

## FR. JAMES BERTRAM REUTER, JR., S.J.

In the early twentieth century, Elizabeth, New Jersey—just south of New York City—was a place where Irish and German families of the second and third generations lived side-by-side and intermarried. JAMES BERTRAM REUTER was a product of this community where, as a youth, he knew his German great-grandfather (Reuter) and his Irish great-grandfather (Roberts), both immigrants “from the old country.” Both branches of the family were already German-Irish by the time REUTER himself was born on 21 May 1916 to James R. Reuter, a young truck driver, and Marguerite C. Hangarter, his seventeen-year-old wife. He was the first of their five children.

The environment of REUTER’s childhood was thoroughly Catholic. He was born in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, run by the Sisters of Charity, and raised in St. Mary’s Parish. Although the older Reuters were not overly pious, the children were raised as good Catholics who regularly attended mass, confessed their sins, and said the rosary. On top of the family piano stood a photograph of his father’s cousin Velma, who had entered the Little Sisters of the Poor. Young REUTER was an altar boy at St. Mary’s Church and attended only Catholic schools.

He first became aware of missionaries at St. Mary’s Grammar School, and by age seven, when he was in grade two, he had already announced to his family that he planned to be a missionary someday. He made this claim so often during his grammar-school days that his father, losing patience, told him to stop: he was too young to know what he was talking about. (Later, when REUTER was preparing for the priesthood, he discovered that quite a few of his fellow seminarians had also foreseen their vocations at about the same age.) A more definitive influence on REUTER’s choice for the priesthood was St. Peter’s Preparatory School, which he attended in nearby Jersey City. The sisters of St. Mary’s warned him that St. Peter’s was rather worn and unpleasantly located behind a soap factory but, they also told him, it had the best teachers in the world.

REUTER now describes his four years at St. Peter’s Prep, which he attended on an academic scholarship, as “very, very good years.” He consistently led his class academically and graduated as valedictorian.

Outside the classroom he also flourished. He joined the school magazine staff and discovered dramatics; his strongest extracurricular activity was debating. St. Peter's debating team was then undefeated for three years and REUTER remembers that victories over other Jesuit schools were particularly sweet. His greatest personal achievement was winning the Fordham Oratorical Contest, in which he pitted his skills against debaters from the seven best Jesuit prep schools on the Atlantic seaboard.

During his senior year, St. Peter's football coach observed REUTER in an intramural match and tapped him for the varsity team. The young man had not thought himself big enough for the game, but he had speed and was thrilled to join the varsity backfield, even though after-school practices and Saturday games meant he had to forfeit his part-time job in a grocery store. Outside the orbit of St. Peter's, REUTER played basketball at the local Presbyterian church and joined the Boy Scouts. With typical diligence and ambition, he earned some forty merit badges and rose to Eagle Scout, the highest rank.

Many of REUTER's teachers at St. Peter's were young Jesuits and he found them an inspiring lot. One stood out: Ernest J. Hartnett, a Jesuit scholastic in his twenties. Hartnett seemed to do everything at St. Peter's. As faculty adviser of the school magazine, he accepted an article by REUTER and gave the freshman author six copies of the magazine in which it appeared. "Going home to Elizabeth on a train with those six copies and reading my own story in print," he wrote later, "I was never the same again." Hartnett ran the bookstore where REUTER worked so that REUTER could get his books free. He also coached the debating society and, at one point, was in charge of dramatics. He was a classroom teacher as well. REUTER recalls that Hartnett "taught by encouraging. I never heard him say a negative word." And he believes that St. Peter's extraordinary debating record was the result of Hartnett's positive approach to coaching. "We were only schoolboys, but Ernie gave us so much confidence that we did not lose a single public debate in three years." Somehow, Hartnett also found time to befriend students individually and he became REUTER's model.

REUTER did not decide to become a priest without reflecting on other paths in life. He considered medicine, and he was quite attracted to the army. Indeed, for a time he hoped for an appointment to West Point, America's elite military academy. This option appealed to his father, who encouraged him. One route to the academy was through the National Guard; REUTER joined while still in high school and earned a medal for marksmanship. But St. Peter's young scholastics provided powerful role models for the priesthood, the Society of Jesus in particular. At the age of eighteen REUTER was not distracted with

hopes for marriage and a family, for he had not fallen in love with anyone. Moreover, thoughts of death caused him to seek transcendent meaning for his life, a desire to “do something positive that would have an eternal effect.”

One could, in those days, enter the Jesuit order directly from high school and once REUTER made his choice for the priesthood known to his mentors at St. Peter’s, they urged him to do just this. Fordham University on Long Island, New York, had offered him a scholarship and he was tempted to take it, but Hartnett advised him that he would learn more “studying as a Jesuit.” And that decided him.

REUTER graduated from St. Peter’s Prep in 1934. A few months later he entered the Society of Jesus and embarked upon his training at the Novitiate of St. Isaac Jogues in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, where he majored in history. He took his first holy vows in September 1936 and completed his “Juniorate” in 1938. St. Isaac’s was part of the Maryland-New York Province of the Jesuits. Like other Jesuit provinces it had its own overseas mission field, in its case, the Philippines. The Province sent one or two men there yearly and REUTER applied to go. Because he was a “specialist” in history his request was given a low priority, but others before him on the list were either disqualified or dropped out and he was selected after all. As he made a final religious retreat at St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson before departing, he says he felt like he was following in the footsteps of St. Francis Xavier, the Society’s pioneer missionary to Asia.

