

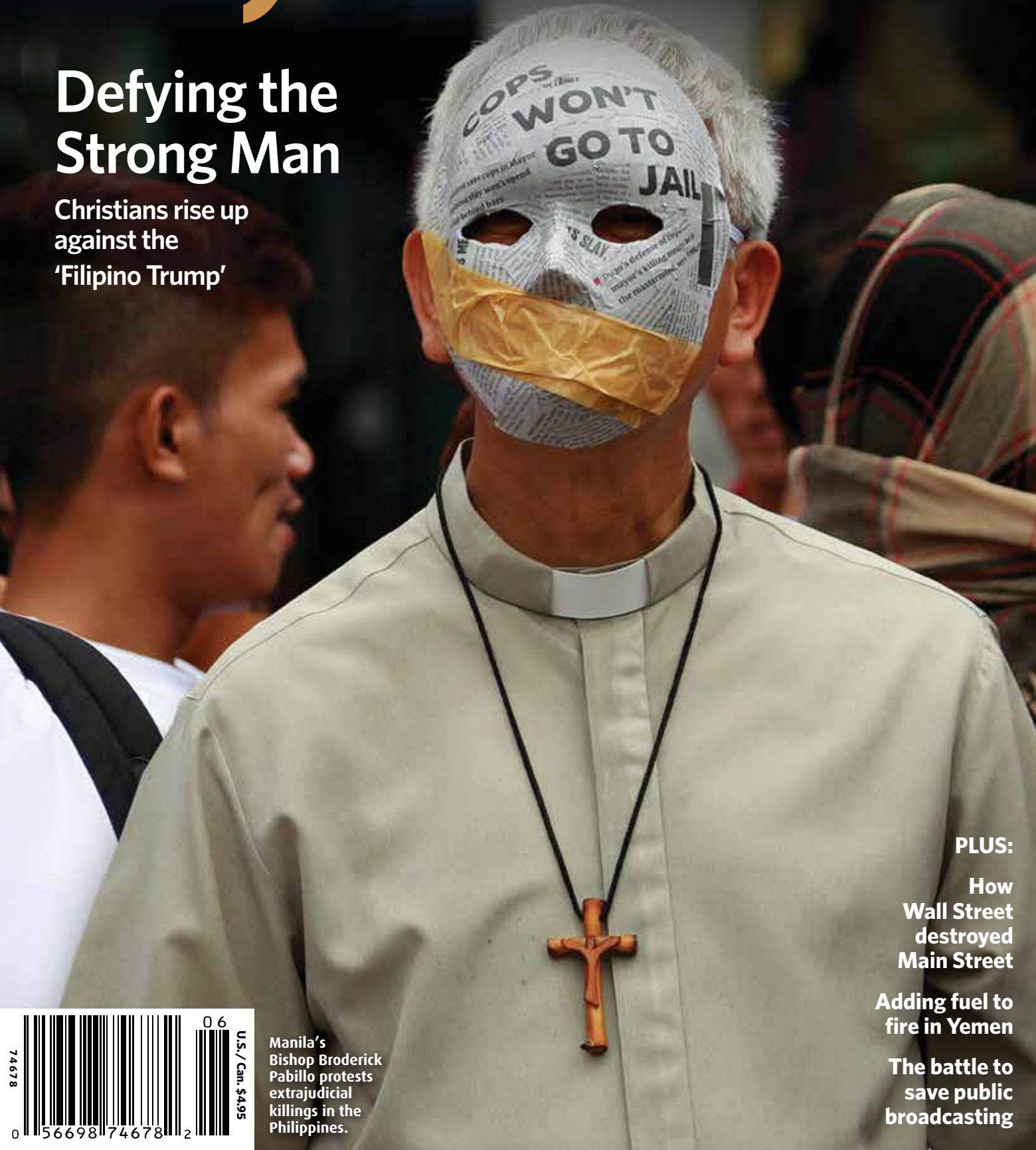
SOJOURNERS

June 2017 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

Defying the Strong Man

Christians rise up against the 'Filipino Trump'



