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EDITOR'S NOTE

IT was already on the fourth day when President Simeon Benigno C. Aquino III formally addressed the nation about the Mamasapano crisis that happened on Jan. 25. Except to give a haphazard report about the 44 casualties from the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in an encounter with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the long running intent to capture the international terrorist Malaysian Zukifli Bin Hir alias Marwan, the President seemed detached and dry.

But it was on his second address a few days after when public opinion was transitioning to become public outrage. It was getting clearer to many that the President was evasive in explaining his role and responsibility as president and commander-in-chief. His preference of attending the inauguration of a car factory with nary a national significance rather than lending his most needed presence at the arrival of the caskets of 44 special forces (who died in a dangerous mission that could only be the making of a high officer in a chain of command) was very telling of one kind of presidential demeanor. People were criticizing him for insensitivity, incompetence and evasiveness—which was characteristic of how he handled the bloody hostage-taking at the Quirino Grandstand in 2010 and the Zamboanga siege in 2013, or so the public perception goes.

From media reports it was established that as early as Sunday morning of Jan. 25, President Aquino already knew of the Mamasapano operation. In fact, he said so during his speech before the PNP-SAF officers on Jan. 30, "Simula pa noong Linggo, umaga pa lang, sinabihan ha ako ng naging resulta nitong kay Marwan. Tapos habang sinisiyasat naming ang pagbobomba sa Zamboanga, dumarating ang mga report," (As early as Sunday morning, I was already told about the result of the operation against Marwan. Afterwards, while we were assessing the bombing in Zamboanga, other reports came.) Indeed, many lives could not have been wasted had someone acted in favor of life. Apparently, the powers-that-be favored other political agenda or something else.

As if these were not enough, the complicity of muddling up the truth belabors the obvious. On Feb. 12, during the Senate hearing on this Mamapasano tragedy, Interior Secretary Mar Roxas, Defense Secretary Voltair Gazmin and Armed Forces chief General Gregorio Pio Catapang, all said they did not inform Aquino about the Mamapasano emergency right away. Resigned PNP Chief Alan Purisima, who keeps popping up as one who is in the know about the Operation Exodus, did not give a good answer when asked if he informed President Aquino about the Mamapasano operation. He said he needed to seek clearance first from the President.

People have been clamoring for an independent investigation. Both Houses of Congress tried to respond to this clamor by conducting separate investigations—in aid of legislation. But, tactically or otherwise, investigation conducted by the Lower House stopped. And so is the one of the Senate by resorting to Executive Sessions which is exclusive and non-transparent. Is there an orchestrated move to bury the truth? This is seriously consequential knowing that history have painful lessons when leaders resort to cover up and lies.

This issue opens with "Seeking truth and justice pursuing peace", a pastoral statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Mamasapano investigation. Our cover story on the same subject is penned by Fr. Joel Tabora, S.J. Read on.

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"QUOTE IN THE ACT

"The poor are at the center of the Gospel. If we take away the poor from the Gospel, we cannot understand the whole message of Jesus Christ."

POPE FRANCIS, in his homily at a Mass celebrated with bishops, priests and the religious at the Manila Cathedral during this State and Apostolic Visit to the Philippines on Jan. 15 - 19, 2015.

"There are also many who became victims and many terrible things happened to their life, drugs or prostitution. Why is God allowing such things to happen, even if it is not the fault of the children? And why are there only very few people helping us."

GLYZELLE PALOMAR, a young girl from Tulay ng Kabataan, a shelter for homeless kids, who gave testimony during the encounter with the youth of Pope Francis at the University of Santo Tomas, during this Apostolic Visit to the Philippines.

"Terrorism is a scourge which is the product of extremist ideology. It is a threat to our Muslim nation and to the entire world."

SAUDI KING SALMAN, custodian of Islam's holiest sites; in a statement read at an international conference on "Islam and the fight against terrorism" held in Makkah, Saudi Arabia held in February 2015.

"The President of the Republic should have learned from this regrettable tragedy that transparency and forthrightness are what are expected of him at all times."

SOCRATES VILLEGAS, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in a statement on the calls by some sectors for the resignation of the Philippine president in the wake of the outrage over the tragic clash between the police and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"He was not just rude, he also did not speak the truth."

AMADO PICARDAL, a Redemptorist priest, who works as secretary to the Office on Basic Ecclesial Communities of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in his published rebuttal to the address of President Benigno Aquino to welcome Pope Francis at Malacañang.

Seeking truth and justice pursuing peace

CBCP statement on the ongoing Mamasapano investigation

CONGRESS has commenced its inquiry into that sad episode of our recent history—the slaughter of 44 gallant men of the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police. We note that the two chambers of the Legislature have opted to conduct separate investigations when a joint inquiry would have allowed for a more expeditious investigation and would have obviated the possibility of findings at loggerheads with each other.

Truth and Accountability

The President and his advisers must give a full and satisfactory accounting of their actions in respect to this tragic loss. The targets of the SAF operations were characterized as "high value targets". If the police went after them, it can only be because they were ordered to do so. Policemen do not order themselves, not even members of the Special Action Force. Indeed, that is what corroborated statements now clearly establish: The decision was made on the highest levels to go after these "high value targets". The only thing that was awaited was "the window of opportunity", a judgment that is made by people on the ground.

Questions call for unequivocal and truthful answers. Lives were needlessly lost because in many ways the operation was covert. Why, for one, were the highest-ranking official of the Philippine National Police and his civilian superior, the Secretary of Interior and Local Government, left out of the loop of information, consultation and command? It seems that a suspended police officer played more than a merely advisory role. Why should he have been giving orders? And if he was in fact issuing orders and commands, should it not be clear that his authority to do so, precisely because he was laboring under a legitimate order of suspension, emanated from higher levels?

The concealment of truth or the foisting of deliberate falsehood even to shield one's superiors from embarrassment or to spare them indictment is always a moral wrong, especially in the context of legal processes and under oath. When one swears to tell the truth and invokes the help of God, one is morally obligated to speak the truth. We therefore urge all witnesses and all those in possession of information material to the resolution of facts in issue to speak the truth at all times.

Heroes among us

As we did almost immediately after being informed of the gallant deaths of our SAF men, the CBCP extols their courage, their heroism and their fidelity to the call to duty. We understand the heartaches of the SAF men and women who rightly have reason to feel that our leaders failed them. While it is true that every person who dons the uniform either as a police officer or as a soldier puts his life on the line in the performance of his sworn duties, it remains the solemn moral duty of the national leadership to protect them from needless harm and to uphold their interests as well. The human person is never merely a means, no matter how glorious, noble or desirable the ends may be!

The Peace Process

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines offers its assistance to the pursuit of lasting peace, a settlement of differences that will allow the people of Mindanao, Muslims and Christians alike including indigenous peoples to live in peace and as equals, citizens of one Republic, nationals of one country. We hold it to be morally obligatory for the government and for the restive segments of Philippine society to search for the paths of peace.

It is of course true that peace cannot rest on deceit, the suppression of truth and subterfuge. This is the reason that getting to the truth of the Mamasapano tragedy is of paramount importance. In fact we should learn from Mamasapano for we paid a heavy price to learn its lessons. We have painfully been shown the pitfalls and the traps, the gaps and the lacunae of deals we have thus far entered into.

The goal cannot be the cessation of hostilities at any cost, but a principled settlement of the dispute, and peace born out of truth, a commitment to social justice and adherence to the fundamental law of the land!

If anything at all, Mamasapano should instill in all, especially in our Legislators, a sense of circumspection in respect to examining the first draft Bangsamoro Basic Law. Let the document be assiduously studied, fully debated and exhaustively examined.

The Moral Requisites of a Just Settlement

There has to be SINCERITY on both sides—on the side of government forces and agents and on the side of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Hostilities must cease while legal processes must be observed. Officers pursuing fugitives from justice or identified terrorists can never be the legitimate objects of attack. Similarly where a truce has been agreed on, it is incumbent on all parties to hold their fire. The government must resolutely pursue its projects for the further development of Muslim Mindanao and for the speedy and lasting attainment of social justice so that our Muslim brothers and sisters may fully share in the resources of the country and in the strides it makes towards prosperity.

The MILF must surrender the culprits: those who cut down the SAF 44 in the prime of their youth and must not interfere with their prosecution and their trial. The video clip that went viral showing the merciless execution of SAF men who were wounded and helpless cannot and must not be shrugged off.

The CBCP stands with the widows and orphans of the fallen to demand Justice and the indictment of the culpable. It must also explain satisfactorily why international terrorists were within the territory supposedly occupied by them.

Finally, the arms and ammunition captured from the SAF and from other lawful agents of the Republic of the Philippines must be returned. Justice and peace demand restitution of what one has wrongfully taken.

Solidarity in Prayer

The CBCP remains one with the grieving families of our fallen SAF men, as well as with the families of all who lost loved ones in this armed encounter. Whether Christian or Muslim, we believe in a God

The CBCP cannot lend its support to any movement that may bring greater suffering for our people. We would do well to join in the debate spiritedly, to be zealous in ferreting out the facts and to be unyielding in demanding accountability.

