the 1990s dealt a severe blow to the revolutionary movement in the Philippines and the church in Negros (Weekley 2001; Rocamora 2001). The "reaffirmists" toed the orthodox line of the CPP (particularly the means of revolutionary struggle) and the "rejectionists" objected to it. The reaffirmists' "protracted people's (read: peasant) war" doctrine as was then being waged was essentially the thinking of former CPP chief José Maria Sison. The rejectionists opted for other means. Some focused on urban insurrection, while others abandoned the armed rebellion component and engaged in reforms within political institutions (*ibid.*). Thus, when the underground movement declined in the early 1990s, following the rifts in the CPP, the political involvement of the diocese diminished with equal speed.

The Local Church in Transition

The leadership transition that occurred in the Diocese of Bacolod was much more complex than what many local churches in the Philippines underwent. Three important factors explain this complexity. First, the Diocese of Bacolod's territory and ecclesial influence were reduced in 1987, following the division of the diocese that led to the creation of the Diocese of Kabankalan (south of Bacolod) and the Diocese of San Carlos (northeast of Bacolod). The bishops installed in Kabankalan (Bishop Vicente Navarra) and in San Carlos (Bishop Nicolas Mondejar) were not known at that time for their political involvement. The Negros Occidental church had become enormous and highly politicized. Although Bishop Fortich had sought this division, an influential clergy member told me that the Vatican leadership wanted the division to curb the growing politicization of the diocese.

Second, a truly crucial factor in the transition was the appointment of Bishop Camilo D. Gregorio. He succeeded Bishop Fortich on 27 May 1989 and was formally installed as the fourth bishop of the diocese on 26 July 1989. In 1984, he had been an assistant secretary in the Apostolic Nunciature during the administration of Archbishop Bruno Torpigliani. Before becoming bishop, Gregorio's priestly ministry was devoted mostly to either academic training and teaching or administra-

tion, with relatively little parish pastoral experience. He tried to respond to what he perceived as the "excesses of liberation theology" by stressing spiritual formation, which was getting sidelined because of social action (Gregorio 2001, interview). During Bishop Gregorio's leadership, the Diocese of Bacolod had to endure deep internal rifts between the conservatives (the pro-Gregorio group) and the progressives (the pro-Fortich group) along with the moderates. Despite these internal tensions, the Diocese of Bacolod for a time was a key player in local and national peacebuilding efforts, which can be explained in part by the role of retired Bishop Fortich and his deeply embedded influence in the Bacolod church.

The appointment of Bishop Gregorio has been likened to the Vatican appointments of bishops in the postauthoritarian period that showed a clear predilection for conservative leadership (Klaiber 1998, 2-4). Brazil's Dom Helder Camara was replaced by conservative prelate Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho in 1985. In San Salvador, El Salvador, an Opus Dei archbishop took over from progressive Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas in 1995. In Lima, Peru, Opus Dei archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani was appointed in 1999. Klaiber, however, argues that in a few cases the appointment of conservative bishops, such as Archbishop Juan Francisco Fresno (Santiago, Chile), did not necessarily mean an immediate change in the overall thrust of the Catholic Church as some successors basically maintained the pastoral (including political) strategy of their predecessors (*ibid.*, 14).

Third, the rise of fundamentalist groups correlated with the growth of charismatic communities in the diocese. These groups were typically antimainline churches (Catholics and Protestants), intolerant of other religious beliefs and practices, and rigid in scriptural interpretation. In Negros, the Born Again movement and other evangelical groups were the most organized fundamentalist groups. The growth of the fundamentalist movements was a global phenomenon in the 1980s and 1990s. In Latin America, Africa and Asia, the drift of the members of the mainstream Catholic and Protestant Churches to fundamentalist movements was quite significant in that it posed a challenge to the dominance of the Catholic Church (Stoll 1990; Gifford 1998). As a

result of this upsurge, Catholic charismatic communities proliferated and competed with the fundamentalist movements. The charismatic organizations in Negros consisted of the Couples for Christ (CfC), Youth for Christ, Bukas-Loob sa Diyos (Openness to God), Brotherhood of Christian Business and Professionals (BCBP), Peace Fellowship, and other covenant communities. These communities mushroomed in the Diocese of Bacolod as a counterforce to the fundamentalist groups that started attracting the ordinary laity out of the local church. The renewal groups were lay-led, transdiocesan, and nationally based. These groups were typically middle class, charismatic in orientation, concerned with spiritual development, and less politically inclined, initially at least.⁵ In general, these groups did not appeal much to the poorer sectors of Negros society.⁶

Bishop Gregorio supported these charismatic communities. This support was perceived by the socially-oriented groups as a reversal of the Fortich vision and legacy, because the groups were very “spiritual” and reluctant to engage in politics in ways that the other organized groups were. The opposition launched by the pro-Fortich group against Bishop Gregorio and his supporters (e.g., the charismatic communities) was firm and sustained. This division was deep-seated in the diocese, and eventually led to the transfer of Bishop Gregorio to the Archdiocese of Cebu in January 2001.