PLUS:

How Wall Street destroyed Main Street

Adding fuel to fire in Yemen

The battle to save public broadcasting

Manila's Bishop Broderick Pabillo protests extrajudicial killings in the Philippines.



contents

JUNE 2017 Vol. 46 | No. 6

COVER

16 **Rising Up in the Philippines**

President Rodrigo Duterte has been called the “Filipino Trump.” He’s worse. But resistance is growing.

by Eric Stoner

PLUS: Protecting the gains of the resurrection/19

FEATURES

22 **Raise Your Hand If You Live in Subsidized Housing**

Our housing policies benefit many homeowners who are least in need of help.

by Neeraj Mehta

26 **‘Imagine It’s Your Life’**

Evicted author Matthew Desmond talks about the toll that housing instability takes on poor families.

28 **Just As I Am**

Against the odds, transgender Christians persevere.

by Austen Hartke

CULTURE WATCH

34 **How Wall Street destroyed Main Street**

Reviews: *Rest in Power*; *Feminist Fight Club*
Excerpt: *When God Was Flesh and Wild*

36 **Eyes & Ears**, by Danny Duncan Collum

37 **On Film**, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 **U.S. attacks in Yemen**

9 **Block grants**

10 **The pope’s call**

DEPARTMENTS

5 **Letters**

12 **Homepage**

33 **Poetry**

44 **Living the Word**

by Jason Byassee

COLUMNS

7 **Hearts & Minds**

by Jim Wallis

14 **Unfiltered**

by Kathy Khang

32 **Bridges**

by Eboo Patel

43 **The Hungry Spirit**

by Rose Marie Berger

46 **H’rumphs**

by Ed Spivey Jr.



Cover photo by Aaron Favilla/AP

16



28



34



Rising Up in the Philippines

President Duterte has been called the 'Filipino Trump.' He's worse. But resistance is growing.

by **ERIC STONER**

LAST SUMMER, riding the global wave of anti-establishment right-wing populism that would several months later propel Donald Trump into the White House, Rodrigo Duterte took power in the Philippines. He campaigned on the promise that he would launch a brutal war against drugs, criminality, and corruption—like he did as mayor, when he sanctioned death squads that took more than 1,000 lives—and wasted no time implementing his agenda once elected. At the same time, he has deftly made overtures to the political parties on the Left, which has largely quieted their criticism.

As was the case in the 1980s—during the nonviolent People Power movement that toppled Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator who ruled the Philippines for more than two decades—this has left civil society, students, and faith-based organizations to lead the charge not only for social, economic, and environmental justice, but also against the rapidly growing number of drug-related killings.

At left, protesters of Duterte's extrajudicial killings. Below, young women react upon learning a relative was killed by unidentified men in Manila.



Reuters



Rouelle/Xinhua/Newscom



Students from the University of the Philippines deny extrajudicial killings during a rally in Quezon City, north of Manila.

In January, I traveled to the Philippines to better understand Duterte's rise and to meet with those organizing to stop him. The international news is filled with headlines of the vicious campaign of extrajudicial executions. To explain his commitment to the cause, Duterte has positively compared himself to Adolf Hitler—saying that he would be “happy to slaughter” 3 million drug users—and pledged that the drug war will continue for his entire six-year term. To date, since he took office more than 8,000 people, or on average more than 30 a day, have been killed by police and so-called “vigilantes,” whom critics argue are often connected to state security forces.

As the drug-related killings mounted, a new ecumenical network of people of faith—including clergy from the Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church—and groups such as Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (KADAMAY), the largest alliance of urban-poor organizations in the country, launched Rise Up for Life and for Rights in October.

Rise Up's bold nationwide campaign has several planks. It works to educate the public on human rights—the right to life being the most important—and a more effective and humane way to deal with the very real problem of drugs in the Philippines.

“There is no substitute for social justice,” said Norma Dollaga, a deaconess with the United Methodist Church who works with Rise Up. “If there is social justice and social welfare, there would be less of a chance for the drug trade to prosper.”

