

MUSLIM FILIPINOS: 1970-1972*

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As the 1970's began the prospects for Muslim Filipinos looked bright from one point of view. In a way it seemed as though the Muslims of the South were coming into their own and were being accepted as a vital part of national life and were beginning to make a contribution for the common good. Evidence for this could be seen in the selection for the Muslim Filipino as the "Man of the Year" by the *Free Press*. The accompanying article pointed to outstanding young Muslim leaders in the field of politics, education, and art. In addition to this a Muslim professor was named as one of the "Ten Outstanding Young Men" of the year. Another Muslim was elected by the voters as one of eight new senators. A young Muslim mayor of Marawi City was chosen "Mayor of the Year." A Muslim scholar was named "Scholar of the Year." A Muslim author introduced the first history of the *The Philippine Muslims* written by a Muslim Filipino. A Muslim was chosen as the "first Muslim President" of Mindanao State University.

There were other signs that Muslim Filipinos were beginning to wake up and trying to "catch up" with the rest of the Philippines in the fields of education, agriculture, economics, politics and religious renewal. These and many other factors led to the hope that the 1970's would be the period when all Muslim Filipinos assumed full rights and duties as citizens of the Republic of the Philippines and would make positive contributions to the local, national, and international community.

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By the close of 1972 this hope had largely turned to despair on the part of Muslims, Christians, and the government, all of whom wonder if the Muslim Filipino could ever be fully integrated into the national life or whether they would remain to be a national problem (previously known as the "Moro Problem" and is today more often called the "Muslim Problem").

Previous writers have written in detail about this problem. In recent years there have been extensive studies, reports, and articles about Muslim Filipinos by both Filipino and foreigner scholars. If these are carefully studied and the findings made more widely known, the Muslim problem can be better understood. It is only by a sympathetic attempt at full understanding that workable solutions can be formulated. There are seemingly few Muslims or Christians who have taken the time and trouble necessary to understand the Muslim Filipino. Yet there are adequate materials available for those who really want to understand and help to find solutions.

This present contribution will be an attempt to understand the present situation for Muslim Filipinos from the beginning of 1970 until the end of 1972. It is based on reports published in Manila newspapers during this period and personal knowledge acquired from studying and living with Muslim Filipinos for more than ten years. It is obviously written from an alien, Christian missionary point of view with an honest effort to sympathetically understand the Muslim Filipino in order to help him realize his full potential. This is an attempt to convey in an orderly manner what has been happening to the Muslim Filipino in the first three years of the 70's. It portrays a pessimistic situation because it deals mainly with newsworthy events which tend to accentuate the negative. It is hoped that such an approach can help all readers to see the complexity of the problem and can stimulate positive response and action toward a solution. A cancer must first be exposed before steps can be taken to find a cure. This is an effort to expose a cancer in the southern part of the Philippines. Is there a cure? Or is it a hopeless case of terminal cancer?

Definition of the Muslim Problem

Although the discussion of the "Muslim Problem" has received adequate attention in books, articles and papers, we frequently need to review what various writers have said about the problem. The

Congressional Report on the "Moro Problem" in 1954 stated the problem briefly as follows:

As an individual the Moslem refuses to concede that he is a part of the entire Filipino citizenry. He identifies himself by his religion.¹

In other words, at the time this report was made most Muslims in the Philippines did not consider themselves "Filipinos." They preferred to call themselves "Muslims" or Maranao, Tausog, Maguindanaon, etc. Today most educated Muslims do refer to themselves as Muslim Filipinos, but those living in rural areas with little or no formal education will usually identify themselves by tribe or religious group. In scholarly, academic circles both Muslims and Christians use the term "Moro" in the positive sense of "Muslim Filipino," but popular usage considers this a derogatory term among both groups.

In answer to the question, "What is the Muslim Problem?" a recent article by Christian Filipino states:

. . . It is the problem of not being able to develop as progressively as the Christian. It is the problem of basic necessities; of not fully submitting to even the very minor workings of government such as taxation. It is the problem of improper education; of Muslim leaders holding political power and yet denying positive development programs for their fellow-Muslims. It is the problem of political struggles between the majority of Christian leaders who have no hold over their voting population and the Muslim minority having absolute hold over their own; of Muslim owning too many guns and Christians owning too many properties . . . It is the historical and psychological problem assuming the ideology of a movement to be independent of the Philippines; of the government neglecting peace and order, community development, road construction. **It is primarily the problem of not understanding the Muslim.**²

In other words, it is a historical, sociological, economic, political, demographic, educational, religious problem of mammoth proportions. It all boils down to a problem of understanding or, rather, the lack of understanding. This implies and includes an underlying prejudice which requires a basic, radical change of attitude on the part of both parties if there is to be any hope for a permanent

solution.