REUTER traveled by train to Chicago and on to Vancouver. There he boarded the *Empress of Russia* for a long sea voyage that took him to Honolulu, Yokohama, Kobe, and then to Shanghai, where he witnessed the aftermath of the recent savage attacks by the Japanese army. From Shanghai the *Empress of Russia* sailed via Hong Kong to the Philippines, where it anchored in Manila Bay on 4 July 1938. REUTER went immediately to the Jesuit college, Ateneo de Manila, in the old city and from there was taken to the town of Novaliches. Here amidst the rice fields just beyond the town stood the Sacred Heart Novitiate, where young Filipino seminarians studied philosophy. REUTER was one of a handful of Americans to join them.

The Philippines was not wholly unknown to the young American. In his first year at St. Peter’s Prep, he and his classmates had been regaled with stories by Jesuit missionaries on furlough from Mindanao. The images lingered. The Philippines was still an American colony during REUTER’s high school days and among the hotly debated issues was that of independence for the islands. (He argued in favor of independence.) And as his Province’s mission territory, the Philippines

had come up often as a topic of discussion at the novitiate in Wernersville. Still, the culture was largely new to him, as well as the climate. The tropical heat bore down on Novaliches daily, and REUTER remembers how, in the afternoons, his white cassock would be plastered to his back with sweat. Snakes lurked in the high grass surrounding the school. One day, after a grass fire, the young men found a python that they proceeded to hang from the second-floor railing; its tail touched the ground! And there were dangers of another kind. Along with the other scholastics, REUTER got malaria.

After a year in the steamy lowlands, REUTER was transferred to the cool, piney mountain town of Baguio—the only place in the Philippines, one American Jesuit told him, “where you can see your breath in the morning.” Here he continued his studies of philosophy at Sacred Heart College. He and the other scholastics lived in the Jesuit hilltop residence of Mirador and enjoyed Baguio’s temperate climate and splendid views. They learned to ignore the frequent rains and carried on their daily outside games and exercises as though nothing were happening. During his free time REUTER coached basketball at St. Louis High and Maryknoll Grade School. “Exhilarating years,” he says.

In mid-1941 REUTER returned to Manila where he was assigned to teach sophomores at Ateneo de Manila in the mornings and, in the afternoons, help produce the Catholic Church’s popular Sunday-night radio program, “The Commonwealth Hour.” The program was broadcast in both Tagalog and English, and REUTER recalls that “it was so joyous, and so controversial, that all the newspapers talked about it for the next week.” The program’s chief writer was the young Filipino Jesuit, Horacio de la Costa, who later became prominent as a historian. Among the actors were many young Ateneans who would later shine in the public arena: Leon Ma. Guerrero, Ricardo Puno, Jesus Paredes, Francisco “Soc” Rodrigo, and Raul Manglapus.

REUTER thrived on this busy life: teaching Manila’s brightest young men, directing dramatics at Ateneo, writing plays for “The Commonwealth Hour,” and, along with other young scholastics, scrimmaging with Ateneo’s varsity teams in the long tropical afternoons. He identified quickly with Ateneo’s school spirit and rooted passionately for its teams. On 7 December 1941 Ateneo’s soccer team triumphantly defeated its arch rival De La Salle College. REUTER was happy. “In those quiet days, long, long ago,” he wrote recently, “I thought that the Philippines was the most romantic place in all the world.”

The day after Ateneo’s great victory over De La Salle, 8 December, was a Catholic feast day. The school community had gathered in the auditorium for mass when news arrived that the Japanese had bombed

Hawaii and American military installations in the Philippines. School closed and boarders were sent home. In anticipation of hard times to come, food was rationed. As the Japanese invasion forces approached the capital, the Americans declared Manila an open city and retreated, throwing open the doors to their food stocks as they did so. The Jesuit delegation from Ateneo was instructed to bypass the meats and other perishables and to bring back only flour and wine—an act of foresight that enabled them to serve communion daily throughout the long years of war and captivity. On the first of January 1942, Japanese soldiers commandeered the Ateneo campus, which they used as a refugee camp and internment center.

Some 460 British, Dutch, and American internees were crammed into the compound. Most of the Filipino Jesuits and seminarians continued to live on campus with the rest of the internees. Among them was the “Commonweal” scriptwriter, de la Costa, who now wrote plays to amuse the residents. For the Jesuits themselves, study went on. REUTER and forty-two others who shared accommodations in the observatory wing embarked upon a study of theology. Although there was never enough to eat, life in the campus-internment center was relatively civil. The Japanese seemed eager to make a good impression and even brought in several Japanese Catholic nuns and a seminarian, with whom REUTER and his friends conversed in Latin.

However, after about a year and a half the Japanese requisitioned the campus and dispersed its occupants. Some went to the large internment camp at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila and others to the University of the Philippines’ agricultural school at Los Baños, sixty kilometers to the south. REUTER himself was not taken to Los Baños until June 1944. Here he was crammed into Barrack 19 along with ninety-five other religious men, right next to the nuns in Barrack 20. (REUTER is certain that Barrack 19 was built over a former pigpen.) At Los Baños the Jesuits taught classes and wrote songs and skits to amuse their campmates, but life was harsh. The internees were fed only four ounces of rice a day, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. REUTER and his companions soon learned to eat anything edible, including banana skins and corn cobs, and to cultivate small vegetable gardens. Sugar and salt were luxuries. Many of the internees were sick, and REUTER himself nearly died from a bout of pneumonia. Among his routine chores was burial duty: “We had quite a few graves in our little cemetery,” he says.