Rise Up makes an effort to fill this void where it can, by helping to arrange therapy and medical attention. Rise Up also arranges legal support for those affected by the drug war, which has disproportionately targeted the urban poor, but recognizes it's not enough. “While legal is important, there will be difficulties if we rely on the legal battle alone. There is the legal truth and the actual truth,” Dollaga explained. “Our desire is that the people will get organized and in a loud public voice say that they should stop all killings and end impunity.”

Witness and document

One of the network's most important tasks, however, is simply documenting the deaths to demonstrate the desperate need for due

Aaron Favila/AP

Friends and family members gather around a victim's casket at a church supporting the Rise Up movement.



Eric Stoner

process. With the news in January that a South Korean businessman had been kidnapped by police in the Philippines and strangled to death inside the police force's national headquarters, the endemic corruption of the government's drug war is beginning to come to light.

Amnesty International has documented in extensive detail how police plant evidence, falsify reports, and steal from their victims' homes, and how they have established a racket with certain funeral homes, which pay them for each dead body they deliver. Amnesty has also collected statements from both police and vigilantes who testify that they have been paid under the table for each person they kill and given no incentive to make arrests.

Rise Up took me to Bagong Silang, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Manila, which they have been supporting. The community was reeling over two massacres that had taken the lives of 11 people since Christmas, including three children and a pregnant woman. On the day I visited, they were having the wake and funeral for a 15-year-old and two 16-year-olds who were killed by unknown gunmen on the evening of Dec. 28 as they gathered for a party.

Rise Up is sheltering one other person who was shot twice that night but managed to escape after playing dead until the shooters left.

Friends and classmates who were close to the dead held each other and wept as they marched alongside the hearses, which were carrying the victims playing their favorite music, with signs saying "Stop killing the poor" and "Rehabilitation not liquidation." The church was packed and full of emotion for the funeral, which Rise Up helped arrange. Father Benjamin E. Alforque—a Catholic priest who was a political prisoner under Marcos—denounced the drug war in his homily and called for justice for these children.

The heartrending day ended with another march to a dusty, congested, concrete cemetery to bury the dead, but the work of the growing Rise Up network to end these senseless killings appears to be just beginning.

"The church should walk with the poor in their struggle for social transformation."

Protecting the Gains of the Resurrection

Father Benjamin E. Alforque is convener of the church-based Filipino group Rise Up for Life and for Rights. Alforque was interviewed via email in February by Eric Stoner.

Eric Stoner: Was there a tipping point that set Rise Up in motion?

Benjamin Alforque: The tipping point was when the killing of the poor started to include poor farmers and peasants who were leaders of the justice and peace groups and organizations, but who were [falsely] charged with being drug users or pushers.

Are people's opinions of the drug war and extrajudicial killings changing?

Many people thought it was okay to kill drug addicts and pushers. People felt safe that they could leave their homes at night to do their jobs without fear that a drug addict would barge into their huts and small homes, rape women, and kill families just to get money for drugs. They favored

immediate execution because, after all, we have no rehabilitation facilities, the jails and prisons are full, and government has no money to spend for their incarceration and rehabilitation. But now, with the extent of the killing of the poor, many are fearful. They fear that they could be the next victim, because the police have a quota of drug-related deaths, and they could be the next one to fill the quota.

Do you see the Catholic Church taking a more active position? On Feb. 18, the church mobilized some 10,000 people to Walk for Life. Bishops have come into the open, telling the president that death is not the answer to the proliferation of drugs and addiction. This show of force by the Catholic Church against extrajudicial killings related to drugs



[is also against] the move in Congress, with executive approval, to revive the death penalty.

The church could do more. It can open its facilities and resources for the positive care of drug addicts. In its pastoral program, dioceses, parishes, and church-based institutions could strengthen catechetical approaches and family life ministries to address the real social roots of addiction and other related maladies.