In solidarity. Fr. Romeo Saniel, OMI, president of Notre Dame of Jolo College hugs PNP Special Action Force member PO3 Narcial S. Ismael, who is a native Tausug and a Muslim after the priest's Mass for the Fallen 44. Ismael asked the Oblate Missionary in his native Tausug: "Father, why is this happening to us? What is God's message for all of us?" The priest shared, "I was speechless. I have no answer. I just wept with him."
PHOTO FROM THE FACEBOOK ACCOUNT OF FR. SANIEL

who does not allow those who remain faithful to him to be lost. We turn now in this moment of grief to the One Father of us all for consolation, strength and hope.

Appeal for True Patriotism

This is not the time for political opportunism. This is not the time for adventurism or grandstanding.

While resolute action is necessary on the part of all, precipitous action and recourse to extra-constitutional measures will only visit more harm and misery on our people.

The CBCP cannot lend its support to any movement that may bring greater suffering for our people. We would do well to join in the debate spiritedly, to be zealous in ferreting out the facts and to be unyielding in demanding accountability. But it is also our moral duty to be law-abiding citizens, animated at all times by the Gospel that insists that we love even those who we may find difficult to love!

No Peace Without Humility

The Kingdom of God is as much a gift as it is a project, for while only God can make his kingdom come among us, he calls us all not only to preach it but, by our deeds, to make its presence tangible and real for the world. Peace is the mark of this kingdom, and so it is that for a Christian there is no other way but to work for peace. But time and again we have been taught that clever calculation, crafty speech and pompously worded documents never bring lasting peace. It is when we humble ourselves and pray, and allow the Spirit to lead us that shall find that path of peace.

The CBCP therefore invokes God's Spirit even as it pledges that bishops individually and collectively will make themselves and their resources available for the demands of arriving at a lasting solution to the problem of turning swords into ploughshares.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Intramuros, Manila, February 16, 2015.

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
President, CBCP

Climate Change: From Ridge to River to Reef

"After a single night's rain, look at the chocolate brown rivers in your locality and remember that they are carrying the life blood of the land into the sea…"

The Cagayan de Oro River after typhoon Sendong hit the province on Dec. 17, 2011. ***FILE PHOTO***

By Abp. Antonio J. Ledesma, SJ

IN his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, EvangeliiGaudium, Pope Francis quotes this passage from the Philippine Catholic bishops' 1988 pastoral letter, "What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?".It is part of his call for the Church to protect the vulnerable creatures of this world and for respecting the integrity of creation (EG, 214).However, when Typhoon Sendong struck Cagayan de Oro in December 2011, it was not only the top soil that was carried out into the sea but the vulnerable houses and lives of many marginalized families living along the river banks. Since then, every succeeding year has brought about in various parts of the country extreme weather conditions and destructive typhoons such as Typhoons Pablo in Dec. 2012, Yolanda in Nov. 2013, and recently, Ruby in Dec. 2014.

I. Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council

It is within this context that the Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council has been formed. The CDORBMC was created during a Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on November 17, 2010, for the protection, rehabilitation and management of the river basin. The Cagayan de Oro River Basin comprises 137,934 hectares within eight tributary watersheds. The area includes the city of Cagayan de Oro and a portion of Iligan City. The major upland area is found in the three municipalities of Bukidnon: Talakag, Baungon, and Libona.

The CDORB Management Council is co-chaired at present by: Archbishop Antonio Ledesma (representing Civil Society); DENR Region X Director Ruth Tawantawan; DILG Region X Director Rene Burdeos; and CDO Mayor Oscar Moreno. Its vision is: A rehabilitated, sustainably protected and preserved, and well-managed CDO river basin by 2020. Its mission is: to oversee and catalyze multi-stakeholders for the rehabilitation, protection, preservation, and management of the CDO river basin.

The Council has 89 registered members coming from eight sectors: national government agencies, local government units, non-government organizations, indigenous people's organizations, business companies, academic institutions, religious organizations, and security groups. It has been recognized by the Mindanao Development Authority as a model structure for multi-sectoral collaboration.

Four Technical Working Groups have been formed: (1) Rehabilitation, headed by DENR; (2) Local Governance, headed by DILG; (3) Community Development, headed by Safer River, Lifesaver Foundation of Liceo University; and (4) Resource Management, headed by the Research and Social Outreach Office of Xavier University.

Steering the Council are a Board of Stakeholders and an Executive Committee which meet more often. These include the four co-chair convenors, the four TWG chairpersons, the three municipal mayors, and representatives of the eight sectors. The Secretariat is serviced by the RSO office of Xavier University, headed by Dr. Hilly Quiaoit.

The CDORBMC was formed in Nov. 2010 in the aftermath of Typhoon Ondoy and the devastation experienced in Marikina City by the sudden overflowing of Marikina River. At that time, there were already warnings that with a river basin area three times larger than the watershed of Marikina River, Cagayan de Oro River posed a more ominous threat to its city. Sadly, a year later on Dec. 16-17, 2011, Typhoon Sendong bore out these dire predictions, resulting in the loss of almost 1,000 lives and the dislocation of more than 40,000 families.

Since its formation, over the past four years, the Council has met more than twelve times, with the Executive Committee and Board of Stakeholders meeting more frequently. Among its activities have been:

• Formulation of a draft Integrated River Basin Management and Development Master Plan by the Center for Environmental Studies and Management (CESM);

• Workshop presentations of multi-geohazard maps by Dr. SteeveGodilano for the river basin area, particularly the municipalities of Talakag, Baungon, and Libona;

• Discussion of six environmental bills filed by Cong. Rufus Rodriguez;

• Information on the National Greening Program (NGP) and its implementation in pilot areas;

• Proposal of a fish sanctuary in a downstream portion of the river;

• Initiation of the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) in the Mt. Kalatungan range with MILALITRA, an association of indigenous people communities.

Among its major calls, the CDORBMC focuses on the following concerns:

• Protect and bring back the forests, including mangrove areas.

• Resolve Ancestral Domain claims and agrarian reform concerns.

• Undertake an information campaign on Climate Change and Environmental Protection.

• Develop Climate Resilient Agriculture.

• Develop appropriate livelihood opportunities for upland farms and fishing communities.

• Undertake massive disaster risk and vulnerability assessment for communities.

• Develop community projects for climate change adaptation and environmental protection.

• Advocate for a Presidential Proclamation declaring the CDO River Basin a Protected Area.

Much work still needs to be done. But with the organizational structure in place, the various stakeholders can hopefully share more easily information and resources to address their common challenges.

The multi-sectoral nature of the Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council was atopic of interest that I was asked to present at the Second International River Summit held in Marikina City on November 19-21, 2014. With the theme, "Reviving Rivers, Rebuilding Civilization," the conference brought together government officials, environmental experts, civil society organizations, and foreign aid agencies to discuss common issues and challenges.

Resource speakers from the countries of Southeast and South Asia, Japan and Australia shared their experiences and ongoing projects in simultaneous panel presentations. The topics included: flood risk management; the role of rivers in culture and heritage; biodiversity conservation in river revival; water partnership, convergence, and governance; etc. The Marikina Summit took place after the first summit hosted by Iloilo in 2012. The third summit will be hosted by Cagayan de Oro in 2016. All three cities have experienced in recent years the dire consequences of severe flooding and loss of lives and property due to river mis-management.

II. National Interfaith Dialogue on Climate Change

River conservation is not only an environmental issue for LGU's and government agencies; it is also a moral issue. In this light, the Climate Change Commission under the leadership of Commissioner Heherson Alvarez initiated a series of interfaith dialogues on climate change over the past ten months. This was carried out in collaboration with the Philippine Council for Evangelical Churches led by Bishop Efraim Tendero; the Climate Change Congress of the Philippines co-chaired by Atty. Christian Monsod and myself; and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy led by Ms. Amina Rasul-Bernardo.

The day-long interfaith dialogue conferences were held in Malacañang (March 14); Cagayan de Oro (May 29); Tacloban on Typhoon Yolanda (Sept. 2) and its follow-up in Quezon City (Oct. 8); Marikina (Oct. 16); Bacolod on Bago River (Nov. 4); Naga on Bicol River (Nov. 14); and again Malacañang for the summary session (Nov. 21).

At these interfaith dialogues, Bishop Tendero and I or our representatives discussed topics on "Stewards of Creation" and "Mobilizing Faith-Based Communities to Address the Perils of Climate Change." Dr. Esteban Godilano, CCCP resident scientist, presented the current technical data on "Climate Change Impacts: From Global to Local." His report highlighted the imminent danger of global warming and the "greenhouse effect" on all human settlements, particularly on island states like the Philippines.