As the fortunes of war changed and Japan’s new empire became increasingly vulnerable to counterattack by the Allies, the Japanese at Los Baños became edgy. Anyone who attempted to escape from the camp faced summary execution. Rescue came at seven o’clock on a

February morning, 1945. Paratroopers from the American Eleventh Airborne timed their assault to coincide with the Japanese guards' morning calisthenics, when rifles were neatly stacked off to the side. (Maps and other information about the camp routine had previously been passed to partisans on the outside.) During a firefight that lasted only eleven minutes, all the camp's Japanese guards were killed. A black American soldier then appeared at the doorway of the building where REUTER and others lay quaking on the floor. In the sweet cadences of the American south, he invited them to step outside. When REUTER realized what was happening, he experienced a deep wave of patriotic emotion and vowed never to change his citizenship. Hence, in later years when several of his American Jesuit colleagues adopted Filipino citizenship, he did not.

The internees were moved to an old prison outside Manila where they remained until the city was liberated. Food and supplies reached them by airdrop. At night, sitting on the green grass of the prison yard, REUTER remembers watching Bing Crosby in *Going My Way*, a Hollywood movie about a Catholic school named St. Mary's. Soon there were letters from home—one, two, three years old. After six weeks, when the desperate fight for Manila was over, REUTER and the others made their way back. Forty-three years later, on Easter Sunday 1989, REUTER vividly remembered that day: "Coming into Manila in a military jeep, in the bright morning sunlight, with my hair blowing in the wind—I was in real ecstasy. We were free! We were really free."

REUTER and the other American Jesuits returned to the United States aboard the troop ship *Eberle* and crossed the stormy Pacific flanked by destroyers, for the war was not yet over. Below decks they whiled away the hours singing songs they had composed at Los Baños. At San Pedro, California, REUTER set foot on his home country for the first time in seven years. A railway car was arranged to carry him and his companions home. Shunted from one train to another, it meandered across the continent, stopping now at a southwest border town, now in Chicago, now in Philadelphia, and arriving at last in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where REUTER's family awaited him on the station platform.

REUTER spent the next three years in the United States studying for ordination. His wartime courses on theology served him well. On 24 March 1946, along with twenty-six other Jesuits who had been imprisoned at Los Baños, he was ordained a priest. On 23 June he celebrated his first mass—at St. Mary's in Elizabeth. More training in theology followed at the Jesuit Colleges in Woodstock, Maryland, and in Auriesville, New York. He received his licentiate (more or less equivalent to a master's degree) in Sacred Theology in 1947. That same summer, he spent twelve weeks at Fordham University, which was just

then setting up a new course in radio and television. Close to New York City, Fordham was able to recruit leading lights in broadcasting for its faculty. REUTER studied under some of the medium's best managers, announcers, directors, and music masters, and was abreast of the latest thinking and technology in the field.

In 1948 he returned to the Philippines to take up his first assignment as a priest at Naga City in Bicol Province, in the extreme southeast corner of Luzon, famous for its abaca, or "manila hemp." The provincial capital and hub of regional commerce and communications, Naga City was actually a rather small town of some sixty thousand souls. There were no telephones but, as REUTER learned, news could spread with amazing speed among its tight-knit citizenry.

At Ateneo de Naga some seventeen hundred boys received a Jesuit education—one thousand in the high school, seven hundred in the college. REUTER joined the senior teaching staff of fourteen priests and scholastics, about half of whom were Americans. This small team of Jesuits was assisted by a staff of Filipino lay teachers. The school was unfortunately located, having been built over a swamp. Its compound was often awash in garbage, and when the waters rose one could, according to REUTER, actually catch fish through the floor of the school. High school and college classes met in the same horseshoe-shaped building, the young boys attending during the day, the older ones at night. From three to five o'clock daily the two groups intermingled for athletics and a flurry of other extracurricular activities.

REUTER taught English and religion in both divisions and, when needed, other courses such as economics. Ateneo's small staff and large student body made such versatility a necessity. At Ateneo de Naga, REUTER was also responsible for five extracurricular activities. He supervised the school's monthly magazine and the publication of its yearbook, led the glee club, coached the debating team, ran the dramatics program, and coached basketball. Initially, he had been given yet another assignment. As "minister" for the local Jesuit community, he was responsible for the nuts-and-bolts of daily life—paying the bills, arranging for the roof to be repaired, organizing the kitchen. But REUTER's multiple responsibilities at school soon overtook those of the community and his Superior freed him to concentrate wholly on students.

Looking back on those years, REUTER remembers with special enthusiasm his creation of Ateneo de Naga's traveling theatrical company, the Cathedral Players. Working through local priests, REUTER arranged for his players to perform in towns all over the province. The core group of actors and stagehands came from the school. For

female parts REUTER recruited girls from nearby Sta. Isabel's, a convent school run by the Daughters of Charity, and the Cathedral Players eventually became an Ateneo-Sta. Isabel joint venture. In local plazas they rendered Bicol-dialect versions of well-known plays with religious and moral themes, such as *Everyman* and *Green Pastures*, and plays written by REUTER himself. One of the latter was a Christmas play entitled *If Mary Came to Naga*. A shining moment occurred when the Bichara family made Naga City's premier theater available for the school's production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*—featuring Atenean thespian Gogo Bichara as Cyrano.

