



## CORAZON “CORY” AQUINO: GLOBAL SERVANT-LEADER

—SHANN FERCH  
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

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**F**erch: Thank you, President Aquino, for this interview. What happened to make you the leader of the Philippines?

Aquino: Well, circumstances prevailed. First my husband was assassinated. And then, of course, we had been living under a dictatorship. And at that time, I was never considering myself as a presidential candidate. But as the opposition, I suppose, looked around and searched for the best possible candidate against a dictator, a number of them were convinced that it had to be somebody the opposite of Marcos—if possible, the complete opposite of Marcos. So I suppose they thought of me because, first, I’m a woman, he’s a man. I’ve never been a politician, although I have been a politician’s wife. I had never voted for Marcos. And the fact that he had incarcerated my husband—of course, we were against his dictatorship. And we were, both my husband and I, working towards the restoration of democracy. So circumstances perhaps required that the opposition present somebody who would be the opposite of Marcos, and in addition to that, somebody who could unite the opposition. And it was the perception that I would be the candidate that could best unite the opposition. The fact that a number of the politicians who had presidential ambitions had indicated to me that they would give way only to me was perhaps a sign that a number of them could be united if I were the candidate.

Ferch: Did those indications come personally to you?



Aquino: Oh, yes, they came to me. And then, of course, some of them had said that on whatever media was available then.

Ferch: What do you think were the great harms the Marcos' regime brought to the Philippines?

Aquino: Well, first of all, he had promised us, promised the Filipino people, that in exchange for our freedom, he would give us bread. He would address our economic needs. But, unfortunately for us Filipinos, he not only took away our freedom, he also took away our bread. So it was, of course, very difficult for most Filipinos. Although in the beginning, most Filipinos were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. And the first year, second year, third year, you hardly heard any opposition. It was only towards. . . I suppose when my husband decided to run in the elections for Parliament where he was able to have a forum for voicing out his stand against the dictatorship. And also, his fellow opposition leaders were able to go out and campaign because Marcos had called for elections for Parliament.

Ferch: How did your faith help you deal with martial law and the different types of injury martial law brought into your life, such as your husband's incarceration? How did your faith help you deal with that?

Aquino: Well, I'm just grateful that I did have the kind of faith that I did, and there was nobody I could turn to, my husband being in prison. And there was nobody who could really help us. So it became very clear to me I had to surrender all these problems to the Lord, and ask Him to guide me. There was no alternative to that. And in fact I am grateful, and I thank the Lord for making me the kind of person I am—realizing my inadequacies, of which there are many, and going to Him who could help me in everything.

Ferch: And at that time, I would imagine, some people divided away from you to avoid being associated with Marcos coming after them?

Aquino: Oh, yes.



Ferch: And some people probably stayed close from their courage. Can you tell me about that?

Aquino: Oh, well, in the beginning, as they say in the Bible, “In adversity, you get to know your friends.” And, of course, prior to my husband’s incarceration, many people thought that he would have a good chance of becoming the successor to Marcos. And, in fact, I remember once I was in the supermarket, and I was waiting for my driver to come bring the car, and there was this woman, a friend of ours, an acquaintance, who was on the other side of the street. And she rushes to me, and says, “Cory, please don’t forget me when Ninoy becomes president.” And I said, “Oh, well, sure.” Then just so many months after, we had martial law. And oh, people were just so afraid to come to our house. And I could count on my fingers the number of friends that continued to be loyal and who truly were concerned about Ninoy, about me, and about our children. But I was glad that in my children’s case, the young people did not allow themselves to stay away from my children. And they continued to be good friends. They were not afraid, and they just wanted to show my children that they would continue to be friends. But it was good for us to know. I remember my husband telling me, he had one visit with Marcos. He was taken there maybe five years after his detention. And I think my husband had told him, “Well, I’m luckier than you in the sense that I know who my friends are.” And, in fact, he was telling Marcos that if we were on opposite sides, I wonder who among these people you can trust. So it was very clear to us then, yes, we don’t have the many friends we used to have, or that my husband used to have, but still the ones who chose to stay with us really were exceptional. And I’m really grateful they continued to be there for us.

Ferch: There is such love for you in the hearts of the young people, and also it’s been part of your leadership to try to encourage and develop the young leaders of the nation. Can you tell me about that some more?

Aquino: Well, as you know, I became president because of People Power, because after the elections—Marcos had manipulated election returns, and



so he had been declared the winner. But I had called for a big rally. And I had asked people to come and to listen to my proposal of having a non-violent protest movement. I was asking them to boycott the products and services of Marcos-controlled or Marcos-owned enterprises. And initially, the opposition leaders were telling me, “You know, Cory, after elections, nobody calls for a rally. And especially after one has been declared the loser.”