Global warming was the focal point of the United Nations' 20th Conference of Partners on Climate Change (COP20) held in Lima, Peru, during the first two weeks of December 2014. As a prelude to this, several non-government organizations also held their advocacy conferences. Bishop Tendero and I were invited to join the Ocean Security International (OSI) Conference on "Protecting the Oceans" held in Lima on Nov. 30 – Dec. 1. Subtitled "A South-South Dialogue on Innovative Strategies and Good Practices to Address the Impacts of Climate Change," the OSI conference brought together experts and academicians from the five continents to discuss the impact of climate change on the oceans, the first – and the last – depository of any form of pollution as well as the cradle of severe weather conditions such as super-typhoons. One significant and perhaps irreversible phenomenon of climate change has been the gradual warming of the Arctic polar ice cap—with its implications for sea level rise endangering island states.

As religious leaders, Bishop Tendero and I pointed out the moral dimensions of environmental degradation and the role of faith-based communities in awareness-building and mobilization for climate change adaptation and mitigation. In the same manner that all religious traditions condemn suicide, homicide and genocide, so now, in a worst case scenario, we are all challenged to work against eco-cide, the killing of the environment itself—and with it, all life-forms on our planet Earth, from upland ridge to river tributary to coastal reef.

Theme of the 'Year of the Poor' of the Diocese of Daet

Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity, Diocese of Daet ***FILE PHOTO***

DAMá (Daloy ng Awa para sa Maralita)

Rationale: The theme and the spirit of the Year of the Poor in the Diocese of Daet is its humble response to the call of Pope Francis, that, "in all places and circumstances, Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor" (EG no. 191). This theme is a continuation of the reflections of the Clergy and the Lay Faithful based on the monthly formations during the Year of the Laity, 2014.

The Diocese of Daet adopts the tagalog word DAMá, as a pivotal acronym which summarizes the activities and programs for the Year of the Poor, 2015.

The word DAMá, which is the tagalog translation of compassion, acknowledges the very nature of God, who is kind and merciful (Psalm 103). It points to a God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, and made know to all of us, to be a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."(Exodus 34:6). The call of Jesus Christ, "to give the poor something to eat" (Mk. 6:37) primarily flows from the initial invitation of God (EG no. 111), who implants in our hearts the gift to mercy. Jesus Christ, "who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of this concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members." (EG no. 186)

The acronym of DAMá, which means Daloy ng Awa para sa Maralita, speaks of the concrete challenge of responding to Pastoral Solidarity. Pope Francis describes solidarity as a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property over private property.(EG no. 189) Moreover, the communal action to the cry of the poor is more than a few sporadic acts of generosity,(EG no.188). Pastoral Solidarity attempts to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and must also promote the integral development of the poor.

In the Diocese of Daet, several pastoral programs and activities are slated to make possible, with God's grace, the flow of mercy and compassion for the poor (Daloy ng Awa para sa Maralita). These are the following: the monthly reflection sessions of pastoral workers in view of Pope Francis' social dimension of evangelization (EG Chapter IV), the House to House pastoral visitations of Parish Priests and Council, the Peregrinatio Pro Cristo in far flung barangays, the "Kapatid namin sa Parokya—Adopt a poor family" program and the daily prayer for the poor souls in purgatory.

Joining Pope Francis in his desire to make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful and thereby renewing the face of the earth, the Diocese allows itself to be transformed in Christ through a life lived "according to the Spirit"(EG no. 162). The diocese through DAMá, uses the evangelical discernment as a diocesan pastoral approach in recognizing the light and strength of the Holy Spirit" (EG no. 50). It is our humble attempt to reach out everyone especially those who are in the existential peripheries.(EG no. 31)

Bishop Gilbert Garcera of Daet together with the Committee on Pastoral Response to Poverty spearheads this diocesan spirituality, DAMá.

Faces of Philippine poverty before, during and beyond the Year of the Poor

By Rev. Eutiquio 'Euly' B. Belizar, Jr., SThD

FORGET the scientific studies for a while. Just open your eyes. Reality stings more than its objective presentations. I am speaking particularly of poverty in this country of super stars, super forecasts of super economic growths, super tycoons and super typhoons.

I remember asking the congregation at the first Aguinaldo Mass last December 16, 2014, well within the Year of the Poor, to ponder the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Thus says the Lord, 'Observe what is right, do what is just for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed'" (Is 56:1). Lest Israel think this salvation is its exclusive property I asked the faithful at Mass to further reflect on how Isaiah forcefully brings the Israelites a reality check indirectly: "Let not the foreigner say, when he would join himself to the Lord, 'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people'…The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,…all who keep the Sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer…For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56:3-4, 6-7).

The beauty of God's salvation, in the vision of Isaiah, is that, unlike Philippine economic growth, it is inclusive. It is not meant only for Israel, unlike the material prosperity of recent Philippine economic achievements which have benefited mostly the upper echelons of Filipino society. What we are saying here is that the universality of God's saving love is denied scandalously by the massive material poverty of our people. Again Isaiah has something to say even now as to why we have come to such a pass: Our present conditions obtain because by and large we have not "observed" "what is right", not all Filipinos get their "just" share of the country's wealth. That is why Isaiah's words are an indictment of our society. But are we ever listening?

Consider the following faces of our poor.

Fishermen, farmers, our working-class rural and urban poor. As a student priest in Rome I once visited Holland and marveled at the opulent houses we were passing by on the way to Amsterdam. "These are fishermen's houses and properties," I was told by our guide, a Filipino residing in the city. On another occasion, I was on a train from NYC to Cleveland, Ohio, to visit a priest there, and again I was awed by the seemingly endless fields of wheat in one place and of grapes in another. "Farmers own those," I was told by a friend. I had to ask myself: Why are our fishermen and farmers in the Philippines so poor and live only in small houses of light and fragile materials, playthings to super typhoons, when they are the hands that feed all of us? Gary Granada sings our common aspiration: "Sana'y meron nang tahanan ang gumagawa ng bahay at masaganang hapunan ang naghahasik ng palay…"

Poverty in public schools, malnutrition of public school students. I was once in U.P. Los Baños at the invitation of a friend who once lived near the area. He was simply showing me the place and we had an afternoon to spend when I saw a sign of a zoological museum and decided to get in. My curiosity turned to big disappointment when I realized I was watching mostly photos or representations, not real or preserved specimens. It is not only once that heard U.P. students themselves criticizing the inefficiency of their own libraries and facilities in terms of services

that are readily available in those of exclusive schools for the scions of the wealthy. If this is true to U.P., the premier public university, you could just imagine the situation in other public schools. Whenever I visit the farthest barangays of my parish I witness the heroism of our public school teachers who brave the rapids, torturous mountains and trails to reach children whom they teach with very meager resources and very often delayed salaries. Everywhere I see faces of malnourished children, some with bloated bellies, others thin and pale for lack of proper nutrition but who smilingly bring themselves to school. For most school is the only way out of poverty but the schools are themselves poor in facilities, poor in the number of teachers available, poor in almost anything except dreams.

Poverty in our public transport system and infrastructure. The MRT-LRT mode of mass transport, now an object of controversy, is millions of miles ahead of the ubiquitous jeepneys, buses, vans, pedicabs and tricycles in the provinces or poorer sections of the cities (which are more than other sections) in terms of time-saving efficiency. And yet the present MRT-LRT systems, despite the government subsidy and fare hike supporting them, are like sick tubercular patients compared to similar systems in ASEAN countries alone. Neighbors such as Singapore and Malaysia readily shame us with their modern, well-maintained, slick, fast, dependable, efficient and numerous mass transport trains and buses. And don't forget the roads. While other countries have already eight-or-more-lane highways we still traverse constricted four-lane ones (at the most). In my province of Eastern Samar where funds from the United States (obtained during the first U.S. visit of the present administration) have passed through layers and layers of contractors and sub-contractors, we are seeing only two-lane highways whose quality is so highly suspect, even sans an engineering degree to support the observation, that they are a far cry from the "world-class highways" promised by the benefactors.

Poverty in our sense of public order and discipline. The chaos in the daily traffic conditions of our cities and even of our big towns are a statement of the poverty of the Filipino sense of discipline and order. Despite heroic efforts by public authorities and well-meaning citizens the problem is nowhere near a solution except perhaps temporarily through huge doses of patience and humor. Even the concept of sharing a ride or car-pooling among friends and fellow workers has not caught up with the rest of the population. The Filipino penchant for quick fixes through various "palusot" modes often result in more prolonged sacrifices for the many. The recent scandals related to the prisoners' continuing criminal lifestyles inside the walls that should have checked them in the first place is yet another illustration of our dire moral poverty.

Poverty in our appreciation of the precariousness of the environment and the perils of climate change. I believe this one is the twin brother of the poverty of our sense of order and discipline. Despite two horrific, catastrophic super typhoons many Filipinos, especially in the cities and poverty-stricken provinces, continue to pollute the land, sea and air with garbage and careless use of fossil fuels. Many rural poor as well as big companies continue to denude the already denuded forests by legal and illegal logging even if, as in the case of my hometown, Borongan, Eastern Samar, the ill effects of legal logging long-ago forgotten are still being felt, thanks to Super Typhoon Ruby's flash floods, with scores of logs accompanying the raging waters.