Toward a Peace Movement

Violence and armed conflict threatened democracy in the post-Marcos Philippines, particularly in Negros. The Diocese of Bacolod, along with civil society groups, advanced the cause of peace in the province and to some extent in the national scene. Bishop Fortich’s role as peacebroker, either as the incumbent or retired Bishop of the See of Bacolod, was crucially important, be it at the provincial, regional, or national level. Fortich was acceptable to all the stakeholders of peace: the CPP-NDF-NPA, the government, civil society groups, and the people. Bishop Fortich dared both the government and military, and the NPA to stop the armed violence and address the root causes of the

insurgency. On 10 December 1986 he was chosen to lead the National Ceasefire Committee (NUC), which monitored the ceasefire agreement between the government and the NDF. On that very day in Bacolod some 100,000 people showed up to celebrate the much-awaited national ceasefire, the first since the insurgency movement began in late 1969 (*TVDS* 1986a).

The rousing welcome of rebels betrayed the people's massive clamor for peace that was long overdue in Negros Island (O'Brien 2002, interview). For its part, the Bacolod diocese engaged both the government and the CPP-NDF-NPA in promoting a negotiated peace agenda. After the failure of the national peace talks in January 1987, President Aquino gave full backing to retired Bishop Fortich to lead the regional peace panel for Western Visayas in February 1987 (Leonardia 1987). Nonetheless, the new postauthoritarian role of the Catholic Church in peacemaking and keeping was not always understood by the military and some government officials, and was held suspect by the CPP-NPA leadership.

The National Eucharistic Year Defines a Peace Agenda

In launching the National Eucharistic Year (8 December 1986 to 8 December 1987), the CBCP issued a pastoral letter entitled "One bread, one body, one people" to highlight the importance of the event (CBCP 1990, 97–107). Prompted by the themes of peace, justice, and unity in this pastoral letter, the Bacolod diocese celebrated the National Eucharistic Year by focusing on the concerns of the CBCP (*TVDS* 1986b, 2). The Eucharistic Year consisted of liturgical celebrations and educational seminars throughout the province to define a peace agenda (*ibid.*).

On 7 September 1987 Bishop Fortich (1987) issued a pastoral letter in the wake of the failed coup d'état on 28 August 1987, which read in part:

In our province, in particular, we have been witnesses to the merciless killings of unarmed civilians caught in the middle of armed encounters between the CPP-NPA and the military or as a result of their tactical operations . . . we wish to be able to dispel this threatening and terrible nightmare by proclaiming once again at the top of

our voice the ABSURDITY OF VIOLENCE and the ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF PEACE.

Fortich was critical not only of the military rebels who plotted against the government but of the NPA rebels as well. He used this occasion to denounce violence wrought by the armed conflict between the military and the NPA rebels. Clearly, at this point, he was delineating the Catholic Church's position vis-à-vis the military and the CPP-NPA, and thus dispelling the suspicion that he was identified with the underground Left.

Culminating the Eucharistic Year was the erection of the Tent City on the grounds of the Sacred Heart Seminary in Bacolod City. People from various parts of the province stayed in tents for one week while attending the Eucharistic Congress for Peace, joining the pilgrimage, and participating in the diocesan-wide Mass led by Bishop Fortich. The Congress participants came from different class backgrounds (some were landowners, middle class people, and members of Basic Christian Communities) and political persuasions (those who were ideologically sympathetic to the NDF and those who opposed armed rebellion). They passed thirteen resolutions that urged the church, among other things, to support land reform, demilitarization, nationalism and sovereignty, political education, participatory democracy, and partnership with the government on genuine development (*TVDS* 1987). A few of these resolutions were captured in the placards of the participants: "Land reform the answer to rebellion" and "Rice not arms" (*ibid.*, 2). On 22 November 1987, despite the rain some 60,000 people, rich and poor alike, and 125 priests led by Bishop Fortich celebrated the Mass that capped the Eucharistic Congress (*ibid.*).