I had been going around, specifically here in Makati (in Manila), because they had had big problems here about safeguarding the ballot boxes. And so I went around and I was looking to see how the people were. And they were calling out to me, “Cory, what else can we do?” And you know, it was not just one, but several of them had told me this. So I would say, “Yes, what else can we do?” And I felt a certain obligation to them, because I had asked them to support me, and to try to work for the restoration of democracy. So, that same day, I called for a meeting of the opposition leaders, and I told them what had happened, and I said, “I’d like to call for a rally.” And so this was when they discouraged me, saying that nobody calls for rallies. But I cannot just, you know, ignore what these people were calling out to me. And so, like I was their little kid and they were telling me, “Okay, so where do you want the rally?” And I said, “Well, I’d like it in the Luneta,” which is the biggest open space here in metro Manila. And they said, “Oh, what if we just have it in another area?” This is in front of the post office that they were suggesting to me, and they said, “If we get ten thousand, or twenty thousand, it’ll look so huge. So let’s just have it there.” I said, “No, no. I really want to know once and for all whether people still want to work for the restoration of democracy, or whether they have given up. So let’s have it in this big park.” And I said, “If nobody comes, or very few people come, then we will know that they don’t want any more of this, and so we can go back to our private lives.” But, of course, the unexpected happened, and estimates ran from half a million to more. And it was just amazing, considering that we did not have any sophisticated sound equipment.





And what we had told the people was to bring their transistor radios because my speech would be broadcast on the Catholic radio station, so they would be able to listen from whatever place they were. That was on February 16, 1986. And I told the people, “I will be visiting ten cities in the Philippines to ask for their support in this non-violent protest movement.” I was only on my third city, in Cebu province in southern Philippines, and news came to us that there were military who had – well, actually had plotted against Marcos, but they had been discovered. So they were retreating and going back to their military camp and the police camp to, I guess, protect themselves from whatever Marcos was going to do to them. So this was the beginning of People Power. And they asked Cardinal Sin to call the people, and Cardinal Sin appealed to the people to go there and to, in effect, protect the military. And I was saying this was the first time perhaps in world history that the civilians were called upon to protect the military. And, of course, the rest is history. The People Power Revolution took four days – actually, a little less than four days. But it was the first of its kind, and it was a very peaceful revolution and we were able to oust a dictator.

Ferch: When you saw that first moment and when you made the courageous decision, “Let’s put it in a larger setting, a larger forum,” and then you saw the five hundred thousand and more people—what came into your heart?

Aquino: Of course I was overwhelmed. And so it gave me the courage to continue, because if they were willing to make such a sacrifice of going there, then the least I could do was to carry on with what I had been proposing to them. And it was just fantastic, something that nobody had expected. Because as the veteran politicians had told me, nobody calls for a rally after the elections, especially after one has lost.

Oh, may I point out that the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines gave us tremendous support, because they issued the statement saying that this was the most fraudulent election ever, and that it was highly immoral. So the people were not expected, or did not have to, recognize an immoral leader. Or a leader elected through immoral means.



Ferch: Beautiful. So after that initial rally, and when you're starting to go to the cities, was the country still under martial law at that time?

Aquino: Oh, yes. Although officially, or on paper, Marcos said he had lifted martial law.

Ferch: Was there a threat that you might be imprisoned for your work?

Aquino: Anything could happen.

Ferch: And how did you develop—you mentioned that Ninoy had been reading Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King, and your own—

Aquino: Jose Rizal.

Ferch: Jose Rizal.

Aquino: And Mahatma Gandhi.

Ferch: Gandhi, yes.

Aquino: Well, he was reading so many. He had also—I remember you mentioning Victor Frankl—

Ferch: Yes.

Aquino: —and he had also told me about all the books he had read. Because he had so much time in prison. And it was really more a question of me getting him as many books as he wanted. And so whenever our friends would ask, "What can we send him?" I said, "Well, could you just send him books?" and, "Which books?" I tell them, "Look at *Time* magazine, and look at whatever's on the best seller list, both under fiction and non-fiction, and he would appreciate that. Like, one of his lawyers, one of his chief lawyers, was a Protestant, and very well-read on the writings of Christians. And so he was the one who introduced my husband to Bonhoeffer.

And I suppose who introduced him to Victor Frankl. But then my mother-in-law was a very religious woman, so she had sent him *Imitation of Christ*.



Ferch: Thomas à Kempis.

Aquino: So it was, as I said, maybe God's way of. . . and in fact, my husband had written that, that in the past he had been so busy because of his being a public official, and he was also very much concerned that he succeed in his political ambition, that he forgot to thank God for all the good things that had happened to him. So it was in prison when he finally realized that he had to ask for God's forgiveness. He found God in prison.

Ferch: You came into this position where the opposition was uniting around you and against Marcos. In light of this, how did you come to your own love for non-violence?

