

# **Together in Chains: Can Enslaving Manacles be Turned to Solid Ties of Solidarity?**

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## **Introduction:**

I come to you primarily as a pastoral theologian, that is to see the issue of globalization as it impacts on church and society and reflect on this reality from the basis of the resources of the faith, then draw implication therefrom for the mission and ministry of the church.

Our mission and ministry take place in the concrete realities of the people, into which the gospel must be incarnated. I am a minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines or the UCCP. The UCCP Constitution makes as one of the Principles we stand on as a church the following: The United Church of Christ in the Philippines affirms its historic faith and its pastoral and prophetic witness in the life and culture of the Filipino people. The Church supports the people's aspiration for abundant life and holistic redemption from all forms of bondage, in accordance with the vision of the reign of God.

What then does it mean "to do mission" in the Philippines today? What forces are at work in Philippine society today that bears on how mission is to be understood and practiced? What issues call the churches' attention? What issues cry to be addressed by Christians and the Christian community? In other words, what is our context? And how does this context impinge, inform, challenge and impact on our partnership, our mission, and our ministry?

## **Pursuing the Way of Peace in the Midst of the War of Terror**

The Psalmist urged, "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34: 14), even as the Lord Jesus himself declared, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9). Almost all other religions have this impetus or call for peace. These call us to walk the ways of peace in a world full of wars.

The 9/11 event has given the United States a golden opportunity to finally implement a policy paper called the "Project for the New American Century" aimed at seeing to it that US becomes the lone superpower after the cold war. Paul Wolfowitz, then serving as Undersecretary of Defense for policy under Dubya's father, drafted a Defense planning document that laid out the core ideas of the Project. "It was a strategy maintaining and strengthening unchallenged US military superiority against a potential future super power rival and against unrest around the world, through pre-emption rather than containment and unilateral military action rather than multilateral internationalism."<sup>1</sup>

The administrations of both Bush Sr. and Clinton did not use this Project.

In September 2000, the Project released its grand plan for the future in a report entitled, "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century." The report begins with the premise that the "United States is the world's only superpower, combining pre-eminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy -- America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible."<sup>2</sup>

9/11, while a tragedy and a catastrophe which all humanity must mourn, was the best thing that could have happened for the Project and its proponents. They released a letter just days after 9/11 arguing that "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsor must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq." To which D. Shank observed, "The real rationale ultimately was not weapons of mass destruction, oil, human rights violations, or any other reasons

given publicly. It was, as had been written two years earlier, the desire for a permanent role in the strategically important Gulf region.”<sup>3</sup>

The ouster of Saddam is not even the end – it is just a means by which the US can gain that permanent foothold in the region.

9/11 provided the justification for the Project and so the so-called "War on Terror" has begun and quickly it degenerated into a "War of Terror” - the lone superpower bullying and terrorizing the whole world - and the war goes on and the end is not in sight.

Susan Sontag of the New York Times wrote: "Real wars are not metaphor - they have a beginning and an end. But the war that has been declared by the Bush administration will never end. That is one sign that it is not war, but rather; a mandate for expanding the American power."<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Nye, dean of the Harvard's Kennedy School of noting the US military victory in Iraq, wrote in the Washington Post: "Not since Rome has one nation loomed so large above the others. Indeed, the word "empire" has come out of the closet."<sup>5</sup>

The same was the view of the leading commentator of the Atlanta Journal - Constitution, published in the capital of the Conservative South, "Invasion “ would mark the next step towards an American empire.”<sup>6</sup>

As Jim Wallis noted, The use of the word 'empire' in relation to American power in the world was controversial, often restricted to left-wing critiques of US hegemony. But now, on op-ed pages and in the nation's political discourse, the concept of empire, and even the phrase 'Pax Americana' are increasingly referred to in unapologetic way.”<sup>7</sup>

In fact, William Kristol, editor of the influential Weekly Standard and who happens also to be the Chair of the "Project for the New American Century" wrote, "If people want to say we're an imperial power, fine.”<sup>8</sup>

No more pretensions. No "Manifest Destiny" altruism. No more apologies. No more batting of an eyelash. Okay fine. Next country to conquer, please. Will that be North Korea or Iran?