Prospects for such a change of attitude are much brighter on the part of the Muslim Filipino than the Christian Filipino. A study done among Muslims and Christians in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte shows that Muslims are much more ready and open to accept and work with Christians than vice-versa.³ Another and more recent survey among Christian college students confirms that much has to be done to change the prevailing attitude toward the Muslim Filipino. This survey was conducted in Manila, Dumaguete and Cotabato with the basic hypothesis that "College students would show more acceptance and tolerance toward the Muslims than the non-college student."⁴

The results revealed that "*the dominant reaction was rejection.*" Additional findings indicated no significant difference among college and non-college students and also among those in Cotabato compared to those in Manila and Dumaguete. This means, that on the basis of this survey, the average Christian Filipino rejects the average Muslim Filipino. Is this a "Muslim Problem" or a "Christian Problem"?

The surveyors further state:

Christian prejudice toward Muslims in the Philippines is not a new phenomenon. It is one of the legacies of more than three hundred years of Muslim-Christian hostility perpetuated under the Spanish colonial rule and a half century of American public policy wavering between separatism and integration. The Muslim-Christian hostility is perpetuated to this day by an ignorant and biased media aided by some members of the educated elite. There is ample evidence that Christians today continue to measure out of their fertile imagination an image of the Filipino Muslims as "brutal," "treacherous," "bandits," and "pirates." In Luzon and the Visayas, the word "Moro" (with all its derogatory implications) is a mother's household weapon of social control for misbehaving children.⁵

The survey also points out the failure of formal education to erase this negative image of Muslim Filipinos and suggests that all levels of educational institutions could be a real help to change Christian students from rejection to acceptance of Muslim Filipinos. This could also be the task of the churches, mass media and civic organizations.

A Muslim scholar has stated succinctly: "The real problem of

the Muslims in this country is not economic, political or social, but the Muslim leadership itself.”⁶ This oversimplification emphasizes another aspect of the problem which greatly needs emphasis, but it does not relieve the Christian Filipino of his share of the problem and responsibility to work with other Christians and Muslims of good will in seeking a solution.

Another recent report by a Muslim senator identifies another facet:

The North Cotabato Problem is a microcosm of the so-called Moro problem which is a failure of the national government to draw, into the mainstream of our national life, the Muslims and other indigenous minorities. It implies a gap in understanding as well a disparity in standards of living between Muslims and Christians in our country.⁷

This lays the blame for the Moro problem on the government and its agencies, past and present, to provide a solution. It emphasizes neglect, apathy, and even antipathy on the part of officials which prevent a sympathetic understanding and realistic policies toward the minority groups of the Philippines. However, pointing the finger at the government can be an easy escape route for both Muslim and Christian. What everyone, Muslim and Christian, needs to recognize is his own contribution to the problem so that he is prepared to contribute to finding a solution.

With the above materials as background we are now prepared to take a look at the contemporary situation for Muslim Filipinos in the 1970's.

The Contemporary Situation

A study of the entire period of the history of Muslim Filipinos is necessary for understanding the contemporary situation, but that is not the purpose of this study. Our purpose here is to trace only the immediate background before the beginning of 1970 which is crucial for understanding the present. It is also well to keep in mind that since the close of World War II large numbers of Christian Filipinos poured into Mindanao from the Luzon and the Visayas. Many of these newcomers settled in the traditional Maguindanao Muslim areas of Cotabato province, “the rice bowl of Mindanao.” This caused a change in the balance of Muslims and Christians and

by 1970, the Maguindanaon found themselves a minority in their own areas.

May 1, 1968, marks the beginning of a radical change in relationships between Muslim and Christian in Mindanao. It was on this date that former Cotabato Governor Datu Udtog Matalam signed a "Manifesto" in Pagalungan, Cotabato which called for the establishment of an Islamic state which would include all Muslim areas of the southern Philippines and would be known as the "Republic of Mindanao and Sulu."

This was the beginning of the "Muslim Independence Movement" which was later changed to "Mindanao Independence Movement" known by the acronym, MIM. The target date announced for secession from the Republic of the Philippines and inauguration of the Republic of Mindanao and Sulu was July 4, 1969.

The MIM was publicized in the national and international press. Copies of the Manifesto were widely disseminated among political and Muslim leaders within and without the Philippines. The measurable response on the part of most Muslim Filipinos was disinterest. It was thought to be the ploy of a disgruntled Muslim politician who had lost his re-election bid to a fellow Muslim.

However, the response on the part of Christians in Cotabato was apprehension and fear. Already in June, 1968, reports began to be published that Christians were fleeing from North Cotabato because of the fear of a Muslim uprising. These reports of evacuations continued for the next few months. Other Christians took a different course of action. They had become firmly established in productive farms and business in Cotabato and were not ready to give up their hard earned gains without a fight. They resolved that they would stay. After all, they were now in the majority in many municipalities and by joining together they would defend themselves against Muslim attempts to drive them out. Although there were sporadic, small scale raids and retaliations in this period, there was no large scale conflict. Tensions and fears increased among both groups as 1969 drew to a close.

1970 — "Mindanao Shooting War" Begins

There was a renewal of reports about the Muslim Secession Movement in the early months of 1970. Muslim youth were said to be receiving "months of rigid training" in the Middle East and nearby

Muslim countries in preparation for ensuing battles with Philippine government forces. The leaders of MIM said they had sufficient means to obtain their objectives and were just waiting for the supreme leaders. The reasons given for MIM at this time were government apathy, fraud and tension at the 1969 polls and the "Jabidah" massacre at Corregidor when a special Muslim guerilla unit was reported wiped out by soldiers of the AFP. The MIM at this stage represented a desperate minority of Muslim Filipinos who felt the only solution was secession from the Philippines.