Earlier on, groups had staged a three-day pilgrimage starting from Hinigaran, La Carlota, and Manapla (*ibid.*, 1). Indeed, the Eucharistic Congress showed the broadest mass mobilization and advocacy of peace constituents in postauthoritarian Negros. In this sense, then, the church was a crucial actor in mobilizing a constituency of peace advocates who equally pursued social justice and development. This peace constituency would later be the leading group in various peace campaigns and initiatives like the peace zone in Cantomanyog.

Cantomanyog and Bishop Fortich's Zones of Peace

Cantomanyog is a small sitio of about 600 hectares in the town of Candoni (Briones 1998, 82).⁷ After the first settlers arrived in 1934, there came about migrations in 1949 from the towns of Leon, Igaras, and Oton in Iloilo (*ibid.*, 83). The settlers thrived on subsistence farming, planting rice, sugarcane, and root crops; they also raised farm animals. When peace talks between the government and rebel groups collapsed in 1988, various local peace initiatives were tried. Peace awareness, education, and advocacy persisted and gained prominence at the height and decline of Operation Thunderbolt, a military offensive in April 1989 against the CPP-NPA in southern Negros. Brigadier General Raymundo T. Jarque was appointed chief of the Negros Island Command (NICOM). Soon after his appointment, the NPA assaulted a military detachment in Caningay, killing and injuring many soldiers (Zulueta 1989, 1). In response the military launched a massive assault on the CHICKS area (that, earlier in 1987, had become part of the Diocese of Kabankalan). The NPA presence and influence in the CHICKS area were particularly strong. Heavy bombing of Caningay began on 23 April 1989. With five infantry battalions sent to the CHICKS area, the operation was extensive, sustained, and heavy (McCoy 1991, 140).

As part of its counterinsurgency campaign, the military aided the proliferation of vigilante groups such as Bantay Banwa (People Wake Up), the anticommunist and antiland reform Movement for an Independent Negros (MIN), religious fanatical sects, and the CAFGUs that were supported by some rich planters to protect their haciendas (LCFHR 1988, chap. 3). As a result some 35,000 people were displaced, causing the death of some 800 children in an evacuation center, who died of natural illnesses brought about by their displacement (O'Brien 1989).⁸ By 7 May 1989 the affected areas, including Cantomanyog, were virtually uninhabited. A high ranking local government official told me that the devastating military operation had the full backing of Provincial Governor Daniel L. Lacson and the support of the national leadership. In an effort to flush out the rebels, the operation lasted until June 1989. In this context of persistent armed conflict, the idea of peace zones emerged.

A pioneering church leader, Bishop Fortich inspired, popularized, and advocated the notion of zones of peace as an imperative in war-torn Negros. In brief, the creation of peace zones hoped to

enable the civilians . . . to live in peace in a certain territory declared as a 'zone of peace' and recognized as such by the warring forces; . . . enable the civilians . . . to work on their livelihood without fear of being harassed by the combatant; . . . give opportunities to the people in the 'zone of peace' to attain total human development. (Anonymous n.d.).

Fortich had hoped that the zones of peace could be introduced in the various conflict-laden areas of the country and thus reduce the incidents of armed conflict (TPS 1989). His proposal was later taken, endorsed, and proposed by some bishops to President Aquino, although no such support was given collectively by the CBCP (1990, 197). The bishops who were supportive of peace zones chose Negros Occidental as an experimental area. Later it could be replicated in every province where armed conflict raged.

Nominated by European and American organizations for the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, Bishop Fortich envisioned the creation of zones of peace as neutral grounds to "humanize the conflict," that is, to free areas from armed conflict so that civilians can get on with their lives (Richardson 1989, 2). This idea was perceived by critics as naive and simplistic. Some military officers thought this was providing a sanctuary for the rebels who were on the run (ibid.). Nonetheless, Fortich persisted in his campaign and inspired sitio Cantomanyog to reinvent its own idea of *sona sang paghidaet* (zone of peace). This development came about because the residents of Cantomanyog, although part of the Diocese of Kabankalan, maintained links with the Diocese of Bacolod through its parish priest, Fr. Rolando Nueva.