I could go on. Or perhaps you could. All we have been saying here is that this Year of the Poor is not only about one face of poverty in our islands. We would be utterly in the wrong if we looked only at our massive material poverty and missed our moral-spiritual poverty that is at its root.

Earlier I asked if we have ever, and truly, listened to Isaiah the prophet as a nation. Perhaps it is too much to ask a nation wont to celebrating even while grieving, wont to forgetting its own history of rising and falling, as to why, how or where we are going.

Or perhaps we have been listening too much to prophets and their words that comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Perhaps we need to simply act and obey what we hear. It is time to "observe what is right" and "to do what is just" so that the "salvation" long-ago announced may finally overtake our Filipino steps.

Sanctifying the economy

By Fr. Roy Cimagala

SINCE becoming a priest, I have left behind my former profession of being an economist. I consider priesthood as demanding total dedication to an exclusively spiritual, moral and supernatural goal.

I understand that being a priest, one should not get entangled with worldly partisan politics or with merely profit-seeking businesses, etc. As Opus Dei founder St. Josemaria once said, "A priest should be a priest through and through." He should only speak about God, and about spiritual, moral and supernatural realities.

Just the same, I also understand that the world of economics, being a human activity, and a major one at that, also needs to be sanctified. That's why, I also pay attention to some economic developments, both local and global, if only to see whether they are in keeping with God's designs or not, which is actually a matter of fulfilling the temporal common good of men.

While there is no strict mathematical relation between our temporal common good and our eternal common good, we can nonetheless say that the former helps a lot in attaining the latter. What we do in our earthly affairs somehow determines our eternal destination.

To be sure, God speaks to us also in the world of economics. He is not absent there. In fact, we need to realize more deeply to acknowledge his presence and his will in this part of our life that we usually regard as a place where God has no role to play at all, or that he simply has a little role, as in a cameo or an extra part.

For all its mundanity, our economic affairs have God at the center of it all. They are where God also speaks to us in a special way, and directs his divine providence of guiding all of us and the world toward him while always respecting our freedom and the

nature of things.

It's where many of us are expected to work for our sanctity and to participate actively in the continuing work of redemption. We somehow need to view our economic and other temporal affairs theologically. They just cannot be understood in purely worldly laws.

Thus, I am happy to note that irrespective of the competence or incompetence of our political and business leaders, we have good reason to be happy and confident that life in general will just move on rather smoothly for us.

Why? Because we have a good economic base to drive our economy. The contribution of our heroic OFWs is enormous, and it's still growing at 6%. And the income generated by our BPOs is also catching up, growing every year at an estimated 20% growth rate.

That's phenomenal!

Local tourism is also rising sharply. We, Filipinos, are spending in our own tourism, suggesting that there is money around and it is being circulated more widely. Thus, the over-all growth rate of our country in the region, while not yet at the top, is not that bad at all.

Imagine if we have leaders who know how to manage the potentials of our economy! Let's hope that we can choose leaders who are competent and honest enough to face the challenge.

Most of all, we have to pray and choose leaders who are God-fearing, and whose source of competence and honesty is precisely their authentic faith in God and their patriotic love for the people. Let's hope that we can see in our lifetime corruption thrown into the dustbin of history.

That may be quixotic as of now. But let's really hope that little by little we, as people, and led by our officials, go through a radical change of attitude, understanding and skill in dealing with money and other economic affairs.

Let's pray that we grow in our awareness that our economic activities are an occasion for sanctification and apostolate. They just cannot be ruled by purely economic laws. They should make us holy and should bring us closer to God and to one another in a communion of love.

While we have to behave in a very natural way in our transactions, we should neither forget that each transaction can and should be a form of prayer, an expression of charity. Each of them should make us a better person, spiritually and morally.

Let's be wary of our tendency to let these business activities feed only our material needs. They have a tremendous capacity to give glory to God and to work for the common good of everyone. Carpe diem! Let's be quick to take advantage of their sanctifying value, if only we know how to sanctify them also.

Nassa 'Yolanda' rehab gears up for next phase

MANILA, Feb. 27, 2015— At least 1,790 new shelters were constructed and 205 houses were repaired as Caritas Philippines' three-year master plan to rebuild areas devastated by super typhoon Yolanda plan is well underway, with phase one nearing completion this March.

Archbishop Rolando Tirona, Caritas Philippines national director, said this is just the beginning of the three-year program, which started last April across nine dioceses severely affected by Yolanda.

Continuing commitment

"This is the realization of our commitment to rehabilitate the lives of the survivors after the typhoon's devastation. Our dream to rebuild resilient communities is slowly coming to life," Tirona said.

Based on the third quarter report, water system and sanitation facilities, as well as hygiene promotion trainings were also provided to 36,913 individuals.

The agency, more locally known as the National Secretariat for Social Action-Justice and Peace (Nassa) said there were also 54,810 beneficiaries of various livelihood assistance and trainings.

Funding support from Caritas Internationalis for the first phase alone, which ends this coming March, amounts to 9.7 million euros or around Php 580 million and has so far reached more than 101,000 survivors in Leyte, Western Samar, Eastern Samar, Palawan, Aklan, Antique, Capiz, Iloilo and Cebu.

Of these, Php 364.9 million have already been spent and accounted for as of December 2014.

'Poorest of the poor' survivors

"On the second year, we are hoping to continue this worthwhile endeavour through the help of our partners and donors," Tirona added.

The #REACHPhilippines (Recovery Assistance to Vulnerable Communities Affected by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines) is deemed as the most massive recovery program led by the Church in the Yolanda-hit areas. The beneficiaries were among the poorest of the poor and the least served by government and other non-government organizations.

The Nassa said it was also the fastest emergency appeal responded to by more than 30 Caritas Internationalis member organizations.

"We make sure that transparent and honest spending is being observed at both the national and diocesan levels. That is why we have institutionalized financial monitoring and evaluation policies by regular monitoring and evaluation each quarter, by national and international auditors," Tirona said.

Caritas Philippines is among the leading church-based agencies working to help Yolanda survivors. ***(Roy Lagarde/ CBCPNews)***

Parish to roll out scholarship program in June

QUEZON City, Feb. 27, 2015—A parish in the diocese of Novaliches will roll out in June an education program that will grant short term course and college scholarships to deserving students from poor families in its communities.

Known as Educational Assistance Program (EAP) of Our Lady of Mercy parish, the initiative will initially enroll 20 young people in four-year, two-year, and short term courses next school year, said pastoral worker Rod Santos in a Feb. 24 interview.

Degree of choice

According to Santos, the EAP requires from the candidate scholar at least a general average grade of 83 to pre-qualify for the degree course scholarship.

The applicant can take the admission test at the school of his choice, provided the tuition fee and other expenses are sustainable under the program, Santos said.

The student can also take the degree of his choice, he added.

Charitable individuals, families, and groups will be tapped by the parish to fund the EAP, Santos said.

Useful, employable skills

Our Lady of Mercy parish has also tied up with Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and Bayan Academy to equip indigent but deserving students with useful and employable skills, he revealed.

The EAP will also tap the Scholarship and Youth Development Program (SYDP), which currently helps some students from the parish as scholars of Quezon City, he added.

The inside of Our Lady of Mercy parish church in Novaliches proper. ***Oliver Samson***

Applicants, who will not meet the grade requirement for scholarship for the degree course, can apply for the two-year and short term courses, Santos said.

Last year, Our Lady of Mercy parish was able to help 32 people graduate from short term courses, like culinary arts, hair dressing, and beauty care, at Bayan Academy, he said. Some of them are employed now.

Parish youth program

The EAP is an initiative of Fr. Tony Labiao, Our Lady of Mercy parish priest, who saw the needs of many out-of-school youth in communities under his parish, Santos said.

The parish covers two barangays only, the Novaliches proper and Sta. Monica.

The scholarship is part of the strengthening of the parish' youth program, Santos said.

Application for EAP, which started this month, is ongoing at Our Lady of Mercy parish until May, he said. ***(Oliver Samson/CBCPNews)***

Bishop's demand: Transparency, accountability on P87-M Tubbataha repairs

PUERTO PRINCESA City, Palawan, Feb. 22—Bishop Pedro D. Arigo of the Prelature of Puerto Princesa expresses hope that transparency and accountability will be exercised with regard to the Php 87-million which the United States (US) government had paid in fine for the damages its vessel, the USS Guardian, had caused the Tubbataha Reefs National Park in 2013.

Tubbataha watch

The prelate said given the culture of corruption eating away at the country's system, he cannot help but raise the alarm on how authorities intend to use the huge amount, and calls on the Filipino public to closely monitor the programs, or the lack thereof, on which the money will supposedly be spent.

"We know all too well the unfortunate way with which funds are handled in this country … We really do hope, however, that each centavo of the Php 87 million will be duly accounted for and really used for repairing and conserving the Tubbataha Reef," he explained.

In his recent interview over Church-run Radyo Veritas, Arigo shared he had heard of existing technology capable of quickly reviving the damaged corals which ordinarily take several generations to grow.

Church support

The Puerto Princesa bishop stressed the Catholic Church is one with concerned anti-corruption groups in ensuring that the money will be expended accordingly.