March 22, 1970, is indicated as the date of the beginning of the "shooting war" in Mindanao. At that time six people were reported killed and two others wounded at Upi, South Cotabato. This introduced the era of "Toothpick" as the leader of the Tiruray tribal army fighting against Muslim terrorism and exploitation.

Not long afterwards the shooting spread from Upi to the province of North Cotabato where 18 of 34 municipalities were in various stages of conflict between Christians and Muslims. The trouble in North Cotabato was not directly related to the trouble in Upi. It was a similar explosion of tension and forces that had been seething for years because of the threats of the MIM, land disputes and political power struggles.

It was at that time that the word "*Ilaga*" was introduced into the vocabulary of Muslim and Christians in Mindanao. Apparently, the *Ilagas* started as community self-defense units to protect the Christian, especially the Ilongo settlers. As time went on, the *Ilagas* developed into goons with guns and became part of the criminal, lawless element in Mindanao.

These outbreaks of fighting in Cotabato resulted in the closing of schools in many areas and mass evacuations of innocent victims. By the end of 1970 more than 30,000 Muslims and Christians have left their homes and farms, according to the estimates of the Social Welfare Administration. This caused a complete disruption of the economy in the entire Cotabato area.

1971 – From Cotabato to Lanao

In the first part of 1971 news from Cotabato continued to include reports of sporadic fights between Muslims and Christians. In June, 1971, headlines screamed 70 MUSLIMS MASSACRED. This took place on June 19, 1971 in a mosque at Barrio Manili, Carmen,

North Cotabato. It described how men, women and children were killed by *Ilagas* while waiting there for a peace conference between Muslims and Christians. The account described how the *Ilagas* had been terrorizing other towns in the area which were supposedly under PC control. Just a short time before this incident, a Muslim senator in a privileged speech had warned about the danger of a "holy war" breaking out between Christians and Muslims in Cotabato. More government forces were sent in the area to try to produce an enforced peace. The Muslims accused the government forces of being allies of the *Ilagas*. The Muslim forces came to be known as the "Blackshirts" which were believed to be the military arm of the MIM. By the middle of July, Cotabato was said to be "stabilized." The conflict spread to Wao in Lanao del Sur on the North Cotabato-Bukidnon boundary on July 4, 1971, when a grenade exploded inside a mosque. Over 60 Muslim homes were said to have been burned by *Ilagas*. Thousand of Maranao Muslims evacuated over the mountain to the Lake Lanao area. The Muslims of Lanao del Sur threatened to mobilize their forces for the revenge of Wao. Reports of Christians in Wao being ambushed and Christian houses burned soon followed.

By the later part of July 1971 more and more reports of violence, killings and ambushes began to appear from Lanao del Norte. Thus by the end of July, South and North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte were mentioned in dispatches as the battleground for every increasing skirmishes in the "Mindanao War." There seemed to be no over-all strategy behind the fighting, but rather spontaneous outbreaks in different areas at different times where large Muslim and Christian populations co-existed. In Lanao del Norte the Christians had a majority of around 70% of the total population. Despite this fact, the political leader of Lanao del Norte was a Muslim serving as Congressman. However, during the 1970 election for the Constitutional Convention delegates, there was reported to be a split between the Congressman and the governor which later developed into a political battle that divided Muslims against Christians. In this case, the Muslim armed groups were known as "Barracudas."

The Battle of Buldon

Accounts from the Manila and international press about Mindanao in early August 1971 indicated that the problem in North

Cotabato was not "stabilized." At this time conflict broke out in the northwestern corner of the province at the town of Buldon. The papers pictured the battle taking place between the Black-shirts and the PC troops. It was also at this time that local and foreign Muslim leaders began the cry of "Genocide!" claiming that government forces planned to annihilate Muslim Filipinos.

As more and more military units approached Buldon with the avowed goal of blasting the Muslim Blackshirts from their refuge, a public outcry from Muslims and Christian leaders pleaded for negotiations instead of killing. A government team including a Muslim senator and the Secretary of National Defense were dispatched to Buldon to arrange a cease-fire. The Mayor of Buldon first sent his son to Malacanang and then he himself followed in a few days to forge a "peace pact" with the President in the later part of August. This resulted in the surrender of a few unlicensed weapons and the Mayor of Buldon was promised ₱ 75,000 for rehabilitation of the town. Thus Buldon faded from the national scene.

Ampatuan, North Cotabato next appeared in the headlines as the site of an *Ilaga* attack on August 20. The tension soon subsided and new reports of violence in Lanao del Norte and Bukidnon were given front page attention. Some writers claimed that the conflict in Cotabato was "far from over" and that it would take years to settle the problem.