Basketball, it seems, was Naga's favorite sport, and REUTER and his fellow teachers pitched in to coach the neighborhood teams that squared off nightly. More important, however, was the high school varsity team that REUTER coached for years and that he led to a province-wide, private school championship in 1951-52 as well as the country-wide Jesuit school championship. So good was REUTER's team that year that it was invited to Manila for the national championships. On a roadtrip, however, his first-string players were lured to a brothel by the opposing coach. Applying its rules strictly, Ateneo de Naga expelled all seven of the players. REUTER remembers with pride the gutsy showing of his second string, which managed to reach the semifinals.

The busy life of teaching, advising, and coaching in Naga appealed to REUTER and he was content to stay. In 1952, however, the year in which he took his final vows as a Jesuit, he was transferred back to the order's premier school in the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila—the school where, before the war, he had first come under the spell of Filipino collegiate life.

The reason for REUTER's transfer was a play. The year 1952 was the 400th anniversary of the death of St. Francis Xavier and, to celebrate it, Ateneo de Manila had determined to put on a play about him; REUTER was needed to write and produce it. Moreover, the institution had developed an outstanding dramatics program under an older teacher who now wanted to retire; REUTER was needed to carry on the tradition.

Ateneo's newly opened campus in Quezon City possessed no theater as yet, so REUTER had to stage his new play elsewhere. He chose Assumption Convent, a girl's school near the old Ateneo campus in Manila, and invited the Assumption students as well as girls from several other schools to participate. The play, *Francis of Navarre*, was a great success and from then on REUTER took over dramatics.



But not only dramatics. He was also teaching English, religion, and Latin. And, as in Naga City, he found himself directing the debating team and the glee club. For a while he coached the junior varsity basketball team and eventually became moderator for all Ateneo's athletics.

Like that of Ateneo de Naga, Ateneo de Manila's faculty was about half American. Indeed, at the time, Americans occupied the leading positions. Both rectors during REUTER's eight years there were American, as were the dean of the college and the head of the grade school. Filipino Jesuits and lay persons made up the rest. The student body was virtually all Filipino and extremely select. Many students were scions of the country's leading families. Their parents and grandparents were members of the small circle of people who dominated government, business, and the professions—as they would also do in their turn. Moreover, REUTER believes that in these years, the school's students were stellar and included some of Ateneo's finest students ever. He delights in ticking off the names, one after another, of his former students who later became prominent. As a busy teacher and coach, and a leader of the school's premier extracurricular programs, REUTER knew and influenced them all.

Under REUTER, Ateneo's glee club became something of a national phenomenon and was often invited to give fund-raising concerts in schools throughout the Philippines. REUTER saw that these out-of-town adventures were good for his singers too. "They learned showmanship in the provinces," he says, and through the special camaraderie of performance and travel, developed lasting friendships with one another.

The same was true for dramatics. The REUTER years became the glory years for the Ateneo Players, the drama club he mentored to near-professional standards. Thinking now of its gala annual productions, REUTER says, "all of them were successful." And as he mentions each one by name—*The Mikado*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Woman of the Hour* (another original by Horacio de la Costa), and REUTER's favorite, *Cyrano de Bergerac*—he can tell you exactly who played the leading roles, which future "stars" made their debut performance in what play, and which couples met and fell in love while singing in the chorus or manning the lights. Like the glee club, the Ateneo Players took their shows on the road, gaining experience and confidence and coming home feeling like "Shakespearian" actors. No other boys' school had a dramatics program like Ateneo's nor the technical expertise to stage theatrical events so well. REUTER's stage crews achieved a fame equal to his players, and routinely helped other schools stage their shows. For Ateneo's all-male stagehands, these excursions provided happy

opportunities to visit girls' schools and to befriend their young actresses.

Aside from the Ateneo Players, many other students studied theater arts under REUTER in Ateneo's summer school. This was especially the case during a period when all of Ateneo's graduate students were required to take at least one credit in drama. In this way, he says, "many, many talented people passed through."

REUTER's student players and stagehands learned quickly that he was a taskmaster who expected perfection. But he trained them well and they learned to work to his rigorous standards. In so doing, they learned to set high standards for themselves, discovered the thrill of successful teamwork, and experienced the special euphoria of "show business."

The vast majority of REUTER's students and protégés did not pursue professional careers in music or theater. Today they are doctors, lawyers, managers, and politicians, many of them prominent. Alfredo Bengzon,\* an example REUTER likes to mention, was a player in *Cyrano* and rose to be secretary of health in President Corazon Aquino's government. A few did make their way into show business, however, including the late stage and movie actor Vic Silayan, who had starred as *Cyrano*. Irrespective of their final careers, many of REUTER's young students developed strong bonds with their mentor, bonds that remained long after school days were over. At some point they began to acknowledge this special relationship by calling themselves "REUTER babies."