Other than outright unilateral aggression on countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq as well as open threats to such countries as North Korea or Iran, the plan of the empire calls for the enlistment of ally-nations to help maintain this US superiority. As the Project asserted, "The presence of American forces in critical regions around the world is the visible expression of the extent of America's status as a superpower" and proposes a "network of 'deployment bases' or 'forward operating bases' to increase the reach of current and future forces."<sup>9</sup>

This leads us to the Philippines. The Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) administration has been parroting the lines of George W. Bush in the US aggression on Iraq and in the Bush's "War on terror." Bush, in turn, describes the Philippines as a major non-NATO ally. US also supported the bid of the Philippines to be one of the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Increasingly, under the guise of joint military training and exercises, US troops are being sent to combat zones in the Philippines and US military intelligence apparatus being used in Philippine internal security and police matters.

The US continues to undermine the International Criminal Court. (ICC). It has entered Bilateral Immunity Agreements with mostly small countries to grant immunity from prosecution under the ICC to US citizens in exchange for military aid. According to Congressman Satur Ocampo, under those agreements US soldiers can escape ICC prosecution even if they pillage, slaughter civilians, commit genocide and other war crimes. Bayan Muna representation has filed a petition with the Phil. Supreme Court, seeking to nullify the RP-US bilateral immunity deal signed on May 13, 2003.<sup>10</sup>

The US has also interfered with internal security affairs of the Philippines. By declaring the CPP-NPA as a foreign-terrorist organization (FTO) in August 2002, It has put into jeopardy the Peace Talks that started about 11 years ago between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front.

The listing of the CPP-NPA as FTO stems from the US Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act which had "attacked the rights and civil liberties in the US

and abroad. Both measures have allowed random arrests and detention without hearings, illegal detention for indefinite periods such as those held incommunicado at Guantanamo Base in Cuba, surveillance of labor groups and political groups, among others. These laws are being replicated in other countries almost in toto, including the Philippines. The GMA administration, using the FTO tag on the CPP-NPA, has intensified its own campaign to demonize its most vocal critics and depict them loosely as "terrorists." It has aggressively campaigned to the European Union to make the same listing as the US."<sup>11</sup>

Pending in the Congress as an urgent bill is the Anti-Terrorism Bill (ATB), which is a copycat of the USA Patriot Act of 2001. The ATB seeks to grant extensive powers to government in stifling open and legitimate protests (right to free speech, assembler privacy, due process, equal protection before the law, etc.), conducting surveillance operations, and opening of bank accounts, among others.

The ATB, however, too loosely and vaguely defines terrorism so that it becomes a catch-all crime for any offense. Its end goal, fears Ocampo, really is to penalize political acts and to stifle dissent, yet remaining silent on the reality of state terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

### **Abundant Life for All, Not Just for Some**

Closely connected to the issue of the War of Terror is the issue of globalization.

The Myth of Globalization. The evangelists of the gospel of globalization preach that the globalization regime will bring us a new era of continuing prosperity that the opening up of markets by liberalization and the removal of tariffs and of protectionist barriers will result into unparalleled economic growth. Of whom, we are not clearly told.

As before, the current slowdown stems from the inherent contradiction of capitalism: the drive for profits by a few leaves the mass of people without means to buy the goods and services they themselves produced.<sup>13</sup>

In 1997 the UNDP warned that "increasing consumption by the rich countries was undermining the prospects of sustainable development for all. While the richest 1/5 of the world's population consumes 86% of its outputs up to 1 billion people remain deprived of basic needs like food, water and proper housing."<sup>14</sup>

More than 80 neo-colonies have lower per capita income today than a decade ago.

Inequality has been worsening: the income of the top fifth of the world's population was 30 times that of the bottom fifth in 1960, 45 times more in 1980, and 74 times more in 1997.<sup>15</sup>

This really simply goes to show that globalization has failed to deliver on its promise. And that the widening gap between the rich and the poor is really inherent in the economic system that has dominance to these days.