Lanao del Norte in the Spotlight

In September 1971 the focus definitely switched to Lanao del Norte where escalation of hostilities between Barracudas and *Ilagas* led to large evacuation of both Muslims and Christians in the towns on the northern coastline. The Christians went to Iligan and Ozamis where they created a major problem. Some went to Cagayan de Oro, Dumaguete and other "safe" areas. Most of the Muslims evacuated toward the Lake Lanao area. The total number of evacuees from these towns was estimated to be around 50,000. The actual number could have been much larger. Together with evacuees from Cotabato and Bukidnon, more than 100,000 people were displaced from their homes during this time.

At the first part of September, the President called the leaders of the warring factions to a meeting at Malacanang. The main contenders were described as the congressman versus the governor of

Lanao del Norte. Charges were heard that Muslim officers were collaborating with the Barracudas and countercharges stated that Christian soldiers were allied with the *Ilagas*. Despite efforts of the President to forge a lasting "peace pact," the conflict increased in intensity. The forthcoming November was an election month, and politics was a major factor in all decisions.

At the end of September, the President made a personal visit to the area in a further effort to stop the shooting war. The result was the creation of a new task to restore peace and order and to form friendships between Muslims and Christians. An effort was made to have the incumbent Christian governor and the incumbent Muslim vice-governor to both withdraw from running against each other in the gubernatorial race and make way for a "neutral common candidate." A period of "uneasy peace" followed as the President's visit was called successful.

By October 1971 clashes between *Ilagas* and Blackshirts in Cotabato regained space in Manila headlines, but Lanao del Norte continued to command equal space and get even more than equal space by the middle of October. The incumbent governor did not withdraw from the race and this meant a renewal of political rivalries with the apparent strategy of trying to pre-determine the outcome with bullets instead of ballots. The struggle continued to pit Muslim against Christian.

The military presence continued to increase as tensions mounted and as election day grew closer. A similar situation existed in North Cotabato where an ex-PC Commander, a Christian, was running against the incumbent Muslim governor.

International implications became obvious as Libya, Malaysia, and Kuwait denounced the Philippine government for a campaign of "genocide" or the "slaughtering" of Muslim Filipinos. They requested the UN to intervene. Libya offered to provide relief for Muslim Filipinos. The Philippines vigorously denied all accusations by Muslim countries.

A crisis occurred on October 26 when newspapers reported that 17 of a PC 22 - man patrol were killed by Muslim Barracudas in an ambush in Magsaysay, Lanao del Norte. The next day's headlines cried, "66 MUSLIMS KILLED IN BATTLE," also at Magsaysay. As the military made elaborate plans for "search and destroy" missions in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, the President called a meeting of Lanao political, military, civic and religious leaders at

Malacanang on October 30. At this meeting it was decided to continue military operations in Lanao del Norte to restore peace and order for the forthcoming elections. The President cancelled orders to send military units into Lanao del Sur which had seen no recent conflict. He gave orders to hunt down all lawless elements and to show no partiality to *Ilagas* or Barracudas. He appointed a liaison committee of respected local leaders to work with the military in seeking a lasting peace in Lanao.

"The Tacub Massacre"

The first part of November 1971 began with an enforced peace prevailing in Lanao and Cotabato. In several towns many voters were still absent on election day, November 8, but elections were held with the exceptions of a few towns in Lanao. Special elections were scheduled in these towns for November 22, and military field operations were halted to encourage voters to return by this date.

Cotabato Norte had elected a Christian governor for the first time and most of the towns elected Christian mayors. The incumbent Christian governor in Lanao del Norte was re-elected. The balance of political power in these two provinces thus swung to the Christians.

At stake in the special elections, besides local officials, were the last few slots in the national senatorial slate. So a full scale campaign was held to woo the voters. "Barracudas" and "Blackshirts" were both reported in force in the Malabang area where a special election pitted Muslim against Muslim.

Despite careful efforts of the Commission on Elections to insure a peaceful election in Lanao, an election day tragedy of major proportions occurred, which set off a new wave of panic, evacuation and hostilities. A group of apparently unarmed Muslims returning in several trucks from the special election in Magsaysay, were fired upon by government troops in Barrio Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte. This tragedy occurred after dark and a full, accurate version of what actually happened at Tacub remains in the dark. The final result indicates that at least 40 Muslims were killed, with no fatality on the government side. The unarmed Muslims were said to have been shot by the soldiers and then mutilated by Christian civilian bystanders. The press labelled this as the "Tacub Massacre."

This incident shocked the entire nation and won a new measure of sympathy for the Muslims from Christian Filipinos. It caused many

Christians in Lanao del Norte who had just returned to their homes to flee in fear of retaliation. An investigation by the NBI implicated 21 army men, including three officers whom the President ordered brought to trial before civilian courts. Responsible Muslim leaders counselled patience to give time for the law to take its course. At the end of November, the 21 soldiers plus three civilians, including one Christian mayor, were named respondents in a complaint of multiple homicide before the Provincial Fiscal of Lanao del Norte. There the case rested until 1972.