Aquino: From the very beginning I've never been into violence. And also, when we were living in the United States, my husband had gone to Nicaragua to find out exactly what had happened there, and he was convinced that no way can we Filipinos resort to violence. Because what good will the restoration of freedom be if you will have so many widows and orphans crying and in pain because of having lost their husbands or their fathers?

When my husband was assassinated, and when in fact around two million people joined us in the funeral procession, later on some of the leaders of the opposition were saying that I missed my golden opportunity. I said, "What do you mean?" Well, they said that at that point I could have asked people to do anything, and they would have done so. And they said, "You should have led them to Malacanya, and we could have taken over." And I said, "Oh, no. That is not my way." And what guarantee do we have: First, how many people would be killed? And then, would we in fact have succeeded? I mean, these are all unarmed people: violence was never my thing. And even during the campaign, some people were also saying, "Why don't you go to Malacanya and challenge the dictator?" I said, "No, no, that's not my way, and we will just have to do it this way." Non-violence is a slower way of doing things, but in the end, the results will be more lasting than if you are able to accomplish things in a hurry.

Ferch: In America and throughout the world, you are an icon of world



peace, human rights, the abolition of war as an instrument of policy. How do you try to continue these processes in the world?

Aquino: Well, let me say that because we do have many problems in the Philippines, perhaps the problems in the Philippines are occupying top priority with me, and while it is true I continue to be involved in the work in other nations, in other people who have suffered loss of their freedom, I try to concentrate on what we can do here in the Philippines to help our poor brothers and sisters. And so last year I launched what I refer to as a People Power, People Movement. I felt it was time that we should not just confine People Power to politics, or to political activities, but that People Power should be used to help people get together and to help them in the alleviation of poverty. So I sought out twenty NGOs, or foundations, throughout the Philippines to commemorate the twentieth death anniversary of my husband. And the idea was for the Aquino Foundation to put their projects or their programs in video and in print so that others who would like to replicate their successful projects would have an easier time of doing so. And my role principally was to be a convener, to bring these people together, to let them know that they are all together in improving lives here. And we have the foundations. We have small NGOs, but each one definitely has a role in the building of a better nation.

Ferch: There tends to be a great deal of cynicism just as an operating force when people feel like things aren't going the way they might want them to go. And your leadership is completely the opposite of that consistently. How do you maintain hope and courage, and stop cynicism? You're emphasizing the life-giving nature, the appreciative elements rather than the deficit-based elements.

Aquino: Well, because we have enough of the negatives. And I keep on appealing to media that perhaps you could balance it, bring fifty percent of the bad news and fifty percent the good news. Because I am convinced that it cannot be all bad news. And people should know that there are still good things happening in our country, and that there are many good people here,



and it would be worthwhile to emulate what they are doing for our country. And fortunately, it's really the bad things that get into the limelight. And I remember reading, I think it was an American magazine, and they were saying, "Well, it's like this, suppose there is a school, and somebody gets this incurable sickness, and that person gets sick and dies." And so everything is focused on that. And in fact, the story goes that all students are not able to go to school because of this incident. But you know, they fail to say that it was really a very unusual case, just one out of that entire student body, and yet the attention was focused on that one sad thing. Of course, I agreed they should report on that, but not to the extent that you forget that ninety-nine percent are still able to go to school, and were not affected by such an ailment.

I guess in everything there should be a balance, and we should, throughout the world, know that we have both a good and a bad. But even if the bad news is more, attracts more attention, still we should do our best to also bring forth the good news.

Ferch: In leadership across different sectors there's a conception that a person has to be ultimately powerful to make things happen. And then power is held in certain ways, often subversively or dominantly. Yours isn't held that way. How do you envision power, and how do you lead with power?

Aquino: Well, of course, power is a gift from the people, and so you owe the people. And you have to be responsible enough that the power should be used in order to improve their lives and not just your life. And also, it's good to remember that power is temporary, and that you may be the most powerful person here in the Philippines today, but who knows what will happen in succeeding days? And in the same way that when my husband was senator, I would like to believe that he was one of the most powerful senators then. Of course, many people thought that he would eventually become president. But then there he was, and then on the same day he gets arrested and detained, for seven years. So I think for all of us who have been entrusted with the responsibility of leading, it is important for us to remember that this is temporary, and it's not yours permanently. But you



will have to render an accounting. I think that should be first and foremost, that in the end not only the people but, I guess, when you face the Final Judgment, you will be asked how exactly you used that kind of power. So I suppose consciously or unconsciously that was part of my prayer, that I not abuse the power given to me, and that I try to use it the best way I can in order to address the needs of the people.

Ferch: The changes in your husband, the transformations that he underwent during prison, what was that like for you personally as his wife?