But more important, the church should walk with the poor in their struggle for substantial radical social transformation. She must fully give witness to the Vatican II documents, especially becoming more fully the church of the poor through basic ecclesial communities as agents of transformation. She must strengthen her pastoral program with the poor and not make her identity revolve around the sacraments and the liturgy that are emptied of their original social content for liberation-salvation. If the church lives more fully with the poor, then she can protect the poor while at the same time being a target with them. That is her cross and her martyrdom. There also lies her genuine participation in the resurrection of Jesus.

Where do you find hope? In my sermons I say, "You must rise up together and assert and protect the gains of the resurrection of Jesus, the gains that he has in store for all of us who believe in him!"

The mass movement of the poor is where I find hope. They incarnate the passion-death-resurrection of Jesus. They relive the pristine experience of early Christianity in various ways for the event of God's reign. ■



Catholic sisters call for justice during International Human Rights Day in Manila last December.

Reuters

A familiar playbook

Duterte has received widespread international criticism for his off-the-cuff vulgar and offensive comments, which are often far worse than anything uttered by Trump. During the campaign, in a country where more than 80 percent of the people are Catholic, he called Pope Francis a “son of a whore,” infamously “joked” that he wished he had been the first to rape an Australian missionary who was gang raped and killed, and admitted to having personally shot and killed people himself.

The reasons that many support Duterte mirror those offered by white, rural working-class Americans for why they cast their ballot for Trump. “The vote for Duterte was actually a rejection of elite rule in Manila,” explained Tess Ramiro, the general secretary for Action for Peace and Justice,

see him as one of their own, said Ivan Phell Enrile, the communications officer for Peace for Life, an interfaith network formed to resist the global war on terror and neoliberal economic globalization. “He projected this image that he had no other corporations or big sectors backing him up. He made it appear that he is independent of these traditional politicians in the Philippines.”

Courting the Left

The similarities between Trump and Duterte, however, should not be overstated. While Trump lost the popular vote in November, Duterte won the presidential election by a landslide, and seven months later his popularity has yet to wane. This is no accident. Despite his often incoherent, rambling speeches, in many ways Duterte has proven to be a far savvier political operator than Trump. “He is a great tactician because he is able to manage both the Right and the Left,” Enrile said. In a move that has effectively co-opted what would have likely been an influential part of his opposition, he gave a number of cabinet-level positions—responsible for agrarian reform, social welfare, and anti-poverty programs—to members of the left-wing National Democratic Front and Communist Party.

Yeb Saño, the former climate diplomat for the Philippines who captured the world’s attention with an impassioned speech and fast after the devastating Typhoon Haiyan struck his country during the 2013 U.N. climate talks in Poland, said that Duterte has also reached across political lines with his appointment of Regina Lopez to head the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Lopez shocked mining companies in February when she ordered 23 of the country’s 41 mines permanently closed. “[She] is a friend of ours and she’s been doing well. ... She refuses to issue more environmental clearance certificates to coal-fired power plants. So how can I say anything wrong about that?” conceded Saño, who is now the executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

“But on the other hand, your bigger picture view of a people-centered sustainable development does not include inflicting harm on others, especially violating people’s human rights and ignoring the rule of law.”

Contrasting words and deeds

However, Duterte’s ability to forge unlikely political alliances does not mean that he is invulnerable. Supporters will likely begin to question Duterte as the gap grows between his rhetoric and his actions. For instance, he has called himself a socialist and advocate for the poor in an effort to appeal to the Left. “But if you look at his actual policies, he is still very much neoliberal,” Enrile explained. “If you look at his economic development programs, he still talks about private-sector-led development of different social services, privatizing government-owned and -led corporations, and enticing foreign investment, but this time around it’s China or Russia—any country except the United States.”