In the beginning of December 1971 a partial peace came to Mindanao. There were still reports of isolated incidents between Muslims and Christians but none of major battles or attacks. A quiet fear prevailed in Lanao and Cotabato — a fear that a major explosion would soon disturb the uneasy lull. In Lanao del Norte many Christian residents again went back to their homes, but Muslims were afraid to follow suit. Reports continued to circulate that the *Ilagas* were in control of the areas along the northern coastlines. The Barracudas and the Blackshirt were rumored to be conducting training camps in Lanao del Sur and Cotabato. Threats were heard of an attack on Iligan City.

A Muslim senator introduced a bill to set aside certain public lands for Muslims and minority groups in Mindanao. He explained that the bill was not designed to segregate Muslims from Christians, but to limit Christian migration to Mindanao and to insure the Muslim enough land for their needs and thus avoid future land disputes.

The Constitutional Convention proposed to help solve the Muslim Problem through legislation guaranteeing equal rights for both Muslims and Christians. Various other agencies and individuals offered solutions to the problem. "Security hamlets" were suggested to establish "safe" areas for farming and living. Medical relief units were mobilized by church and government agencies to assist refugees, especially in Iligan and Cotabato.

As 1971 drew to a close the Christmas spirit of "Peace on Earth" prevailed in Mindanao. It had been a bloody, tragic year in the Mindanao War — with no permanent solution in sight. The war had pitted Filipino against Filipino. There are no exact figures as to the number of casualties. One source reports over 600 killed in Cotabato alone. "Official" estimates reveal over 800 dead in Mindanao. The actual number is probably well over 1,000 since many

incidents were not reported. The number of wounded would then be several thousands. The refugees were more than 100,000. One source reported more than one million!

No matter how one looked at the figures, the cost in human suffering was beyond computing. The losses of homes, the destruction of mosques, the cost of weapons, ammunitions and manpower reached a staggering total. The delays in development are causes for remorse. The trouble was caused by a small minority of the population, but the suffering and the loss was staggering to every man, woman and child in Mindanao. Nobody won. Who lost the most? Muslims or Christians? What did the New Year hold for both groups?

1972 — The Conflict Spreads

January 1972 started with relative peace and Mindanao. It was a cause for rejoicing when the daily paper contained no news from Mindanao. In this case, "No news is good news." As a rule only bad news was reported in Muslim-Christian relationships. The slow, painful, slight progress in improved relationships was not newsworthy. Yet, this was taking place on a small scale in Cotabato and Lanao between Muslims and Christians of good will.

In the middle of January, eight Muslim ambassadors were invited to visit the Philippines. After they visited various Muslim areas, they reported that they were "now convinced that there is no genocide against Filipino Muslims." These ambassadors represented the United Arab Republic (Egypt), Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. It is significant that Libya was not represented.

Monday, January 24, was a historic day for Muslim Filipinos, for it was the first time that a Muslim delivered the invocation at the opening joint session of Congress. This was welcome recognition by both Muslims and Christians.

February of 1972 continued to be relatively calm in Mindanao. Reports of isolated incidents, ambushes and plots continued to come from Cotabato and Lanao. There were no major outbreaks which demanded a massive response by the AFP. Troops continued to attempt to preserve the peace in troubled areas. Christian residents continued to return to their homes in Cotabato and Lanao, but Muslim residents, with few exceptions, were unable to return to their former homes in either area.

Zamboanga del Sur was mentioned as a new area of activity by the *Ilagas*. This brought apprehension to both Christians and Muslim residents who considered the *Ilagas* as murdering criminals.

The unsettled peace continued into March and April as new solutions were proposed to settle the Mindanao problem. The Muslim-Christian Brotherhood of Marawi, the Concerned Citizens of Iligan, and other groups and individuals in Cotabato and Sulu were seeking to understand and explore new ways in which Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos could live and work together for the common good.

The "Tacub Massacre" was in the headline once more in March 19, 1972, reporting that charges were filed against 16 soldiers, while the other soldiers and civilians were not charged for lack of evidence. This is the last report on that case as this material is being written at the close of 1972.

The month of May 1972 brought reports of new fighting in the new area of Balabagan in the southeastern corner of Lanao del Sur. This is the second mention of fighting in Lanao del Sur. The first was Wao, in July, 1971. Both Balabagan and Wao are on the fringes of the province. The central, heavily-populated area around Lake Lanao had been spared from actual conflict. The new fighting occurred in an area where there is a mixed Muslim-Christian population. It was said to be sparked by a feud between local politicians and a logging company. Around 5,000 people, mostly Christian, evacuated the area until peace was restored several months later.

Zamboanga del Sur was the scene of new conflicts and became, for a while, the main "hot spot" in the Mindanao War. The evacuations of both Muslims and Christians from this area continued.

Sulu came into the picture for the first time when the acting governor issued a warning that the Tausog Muslims there were well prepared to deal with the *Ilagas* who were rumored to be preparing for an attack on Sulu. It was also revealed that Muslim "training camps" were in operation in Sulu, utilizing "Malay speaking" foreign instructors.

A "feud" between Iligan City and Marawi City occurred in May. This led to an escalation of fears and tensions in both areas. At one stage travel between the two cities was cut off at military check-points. Some Christian families evacuated from Marawi and Maranao Muslim families left Iligan. Rumors were rampant concerning an *Iloga* attack in Marawi.