Cantomanyog used to belong to Kaisahan (United) Farm Settlement Cooperative, a pilot project of the Bacolod diocese; the cooperative was directed by Fr. Luis Jalandoni who had just returned in late 1967 from his theological studies in Germany (O'Brien 2002, interview). The diocese sent a chaplain to the settlement area even though

Cantomanyog was under a parish priest. O'Brien believes that Kaisahan sowed the seeds of lay empowerment and human integral development among peasants in the area, including Cantomanyog. Apart from this influence, the BCC, which was introduced in the area in 1975, became a factor in the community life and action in Cantomanyog. A regular *panimbahon* (community worship) was held every week, and on some occasions the parish priest visited to celebrate Mass with the people. Aside from the regular *panimbahon*, the BCC held weekly meetings which tried to respond to community issues.

The Cantomanyog residents, among many others, were adversely affected and displaced by the military assault on the NPA enclaves in April 1989 during Operation Thunderbolt. Prior to the assault there were about sixty-eight families in Cantomanyog. The evacuees went to Haba Elementary School in Candoni and stayed there until the first week of June 1989 when the evacuees, numbering about twenty-seven families, started returning to Cantomanyog (Nueva and Eliseo 2001, interview). The military refused to guarantee their safety, but they decided to go back. Dealing with the violent conflict between the NPA and the military was then a pressing concern of the community. Father Nueva, then parish priest of Candoni that included Cantomanyog, was actively engaged in the struggle of the community to declare and advocate their own version of *sona sang paghidaet*. Indeed, the community declared their area as a zone of peace on 26 December 1989, but this did not gain any publicity or substantial support from the local church and civil society groups. It was thought that a redeclaration with the support of organized groups would highlight the issues of peace.

The Peace Caravan and the Redeclaration of Cantomanyog

To draw more attention to the redeclaration of the zone of peace, a five-day campaign known as the Peace Caravan was initiated and led by the Catholic Church. It was supported by the PIC and civil society groups, namely, Pax Christi; Negros Priest Forum (NPF); People's Power for Enlightenment and Commitment for Sovereignty and Truth (PENTECOST); Broad Initiatives for Negros Development (BIND);

Bulig Foundation; Paghiliusa sa Paghida-et Negros (Unity for Peace) or PsPN, a Bacolod City-based nongovernmental organization (NGO); and Peace Zone Advocates in Negros (PEZAN), a multisectoral formation of peace activists in Negros (*Ang Kristianong Katilingban* 1990, 4–6; Villanueva 2001, interview). These groups were typically middle class, although some members came from the poor sectors of society. These civil society groups had a close affinity with the church not simply because the clergy, religious, and lay people were members of these organizations but primarily because of their commitment to peace and justice in Negros. But these groups were ideologically differentiated. The NPF and PENTECOST, for instance, were ideologically sympathetic to the NDF, while Pax Christi, Bulig Foundation, and PsPN were often critical of the revolutionary movement. Still and all, the church-civil society partnership was anchored on a shared vision of Negros based on peace and social justice. That the church played a crucial role in orchestrating a multisectoral Peace Caravan proved that it could form an alliance with civil society organizations.

The peace campaign that covered the island's two provinces of Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental started on 13 February 1990 with a Mass that was held at the Queen of Peace Church in Bacolod City. Thirty priests, including Bishop Emeritus Fortich, led the Mass celebration. In his homily Bishop Camilo Gregorio exhorted the people to rally behind the themes of unity, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice with love (Gomez 1990a, 1). Although, along with Bishop Fortich, he blessed the Peace Caravan, he remained suspicious that the Left was out to use the campaign for its political ends. With the exception of Bishop Fortich, the perceived silence of the hierarchical leadership betrayed the cleavages within the local church as regards the peace campaign. Following the CBCP position, Fortich maintained that the campaign was a timely response to President Aquino's "Decade of Peace (1990–2000)" declaration (*Ang Kristianong Katilingban* 1990, 4). Some local elites and hacenderos also supported the Peace Caravan, secretly and overtly (Empestan 2001, interview).