Moreover, Arigo has invited the lay faithful to get themselves involved in the Ugnayang Barangay at Simbahan (UBAS) which will give them an opportunity to be part of a team that monitors and campaigns for government transparency and accountability.

World Heritage Site

On January 17, 2013, the US Navy minesweeper USS Guardian reportedly ran aground at the UNESCO-declared World Heritage Site, damaging an area of 2,345.67 square meters (25,248.6 sq ft).

The incident sparked nationwide outrage, prompting the US government to issue a public apology. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

Priest agrees PH's economic growth due to population

Anti-RH Law protesters express their sentiments against what they believe to be a population control measure. ***FILE PHOTO***

MANILA, Feb. 10, 2015—Reacting to a recent Bloomberg report tagging the Philippines as Southeast Asia's new "strongman," with a young workforce that fuels economic growth, a Catholic priest has expressed sadness that despite the blessings human resource brings, the government solution to poverty is population control.

"The news hardly comes as a surprise. It validates the assertion that a strong and robust population is a great source of wealth for our country. Unfortunately, our government leaders and policy makers believed that a Malthusian approach, which considers a growing population as a threat to our nation's economy, is a more effective way to spur economic growth," said Fr. Jerome R. Secillano, parish priest of Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro Parish in Sampaloc .

'Population boon'

Calling it a "population boon," Bloomberg recognizes demographic dividend as one of five factors that have contributed to the Philippines' impressive economic performance vis-a-vis Thailand's.

The other four are: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, manufacturing boom, exports surge, and consumption swell.

The article reads: "About 31 percent of the Philippine population was 10-24 years old last year, compared with 20 percent in Thailand, according to the United Nations Population Fund. The average fertility rate in the Philippines from 2010-2015 is estimated at 3.1 percent compared with Thailand's 1.4 percent. Little wonder then that Thailand is seeing the most rapid reduction in the ranks of its working-age population in Southeast Asia."

Despite the government's insistence that checking the country's birthrate is a "pro-poor" measure, Secillano, who serves as executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)'s Permanent Committee on Public Affairs (PCPA), pointed out that the passage of the Reproductive Health (RH) Law "rejects and destroys what human resources can possibly contribute to our economy".

"It's a pity that the poor are actually seen as mere 'mouths' to be fed and not as partners for stirring economic growth," he lamented.

Aging population

While he admits that limiting the country's population has its own positive economic impact, he stressed that its gains will not be for long.

The priest explained the Philippines needs a strong work force, especially as an aging population becomes unproductive.

Secillano used China and Singapore as examples of economically developed countries that have belatedly realized the negative effects of a "one-child" policy.

"The Philippines must learn from this experience and must be aware of what Pope Francis [called] a form of 'ideological colonization'.

To read the full article, visit: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-30/move-over-thailand-the-philippines-is-southeast-asia-s-strong-man. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

CBCP head: Investigate those guilty of DAP misuse

Anti-pork barrel protesters sign a petition calling for the scrapping of all forms of discretionary funds during the Million People March on August 26, 2013, Luneta. ***FILE PHOTO***

MANILA, Feb. 4, 2015—Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) president and Lingayen–Dagupan Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas said with the latest Supreme Court ruling on the controversial Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP), people hope "those who knowingly and deliberately misused public funds in a manner declared illegal should now be investigated and…prosecuted."

In a one-page statement issued Wednesday morning, Archbishop Villegas said the CBCP "renews its call for a government that truly serves the nation and that truly avoids all forms of corruption and deceit."

He also called on legal academics and other concerned citizens to study the implications of the latest Supreme Court resolution on the controversial DAP.

In a statement released this morning, Villegas said "some are disturbed by the fact that the Resolution apparently lends its judicial fiat to disbursments for unappropriated items or projects."

He said "while it does seem like the court has maintained its initial characterization of transfer of funds from one branch of government to another," there are still pertinent concerns. He explained "under the present constitutional system, the Constitution is what the Supreme Court says its text means."

He called on everyone to abide by the Rule of Law by complying with the latest Supreme Court resolution.

"The CBCP itself will conduct its own study with the aid of consultants and experts," he added as he expressed optimism to introduce proposals for change, "if these should be deemed necessary, either by legislation or even by constitutional amendment." ***(Melo M. Acuña/CBCPNews)***

FABC president pays homage to Egypt's Coptic martyrs

INDIA, Feb 23 2015—The president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) paid homage to the 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians beheaded last week by Islamist extremists in Libya, wishing their martyrdom bring dialogue and peace among all religions.

"Our hearts bleed for the twenty-one Coptic Egyptian citizens in Libya. The Church of Asia bows our heads in prayer and offers our condolences and sympathy to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and to the families of the Martyrs and the Egyptian people and the Bishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli," said Cardinal Oswald Gracias, FABC president.

He noted that deliberate killing of the 21 innocent young men—killed simply for being Christian—is an act of cowardice and evil, and in the face of death, these Martyrs showed immense courage, strength and dignity.

Cardinal Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, said he offered his Mass on the first Friday of Lent for the eternal rest of the souls of the 21 Coptic Christians and for their grieving families.

"We pray that the sacrifice of their lives brings graces of Peace for the whole Coptic family in the midst of these senseless and tragic crimes," the cardinal said.

"This heinous act," he said, "underscores the urgent need for promotion of peace and dialogue among religions and the urgent and pressing need to correct the distorted and false and misleading view of God and religion." "This is and against the nature of God and against all religion. We pray for them and pray for the conversion of heart of all those who committed these crimes," he added. ***(Vatican Radio/UCAN)***

Hong Kong, employer who tortured Indonesia maid jailed for six years

HONG KONG, Feb 27, 2015—The District Court of Hong Kong has sentenced Law Wan-tung to six years in prison, for beating and torturing her Indonesian maid. In 2013 the case first came to light highlighting the actual situation of migrants in the Territory . The judge who sentenced her, Amanda Woodcock, explained that the woman's attitude was "regrettable" and pointed out that the Law "has not shown any compassion" for her victims. In addition, she called on the authorities of the former British colony and those of Jakarta to investigate the agencies that traffic human beings.

The story of Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, 23 triggered a wave of global outrage and has turned the spotlight on the real situation of the approximately 300 thousand migrants from different parts of Asia, who enter the territory in search of work. These people suffer abuse while still in their country of origin, which they can only leave through "specialized agencies" and then only to end up in a nightmare of unpunished crimes and slavery.

The woman was hospitalized in January 2014 in a hospital in Central Java: her body bore the marks of cuts, burns and bruises of varying gravity that were inflicted by her former employer. Her health conditions have improved, but she was bed bound for a considerable period and then confined to a wheelchair. During the trial, the defense argued that Erwiana "is an opportunist who procured the wounds to cover her clumsiness and now wants her employers to pay".

Judge Woodcock found Erwiana was "too simple" to lie about the abuse she suffered, including the time Law twisted a metal tube from a vacuum cleaner in the maid's month, causing cuts to her lips. For this particular assault, Law was found guilty of inflicting grievous bodily harm with intent, the most serious charge of all.

Speaking outside court, Erwiana said she was not fully satisfied with the length of Law's "light" jail term but was pleased that she was going to prison. She said that the six-year sentence suggested the government tolerated slavery and maltreatment of migrant workers. "And that's not good." ***(AsiaNews)***

Mamasapano, the President and the Bangsamoro Basic Law

By Fr. Joel Tabora, S.J.

THE President has called for a day of mourning for those who perished in Mamasapano. When we fly our flags at half mast on Friday (January 29), and call upon the God whom we know to be merciful and compassionate, I shall be mourning the deaths of the policemen who died on mission to serve warrants of arrest on known terrorists. But I shall also be mourning the deaths of the members of the MILF and of the BIFF who perished in the same encounter. I shall mourn them, Filipinos all, driven to foolhardy carnage or savage violence by obedience, ignorance, recklessness or fear. In silence, I will pray for peace.

I will also pray that we not be deterred from the path of peace. This has been an arduous path travelled with much sacrifice and pain. But it is the only way of hope.

Recalling the Causes of War and Violence

For me, travelling the path means recalling the causes of the wars and violence

Supporters of a sympathy run for the "Fallen 44" hold up white flowers on March 8, 2015. The run began at 1:00 a.m., ending before 9:00 a.m. at the Immaculate Heart of Mary parish at the University of the Philippines Village. ***MELO ACUÑA***

in Mindanao, almost too traumatic for people from the south to remember and too embarrassing for people from the north to admit. Just some instances: Nur Misuari emerging in the wake of the Jabiddah massacre; the reckless adventurism of Marcos in Sabah that ended in the Jabiddah massacre; the homesteading policies from the north which ultimately deprived Muslim and Lumad Mindanaoans of their lands and altered the Mindanao landscape forever; the "Filipinos" from the north who sided with the Americans in "civilizing" the Muslims who had not accepted the ways of the "little brown brothers" of white foreigners; the "Filipinos" who stood by as Americans massacred Muslims in Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak in Jolo; the Muslims had fought valiantly to defend their Muslim faith, culture and independence from the foreigner; the treaty of Paris in which Spain sold the Philippines to the Americans along with the sovereign Muslim sultanates that the Spaniards had never conquered; three hundred years of Moro wars that frustrated the Spanish will to conquer and convert them; two hundred years of presence and matured civilization in the Philippines before the arrival of the Spaniards. Among the causes of war and violence in Mindanao has been injustice from the north brought on Moro identity, political sovereignty, and integral development.