Closer to home, we see distressing figures. Let me just cite the figures on employment coming from the government's of Labor and Employment.<sup>16</sup>

Laid-off workers rose from 67,624 in 2000

to 71,864 in 2001

and even further to 77,601 in 2002

540,000 workers lost their jobs as of July 2003

Unemployment increased from 3.8 million in 2002

4.35 million in July 2003

Company closures increased by 27% from 2,258 firms in 2000

to 2,859 in 2001

and went further by to 3,296 in 2002

The Fair Trade Alliance, which quoted these figures in a paid ad, argues that this was largely caused by trade liberalization that was implemented too rapidly. Their argument was that the WTO forced their excessive trade liberalization condition on us. We had no choice; or else we would be cut off-from global trade.<sup>17</sup>

Ernesto M. Ordoñez, who was former Undersecretary of Agriculture, former Undersecretary of Trade and Industry and former Chair and Cabinet Secretary for Presidential Flagship Programs and Projects, in a commentary in Philippine Daily Inquirer (Oct. 31, 2003) wrote that, "while some WTO impositions are indeed harmful to us and several developing countries," he says that "this is not the whole truth" - the painful truth being that we played a large part in causing our own problems.<sup>18</sup> What Ordoñez was saying was that part of the problem was self-inflicted.

There was to be a programmed tariff reduction program that countries commit themselves to. We committed to a tariff reduction of only 10-30% over an extended period of 10 years. What we actually implemented was an average tariff reduction of more than double our WTO commitment: 49% in industry and 50% in agriculture. Further more we did this in only 5 years, half the time allowed by our own WTO commitments.<sup>19</sup>

Justice Florentine Feliciano, a former Chairperson of the WTO's appellate body for Trade Disputes and a former member of the Philippine Supreme Court describes the Philippine tariff reduction as a "total unilateral disarmament" that has unnecessarily put industries and jobs on the chopping block of global competition.<sup>20</sup>

And to think that our President prides herself to be an economist and a classmate of the US President who had a slogan, "It's the economy, stupid!" I don't know, maybe that slogan should not just be addressed to Dubya's father but to Clinton's classmate as well).

But what about the much-touted growth of domestic economy by 4.5%? This was mostly driven by the service sector particularly the growth of telecommunications with the continuing demand for cellular phones. Manufacturing also expanded but only because of the increase in the manufacture of food and other consumer products as well as basic metal, indicating an infantile and backward economy. Meanwhile, agriculture shockingly declined by 32%.<sup>21</sup>

GNP registered a 5.6% growth rate but this was largely due to the ever-

dependable remittances of migrant workers, which grew by 21% -- what with an average of 2,300 Filipinos leaving the Philippines a day in search for jobs and livelihood abroad.<sup>22</sup>

The question is, did the posture of rapid trade liberalization work for investment opportunities here in the Philippines? Dr. R. Montalba noted that the country needs massive investments to rouse its dormant economy. But since the government has oriented the economy toward export, such massive investments will come only if the export sector are good. Investors look only at the profitability of the international market, not the strength of domestic production." That is why the investment-led, export-oriented development strategy of the Philippine government is, in fact according to Montalba, the sure recipe for economic underdevelopment and chronic crises.<sup>23</sup>

The World Economic Forum showed the continuous slide of the Philippines in world competitiveness rankings, in spite of what it has done in trade liberalization.

The country dropped to 66th place in the growth competitiveness index from 63rd place last year. The index measured the capability for economic growth of 102 countries. The Philippines also fell to the 64th slot from 61st of 95 countries in the business competitiveness index, which measured the over-all investment climate in the country.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, although the US gained a 7.2% economic growth this 3rd quarter of last year<sup>25</sup>, the US has been itself grappling with recession. In recent years the US has increased state intervention in its own economy to support ailing industries "as a matter of national security." To date, the US government in order to protect American steel producers, agriculture and airlines sector has poured hundred of billions worth of subsidies. At the same time, however, it has exhorted other countries to further open up their markets for American goods and investments.<sup>26</sup>



## **Globalization and the War on Terror: Two Ends of a Manacle**

Pres. Bush, in his opening remarks to the National Security Strategy of the USA in Sept. 20, 2002 declared, "The United States will use this moment of opportunity (i.e. the war on terrorism) to bring democracy, development of free market and free trade to every corner of the world."<sup>27</sup>

Ninan Koshy observed, "A close reading of the Bush administration's plan in the document for corporate world economic dominance reveals an audacious agenda. The implication of the document is clear: There is an integral relation between American style free-market economies and American security in the world. Globalization and imperial security go together. Global capitalism, enforced militarily if needed, is the bulwark against terrorism."<sup>28</sup>

But as noted by Koshy, "If free trade is integral to imperial security, it is a threat to people's security." He then quotes the New York Times editorial on July 21, 2003 about the war on terrors' "second front" – the Philippines:

"The beleaguered Philippine Island of Mindanao is crawling with Communist and Islamic fundamentalist guerillas, and links between Al Qaeda and local insurgents have made the island a battlefield in Pres. Bush War on Terrorism. But to farmers in Mindanao, home to more than 2/3 of the Philippines' corn production, subsidized US exports looms large as any other threat. Since Philippines joined the WTO eight years ago, American corn growers have received an astonishing \$34.5 billion taxpayers' support.