REUTER's eight-year sojourn at Ateneo de Manila came to an end in 1960 when the Jesuit hierarchy in Rome decided that the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus should establish a communications office. (The Philippines became a Province in its own right in 1955.) REUTER, with his formal training in radio and television and his years of experience in theater, was the natural choice to head the office. Although his ties with Ateneo de Manila remained strong, he now moved out of the Jesuit residence on campus and, in the course of a few peripatetic years, lived in several different Jesuit houses in the Manila area. In 1964 the spacious new Jesuit residence called Xavier House was completed in Santa Ana, not far from the Catholic Church's national office in the Philippines. Horacio de la Costa was Jesuit Provincial at the time, and he invited REUTER to occupy the new house and set up his media studios there. REUTER has lived there ever since.

\*RMAF Awardee in Government Service, 1991

REUTER's new task as the Jesuit secretary for communications for the Province was to encourage Jesuits to use radio, film, television, and the press in their apostolic work and to teach them how to do it. Beginning in 1967, as national director of mass media of the Philippine hierarchy, his mandate was expanded to include the entire Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. Thus, REUTER became the Church's all-around media expert as well as a television producer, director, scriptwriter, and an on-camera personality in his own right.

Philippine television was in its infancy during REUTER's Ateneo de Manila years, but he was already alert to its possibilities. Indeed, there was only one television station in the country in 1953 (broadcasting from the roof of a supermarket) when the Ateneo Players aired *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which, says REUTER, was "the first big play on Philippine TV." As the number of stations slowly expanded, producers were hungry for good dramatic material and often broadcast REUTER's Ateneo-based shows. "The very first TV dramas in the Philippines," he boasts, "were ours." REUTER was already on friendly terms with the pioneering producers, directors, and performers, as well as the network owners. One of the latter, Eugenio "Geny" Lopez, Jr., had played basketball as a boy under REUTER's tutelage in Baguio before the war. REUTER was therefore thoroughly at home in the country's nascent television industry when, in 1960, he became involved in it more or less full time.

Part of REUTER's new work included telecasting the celebration of the mass each week and other programs of an overtly religious nature (e.g., retreats, special services during Holy Week and Christmas, sermons, and other spiritual lessons). But he was eager from the beginning to introduce entertaining shows that were also uplifting and wholesome and that bore a religious message. For example, REUTER began adapting for Filipino audiences radio and television plays written originally for Fr. Patrick Peyton's "Family Theater" in the United States. Many years before as a theology student, REUTER himself had written a prize-winning script for "Family Theater," and in 1962 he spent nine months in Hollywood learning new production techniques in Peyton's studios. The Philippine version of "Family Theater" used the American scripts plus some of REUTER's own. A typical episode was "God and a Red Scooter" in which an embittered man, whose wife lies dangerously ill, rediscovers his faith through the example of his small son. From the beginning, says REUTER, "it was a smash." It ran for years.

A wholly original program developed by REUTER in the early 1960s was "Santa Zita and Mary Rose," a weekly television drama in which the heroines were housemaids. This enormously popular television show

grew in part from an idea of Fr. Walter Hogan, an Irish-American Jesuit and labor activist, who prodded REUTER to do a program that celebrated the dignity of labor. It came to fruition due to the creative energy and interest of Mary Rose Jacinto, a steel heiress and devout Catholic who wrote most of the weekly episodes, hosted the program, and whose family's company, Jacinto Steel, covered most of its expenses. "Santa Zita and Mary Rose" traced the fortunes and foibles of two Filipino households, focusing on the roles of the maids—good ones, who performed their tasks diligently and kept their charges out of harm's way, and bad ones, who put them at risk through carelessness and improvidence. The program elicited a big response in the form of letters, phone calls, and newspaper coverage. Some of these were complaints. One matron, for example, complained that her maids were learning bad habits from watching the show, such as sitting on the family's living room sofa! "Santa Zita and Mary Rose" captivated Filipino audiences, who for the eleven years from 1961 to 1972 (the year President Ferdinand Marcos closed down the television stations) reserved 5:30 to 6:00 every Sunday evening for the show.

The program was broadcast live and REUTER directed it himself. Each Sunday morning after saying mass he would enter the studios to block out the scenes for the week's episode. At one o'clock the cast would arrive, and from then until five, he rehearsed them. "Then at 5:30, with three cameras running—Pow! We would go live." At six, REUTER appeared on his own religious talk show, "Father Reuter Presents."

By the mid-1960s REUTER was producing seven popular programs weekly plus occasional "specials." "Teenagers" addressed adolescent experience through drama, while "Education on TV" dwelt on issues in science, development, and current affairs. "RJ and the Riots" was a high-spirited, rock-'n'-roll variety show. For his many programs, REUTER called upon the talents he had helped to develop at Ateneo de Manila and in Manila's women's schools and colleges. He also drew players from high schools, grade schools, and even the Ateneo law school. In this way the circle of "REUTER babies" grew wider and wider. For REUTER himself, the personal ties were as important as the professional accomplishment. In reminiscing about these years he inevitably mingles the two, recalling how Mary Rose Jacinto met her future husband on the set of "Santa Zita and Mary Rose," and how Cecile Guidote,\* later a leading light in innovative Filipino theater, got her start by producing and directing "Teenagers" and appearing on "Family Theater" and "Santa Zita and Mary Rose."

\* RMAF Awardee in Public Service, 1972.