The path to peace means that Filipinos from the north respect Filipinos from the south. Mindanao is not a tool for the development of the north; it is not an "opportunity" for the development of the national economy, nor a tool for the advancement of national politicians; its peoples, histories, and civilizations are not instruments for the development of those of peoples from the north. Unless this is respected in the cultures, policies, and laws for which we take responsibility, the path to peace is not travelled.

There was a time when a Muslim, frustrated by the lack of justice and respect accorded him by national leaders from the north, called for Muslim independence. Just the call for independence sowed terror in the hearts of non-Muslim Filipinos in the south. Terrified, they thought the best way of defense was offence. The terror of the Ilagas began. It spawned the counter terror of the Blackshirts and Barracudas. It brought the Manili massacre and the battle of Buldon. Mindanao's soil was soaked in the blood of its sons and daughters. The MNLF, then the MILF took up the cause of Muslim independence, now on a more serious plane. This was countered by the national leaders from the north. But supported by Muslim powers from abroad. The armies from the north were sent to conquer the armies of the south. They did not. They could not.

Path to Peace on a higher, more noble plane

The only thing that could stop the wars was the mutual insight that guns, violence and wars do not solve problems, but only increase the need for guns, violence and wars. That insight put us on the path to peace. First, in partnership with the MNLF. Now, in partnership with the MILF. It is a path from which we must not stray.

Where we once thought guns and warfare could forge peace, we have now agreed to embark on a path to peace on a higher, more noble plane, the path of human conversation, of merging dreams for peace, negotiation, rational debate, and forging agreements for peace under the parameters of a shared constitutional democracy. Those agreements belong to the essence of the path of peace. They are made in good faith, and kept in good faith. Otherwise, the peace is imperiled.

One of the agreements for peace occurred as hostilities ended in 1997 in the Implementing Operational Guidelines of the Ceasefire Agreement: "Police and military actions and administrative/logistic activities shall continue to be undertaken by the GRP throughout Mindanao and the entire country. In the pursuit thereof, confrontational situations between the GRP and the MILF forces shall be avoided by prior coordination with the latter." (Article II) It is an agreement made with our formal partner in the peace process, the MILF. It is not an agreement which can be unilaterally set aside or disregarded.

The reason we entered into the agreement is presumably because we are aware that the path to peace is arduous and dangerous. Peace has its enemies. It is attacked by the interests of traditional centers of political power, powerful armed clans, shameless avarice, the arms trade, foreign interests, religious extremism and even local and national terrorism. Our partners know of these enemies of peace. They are more intimate with their dynamics than any planner from the north can be. The peace process does not mean that these enemies of peace have been overcome. The peace process means that together we are journeying towards peace, and that overcoming the enemies of peace is in our shared interest. In Mindanao, the government's partner for peace is the MILF.

It is a partnership that has been premised on trust, and a partnership that can only grow in trust. It is a partnership, the President says, that has many times borne fruit: "We have already made such great strides because we trusted one another. We have proven that we can work together."

A TIME TO GRIEVE. Relatives, family members and friends of the Fallen 44 led by Mrs. Erika Pabalinas attend a memorial Mass for their loved ones on March 8,2015 at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. ***MELO ACUÑA***

Why was our Partner in Peace in Mindanao not engaged?

It is therefore incomprehensible for me why our partner in peace was not engaged, as our 1997 agreement stipulates, in order to meet the problem of the presence of the two terrorists in the very sensitive town of Mamasapano.

In this context, President Aquino's address last night was opaque. He said the agencies involved in the pursuit of terrorists "are not always required to obtain my approval for each and every one of their operations, because it would be impractical for them to wait for my clearance before proceeding." Here he is saying he did not necessarily have to approve the operation. He does not say that he did. He seems to say the approval came from below him. Apparently, he was working with operatives in subsidiarity. "They decided to take action and serve the warrants of the two individuals." Without admitting he was briefed about this particular operation, he was being briefed generally. "In the briefings the PNP gave me about the continuing operations against Marwan and Usman…" In these briefings, he was giving instructions: "I repeated countless times the need for proper, sufficient, and timely coordination between the SAF, the military." Referring to volatility of Mamasapano, he says, "Strangers cannot just enter this territory." Yet he says immediately thereafter: "Our troops needed to enter quietly and carefully…." But why did he not also instruct the operatives to coordinate with our partner in peace in Mindanao, the MILF? Or why did his subordinate not give this instruction? Was it ignorance of the agreement? Or mistrust of the peace partner? Or northern arrogance that thinks Mindanao is its back yard and Maguindanao a bed of roses without thorns?

Who failed to coordinate with the one group that could have helped government achieve its objective and prevent the carnage – not in the ways of the north, but in the ways of the south?

Why was trust placed more in a secret commando apparently headed by a man of tarnished repute? Was the path of peace abandoned for thirty pieces of silver?

Bangsamoro Basic Law should not be derailed

With the President's statement, it is all the clearer to me that the peace process leading to the approval of the Bangsamoro Basic Law should not be derailed. The brutal manner in which human beings were killed in Mamasapano can never be excused. We cannot close our eyes to this. But blame cannot be laid solely at the feet of the MILF, as Senator Allan Peter Cayetano does inanely. The reckless planning and shoddy execution of this operation, whose responsibility lies with its author, caused the disaster.

But the disaster should not include the Bangsamoro Basic Law. On the contrary, it makes its passage – through "the wisdom of the Congress of the Philippines" – more urgent. Here, we need the wise legislator, the statesman obedient to the common weal. This is a longstanding debt to the Filipino Muslims in justice. We owe it to them in respect. We have agreed to this. We owe it to them in self-respect.

Should the President resign?

THERE are calls for the resignation of the President in the wake of the outrage and grief over the sad fate of the "Fallen 44", the gallant SAF uniformed men who lost their lives at Mamasapano. Some members of the Philippine Catholic hierarchy have echoed this call. For the present time, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines has not arrived at a collective position. Whether or not the President should resign and yield the powers of his high office to a lawful successor is a judgment that he must make, after prayerful discernment, and in all humility and judiciousness.

We do not yet have all the facts, however. In fact, we have been given conflicting accounts of what really happened. But one thing should be clear: We must not lay the blame on those who already paid the ultimate sacrifice by laying down their lives for they were never in a position to command but, true to the culture of the police and of the military, stood ready to receive orders.

But we must get at the facts. That is why the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines fully supports and endorses the creation of a credible Truth Commission or a Fact-Finding Body. Any inquiry by a police body, such as a Board of Inquiry, no matter how veridical its findings, will be weighed down by lingering doubts about its preparedness to point to liability, no matter how high up the chain of command attribution must go! Subordinate officers, whether in the police or in the military, after all seldom point accusingly at superiors! An investigation by Congress is likewise compromised by the political allegiances of most of its members.

The CBCP therefore strongly suggests that the members of any such committee, though appointed by the President, must be endorsed by and acceptable to the public, recognized for their probity, acknowledged for their truthfulness and characterized by their boldness. The vocal advocates for the passage of the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law are not credible nominees because they have made it exceedingly clear that they would not like the sad incident to derail the process of the enactment of the BBL. It is as important that the hearings of the body be open to all, and that its findings be available to all. Nothing is served by secrecy.

President Benigno Aquino III **Malacañang News Bureau**

The President of the Republic, the CBCP prays, should have learned from this regrettable tragedy that transparency and forthrightness are what are expected of him at all times. It will serve him well to listen to sound advice and counsel from truly wise, and not from those eager to curry favor! He has been roundly criticized for having absented himself at the arrival honors for the mortal remains of our heroes. He will, in the future, we hope, make better balanced choices and conduct himself as his high office demands. We pray that in all humility he would willingly accept just criticism rather than have his spokespersons concoct excuses at every turn.

Before we have all the facts, however, the CBCP cannot morally join in the calls for his resignation, leaving this decision to his humble and prayerful discernment of his capacity to lead and the support he has not only from officials of government but from members of Philippine society.

We entrust ourselves to God who has promised to heal our land if we turn back to him in prayer, penance and supplication.

February 4, 2015
+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
CBCP President

Guide our feet into the way of peace (Lk. 1:79)

MILF chair Murad Ebrahim gives a speech during the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in Malacañan on March 28, 2014. (OPAPP)

A Pastoral Statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Draft Bangsamoro Basic Law

TO All People of Good Will:

Peace be with you! With this greeting of peace we as religious leaders share with you our thoughts on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

Our Perspective as Religious Leaders

Our first stance is to listen and discern. We will especially listen to those who are directly affected by the BBL, those living in the Bangsamoro, the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities. We will listen to those who support the BBL and to those who oppose it. We will listen to those who believe that there has been a lack of consultation. Further, we will listen to those outside the proposed Bangsamoro territory—Muslims, Christians, Indigenous Peoples, peoples of other religious persuasions.