Aquino: Well, some changes I could see; other changes I could not. Like when he went on his forty-day hunger strike, he was telling me, "You know, Cory, try not to worry too much, because if I go, then that means my sufferings will be over." But I was telling him, "Well, you know, just make sure that you don't have a death wish, and let's just continue praying so that God will guide you and guide me in the best way to do this." And for him, later on, he would tell me that his life really had changed so much because of that, that he was able to not have anything to do with food. He limited himself to water, amino acid tablets, potassium, a little bit of sugar, and salt tablets. So he lost forty pounds in forty days. And, of course, it was a very difficult experience for me. Also, seeing him become weaker and weaker. And the military had allowed me to visit him every day because he was having difficulty just walking from his bed to the bathroom. And so my oldest son and I would help him up and bring him to the bathroom. But, as I said, I didn't see all the changes; but certainly, later I could see that whereas before he was completely a politician, with all this suffering that he had undergone, and all these prayers, he no longer was aiming to become president, but in fact, he was looking to God to show him the way to becoming a better person, and to show him how best he could help the people. Some of his critics would say, "Oh, how can Ninoy forget about being a politician? He's been a politician almost all of his adult life." But I could see that. And also, he would tell me, "I hope I will be released from prison if only to make up to you and to the children for all the times that I neglected you because I was so busy with my political life." And, in fact,



he told our youngest daughter, who was only a year and a half when he was incarcerated, “I hope I can make it up to you.” So she was nine years old when finally he was living in the same house as we were. Because prior to that, she thought that we were talking about the possibility of her dad being released, and she said, “So, Mom, where’s he gonna live?” And I said, “He’s gonna live here.” “Where? Where is his room?” Because she was sleeping with me all the time that my husband was in prison. I said, “Here,” and she said, “But this is not his bed.” It was really something so new for her. And so when we got to Boston is the first time she had a father living with us. And Ninoy was just so happy he was able to be with us. And, as I said, he really tried his best to make up for whatever neglect in the past.

Ferch: That’s a very lovely aftereffect of suffering. What’s your view of suffering in leadership, and the way you approach it?

Aquino: Well, to be a leader is to be prepared to take on whatever sacrifices or whatever sufferings you will have to go through. I mean, leadership is not a gift without strings, okay? So you really have to devote most if not all of your time to seeing that you are in fact leading your people towards the right direction. It carries with it so many responsibilities. And, of course, a leader also has to worry about making the right decisions. But that’s what a leader is about. You have to take risks. At the same time, it is important. . . and the suffering was more in my husband’s case than my case . . . that we prayed a lot and asked the Lord to help us as we were confronted with different trials, so that we could arrive at the right or the best possible decision.

Ferch: You went to Assisi, and can you relate what you discovered there?

Aquino: Yes. After my presidency, I had a chance to visit Assisi, and as we were going around, the guide said, “You know, St. Francis would always ask the Lord for more sufferings.” So when we got back to the hotel, I said to God, “I don’t think I’ll ask for more sufferings. But if more sufferings come my way, I will not complain.” And, in fact, that has been



my prayer to the Lord, that I hope there will be no more suffering, but if suffering does come, please help me. And I used to think, or I like to think, that there was a quota for suffering, and that all of us had served in quotas. And I felt I had filled up mine. And I remember when we were living in Boston, I would write haikus. You know, the Japanese way of writing verses? And in one of them, I had said, "The worst of my life is over, I hope. And may the best please come soon." And I had shown it to my husband. I said, "I hope the worst is over." And he said, "No, Cory, I'm afraid it's not." And I said, "My goodness, what else will happen?" You know? Then one of my other haikus was, "In pain and sorrow, I have never been alone. Many thanks, dear Lord." And I have been so grateful that in my greatest difficulty and my greatest pain, there was always someone who would help me. There would be my children, or there would be friends. It would have been disastrous, I think, if I had been all alone. I mean, of course you believe that God is there. But since we are still in this world, you still want human beings to talk to and to relate to.

Ferch: What was it like to grieve Ninoy's death, and unite your family, and three years later, step into presidential leadership?

Aquino: Well, before my husband left Boston to return to Manila, he had explained certain scenarios to me. And he was telling me, "Well, Cory, try not to worry too much. Maybe when I return home, I guess I'll probably be arrested at the airport and taken back to the detention center where I was. Or I might be confined at the heart center, because I have gone through a triple bypass. Or better still, they might think I am no longer a threat anyway, they might agree to make me go under house arrest." And I said, "Oh, that would be wonderful," I was thinking. And then he added as a last thing, "But then if Marcos makes a mistake and has me killed, that could be the best thing that will happen to me." This is what Ninoy said. And I said, "Ninoy, how can you say that?" And he said, "Well, I've always wanted to die for our country, and this would be it." And so when my husband was assassinated, of course my children and I were all crying. And I told them, "Well, I have to tell you what Dad told me before he left." I hadn't told





them before. And I said, “He said that he has always wanted to die for our country, and he got his wish.” And later on, my children told me, “Well, Mom, it helped when you told us. That was what Dad wished for, and that at least his sufferings have ended and he really was able to the very last moment of his life to do something for the Filipino people.”