In the month of weddings, the "Muslim Wedding of the Century" in Marawi received favorable publicity in the national and international press. This provided a welcome breathing spell to think of love instead of war for a few days.

Reports of further *Iloga* attacks in Zamboanga del Sur produced a threat from Sulu that 800 Taosug warriors were set to invade Zamboanga in retaliation. This caused additional unrest and evacuation. Muslims went to Sulu and Lanao, and Christians to Lanao del Norte and other "safe" areas.

A reporter from a Manila newspaper interviewed the *Iloga* leader, known as Kumander X, in Cotabato in a secret meeting. He was reported to be a Boholano who had organized the *Ilogas* as a vigilance group against Muslim terrorists. He said that the many groups calling themselves *Ilogas* had no right to do so and were only common outlaws.

Early July, 1972, brought another group of foreign Muslim emissaries to the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. The delegations was composed of representatives from Libya and the UAR. During their inspection tour, Muslim Barracudas raided areas in Zamboanga del Norte. This helped to weaken the charge of genocide.

At the end of their four-day tour, the Arab envoys said that they fear that the Mindanao conflict has become a "religious war" in the minds of Muslim Filipinos. When asked to comment on this, one of the Libyan representatives responded:

... personally we don't believe there is such a thing. But what is important is not what educated people believe in. What matters is what Muslims in Mindanao think. They think their war against the Christians is a religious one.

The Egyptian and Libyan officials also announced that they found no evidence of "a state genocidal campaign."

By the end of the month of July good news came from Zamboanga del Sur in the form of report that Muslims and *Ilogas* there had agreed on terms for a peace conference. A peaceful period seemed to be long overdue in Mindanao.

The months of August and September, 1972 were unusually quiet in both Mindanao and Sulu. There were persistent reports and rumors about Muslim training camps in Lanao del Sur and Sulu. No major raids or attacks were reported by the time Martial Law was

implemented on September 21, 1972.

Martial Law produced an improved peace and order situation throughout the entire country, including the areas of previous tensions and conflict in Mindanao. There were some rumors about fighting in North Cotabato between Muslims and government troops. This was confirmed by brief accounts in the news, but there was no indication about numbers involved, or how serious these skirmishes were.

Except for one outlaw band on the rampage in Lanao del Sur, the situation in both Lanaos was encouraging up through the middle of October 1972. Travel between Marawi and Iligan had returned to normal. Fears and tensions in the area began to subside.

The Marawi uprising of October 21-22, 1972 came as a shock and surprise to everyone. On Saturday morning, fanatical, radical, rebel Muslim forces made a simultaneous attack on the PC headquarters at Camp Amai Pakpak (formerly Camp Keithley), at Mindanao State University, and the Pantar bridge at the boundary between the two Lanao provinces.

The rebels succeeded in gaining control of the University and the PBS radio station on the campus. They broadcast inflammatory propaganda to the Muslim Maranaos encouraging them to support them. They contended that since the arrival of the Spanish, the government in the Philippines had always been against the Muslims. Therefore they claimed it was necessary to overthrow the government so that there would be no restrictions in the practice of Islam. They called themselves the "Mindanao Revolutionary Council for Independence." Their plea fell on deaf ears; the masses did not support them.

Rebel forces held the bridge at Pantar for a short time until government troops arrived from Iligan. They temporarily succeeded in blocking the bridge by burning a Coca-Cola truck in the middle of the bridge. The truck was cleared by Saturday afternoon, and the first government reinforcements were able to reach the Marawi Camp by 5:00 p.m.

The original rebel attack on the Camp had failed on Saturday morning. On Saturday night the rebels made a fanatical, suicidal attack on the Camp running in wildly while shouting, "Allahu Akbar!" (God is the greatest!). The heaviest part of the attack came from 2:30 a.m. until 6:30 on Sunday morning. They lost over 40 young Maranaos in the attack, while the government troops suffered

no casualties.

On Sunday morning government troops easily gained control of the University with no bloodshed. The students and faculty were unharmed, as was the Japanese ambassador who had been visiting the campus when the attack occurred.

Also on Sunday morning, a group of around 100 desperate rebels entered the poblacion of Marawi like a wild, unruly mob. They looted Christian homes and took several Christian hostages who were later killed. By Sunday afternoon all of Marawi City was back under government control and the Marawi uprising was over.

The aftermath of the uprising was a tragic scene of confusion and panic. Most of the Christian population evacuated to Iligan as soon as possible. Many Maranaos went to the homes of relatives and friends in various towns around the lake. Some took their Christian friends with them to escape the rebel madmen. The students and faculty at MSU all left the campus as soon as they could find transportation. Many Christians may never return to Marawi or Lanao del Sur again.

Who were these rebels? Reports indicate that they were composed of seven different groups of radical, fanatical elements. Their numbers were estimated to be from 500 to 1,000 mostly teen-age, uneducated Maranaos with a few educated leaders.

Why did this happen? There is no simple answer. It helps some to understand the Maranao political situation. The events of the 1970's in Mindanao also throw some light on the matter. The reports of training camps, smuggled arms, financial help from sympathetic foreign Muslims can help find the answer. The October 25 deadline for turning in unlicensed weapons was a factor in the timing.