What we receive we shall present to officials concerned.

Our overriding concern is the common good of all Filipinos. We believe that concern for the common good is also that of the negotiating panels, MILF and government. After so many years of grave discussions replete with turns and stops, they have finally reached an agreement which they believe is the basis of a just and lasting peace.

We do not propose any specific political or ideological blueprint for peace. We are not political negotiators or political officials. We are not constitutionalists or lawyers. We refrain from delving into the constitutional issues raised by many. We leave those to constitutional experts to argue and to the Supreme Court to decide.

Our mandate as religious leaders is altogether different. Ours is to proclaim, as Jesus did (Eph. 2:16), "glad tidings of peace." Our specific concerns are the religious and moral imperatives of peace. That perspective is as always our viewpoint as religious and moral teachers.

Peace is God's Gift

And this is the most fundamental religious teaching about peace that we share with you. Peace is God's gift. It is given to those "among whom his favour rests" (see Lk. 2:14). It is "through the tender mercy of God" that we are led to peace by "the dawn from on high" (see Lk. 1:78=79). And Jesus himself said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (Jn. 14:27).

Because peace is God's gift, we need constantly to pray for peace, the peace that God desires for all of us, the peace that reconciles us with one another, with God, and with all His creation. This is the kind of peace that we wish and pray for when we greet one another: Peace be with you. Salaam. Shalom.

Peace is in and of the Heart, Peace is Harmony

Peace is fundamentally in the heart, of the heart. Peace is harmony. Peace is unity. Peace is reconciliation. Peace is mutual forgiveness among peoples.

A peace agreement may be signed between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Armed conflicts may cease. But if hatred or desire for revenge or dislike or aversion consumes the heart, if deep historic biases and prejudices remain, the eruption of violent conflict is simply simmering below the surface of apparently peaceful coexistence.

Peace Comes with Justice

Peace is not the fruit of a mere handshake or an embrace. Peace comes with justice. Peace is the assurance of respect for fundamental human dignity and human rights. For the Bangsamoro, justice means the recognition of their centuries-old aspiration for self-determination, their right to chart their own destiny in dignity and freedom. For the whole country justice requires the acceptance of the overarching right of national sovereignty and national territorial integrity. For Indigenous Peoples in the Bangsamoro, justice means respect for and protection of their right to their ancestral domain already officially recognized by the Indigenous Peoples Right Acts (IPRA). For non-Muslim and non-indigenous inhabitants in the Bangsamoro, justice is a recognition and protection of their fundamental human rights, such as religious freedom and property rights. Pope Francis in his message at Malacanang emphasized this when he said: "I express my trust that the progress made in bringing peace to the south of the country will result in just solutions in accord with the nation's founding principles and respectful of the inalienable rights of all, including the indigenous peoples and religious minorities."

Some Concerns of Justice

Some of these rights may be inad-

equately or inappropriately articulated in the BBL. Many believe, for instance, that a time-free 10% requirement to have a referendum for inclusion into the Bangsamoro will effectively expand the Bangsamoro territory through the years because of the sheer force of population immigration. Others see the need for a clear elaboration of the Bangsamoro exclusive right over education so as not to endanger the nature and purpose of Christian religious educational institutions. Still others are concerned about the ambiguous concept of contiguity by water, and see dangers of a Bangsamoro territory slowly expanding through time.

Many are also disturbed that there is a lot of misinformation and misinterpretation with regard to certain provisions of the BBL, as for instance, the provisions on land. Presently attempts to grab land or drive away their lawful owners by force of arms and even by murder, under the pretext of ancestral domain, are creating fear and tension, among certain communities in the Bangsamoro. The reported rise of shadowy civilian militias for self-protection recalls the tragic past of "Ilagas" and "Blackshirts" in the 1970s. This is totally unproductive and ironic when we understand the BBL as a promise of peace and harmony.

Such concerns we bring to the attention of MILF and government peace negotiators, as well as of legislators who are tasked with refining the draft BBL.

Peace Comes with Fairness and Equity

We all desire that the provisions of the BBL express fairness and equity. For this reason we hope that the BBL will ensure equal opportunity for integral human development for all the peoples in the Bangsamoro. We desire a BBL that will respect various cultures, religious beliefs and traditions. We wish to be assured that the BBL will provide equal access to educational, economic, political benefits and resources.

It would be a travesty of fairness and equity if, for instance, jobs are denied to capable persons simply because of ethnic, cultural, religious or gender considerations. Discrimination would be a direct contradiction to the fundamental Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination that responds to deep feelings of neglect and marginalization.

Peace is Unity through Dialogue

Isaiah the Prophet spoke of a messianic time when the Word of the Lord shall come to the people. "They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is. 2:4).

We are at the cusp of a new Mindanao history when arms of destruction are replaced by productive tools for human development, when men trained for war are trained for wise and prudent governance. In some countries innocent civilians are persecuted or even killed, their homes devastated, places of worship destroyed. May this not be so in our country.

We, therefore, commend the consensus decision of both negotiating sides for the decommissioning of military forces and arms. We also pray that the form of government in the Bangsamoro will unite the different cultures together for the common good. We appeal to emerging political parties that they effectively remove the neglect and isolation of the poor from decision-making and make them active partners for their integral development. We ask legislators to ensure that the provisions of the BBL as well as their implementation will be forces of solidarity and not of division.

We make a special appeal to all sectors, groups, and political movements of the Bangsamoro to come together in dialogue towards a consensus position on the BBL.

Dialogue is the way to peace, not the use of arms. This has been the experience of successive negotiating panels on both the MILF side and the government's. From hostility to openness, from aggressive one-sidedness to mutual respect and understanding, from contestation to trust and friendship – this is the road of authentic dialogue. When the encounter of persons from opposite sides is authentically human, it is the Spirit of the Lord that draws them together finally as friends. And friendship is an expression of love — "the common word" for Muslims Christians, and peoples of other religions.

Final Pastoral Observations and Recommendations

In the light of the above moral and religious considerations:

1. We commend the perseverance of the negotiating panels of both the government and the MILF that, even with changes of key personnel through the years, persevered in the peace process, changing the nature of tense and troubled negotiations into trustful dialogue for peace.

2. We commend the realism of the MILF vision to dialogue towards self-determination while respecting and preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

3. We appeal to Congress to sift objectively and wisely through the results of their Mindanao-wide consultation and ensure that the fundamental Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination be effectively enshrined in the final BBL, together with the twin national principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

4. We strongly recommend that the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the non-Muslim peoples in the Bangsamoro—Christians, peoples of other faiths, and Indigenous peoples—be respected and promoted as already enshrined in existing laws, such as property rights and the IP ancestral domain.

5. We recommend the inclusion of a provision in the BBL that would make it impossible in the future for any radical extremist group to exploit or change the democratic framework of the Bangsamoro government so as to deny both the doctrine and practice of religious freedom.

6. We pray to our Lord God for wisdom for our legislators so that they would keep in mind the good of the Bangsamoro and the common good of all Filipinos.

Conclusion

We believe that regarding the centuries-old conflict in Mindanao we are, with a significantly improved BBL, truly at the threshold of a just and lasting peace.

We place our concerns of peace in the hands of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, so that through her maternal intercession her Son, Jesus who is himself our "Peace" (Eph. 2: 14), may always be with us "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

For and on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS, D.D.
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
January 22, 2015

CBCP President on the SC DAP RESOLUTION

THE Public Information Office of the Supreme Court yesterday announced the Court's Resolution on the government's Motion for Reconsideration of the judgment rendered adverse to DAP.

While it does seem like the Court has maintained its initial characterization of transfer of funds from one branch of government to another, some are disturbed by the fact that the Resolution apparently lends its judicial fiat to disbursements for unappropriated items or projects. Under our present constitutional system, the Constitution is what the Supreme Court says its text means.

The CBCP therefore invites legal academics and others to study the implications of the Resolution. Meanwhile, all are urged to abide by the Rule of Law by complying with the decretal provisions of the Supreme Court's judgment and resolution. The CBCP itself will conduct its own study with the aid of consultants and experts. Together, we hope to make proposals for change, if these should be deemed necessary, either by legislation or even by constitutional amendment.

It is also hoped that those who knowingly and deliberately misused public funds in a manner declared illegal by the Supreme Court should now be investigated and, if necessary, prosecuted. The CBCP renews its call for a government that truly serves the nation and that truly avoids all forms of corruption and deceit.

February 4, 2015
+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
CBCP President

Walk on rich in thanksgiving

CBCP Pastoral Exhortation in the Year of Consecrated Life

AS you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col 2:6-7)

OUR Holy Father Pope Francis has dedicated the year 2015 for Consecrated Life. This special Church event started on the First Sunday of Advent and will end on February 2, 2016, the World Day of Consecrated Life. The purpose of this event according to the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal Joao Braz De Aviz, is to "make a grateful remembrance of the recent past while embracing the future with hope."