Ferch: In your own leadership, then, without Senator Aquino, your husband, with you, comes this huge responsibility to recover a nation that’s been destroyed by the Marcos regime. Can you tell me about the loneliness and the responsibility?

Aquino: I had almost three years before the presidency, I mean from 1983 to 1986. And in the beginning, I was just telling the opposition leaders that I would support them in the activities, and principally that entailed my going to the protest marches, and giving speeches occasionally. The first big decision I had to face was in 1984, a year after my husband’s assassination, when Marcos called for elections to Parliament, and the opposition was divided. Some of them were saying, “Why should we go into this again? He’ll just cheat us again, as he did in 1978.” And then there were others who were saying, “No, no. Let’s take advantage of this, because then it gives us at least a chance to speak out openly, and we will not be arrested,” because after all, Marcos had said, you know, “This will be a time for open discussion,” or whatever he meant by that. Anyway, I was really very much troubled by that and I kept praying. And in fact, I was saying, “Ninoy, I hope you can appear to me in a dream because I’m having so much difficulty.” Both sides really have very convincing arguments, either for boycott or participation. But in the end, I was convinced that it had to be participation. And initially, when people were asking, I said, “You know, why don’t all of us make our own decision about this?” And, “Why do I have to make it public?” But people kept telling, “No, no. People are waiting.” Or, “A number of people are waiting for you to tell them how you stand on this issue.” So finally I had to do that, and I requested a Catholic radio station if I could read my statement, and they could broadcast it.



Ferch: Would that be broadcast to the whole country generally?

Aquino: Nearly. But anyway, it was the only way I could deliver the message. And after that, oh, I really received some terrible mail. There were letters telling me that, "You're so naïve," and "How can you believe this is the best option?" And somebody even said, "Ninoy must be turning in his grave. You didn't seem to learn anything from him." Oh, really some very painful things. And I said, "Well, anyway, I am convinced this is the right way." And later on, in fact, one of those who had written to me had the nerve to ask me if I could endorse him. He decided to participate after all. He was running for mayor in Mindanao. And I'm saying, well, I'm not really such a charitable person in that respect. So when he came and asked me that, I said, "Wait a second. Didn't you write to me and tell me how naïve I was, and how Ninoy must be suffering because. . ." So I said, "No, I can't endorse you." And he said, "No, Ma'am, I never wrote you that." And I said, "Isn't your name So-and-So?" And he said, "Yes, but maybe somebody else wrote that." And I said, "Oh, look, let's just forget it, and just get somebody else to endorse your candidacy." It was like that. And during that time, I was not a candidate myself, but I campaigned. I must have delivered at least sixty speeches. I went throughout the country, and where we had candidates who had asked me to help in their campaign, I did so. And it gave me a chance also to tell the people what exactly had happened during martial law. Because most of them were in the dark. They didn't know, well, maybe they knew Ninoy, but they weren't too clear about exactly what detention in a military camp is all about. So I told them that, and I was saying "I don't want what happened to my husband to happen to any of you. And also, I don't want your children to suffer the loss of their father." And, "All of us, I hope, can work together to bring about a change, and to restore democracy in our country." So I would be saying the same speech everywhere. But anyway, since most of them had not heard it, I suppose I was no longer nervous facing crowds. It was before that, when my husband ran during. . . well, he was running from prison, and we had to substitute for him. It was my youngest daughter who was seven years old who didn't mind giving speeches. And she gave, I counted, seventy



speeches. And she would. . . friend of mine who was a radio announcer was present when I introduced the candidates for the opposition, and he volunteered to teach my daughter how to give a speech in Filipino. And I asked her first, “Do you want to do it?” And she said, “Yes, I do, Mom.” And so she went all over, and she was a hit because how many seven-year-olds do you have who can speak like that? And in fact, the women who would listen to her really were always in tears. And her speech was quite simple. She said, “I’m Kris Aquino, I’m seven years old, but for almost six years, my father has not lived with us because he has been in prison. So please help us; help my mom, help my brother and my sisters, so that we can be a family again. And give my father the opportunity to serve you once again.” And then she would recite the twenty-one names of the candidates of the opposition, which she could easily do. And so she, in fact, we were really impressed because she made it to the front page of *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*. And so I was telling my husband, “She beat you to it.” She also beat me to it!

Ferch: Beautiful presence. In Ninoy’s letters to his children, and in your prayers for your children, and just the way you carry yourself, there’s a deep tenderness for your children and your family, which is also communicated to the nation and to the world. Tell us, tell me about the tenderness that you two have for your children.