What was the result of the uprising? It made Marawi City like a "ghost town" and the University a "ghost university." By late December, Marawi City was beginning to come back to life. Most of the schools and businesses were not yet back in full operation. MSU planned to begin classes again on January 8, 1973. It is uncertain how many of the students will return.

Perhaps the worst result is that this attack has restored in the minds of many Christian Filipinos the worst imaginable form of the "moro image" as a wild fanatical *juramentado* who delights in chopping hands off of Christians and looting Christian homes. "You can never trust a Moro." This common saying of many Christian Filipinos has now been confirmed by what happened in Marawi on

October 21-22. It does not matter that only a small fraction of the Maranao people took part in this uprising, or that the overwhelming majority of Maranaos deplore what happened even more than the Christian Filipinos. The "Moro image" has been revived by the Marawi uprising. This image will take a long time to die. Maybe several generations? Maybe never?

The uprising caused a serious economic setback to the whole province. Even worse, it has been a real setback in Christian-Muslim relationships and understanding. The biggest losers and those who will suffer the most are the Muslim Filipinos, especially the Maranaos.

One week after the Marawi uprising, Muslim rebels unsuccessfully attacked a PC outpost at Parang, Cotabato near the border of Lanao del Sur. This was probably composed of some of the same group which attacked Marawi.

As the year of 1972 draws to a close, reports of large scale fighting in Sulu between Tausog "outlaw" bands and government troops are beginning to filter through. This means that even under Martial Law, the "Muslim Problem" continued to occupy the attention of the AFP in the three major groups of Muslim Filipinos: the Maguindanaon, Maranao and Tausog. Although the lawless groups represent only a small portion of the entire Muslim population, it causes a major problem for both Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos to which there is no easy solution.

This has been an attempt to portray the major events involving Muslim Filipinos in the early 1970's in a chronological, orderly, fashion. An attempt will now be made to conclude with what this means for the "Muslim Problem."

Conclusion

The first three years of the 1970's seem to have only emphasized and increased the immensity of the "Muslim Problem." It appears to be a hopeless situation to which there is no workable solution. Many solutions have been offered in writing. This is the easy part. The impossibility seems to be in putting the solution in action.

One Muslim writer offers "orchestration" as an alternate solution to integration. This would mean that Muslim Filipinos and Christian Filipinos learn to understand one another, accept one another and recognize each other's past and potential contribution

to the history, culture and life of the Philippine nation. This would also mean:

. . . the establishment of more schools, more roads, more hospitals and removal of the patronizing attitude of the Christian majority, the removal of the ultimate aim of converting the Muslims as the penultimate solution to the Muslim problem.⁸

“Orchestration” is defined as “the fusing together of desirable traits of the various ethnic groups in the Philippines for the purpose of forming one people, the Filipino people.”⁹ This is another way of saying that all Filipinos need to accept the concept of pluralism as a workable solution for different people with different culture, different religious faith, different language to work together in harmony for the national good. This is a high ideal. Is it attainable? Not as long as present attitudes persist. *A change of attitude is the first priority.* Talking to one another is a good place to begin. Dialogue is necessary. The same Muslim author asks:

What, for instance, have our Christian brothers done for more than three centuries to effect a common dialogue with the Muslims? Where is the moral force of Christianity, the force of love and goodwill to make the Muslim Filipinos feel that they also belong to this nation? Is Christianity good only to convert people and deny other people the love of Christ? These are questions over Christian brothers must answer. These answers will determine whether national cohesiveness is possible.¹⁰

There is a healthy beginning of a change of attitude on the part of some Christian Filipino leaders. This is the exception at this stage. If this change of attitude could filter down among the masses of Christian Filipinos, the problem would soon be solved. One example of a positive change of attitude is reflected in a “Statement on Mindanao Situation” issued by the Roman Catholic clergy and laity in Mindanao on November 20, 1971. After expressing the desire to seek a permanent solution to the problem, pleading with political leaders to change their attitudes and assuring the Muslims of a desire to live peacefully with them, the statement adds:

We direct our appeal in a very special way to the Christian leaders who are indifferent to the aspirations of the

Muslims. We appeal to them to develop a respect for the genuine values of our Muslim brothers, to be more appreciative of their customs and beliefs, to make common cause with all, irrespective of tribe or faith in the fight against injustice or oppression.¹¹

A Christian Filipino doctor who served the medical needs of the Maranaos for over thirty years said:

On account of geography Filipino Muslims and their brother Filipinos cannot exist apart from each other. And definitely, our nation cannot survive when deep in its land exists a foreign, hostile Muslim nation. We must learn to live together; we must learn how to respect each other; and we must accept in our minds now that we can only be one solid nation.¹²

The change of attitude must come from both Muslim and Christian. Why has the Muslim area been slow to change and to keep pace with the rest of the Philippines in education, agriculture, infrastructure, economics, etc.? Religious and cultural differences are merely convenient excuses. Government neglect is often cited as the primary cause. The ultimate answers may be found in the conservative, reactionary nature of "folk Islam" which controls the thought and lives of many rural Muslim Filipinos. These forces of conservatism resist all change as detrimental to Islam. They have not yet seen the advantage of rational change for the betterment of society. Some Muslim leaders have seen this. One Muslim scholar has explained to fellow Muslim Filipinos:

