

Cults Began as Political Weapon, Ended Up Deifying Ferdinand Marcos With AM-Marcos Funeral

EILEEN GUERRERO September 10, 1993

BATAC, Philippines (AP) — Ferdinand Marcos exploited the mysticism of Filipino peasants as a weapon against his enemies before his ouster seven years ago. Many of the cults he secretly promoted now worship him as a god.

Several of the Marcos cults flocked to his hometown to pay homage to the late president, who was buried Friday. Scores of cultists, some in white or blue robes and others in old flour sacks, camped around town and near the sumptuous Marcos mansion, where his coffin was on display.

"There are three miracles," said Valentina Gaudia, 56, a member of the Gold Eagles cult of Pangasinan Province. "God the Father is Ferdinand Marcos, God the Son is (Marcos' son Ferdinand Jr.) and the Holy Spirit is Imelda Marcos. They are the Holy Family."

Retired Col. Bernabe Abella, a former intelligence officer, said he founded the cult in 1969 as a means of luring ignorant, impoverished peasants away from the fledgling Marxist movement.

Abella, who still runs the cult, said the scheme worked so well that after Marcos declared martial law in 1972, he and other officers presented the president with a secret plan to use mysticism against both the Communists and Muslim rebels in the south.

"We knew it would click because the people are religious," Abella said.

He said his fellow officers competed with one another to see who could build the biggest following.

Mystic cults with aspects of Christianity and paganism had flourished in the Philippines for centuries. But with the government and military secretly promoting them, their numbers expanded rapidly.

The number of cults is estimated in the hundreds, with tens of thousands of members nationwide.

Abella said he never intended for his Gold Eagles or similar cults to deify Marcos. They were simply designed to generate religious feeling against secular leaders among the Marxists and the Muslim Moro National Liberation Front.

But in a superstitious culture, things got out of hand and Marcos ended up as a central figure in the cults' beliefs.

At its encampment beside a squalid, cement-block house down the street from the Marcos estate, the Alpha-Omega Society has set up an altar featuring a colored portrait of a youthful Marcos and his wife, Imelda.

A member, Nestor Ramos, recounted the cult's belief that Marcos received the spirit of Jesus. After the exiled Marcos died in Hawaii in 1989, Ramos said, the spirit moved to Rudy Tiongco, husband of the cult's founder, known only as "Mamma Rose."

Another group, the Enchanted Maria Sinukuan, believes Marcos and Philippine national hero Jose Rizal, an intellectual and, ironically, an agnostic executed by the Spanish in 1896, are both reincarnations of Jesus.

Members of the Enchanted cult set up camp at the government cotton research building in Batac for the Marcos wake. Cult members, dressed in white robes, wander the streets carrying traditional Roman Catholic pictures of Jesus with Marcos' face superimposed.

Rudy Cabusao, a leader of the Enchanteds, contends Mrs. Marcos received heavenly powers after the death of her husband.

"The fire raced through her arms into the body of the first lady," he said. "The prophecy came true. And that's why we're following the family around."