Forty vehicles carrying about 500 participants joined the caravan (TVDS 1990, 1–2). They first headed to the north where a rally was

staged in Escalante, the site of the well-known massacre in 1985 that killed twenty-one people and injured scores of civilians (Gomez 1990a, 2). Later in the afternoon, they arrived in San Carlos City where some 1,000 people awaited them at the plaza. The signing of the scroll of peace led by Bishop Nicolas Mondejar of the Diocese of San Carlos, San Carlos City Mayor Tranquilino Carmona, and its Chief of Police Captain Demetria capped the day's events (*ibid.*). The following day the caravan trekked to Bais City in Negros Oriental. Along the way, anti-communist and antipeace placards read: "Don't deceive us with your zones of peace," "Down with communism," and "Don't disturb Negros Oriental" (*TVDS* 1990, 1). That same day the caravan arrived in Dumaguete City, capital of Negros Oriental, at around 3:30 P.M. At the plaza, Bishop Fortich read the CBCP pastoral letter, "Seek peace, pursue it" (O'Brien 1990, 18).

The big event in the Peace Caravan was planned on 16 February 1900, the planned day for the declaration of the peace zone in Cantomanyog. The caravan was held up by barricaders backed by the military under General Raymundo Jarque at Barangay Haba, some three kilometers from Cantomanyog. Negotiations were pursued by leaders of the caravan to allow it to proceed to Cantomanyog, but failed. There were some 2,000 barricaders, including residents of Barangay Haba and evacuees, some 150 rebel surrenderees, and people recruited from places as far as Sipalay and Cauayan (Marcelo 1990, 2). Like the military, these barricaders denounced the peace zone project and church leaders as communists. The barricaders were nonresidents of Cantomanyog and, therefore, did not have any stake in the peace process of that locality. They had mixed reasons for being there: some were driven by a strong anticommunist stance, others were let down by the underground movement, and some were recruited (*hako*) by civilian and military authorities.

Seeing no breakthrough in the impasse, the peace campaigners decided to celebrate Mass after which Natividad Epulan, a Cantomanyog resident, read the Zone of Peace Declaration. It read:

We desire peace and quiet that will last so that we can develop our lives and livelihood. The prevalence of peace is a necessary condition if we are going to confront POVERTY AND INJUSTICE. In

short, we desire to have peace, prosperity of people based on justice.⁹

Thus, Cantomanyog became one of the first peace zones in the Philippines.

Cantomanyog, Peace, and Development

Cantomanyog envisioned peace, a place where development of the people was founded on justice. For the locals, genuine development meant that they would confront poverty through the creation of livelihood activities. It further meant that they would determine the kind of development they wanted. Peace was not simply the absence of violence, but necessarily included participatory development. In the spirit of justice, the fruits of development were to be distributed to members of the locality.

This thrust was further bolstered when Cantomanyog became a recipient of the Aurora Quezon Peace Award in 1991 (Nueva and Eliseo 2001, interview). For its part, the executive branch of the government awarded a development fund worth US\$100,000.00 to Cantomanyog.¹⁰ The money was used to widen the road connecting it to Candoni municipality, and to strengthen the community consumer cooperative and other related programs. The community also bought a truck to transport their produce, and prohibited gambling and the sale of liquor in the area. Under these strict conditions, violence linked to liquor or gambling ceased (Briones 1998, 131). All these outcomes gave indications of the community's pursuit of peace along with development and justice. Clearly, at this point, their exercise of citizenship was not simply the reclaiming of their right to development and the responsibilities that go with it, but ineluctably involved participation in a kind of development that made them actors and beneficiaries at the same time. The absence of violence was not enough. They had to device their own scheme of development which included socioeconomic livelihood and a culture of peace that proscribed gambling, arms, and the like.

The peace zone was politically contentious. It was never endorsed by the military, the local government, the rebel returnees, or the CPP lead-

ership. The military saw it as merely a strategic ploy of the NPA whose members were on the run because of persistent military attacks (Gomez 1990b, 2). The military saw peace havens as obstacles to its all-out war with the rebels. In the minds of local government leaders, the lack of consultation and their exclusion in the peace campaign rendered the whole project void from the very start. The nineteen members of the Municipal Mayors' League unanimously endorsed a resolution criticizing the creation of peace zones, chiefly because the mayors were not consulted in making the peace plan (*ibid.*). In any case, because they were actively engaged in the counterinsurgency campaigns that endorsed a total war policy, the mayors were unlikely to be sympathetic to the cause of peace espoused by the residents of Cantomanyog. For the rebel returnees, like the Brotherhood of Organized Resignees from CPP in Negros (BORN), it was a CPP/NPA ploy to gain belligerency status under international law, divide the clergy in Negros, protect the NPA, and manipulate the outcome of this peace initiative (Toga 1990, 3). For the CPP leadership, the establishment of the peace zone militated against the revolutionary struggle waged in the countryside, although some local NPA regulars and NDF sympathizers were open to this initiative (Diokno 1989, 7; *TPS* 1989, 7).