One issue on which Duterte has clearly followed the neoliberal program is his embrace of what are called free trade “economic zones” in the Philippines, special areas where there are fewer government regulations as well as tax incentives for corporations to set up shop. For example, the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport Authority (APECO) on the east coast of Luzon is one of more than 300 such zones in the country; it’s currently in the crosshairs of an impressive group of young campaigners. They are part of Task Force Anti-APECO, a coalition of organizations and students affiliated with Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB), which means “church in service of the nation.” SLB began as a group of hundreds of nuns,



Duterte has said he would be “happy to slaughter” 3 million drug users.

which played an important role in organizing nonviolence trainings during the People Power movement. “It’s just like saying a vote for Trump is a rejection of the Washington system.”

Despite hailing from a political dynasty himself, Duterte successfully portrayed himself as an outsider and “common man” during the campaign.

“With his manner of speaking, with his populist rhetoric, with the policies that he is advocating,” those who voted for Duterte

Rebecca Lawson of Pilgrims for Peace walks in a cemetery with Father Teodulo Holgado during a funeral for three children who were victims of extrajudicial killings.



priests, and seminarians who deployed to election hotspots to protect the vote during the 1986 People Power movement. Today it is the socio-political arm of the Jesuits in the Philippines.

The campaign against the zone first drew national attention in 2012 when farmers, fisher folk, and Indigenous people whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by APECO marched more than 200 miles from the coastal town of Casiguran to Manila. SLB and the task force played a support role during the action and have since tackled the issue from a number of directions.

They have regularly lobbied government agencies and senators to cut the budget for the zone. With the help of pro bono lawyers, the group also filed a Supreme Court case to repeal the law that authorized APECO, since the people who live in the zone were never consulted by the government, as the law requires. Task Force Anti-APECO has community organizers on the ground in Casiguran as well to work on capacity-building and support the livelihood of locals, who are already losing their land as developers move forward with their projects.

“We are trying to help them articulate

and offer an example of what development they really want,” said Bernie Aton, who works on disaster relief with SLB, “so that they can tell the government, ‘if you really want to help this community, this is what they want.’”

Mandating peace education

The university system in the Philippines has also been a hotbed of dissent and organizing. In the first mass action since

Duterte assumed the presidency, hundreds of primarily young people across the country came out to protest the burial of Ferdinand Marcos in

the Cemetery of Heroes in November.

Students were primed to take action, in part, because of peace education, which was introduced in the Philippines 30 years ago and has since grown deep roots in the country.

Miriam College, a Catholic school for girls and women in Quezon City that offers pre-elementary to post-graduate programs, has been a pioneer in the field of peace education. As part of a network of schools, it has successfully baked peace education, with a strong focus on advocacy, into the country’s education system at every

“We believe that people are not beyond redemption.”

level—from grade school through college. “Even on the licensure exam for teachers, there are questions on peace education,” explained Jasmin Nario-Galace, executive director of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College and president of Pax Christi-Pilipinas. “In that sense, I think we have succeeded in mainstreaming it, at least for teacher education.”

The effort was aided by an executive order signed by then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2006, which peace advocates had lobbied for and helped draft. The order mandates that peace education be included in the curriculum at all public education institutions in the Philippines, as well as be a mandatory part of teacher training.

While mass mobilizations against extrajudicial killings are just beginning, students and teachers took an early lead in making their voices heard on the issue by organizing a range of actions—from letters to the government opposing the killings to spoken word events and candlelight marches and vigils. “While peace education isn’t being threatened,” Nario-Galace said, “our core values are: the value of life. There is an inconsistency there.”

“We believe that people are not beyond redemption,” Dollaga said. “We all have the capacity to start life anew. Once they are executed there is no way that they can change. The needs of the people should be provided, and this is part of the redemptive work that can be done for the people. This is the way of compassion. This is the way of mercy. This is the way of love and justice.”

In January, after the scandal around the South Korean businessman’s death in police custody made headlines, Duterte temporarily suspended the police role in his drug war, indicating that a smaller agency would take the lead, along with the military. In March, he reversed that decision—while also saying that 40 percent of the police force is corrupt. Until these operations stop altogether, the work of People Power-fueled groups will continue to be of utmost importance to the future of the Philippines. ■

Eric Stoner is an editor at Waging Nonviolence and an adjunct professor at Rutgers University.