Aquino: Well, again, I had said that when I got married, I was determined to be a good wife and mother. And there was no problem there. And my husband also agreed that one of us should be with the children. Because we had seen how many children of public officials really craved for attention, and I guess needed parental supervision, et cetera. And so we were determined we would give them that, and we would make sure they grew up to be responsible citizens. And I remember during martial law, it was my second daughter who was being interviewed by a foreign journalist, and I heard the journalist ask her, “So, you must miss your dad a lot, and it must be very difficult for you.” And she said, “Oh, yes, I really miss my dad, but it would have been worse if it were my mom in prison.” And the journalist



says, “Why do you say that?” And she said, “Well, every day, as far as I can remember, whenever I would go home, I knew she’d be there. And so I knew whatever problems or whatever thing, whatever I needed, I could immediately tell her.” And so it made me feel good that whatever I did was not only appreciated, but I guess made an impact on the lives of my children.

Ferch: You said for a loving marriage, it takes people that can bring out the best in each other. How did Ninoy bring out the best in you, and how did you bring out the best in him?

Aquino: Both Ninoy and I were opposites in a sense. He was an extrovert with a capital E, and I, I enjoyed my privacy. But I realized because of martial law, there was a reversal of roles since he was confined in his tiny, tiny room. And he had no access, of course, to the outside world. I had to be his spokesperson, his eyes and ears also. So I would report to him whatever his lawyers and his political associates would tell me. And because he had an ongoing trial, I would attend the meetings with his lawyers. And it was also very good education for me. They were teaching me all about, well, not only the laws, but telling me how impossible it was for us to win because Marcos could change the rules at any given moment. So in his case, because before, he could solve almost any problem. And I also felt whatever problem I had, I could just bring to him, and he would find ways and means of addressing that problem, or the two of us could easily look for solutions. But this time, both of us were powerless to do so. And so the two of us naturally had to turn to God. And while I was prayerful before, I was not as fervently prayerful as I became, okay? Because before, what were my problems? Really nothing. And very inconsequential compared to the enormous problems that were brought to us because of martial law. Ninoy, in his case, he had written in his diary, “Well, I was a nominal Catholic, and the only reason I would go to Mass every Sunday was to avoid a quarrel with Cory.” So because I had made it a rule every Sunday, all of us go to Church, and we go to Church together. So that’s what he had written in his diary. But, later on, he had all the time in the world. He had



become so prayerful. And in fact, he would ask me, “So, Cory, you pray the Rosary every day?” I said, “Yes, of course.” “How many do you pray in a day?” And I said, “Well, three.” At that time, there were only three major mysteries, unlike now, there are four major mysteries. “Three.” “Is that all?” he said. “Yeah, well how many do you pray?” And so he said, “Well, once I think I prayed fifty Rosaries.” And I said, “Oh, well, Ninoy, you don’t do anything, you know? You’re just here, so you have all the time in the world.” But I suppose all the prayers. . . and he was forever reading the Bible. Prior to that, neither one of us really was into Bible reading. But in prison, oh, he was just reading the Bible. In fact, I think my oldest daughter was telling me, “You know, Mom, for my first year in college, you put down the occupation of your father, so I put down Senator. And then now, the way he talks to us about. . . I think I’ll just say ‘Preacher,’ because every time we visit him, he tells us about what he has read, not only the Bible, but all these other religious books that he has read.” So we were seeing that the years of his imprisonment were very difficult, but they gave us the greatest learning experiences. If we had not gone through those difficult times, oh yes, I guess I would go to Mass, and I would pray, but there would not be that fervor, or that intense consciousness of really surrendering yourself to God. So while. . . as I keep on saying, “I hope there will no longer be more sufferings,” but I think that if one were not suffering, would one pray? Because if things are going well, then you think, “Do I need the Lord?” But when things look hopeless, or you feel so helpless, then there’s no other recourse. And I feel sorry for people who do not pray, or who do not believe that there is a God. And I am grateful to the Lord that He did not allow us to despair. In fact, He made us better people. As I was saying, I was glad that neither my husband nor I felt hopeless or helpless at the same time. It would have been tragic if both of us were feeling so low. And there would be times when I’d visit him, and oh, he would say, “Oh, Cory, does anybody ever even remember me?” And I think this reminded us to resign ourselves, that this will be forever. And he’d say it might be forever. And I’d say, “No, no, Ninoy, of course not.” And I’d tell him that I’m sure things will change, and whatever good



news I could get, which was very few and far between, I'd just tell him, "Look, this happened." Then there would be days when I would feel really bad, and I'd say, "Oh, I wonder if this will ever end?" And he'd say, "Yes, it will. . ." So it was good. God made. . . I believe God made it possible for us not to be feeling low at the same time, so that one would be able to comfort the other.

Ferch: You have one of the rare marriages the world can emulate, and—

Aquino: Oh, it wasn't a perfect marriage!

