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Philippines cult idolises Marcos



The cult is considered blasphemous by many

By David Willis in Manila

The former president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, who ruled the country for 20 years, may be reviled by many Filipinos but to some he is quite literally a saint.

In his home district of Ilocos Norte

hundreds of members of one of the world's most bizarre religious cults gather every month to pay homage to the former dictator.

They meet in their own chapel in a mountain retreat dressed in identical white flowing robes, and face an altar bearing the picture of the sacred heart of Jesus, a symbol of God's mercy.

But Christ's face has been replaced by that of Marcos, a man less renowned for his compassion.

The cult believes Marcos, who was chased into exile by a people's power revolution

and is believed to have taken around \$6bn with him from the national coffers, was misunderstood.



His worshippers gather every month

"He didn't steal, he simply kept the fortune they accused him of stealing.

But the time will come when all the money will be recovered and used for the development of our country" says spokeswoman Sunni Artegaron.

Disgraced

The body of the disgraced dictator, who was denied a state funeral, lies in a makeshift mausoleum where a requiem blares constantly.

The government threatened at one stage to cut off the electricity supply to his refrigerated crypt because his family had not paid the bill.

The Marcos family still has influence in the country, however.



They all wear identical white flowing robes

Eldest daughter Imelda Junior was recently elected to congress, along with her mother Imelda.

She is keen to rewrite history concerning her father's iron-fisted rule and believes she has the support of people in her home province:

"I think that many of the younger people who don't have so many preconceived notions and who have actually received a virtual lifetime of propaganda are beginning to think it is important to review what actually happened."

Many in the Philippines believe in the culture of forgiving and forgetting.

But the Catholic church, which ironically sits at the end of Ferdinand Marcos Avenue, is uneasy about the family's revival.

Parish priest Victor Enundo says forgiving and forgetting may be part of the culture in this country, but depicting Marcos as Jesus is simply going too far:

"This is blasphemy. We have only one God. To take people who have been leaders and create them as Gods is

wrong."

Missing millions

The urge to forgive and elevate Marcos from sinner to saint comes ironically just as the Philippine government is stepping up its hunt for his missing millions.

It is no secret that much of it is squirreled away in Swiss bank accounts, although his widow Imelda denies this.

She says her husband did not take anything from the country, and that he "gave everything" to the Philippines.

The newly-formed cult agrees with this, and wonders what he might have achieved had he not been chased from power.

For many other Filipinos however this is a concept almost too ghastly to contemplate.

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