We have spoken so much of what the government should do for the Muslims but what is important is what we should do for ourselves. As Muslims we should first of all know more about Islam, the Message of the Quran and *Hadith*, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. We should develop the Islamic virtues of compassion, bravery, cleanliness, steadfastness, patience, straight talking and above all, love of learning. We should see to it that all forms of exploitation is absent in our national community. Actually there is exploitation in our country, not only of Muslims by Muslims and Christians, but also Christians by Christians. This is why it is quite difficult to integrate all elements in

the country into the nation since people will not commit themselves to a social situation where they are not the beneficiaries. I believe strongly that only when both Christians and Muslims are simultaneously integrated into the national community will there be a peaceful existence between both communities. The difficulty is the integration of the majority for the simple reason that the number is greater.¹³

The major emphasis of the above is on the Muslim responsibility for integration. The last sentence implies that the Christian Filipino has a greater responsibility because there are more of them. The *average* Muslim Filipino has much more contact with the Christian Filipino than the *average* Christian Filipino does with Muslim. A recent study reveals:

. . . while Muslims imbibe much of the Christians' non-religious values and practices, Christians have notably failed to increase their understanding and appreciation of Muslim social and cultural values which could be accepted by the majority and added to the common values of an emerging Filipino nation.¹⁴

This recent study by the Filipinas Foundation called *An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs* gives an objective appraisal of the "Muslim Problem" and concludes with recommendations for development in socio-cultural, political and economic fields.¹⁵ Many other reports and studies have been published which can help to understand the problem.

Who is to blame for the "Muslim Problem" and the unrest, conflict, antipathy, tensions, fear and despair that lurks in Mindanao and Sulu? The blame has been placed on various internal forces such as government apathy, the military, the President, the Christian Filipino, the Muslim Filipino, the political leaders, "datuism," Blackshirts, *Ilagas*, Barracudas, "landgrabbers." External influences have also been blamed such as the Communists, Indonesians, Malaysians, Libyans, Israelis, and others. The above indicates that everyone is to blame and no one is to blame. Only when each individual can honestly examine his own attitudes and motives toward his fellowmen can any hope for an answer be found. Only when each individual can recognize and admit his share of the blame can there be any hope for a solution, as each one tries to correct his own attitudes, motives

and actions. Only when each person recognizes that he is part of the problem can he hope to become part of the solution.

It has often been denied that the Muslim problem is a "religious problem." This can be understood correctly if it is meant that no major doctrinal differences were the cause of the problem. In another sense, the Muslim problem is a major religious problem, if it is meant that the Christian Filipino has failed to live according to his religious faith and the Muslim Filipino has done likewise.

The word "Muslim" means "one who submits his entire life to the will of God." The Christian prays, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Both Christian and Muslim then want to follow the will of God in their daily life. The problem comes in trying to determine what the will of God is and to live according to it. Are the Christian and Muslim ready to try to find the answer together? What is God's will for Mindanao and Sulu? Is it God's will that the hatred and killing continue? Is it God's will that poverty, disease and ignorance continue when the money spent for guns and bullets could erase these scourges of mankind? Is it God's will that Filipino continue to fight against Filipino? If the Mindanao problem is a religious problem, then every other solution has not just failed. It has not even been tried. God's will be done! Inshallah!

NOTES:

¹Domocao Alonto, "A Report of the Special Committee to Investigate the Moro Problem, especially with regard to the Peace and Order in Mindanao and Sulu," Third Congress, Republic of the Philippines, 1954.

²Rita G. Baltazar, "Islam and Succession," *Solidarity*, VI, 4 (April, 1971), 70.

³Hilarion Gomez, "A Christian Approach to Filipino Muslims," *Church and Community*, X, 4 (July-August, 1970), 13-22.

⁴Luis Q. Lacar and Chester L. Hunt, "Attitudes of Filipino Christian College Students Toward Filipino Muslims and Their Implications for National Integration," *Solidarity*, VII, 7 (July, 1972), 5-7.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶Alunan C. Glang, *Muslim Succession or Integration?* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1969), p. 26.

⁷ Mamintal A. Tamano, "Report on Deteriorating Peace and Order Conditions in Cotabato" (Filed by Committee on National Minorities, April, 1971), p. 22.

⁸ Glang, *op cit.*, p. 23

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13

¹¹ "Catholic Statement on Mindanao," **Manila Chronicle** (November 27, 1971), p. 11.

¹² Dr. Alfredo Q. Primero, "Some Cross Cultural Problems of the MSU," **Mindanao Scoop** (January 31, 1970), p. 1.

¹³ Cesar A. Majul, **The Historical Background of the Muslims in the Philippines and the Present Mindanao Crisis** (Caloocan City: Convislam Press, 1972), pp. 26-27.

¹⁴ **An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs** (Makati, Rizal: Filipinas Foundation, Inc. 1971), 193-194.