Ferch: I understand, but it is one that has another sort of icon of love, where two people even switch their ways of being in order to be more whole, you know?

Aquino: Yes.

Ferch: And learn from each other in doing that, and then maintain that deepened sense of love during pressure, and during suffering, versus something that fell apart during the pressure.

Aquino: That's why I really feel so blessed. Of course, I've been thinking, "Would I ever have married anybody else?" I don't think so. And not that nobody ever looked at me, you know? Because I am vain enough to think that there were others. But none of them ever measured to my husband's qualities. And I feel blessed that we found each other, although it was inevitable that we would meet each other, because we both come from the same province, we both come from political families. And so it would have been almost impossible for us not to meet.

Ferch: And so I have to ask, how did you fall in love?

Aquino: Well, we met when we were both nine years old, okay? Of course, no love then (laughter). Then I was in the United States from age thirteen to twenty. We met again when I was about sixteen or seventeen. And then he wrote to me. But I was looking for somebody who was five years older than me, because my father was five years older than my mother, and they did have an ideal marriage. And I thought, "Yes, I need



somebody who is at least five years older.” So I wasn’t paying attention to him. But after my junior year, when I came home for vacation, that’s when I fell in love. And I felt, yes, he’s the man for me. But before that, I was still hoping, as I said, looking for a man five years older than me. But I never met that man.

Ferch: What was it that inspired you when you did fall in love?

Aquino: Oh, yes. Because my husband perhaps is the most entertaining person that I have ever met. He read a lot. And as I said, he could out-talk anyone. And when we were living in Boston, most of our friends, they were Filipino doctors. And they were just amazed at his knowledge of medicine. And they would ask, “Ninoy, were you ever in medical school?” And he said, “No.” But he was just so knowledgeable about so many things. And, well, it was to his credit that whatever he read, he retained. He really was, maybe not a walking encyclopedia, but close to that. And so I was lazy in doing research. And you know, I knew that so long as Ninoy was there, I’d be able to ask him anything and everything. And when we were living in Boston, he was telling me, “Cory, why do you keep on reading those best-sellers?” I said, “Ninoy, this is my only time finally that I can relax, and I like to leave the world of politics and all these other difficult things, and only just let me be.” And when I became president, I said, “Oh, why didn’t I listen to Ninoy and read all those books that he was forever bringing me from Harvard?” But well, anyway, that was it. But whenever we would attend a dinner given by one of his Harvard associates or a professor, I’d just keep quiet, because oh, my goodness, I was just in awe of all these learned people talking about everything. And so after the dinner, when we would go home, then I’d ask my husband, “So, can you talk about what he was saying?” And I’d ask him to amplify whatever it was. So again, he’d say, “That’s what I’m telling you. Read other books than what you’re reading.” And I’d say, “It’s okay. Anyway, I’m sure they appreciate that some of us are just listeners, because all of you want to talk at the same time.” (laughter) It was good for me to be in that kind of envi-



ronment also. And certainly, I knew that I knew so little compared to all of these people.

Ferch: Your presidency at the same time was defined by an intelligence that people could adore and follow willingly and joyfully. Can you talk about the nature of that? I mean, you have this. . . I was talking to one of the people. . . Monchito, recently, and how a woman approached you just on the street to embrace you and kiss you on the cheek. And it reminds me of when I was in South Africa, and the love for Mandela is so physical, and you can feel it in the people. And you feel it here for you, and it's very inspiring. Can you talk about the nature of that?

Aquino: Well, I'm very grateful to the Filipino people that a number of them still care for me, and certainly let me know that they're willing to help in whatever way they can. I suppose, some people tell me that I'm credible because I'm sincere. And I said, "Well, I don't say something that I don't mean." Although, of course, I'll tell somebody who's unattractive, "Well, you look very good!" (laughter) But I won't go beyond that. But I suppose you can say that at the start of each day, I pray to the Lord and tell Him to guide me, and to help me every moment of the day. And it's not a long prayer; it's just I ask for His help. And early on, I would tell my husband, "Could you tell me in a dream again, or tell me what it is that I can do?" But I suppose, Somebody was telling me, I think God was telling me, "Look, it's about time you thought for yourself," or something like that. But anyway, I was just so happy and so relieved that I was able to finish my term of six years because when my husband was preparing to leave Boston to come back here, and I think an American journalist had asked him, "So Mr. Aquino, why are you going home? Isn't it dangerous for you to do so?" And he said, "No, it's very important for me to go home because I want to be able to talk to Marcos, and to ask him to start returning our country to democracy." And the journalist said, "But aren't you afraid of the danger?" And he said, "Yes, of course. But as a leader, I should be with my people, especially in times of suffering." And he was. And then he said, "I will never be able to forgive myself knowing that I could have





done something and I did not do anything.” And that stayed with me, and even if it were such a monumental task to challenge the dictator, at a certain point, I said, “I have to do as Ninoy did.”