Evidently, everyone wanted peace in Negros. Nonetheless, peace meant differently to varied sectors of Negros society. Those who denounced the Peace Caravan, such as the military and its civilian allies, wanted peace that meant the elimination of the communist rebels whom they perceived as troublemakers. The CPP-NPA's version of peace was anchored on a nationalist ideology and class struggle toward a classless society. In effect, this meant the necessity of a protracted war to rectify class contradictions in Philippine society. Those who joined the peace campaign desired not merely the cessation of hostilities but also participatory development that addressed the issues causing rebellion. The notion of peace was essentially contested, but the church and civil society groups took the option that enabled the victims of violence to rebuild their community despite objections from all sides.

Even though the Diocese of Bacolod played crucial roles in supporting and advocating the struggle of Cantomanyog to launch its own

version of a peace zone, ultimately it was the persistence of the BCCs that made their area free from armed conflict (Villanueva 2001, interview). The idea of a peace zone was neither imposed from above by the ecclesiastical authorities nor was it engineered solely by peace advocates. It was initiated by the community and supported by the church leadership and civil society actors. The residents relentlessly talked to and persuaded armed groups from both sides to respect their declaration. They confronted the respective field commanders when a violation was reported (Nueva and Eliseo 2001, interview). And they repeatedly and persistently did so until 1993, when both armed groups were no longer seen in the area (*ibid.*). This achievement would not have been possible were it not for the influence of Kaisahan, the flow of chaplains that ministered to Kaisahan, and the BCC movement through which the Bacolod diocese lent its support, although Cantomanyog and Fr. Rolex Nueva were not part of the diocese. O'Brien believes that the language of the declaration, such as "peace based on justice" and "total human development," showed some similarities with the discourse characteristic of the Kaisahan project of the diocese in the 1970s (O'Brien 2002, interview). Moreover, at the time of the (second) declaration of the peace zone, the support extended by the Bacolod diocese and civil society organizations expanded the peace campaign, despite some misgivings on the part of Bishop Gregorio.

The Cantomanyog experience was not replicated in ways that Fortich envisioned, and neither did it influence the creation of peace zones that grew out of different contexts. These zones included the ones in Tulan, North Cotabato; in Sagada, in Bangilo, Malibcong, Abra; in Bual, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat; and in Maladeg, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur (see Coronel-Ferrer 1997, 180). Nevertheless, the local community, civil society groups, government leaders, and church organizations acting in concert proved crucial in the success of these peace zones. In Tulan, for instance, about 80 percent of the community members were part of the BCC which had the support of the parish priest and other clergy leaders (Sta. Maria 2004, 6–8). Fortich's version of a peace zone was the inspiration, but it was the people who initiated and gave

it a human face. Even before the five-day island-wide Peace Caravan was launched, the Cantomanyog people had already declared their area as a conflict-free zone on 26 December 1989, but it did not gain sufficient public attention. These initiatives from below evidently shore up Scott's (1990) "hidden transcripts" thesis concerning forms of protest by subaltern groups in the face of dominant forces, such as the military and the CPP-NPA. With the support of the local church and civil society actors, the community relentlessly engaged the parties involved, whether it be the military or the NPA. Thus, the local BCC residents themselves, with the assistance of their parish priest Father Nueva, were the ones who formulated their own version of *sona sang paghidaet*. But the role of Father Nueva was also important. He frequently visited Cantomanyog, and his presence and participation proved pivotal in empowering the locals to create their own version of the peace zone. Additionally, he was a key liaison to the larger local churches (Diocese of Bacolod and Diocese of Kabankalan) and the peace advocates.

A Peace Constituency

The Cantomanyog peace zone became a living symbol of the aspirations of peace advocates and ordinary citizens. Former Negros Occidental Governor Rafael Coscolluela claims that the campaign "proved that there was a peace constituency . . . by a good number of people" (Coscolluela 2001, interview). The mobilization showed plainly that peace had a sizeable following which was not simply to be dismissed. In the declaration of Cantomanyog's peace zone, the peace initiative from below and peace advocacy from above (church leaders and peace advocates) intersected at once to address issues spawned by armed conflict.