This helps explain how America is able to export -- the less polite word would be to dump-- corn at only 2/3 of its cost of production. The resentment is intense. Farmers' despair, local farmers say, fuels the Marxist New People's Army insurgency.

## **Partnership Response: Turning the Enslaving Manacles into Solid Ties of Solidarity**

What can we do together?' - that is a question we must grapple with, as we weave the vision and shape of a just and sustainable society and a global community.

In a situation and context where any view against the US policies seemed to be demonized as evil and idolatrous, what can we do raise a prophetic voice? Can the very chains that enslave the world today be the very ties that can link us in solidarity-be it as churches, as partners in mission, as servant people, or as concerned citizens of the world- to a world reeling from the impact of globalization and the war of terror?

Can we join hands together in saying "NO" to the empire? Jim Wallis' article "The Dangerous Religion of George W. Bush" ends with some challenges and questions that may be a fitting conclusion to this reflection:

"Christians should always live uneasily with empire, which constantly threatens to become idolatrous and substitute secular purposes for God's. As we reflect on our response to the American empire and what it stands for, a reflection on the early church and empire is instructive . . . As with the early church, our response to an empire holding 'absolute sway' against which 'no one would dare to go to war' is the ancient confession of 'Jesus is Lord'. And to live in the promise that empires do not last, that the Word of God will ultimately survive the Pax Americana as it did the Pax Romana.

"In the meantime, American Christians will have to make some difficult choices. Will we stand in solidarity with the worldwide church -- the international body of Christ -- or with our own government? . . . Once there was Rome, now there is no more Rome. Once there were

barbarians; now there are many barbarians who are the Saddams of this world. And then there were the Christians who were not loyal to Rome, but to the Kingdom of God. To whom will the Christians be loyal today?"<sup>30</sup>

The last question can very well be addressed to all of us: "To whom will we, whether we be Filipinos or Japanese, be loyal today?"

### **Endnotes**

1. Duane Shank, "The Project for a New American Empire" Sojourners Magazine, Sept - Oct 2003 as reprinted in Kilosbayan Sept-out 2003, p. 22
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. "Dissent is coming from all quarters - even in Bush's own church," The Observer Oct 20, 2002 as sent out to no2|AlloutWar@yahoogroups.com., p. 2. (Note: The Kansas City Star ran a long account of voices of opposition from people of faith, quoting (Jim) Winkler at length, saying, "United Methodists have a particular duty to speak out against an unprovoked attack. It is inconceivable that Jesus Christ would support this proposed attack."]
5. Jim Wallis "The Dangerous Religion of George W. Bush " Sojourners Magazine Sept-Oct 2003 as reprinted in Kilosbayan, Sept-out 2003, p. 19 9 Shank, p. 23
6. Dissent, p.2
7. Wallis, p.19
8. Ibid.
9. Shank, p.23
10. Congressman Satur C. Ocampo, "The Current Global Crisis and Prospects for Peace," input for the National Peace Conference, Sept 12, 2003, p. 4
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., pp. 4-5 ("To date, 32 members of Bayan Muna at the grassroots level have been killed in the course of their work. Ten human rights workers of KARAPATAN have also been killed under the GMA administration alone

13. Ibid., p. 2
14. UNDP Human Development Index of 1997
15. Ocampo, p.2
16. Ernesto M. Ordoñez, "The Truth About Trade Liberalization," Philippine Daily Inquirer, Oct 31, 2003
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Dr. Robinson Montalba, "The Philippines: A Society in Perennial Crisis," a paper delivered at the National Peace Conference, Sept 12, 2003, pp. 3-4
22. Ibid., p.6
23. Ibid., p. 4
24. Ma. Theresa Torres, "GMA blasts report on RP competitiveness," Manila Times, Nov In 2003, p. A4
25. US economy bolts to 19-year year high, global effects awaited, AFP as reported in Manila Times, Nov 1, 2003, p. 83 26
26. Ocampo, pp. 2-3
27. Ninan Koshy, "Current Asian Geopolitics In the Context of War on Terror"
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Wallis, p. 21