Television, of course, was only one of the media REUTER was responsible for, although it was the one in which he shone most conspicuously. But during the same years, REUTER also played a key role in establishing and expanding the Catholic Church's radio broadcast system in the Philippines. From 1965 to 1967 he was acting general manager of Radio Veritas,\* during which time he supervised the installation of two new 100-kilowatt transmitters and other sophisticated equipment donated by German Catholic charities and the West German government. Later, when a Filipino priest was asked to head Radio Veritas, REUTER continued to serve as consultant and program director. Radio Veritas was only one of some 250 radio stations operating in the Philippines at the time. A handful of other stations were also Church-affiliated, and beginning in 1956 REUTER set up the Federation of Catholic Broadcasters to facilitate cooperation. In 1967 REUTER founded Endue Asia, the Asian branch of the International Catholic Association of Radio and Television, to link Catholic broadcasters throughout the region.

Despite his prolific activities in media, REUTER continued to perform priestly functions as well. He became chaplain of St. Paul's College in Manila and celebrated mass there every morning, walking to the school from nearby Xavier house. He conducted frequent retreats and, in time, specialized in retreats for young people in their final year of school—long weekends in Baguio, Tagaytay, or Antipolo. And he was busy officiating at marriages and baptisms for various "REUTER babies."

The late 1960s were traumatic years in the Philippines. Student demonstrations erupted, demanding an end to Philippine participation in the war in Vietnam and attacking American influence and presence in the Philippines generally. These anti-American sentiments were rooted in Philippine nationalism and spread far and wide beyond the student community. At Ateneo, students demanded that key positions in the school be filled by Filipinos, not Americans. REUTER himself was no longer teaching at the time and was largely spared, but he was saddened by the reaction of some of his American colleagues who buckled under the strain and left the Philippines.

Among the activists were some of REUTER's friends and former students; this is probably why he never took the anti-American rhetoric very seriously. He did experience this radical nationalism firsthand on one occasion, however. *Cisco*, a play under his direction, was picketed by crowds of left-wing activists. This quintessential REUTER production was about St. Francis of Assisi, with leading men

\*RMAF Awardee in Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts, 1986.

from Ateneo and leading women from St. Paul's. The demonstrators attacked the play as "anticommunist" and "progovernment"; REUTER was attacked personally as an elitist and friend of the rich. For a few days the furor was such that his players were unable to leave the theater. On the other hand, REUTER notes happily, the free publicity was a boon and *Cisco* played to record crowds.

When President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law on 21 September 1972, REUTER's realm of operations was suddenly diminished. REUTER is emphatic in saying that, first and foremost, "Martial Law was declared against mass media." Marcos's first letter of instruction directed his press and defense secretaries to "take over and control all communications media for the duration of the present national emergency." With one exception, all the leading newspapers of metropolitan Manila were closed permanently; only the radio and television stations controlled closely by Marcos remained on the air. Moreover, journalists and media owners alike were arrested and jailed, some of them for several years.

REUTER's immediate task, as national director of mass media for the Catholic hierarchy and head of the Federation of Catholic Broadcasters, was to help get Catholic radio stations back on the air. Under Martial Law, the army's Office for Civilian Relations decided who could broadcast and who could not, and REUTER became the formal go-between for the federation's seventeen stations and the military authorities. What the regime required, he says, was obedience: "All of us had to bow our heads and promise not to say anything against Marcos or his regime or the military." It was a humiliating process, but in consequence all but one or two of the stations were eventually permitted to go back on the air. "We played ball," he says, "but as Martial Law went on, it got more and more painful."

For REUTER personally, Martial Law was anathema. To help fill the breach in honest news, he launched a weekly four-page newsletter called the *Communicator*, in which he chronicled the behavior of the government, printing facts not available in the Marcos-controlled media. He produced the *Communicator* at Xavier House and distributed it to ten thousand readers. For a few years he got away with it, perhaps because Marcos was disinclined to tangle with the Catholic Church, whose senior bishops supported him, or perhaps because REUTER was on friendly terms with Marcos's defense minister, Juan Ponce Enrile. (Enrile's wife was a "REUTER baby.") However, REUTER's accounts of the regime's brutalities, circulated in the *Communicator* and reported over the air by the bolder members of the federation, finally prompted Marcos to take action. In 1976 the military closed

down two Church-affiliated radio stations, one run by the Jesuits in Malaybalay, Bukidnon, the other by the Maryknoll fathers in Davao. Shortly thereafter eleven military vehicles entered the Xavier House grounds, where REUTER was arrested by six colonels and majors, including one Col. Rolando Abadilla whom REUTER had implicated in a military murder.

REUTER was put on trial for subversion, inciting to rebellion, and dozens of other charges arising from the *Communicator*. His trial went on for twelve days and received a lot of attention in the Marcos-controlled press, where REUTER was depicted as a criminal. Told to prepare a written response to the charges, REUTER instead wrote a passionate indictment of the Marcos regime. Its appearance in the international press so embarrassed the Marcos government that at this point Enrile intervened and REUTER was granted amnesty. However, the charges were not dropped and REUTER was warned that they might be reactivated at any time. For the next two years military guards kept constant watch at Xavier House, never interfering with REUTER's routine comings and goings but logging all visitors and maintaining a menacing presence.