Ferch: World leaders. One or two world leaders that you have a great appreciation for?

Aquino: Well, Nelson Mandela would be the top of the list. And I met him in South Africa in 1997. Anyway, aside from being the great person that he is, oh, he’s just the most charming person also. And when I met him in Cape Town, he said, “Oh, Corazon Aquino!” And he said so many nice things about me. Then he tells my two daughters who are with me, “You really know how to choose the right mother.” Of course, how does one feel when Mandela himself says that? And so we had a chance to talk and I had told him that I was involved in NGO activities. And he had said, “Well, how do you propose to go about this?” I said, “Well, initially I’ll just be working with NGOs in the Philippines. But I felt we could all learn from each other.” And he had said, “Well, I hope you will not forget South Africa.” And luckily, the people who had invited me to South Africa, the Kaiser Foundation, when I told them that, they said, “Well, maybe we can work on something.” And so when I came back, I asked my former Secretary of Health, Dr. Alran Bengzon, to think of some program where we could invite health workers from South Africa to come here, and also health workers, I think, from Thailand. So they arranged for a one-week seminar. And so Philippine medical workers and Thai medical workers could, in fact, pass on to the South Africans what we were able to do here successfully. And so I was glad that we were able to do that. And even now, we work closely with the Hansider Foundation, and Hansider Foundation helps a number of other NGOs in the region. And I was suggesting to them that perhaps we could go to different countries and inform them what we are doing in our respective countries so that others who would like to replicate successful projects would not have to go through a trial and error method, but could in fact just follow what the NGOs have done. And I told him, “Well, I’m volunteering. If you need my help, I can go to other countries



and tell them.” So I’m waiting for them to tell us about that. Because I was saying that First World to Third World sometimes is difficult, but I think Third World to Third World could, in fact, understand each other better, perhaps would have similar problems and would be able to address those problems better. And another person. . . a world leader? King Baudoin of Belgium. I was just so impressed with his holiness. I have, maybe, well, Mother Teresa, I also was fortunate enough to have met her a number of times, but King Baudoin was just somebody so special, and I felt so fortunate I was given the opportunity to meet with him and his wife, Queen Fabiola.

Ferch: Your leadership is often seen as united with the deep leadership of Christ. How does your love for Christ influence your leadership?

Aquino: Well, not only my leadership, but I guess my whole life. And especially where suffering is concerned. It gives me much consolation that, my goodness, what is this that I am suffering compared to what Our Lord has suffered. And I was so glad that they did make a movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, which certainly moved me, and I guess must have moved millions all over the world. So I cannot think of myself as being separate from the good Lord. And my whole day is dedicated to Him. I mean, I say that in the beginning of the day, and at the end of the day, I address myself to the Lord. So I pray that those who do not believe in Him hopefully will be given that grace, to go to Him so that their lives will be that much better, and that they will be able to handle whatever problems or trials come their way.

Ferch: Another unique aspect of your leadership around the world is politically, it’s not often that you see politics founded on prayer. So I was listening to one of the interviews yesterday when some of the media were interviewing you, and you ended with, “All parties concerned, really, we need to pray.” And that’s a different approach for the world. How do you think of prayer as foundational?

Aquino: Well, I suppose some people make fun of me when I talk like that.



But that's what I believe in, and it's worked for me as I suppose it has worked for others. And I will continue believing in the power of prayer, and I will pray that more people will do the same thing.

Ferch: Your government was one of the strongest post-regime governments the world has seen. And how were you able to effectively resist seven coup attempts, when you think back to that?

Aquino: Well, thanks to the help of the people. In spite of the coup attempts, the people were for me. They never, you know, showed preference. Maybe a few showed preference for the military rebels, but the great majority stuck by me.

Ferch: Finally, what is your view of Filipino leadership, and what do you hope for Filipino leadership?

Aquino: Well, leaders are the same, and different at the same time. And I am not one to say that my leadership is the best kind. And also, different times require different kinds of leaders. So perhaps in the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy, perhaps my kind of leadership was necessary at that time. But, as I said, it really depends on the circumstances, on the times, and on the world situation. But I just hope, and I pray, that we in the Philippines will always try to get the best leaders possible.

Ferch: Do you have any recommendations or thoughts for the more Western, especially American, leadership these days?

Aquino: No, I think it's improper for me to give advice, especially unsolicited advice.

Ferch: Thank you so much.

Aquino: You're welcome.

Ferch: Also, a few gifts from us to you.

Aquino: Oh, thank you.

Aquino: And I have something. This is for your daughters.



Ferch: Thank you.

Aquino: And that's my sign for the letter L. It stands for Love and was the name of the Party. And these are cards for your wife.

Ferch: Thank you. Your time is a gift to us.

Aquino: So, thank you very much.