After the collapse of negotiations between the government and the NDF, peace advocacies were left to local government and church leaders, with very little involvement by the peace constituency. These advocacies continued after the retirement of Bacolod's Bishop Fortich on 31 January 1989, but it did not have as much support from peace advocates as it garnered previously. In the wake of the stalled national

peace talks, both Bishop Gregorio and retired Bishop Fortich pursued local peace talks for the province of Negros Occidental. On 25 September 1991 Governor Lacson announced a ten-day ceasefire in Negros, the first province in the Philippines to attempt a voluntary ceasefire (Gomez 1991a). For this purpose, a Peace Committee was set up which included Bishop Gregorio and retired Bishop Fortich. The committee sought ways and means to engage the rebels to return to the negotiating table. This move was utterly rejected by the NDF-Negros, sensing that it was a "vile scheme to divide-and-rule" (*ibid.*, 14). Notwithstanding some reported skirmishes between the military and the NPA, and the rejection of the offer of local peace talks by the NDF, the local ceasefire was extended for another ten-day period (Gomez 1991b). Despite repeated appeals by the Peace Committee to convince the NDF to engage the local peace negotiations, no progress was made.

The diocese made more attempts at local peace talks in 1992 through the former priests who joined the underground movement, but to no avail (Loretizo 1992, 1). In 1999, after the failed national peace talks, local talks were relentlessly pursued, but again these failed for the same reason that the NDF wanted comprehensive talks, not local peace initiatives. Complicating the situation of armed conflict was the persistent counterinsurgency campaigns of military and paramilitary units (often supported by the landed elite) that only bred more violence and suspicion about the trustworthiness of the government.

In sum, all these peace initiatives starting from the National Eucharistic Year (1986–1987) up until 1999 did not simply fall by the wayside. The peace campaigns sent strong signals to the government that the military approach to the problem was not the solution; and, to the CPP-NPA, that the revolution being waged was not really propoor as the poor were the ones caught in the firing line. The formation of a peace constituency made it clear that the citizenry had as much stake in the peace process as the government and the rebel forces. Sustaining the peace movement was altogether another matter when the national leadership from both the government and the NDF failed to reach any agreement.

Conclusion

Despite its internal cleavages, the local church played an important role in strengthening citizenship when it partnered with civil society organizations. It must be noted that, due to its connection to the Vatican state, the local church is distinct from civil society, which refers to the public sphere composed of voluntary organizations located between the household and state. Nonetheless, church associations are part of civil society.

In the Diocese of Bacolod these associations were crucial in the church-civil society partnership, a recent development that dates back only to the time of Fortich as diocesan bishop. This partnership increased the church's resolve in matters affecting the lives of people, such as peace.

The church's contribution to peacebuilding in Negros thus goes back to the 1970s, when it sponsored the Kaisahan project (involving several places like Cantomanyog) and the formation of BCCs. These activities served as initial inroads that gradually changed the religious discourse and practice of the people. In the post-Marcos period the local church used the National Eucharistic Year as a launching pad for its mobilization of peace advocates and organized groups. Peace education and the raising of people's consciousness about the effects of armed violence were some of its achievements. This momentum was further accelerated during the Peace Caravan and its culminating event, the redeclaration of Cantomanyog as a peace zone. Although its attempts to bring the government and the NDF back to the negotiating table failed, the church along with civil society actors were the only credible groups in Negros and in the whole Philippines that evidently had a commanding moral confidence to engage the armed groups and the military.

Engaged citizenship does have many expressions. One such articulation and actualization is the peace movement in Negros. In this experience, citizenship was rooted in the people's struggle for peace. Owing to the prominence of Bishop Fortich, the citizenry's persistent clamor for peace, and the vibrancy of civil society organizations, Negros Occidental witnessed one of the first provincial peace initiatives in the country. The various peace education programs during the National Eucharistic Year (1986–1987), the Peace Caravan, support for

Cantomanyog's bid to become a peace zone, and other peace initiatives defined a constituency of peace advocates in Negros.

These peace efforts are small representations of the peace initiatives of the national churches in Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Chiapas in Mexico (Klaiber 1998, 9; Cleary 1992, 204). In these instances, the Catholic Church acted as "a mediator, moderator or mentor of democracy," as Cleary (1992) speaks of it in several Latin American contexts. As mediator, moderator, and mentor of competing political actors the Catholic Church leadership in Latin America, like the Diocese of Bacolod, became a protagonist in defining an agenda for peace. For instance, in 1984 the Church in Chile through Juan Francisco Cardinal Fresno was instrumental in the formulation of the "National Accord for the Transition to Full Democracy" (Klaiber 1998, 60–61). Although extreme rightist groups, the Communist Party, and other underground leftist movements did not join the dialogue convened by Cardinal Fresno, some of the basic principles in the text (stipulating general elections, among other things) were accepted by the parties concerned, including the Communist Party. The National Accord did not completely succeed, but "it gave new impetus to the parties in their quest for unity and consensus" (*ibid.*).