At the same time, debate flared among Catholic broadcasters about how to respond to the closing of the two radio stations. Some members of the federation argued that Catholic stations had no business provoking the government and putting the Church at risk; others, siding with REUTER, believed that Catholic stations should unite and protest the closing. The majority believed as REUTER did and opted for "principled survival." But Radio Veritas and two other Catholic stations withdrew from the federation over the issue, preferring a safer course.

"Family Theater," "Santa Zita and Mary Rose," and "Father Reuter Presents"—all these were victims of Martial Law. But after his release REUTER continued to supervise Church telecasting, including religious services and special events such as the Pope's visit to the Philippines in 1981. Otherwise he remained busy with priestly activities, such as preaching, organizing retreats, and hearing confession. He also put on plays at St. Paul's and other Catholic schools in Metro Manila. Through the federation he continued to strengthen links among the country's remaining Catholic broadcasters. Meanwhile, the fruits of Ferdinand Marcos's Martial Law became increasingly bitter. By the early 1980s, many who had sided with Marcos in the beginning, or who had reacted passively out of fear or resignation, had come to share a common revulsion for the regime. Within the Catholic Church, too, many more now agreed that the regime was fundamentally unjust and corrupt.

The assassination of leading oppositionist Benigno Aquino in Manila on 21 August 1983 finally brought anti-Marcos sentiment out into the open. It took a few years for a viable opposition to cohere, however, and for a figure to emerge who could rally Filipinos to the common cause of removing the dictator. Behind the scenes in this intricate process, a Filipino brain trust, whose members had common roots in Ateneo de Manila and included some of REUTER's former students, played a critically important role. At the same time, Radio Veritas shed its cautious demeanor and boldly covered the activities of the newly vociferous opposition. The federation's stations also carried the news of dissent, and REUTER himself now moved to strengthen its internal links by providing shortwave radios to member stations so they could stay in touch with each other twenty-four hours a day. Then in 1985, as the crisis began to peak, REUTER readied the federation's members for the role no other organization could play.

The Federation of Catholic Broadcasters was the only independent communications network that covered the nation. As the country approached the extraordinary Snap Election of 7 February 1986, in which Ferdinand Marcos was challenged by Corazon "Cory" Aquino, wife of the martyred Benigno, REUTER allied the federation with NAMFREL—the National Movement for Free Elections. It was NAMFREL's goal to monitor the conduct of the elections so that the results would reach the public untainted. The federation's members, along with Radio Veritas and five college radio stations, were now linked to each other and to four mobile units by shortwave radio and computers. As the elections approached, REUTER's team trained intensively with the new equipment so that they could relay "swift, honest reports on the results."

During the elections REUTER's studios at Xavier House coordinated the flow of news to and from member stations, the colleges, and the mobile units that were placed strategically around Manila and operated by teams of "REUTER babies." One unit was at NAMFREL headquarters. By phone, REUTER himself was linked to the American Embassy. Speaking for the federation over Radio Veritas, June Keithley, a media personality whose career had its roots in REUTER-directed student productions at St. Paul's College, kept listeners abreast of accurate news from all fronts, news channeled through Xavier House. The counting went on for a week, during which time, says REUTER, "We were in constant contact with each other both night and day."

The NAMFREL vote count, corroborated by independent election watchers, showed Aquino to be the victor. The official government count showed otherwise and Marcos was officially pronounced the winner. "We knew that there was widespread, open, shameless fraud," says REUTER. Since this was the popular perception as well, a stand-off



now occurred between Marcos and his government, on the one hand, and the massive and now well-organized opposition forces who claimed Aquino as president, on the other. In mid-February the Catholic bishops proclaimed that the official election results were fraudulent and the Marcos government had no moral basis. REUTER kept his communications network going with a skeletal staff as the crisis deepened.

The defection from the Marcos side of Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos on 22 February brought things quickly to a head. Encamped in Metro Manila's Camp Crame (headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary), the two men were vulnerable to counterattack by forces still loyal to Marcos. Jaime Cardinal Sin, speaking over Radio Veritas, called upon citizens to defend them. Soon there were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets peacefully thwarting the advance of tanks and troops sent by Marcos. REUTER called his radio volunteers back into service, and from mobile units throughout the city they fed eyewitness reports to Xavier House, from whence they were relayed to Keithley at Radio Veritas. Keithley became the guiding voice of the EDSA Revolution, so-named because the greatest number of citizen protectors were massed outside Camp Crame along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, or EDSA. Based on reports from REUTER's mobile units, Keithley gave people specific instructions, e.g., "Two tanks are approaching Camp Crame from Fort Santiago. They are now at the corner of Ortigas and EDSA. Please move to Ortigas and EDSA immediately." Meanwhile, at Xavier House, REUTER maintained contact with the defecting leaders, the American embassy, Aquino's forces, the Cardinal, federation affiliates around the Philippines, and with "REUTER babies" posted strategically around Metro Manila. His radio code name was Papa Bear.

So effective was this effort that on Sunday morning, 23 February, armed forces loyal to Marcos destroyed the Radio Veritas transmitters located outside Manila in Malolos, Bulacan. For REUTER the best alternative station was DZRJ in the city's very center. (DZRJ had been founded by Ramon Jacinto—RJ of "RJ and the Riots" and brother of Mary Rose Jacinto. When Martial Law was declared, the station had been seized by Marcos and given over to the army.) At this precise moment of the EDSA Revolution, its supervising officer had joined Enrile and the other military defectors and made the station available to REUTER. Soon, June Keithley was ensconced in its twelfth-story broadcasting booth. As a team of volunteers from Manila's show business community filtered incoming reports and wrote news bulletins, Keithley's familiar voice over the airwaves guided millions in the city to the new frequency number. Meanwhile, the steps leading to her isolated perch above the city were guarded by nuns, for Keithley was now on the government's death list. (Marcos's forces never found

the rebel station, perhaps because it was so close to the presidential palace, Malacañang.)