Thus, in several Latin American countries, because of church mediation opposing parties finally met, negotiated, and embarked on the tedious task of forming a consensus on peace and reconciliation (*ibid.*, 139). Although the national peace accords brokered by the church were observed unevenly, these attempts to resolve contentious and opposing interests would not have been possible if the church were not a credible mediator. In Negros, owing to public confidence, the church has become the principal actor with moral authority to convene political and social groups in a dialogue. The church has filled the gaps created by the weakness (or relative absence) of democratic institutions, the basic flaw of the political system in Negros as in the whole Philippines.

In this context, peace advocacy has a way of molding engaged citizenship. Citizenship not only means that people are conscious of their rights and responsibilities; it also means that they participated in the peace process. Thus, the people have ceased to be merely inhabitants of the land. They have become informed citizens who have as much stake

in peace issues as the government, the armed groups, and other organized associations. Beyond the declaration of Cantomanyog as a zone of peace, the community has been able to embark on development and livelihood projects, aided by external funding and technical assistance. Peace for Cantomanyog means not only the absence of war, but also the inclusion of participatory development.

Notes

Abbreviations used more than once

BCC	Basic Christian Community
CBCP	Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
CfC	Couples for Christ
CHICKS area	The municipalities of Candoni, Hinoba-an, Ilog, Cauayan, Kabankalan, and Sipalay in southern Negros Occidental
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
LCFHR	Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
NDF	National Democratic Front
NPA	New People's Army
NPF	Negros Priest Forum
PENTECOST	People's Power for Enlightenment and Commitment for Sovereignty and Truth
PPDO-NO	Provincial Planning and Development Office-Negros Occidental
PsPN	Paghiliusa sa Paghida-et Negros (Unit for Peace Negros)
TMC	<i>The Manila Chronicle</i>
TPS	<i>The Philippine Star</i>
TVDS	<i>The Visayan Daily Star</i>

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1. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), at the time of the crisis, claimed that malnutrition affected 82 percent of children in Negros (*Economist* 1997, 45).

2. The Medellin Conference in Latin America officially gave rise to Liberation Theology and the proliferation of BCCs as the new model of becoming church.

3. McCoy (1984) explains the growth of the BCCs in Negros and how some Irish Columbans tried to respond to state exploitation without being swayed to the cause of armed rebellion.

4. Resolution no. 3 (Part III) of the Priests' Pastoral Congress II (1986) defined its policy toward the underground movement: "Resolved, that we take *no condemnatory but dialogical stance* towards the CPP-NPA while we reject some of the philosophical assertions of Marxism concerning man, society, and religion" (emphasis added).

5. The CfC, however, became politically involved in the run-up to the ouster of President Estrada and during the 2001 national elections.

6. In the national scene, however, the El Shaddai, the biggest charismatic movement in the Philippines, appealed to the *masa* (masses) and became politicized over time (Gorospe-Jamon 1999). It held political choices that at times ran counter to those of the Catholic Church hierarchy. Owing to its distinctly lay character, the members of the hierarchy felt that some guidance was needed. In the case of El Shaddai, Bishop Teodoro Bacani and some priests were designated as spiritual directors.

7. The sitio is a subunit of the barangay, the smallest political unit in the Philippines.

8. Local papers estimated that some 200 children died (TMC 1989, 3). O'Brien's estimate of 800 children seems more credible since he personally conducted the survey. The journalists in Negros tended to sympathize with the soldiers who carried out Operation Thunderbolt.

9. "Pamat-ud sa pagtukod sang isa-ka sona sang paghidaet" (Declaration concerning the establishment of a zone for peace), 26 December 1989. Translated by the author with the help of Fr. Niall O'Brien. [See pages 255–58 for the full text of the declaration, with our own English translation—Ed.]

10. As part of a confidence-building measure, development funds were also given to other peace zones. President Ramos declared seven peace zones as Special Peace and Development Areas (Cantomanyog included) and awarded a total of P24,290,750.00 (US\$485,815.00). See Coronel-Ferrer 1997, 180.

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