For eighteen hours, through *Radyo Bandido* (Outlaw Radio), as the station was aptly named, Filipinos learned how mounting defections from the military were slowly but surely sealing Marcos's fate and how their own heroic actions had stopped military tanks in their tracks. On Monday, forces committed to Aquino seized the government-owned television station at Channel Four, and Keithley and the other REUTER lieutenants moved there. The following day Aquino was sworn in as president and the Marcos family was whisked away to Guam aboard two American planes.

During this time REUTER had commandeered nearly all of Xavier House. Dozens of "REUTER babies" had camped out there, eating, sleeping, and keeping the news flowing. Exhausted and jubilant, they now joined the general celebration. About a month later they met again on the Xavier House lawn to honor Keithley and to commemorate the role she played as "Commander in Chief of the Army of the People"—the title inscribed on a plaque given by "the REUTER babies, who were her staff officers during the Battle of Manila, 5-25 February 1986." As for Papa Bear himself, he describes his role in the EDSA Revolution as accidental. He had mobilized his team for an election, not a revolution. But, he says, when the crisis came, "The system worked. It worked at EDSA."

"Father REUTER," as he is known to Filipinos, embarked on his seventh decade just as the Philippines began its new search for democracy. The Aquino government included many of REUTER's former students. Their tasks were difficult, all the more so as individuals and groups long suppressed by dictatorship now competed for influence. REUTER was distressed to observe the way that political infighting soon took its toll on these crusaders in government; many eventually left in frustration. One, Jaime Ongpin—another bright Atenean who had met his future wife while working on a REUTER show and who was later a prime mover in the campaign against the dictatorship—committed suicide after resigning as secretary of finance. These events have been sobering and sad. Yet REUTER remains buoyed by the success of the EDSA Revolution and by the Filipinos' demonstration that "People Power" can control the destiny of a nation.

REUTER's life today seems just as busy as it ever was. He rises early and begins his day with a long run whenever he can. Six o'clock mass at St. Paul's is followed by a morning full of correspondence, meetings, and radio work for the federation; then a noontime swim, lunch, appointments, and, often in the late afternoon or evening, play

rehearsals. "Santa Zita and Mary Rose" is back on the air. It is now videotaped and absorbs his entire Saturday. There are many marriages, baptisms, and funerals at which to officiate.

REUTER continues to ponder the media's paradoxical power. On one hand, he acknowledges that the popular mass media "is doing a terrific amount of damage" on the way young people form their values; on the other, a free media is essential for democracy. "Public opinion," he says, "is the last tribunal of democracy, and the court that presents the evidence is media: radio, television, press, and film."

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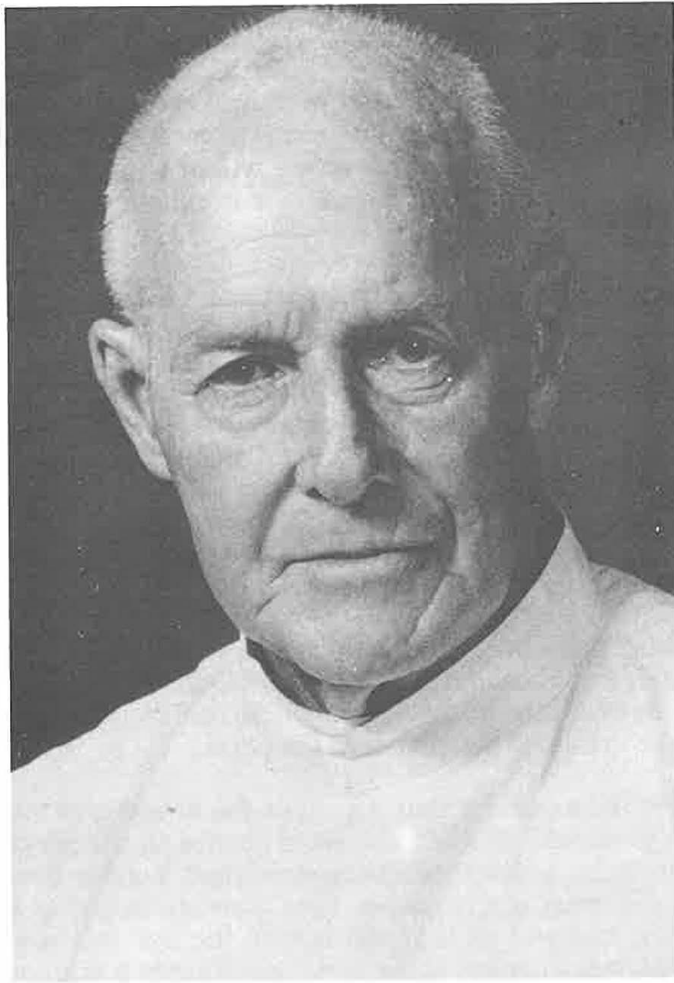
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