The year 2015 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of Perfectae Caritatis, the Vatican II Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,

Concurrent with the aforementioned events is our observance in the Philippine Church of the Year of the Poor as part of our nine-year preparation for the Great Jubilee 2021. Thus, our observance of the Year of Consecrated Life and the Year of the Poor in 2015 serves as our ecclesial horizon in our "grateful remembrance of the past and hopeful embrace of the future".

Grateful remembrance

In the middle of our nine year preparation for the Great Jubilee 2021 celebrating the first Mass and first baptism in the Philippines, we invite you to celebrate kaplag, the discovery on April 29, 1565 of the image of the Santo Niño in an abandoned house inCebu. The finding occurred just a day after the arrival of the Legazpi-Urdaneta expedition inCebu, and was greeted as a marvelous portent of the success of the missionary endeavor. Effectively, this day marked the formal beginning of the continuous proclamation of the Gospel to us Filipinos.

Pit Señor!

It must be noted that when the Santo Niño was found, there were evidences that it had been treated as an object of veneration. Its original garments had been replaced by local material; it had a necklace of peculiar make, but with a cross probably also from Magellan; flowers were found before the image. The Cebuanos had made sacrifices in front of the image and had anointed it with oil. This image of the Santo Niño is believed to be the same one given by Magellan to the native queen who was baptized Juana in 1521. Thus seven years from now we shall be celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the first recorded Mass and baptism in the Philippines.

The First Missionaries

Our Christian faith was brought to our shores by selfless men and women from many countries. During the first three centuries they came initially from Spain and Mexico, but also from Italy, Germany, and Central Europe. They were formed and sent by religious Orders, which at that time were the most organized to send missionaries. They braved the seas in ships, with each batch or shipload called a barcada (whence the popular name for our peer groups). It pleases us to recall their institutions in an honor roll, in their order of arrival:

In the first century of evangelization these were: the Augustinians (OSA), 1565; the Franciscans (OFM), 1578; the Jesuits (SJ), 1581; the Dominicans (OP), 1587; the Japanese beatas, 1602; the Augustinian Recollects (OAR), 1606; the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God (OH), 1611; and the Poor Clares (OFM), 1621.

Members of the Third Orders for women of these congregations, now called the Lay Orders, also formed their own institutions of consecrated life in thePhilippines. In order of their foundation, these were: the beatas of Bolinao, 1659; the Dominican Tertiaries (OP), 1682 and 1750; the beatas de la Compañia, ancestors of the RVM sisters, 1684; the beatas of Babuyanes, 1719; the Augustinian Recollect Tertiaries (OAR), 1719; and the Augustinian Tertiaries, ancestor of the ASOLC sisters, 1740.

In the second half of the 19th century came more congregations: the Vincentian Fathers (CM) and Daughters of Charity (DC), 1862; the Augustinian Tertiary Sisters from Barcelona (OSA), 1883; the Capuchin Friars (OFM Cap), 1886; the Assumption Sisters (RA), 1892; and the Benedictines (OSB), 1895.

During this same time religious groups of women were also formed: the Hermanitas de la Madre de Dios, Cebu, 1877; the beatas de Balingasag, Misamis Oriental, 1880; and the beatas de Santa Maria Magdalena, La Paz, Iloilo, 1887.

The critical condition of the Philippine Church at the beginning of the 20th century in the light of the Philippine revolution against Spain and the Philippine-American War led the bishops to call for other congregations. First to respond were the Sisters of St Paul of Chartres (SPC), 1904. From here up to the convening of the First National Eucharistic Congress in Manila on 11-15 December 1929, there arrived the Redemptorists (CSsR), 1906; the Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM), 1906; the Benedictine Sisters (OSB), 1906; the Fathers of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), 1907; the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), 1908; the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), 1909; the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM), 1910; the Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC), 1911; the Franciscan Missionariers of Mary (FMM), 1912; the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS), 1912; the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS), 1912; the Oblates of St Joseph (OSJ), 1915; the Pink Sisters (SSsPAP), 1923; the Discalced Carmelite Nuns (OCD), 1923; the Maryknoll Sisters (MM), 1925; the Maryknoll Fathers (MM), 1926; the Columbans, 1929; and the Franciscan Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (now SFIC), 1929. During this period another congregation for local women was also established, the Dominican Sisters of Molo (OP Molo), 1925. In the ensuing decades up to the present, many more congregations of men and women, local and international, have come to assist in the continuing evangelization of the Church in the Philippines.

They Lived Christ and Shared Christ

To each and every one of these men and women, "known or unknown," the Papal Legate Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti said, "the Church devotes a grateful and heartfelt thought, as does also the fatherland which they helped to establish."

Apart from the obvious apostolic work such as catechizing, preaching, and building churches, these men and women lived their religious lives in community.

The legacy of these religious congregations to Philippine life is staggering. Histories of peoples were written down or may be gleaned through neatly kept canonical books, records of income and expenses, and inventories of church goods and property, all of which were dutifully turned over by every incoming and outgoing personnel and kept in archives and libraries. Members of religious congregations were sent as emissaries to foreign countries such asJapan,China,Cambodia, andSiam. They contributed to the defence of the islands against pirates

and slave-raiders, helped in pacifying revolts, and extended assistance during natural calamities such as famines, wars, plagues, floods, earthquakes, and typhoons.

The Promotion of Filipino Culture

The arts and sciences flourished under their care. In terms of cultural heritage alone, the country is the richer not just for solid and artistic churches and conventos but also schools, hospitals, orphanages, leprosaria, dams, fortresses, watchtowers streets, bridges, plazas, and even marketplaces like the market of Baclayon, Bohol and town halls like the tribunal of Paoay, Ilocos Norte.

Philippine languages were preserved in grammars and dictionaries. Local plants were documented and promoted for their medicinal and economic value. The Augustinians introduced the European-style weaving loom, and brought in trapiches from Mexico to extract sugar. As early as 1669, the Franciscans had introduced a hemp-stripping machine in Bacon, Sorsogon which presaged Bicol's abaca industry.

Explorations of new territory were preserved in maps, duly printed in the presses which the religious orders established. The Villaverde Trail opened a route that connected Pangasinan with Nueva Vizcaya via the Caraballo mountains (1890s). The most famous Philippine map is that by the Jesuit Pedro Murillo Velarde, printed by Filipino engravers inManilain 1734. The Dominicans established a printing press in 1593, the present UST Publishing House, possibly the second oldest running publishing house in the world.

The Jesuit Meteorological Observatory established in 1869 pioneered in predicting tropical disturbances. In Minuluan (now Talisay) Negros Occidental, Fr Fernando Cuenca OAR promoted the sugar industry by inventing the hydraulic pressing machine for milling cane in 1872. Fr Felix Huerta OFM facilitated the realization of the water supply forManila in 1882.

Pope Francis in his homily at the Manila Cathedral rightly said: "As the Church in the Philippines looks to the fifth centenary of its evangelization, we feel gratitude for the legacy left by so many bishops, priests and religious of past generations. They labored not only to preach the Gospel and build up the Church in this country, but also to forge a society inspired by the Gospel message of charity, forgiveness and solidarity in the service of the common good."

Embracing the future with hope

Hail Our Valiant Religious Men and Women

The commemoration of the discovery of the Santo Niño leads us to embrace the future with hope as we observe a truthful review of the contribution of the religious orders and congregations. We are called forth to a renewed commitment of their following of Christ through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. May every religious be led to a joyful response with the people of God in the work of evangelization today!

First, a truthful review should be based on historical evidence of the religious groups who came to the Philippines, especially the friar orders of the Spanish colonial period. The ghosts of the Black Legend and even of our own Propaganda Movement and its supporters have conditioned our thinking towards these friars, with the backlash that the key to the understanding of so many sources to our history—our knowledge of the Spanish language—has unfortunately deteriorated. Unfamiliarity with primary sources has led significant sectors of the Philippine Church—hierarchy and seminary professors included—to regard the role of the religious in the Spanish colonial chapter of Philippine church history in a negative light. Shadows there were aplenty, for sure, but these seem to obscure the lights that are so much more illuminating.

Second, the call to follow Christ through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience must be renewed and deepened in religious life. As described in the Essential Elements of Religious Life, living the evangelical counsel of chastity is their testimony to hope since it is "a sign of the future life and a source of abundant fruitfulness in an undivided heart for the Kingdom of God".

The evangelical counsel of poverty, in imitation of Christ who lived a life of poverty and who showed preferential love for the poor, invites those in consecrated life to a deeper integration of how they embody this vow in fact and in spirit as religious during this Year of the Poor. The evangelical counsel of obedience calls them to pattern their lives after Christ who surrendered His whole life following the will of the Father until death. Thus, the evangelical counsels express not only their public consecration in the Church, but also form their identity, lifestyle and mission as religious today.

A Joyful Response

Third, a joyful response with other Church groups in the work of evangelization must characterize religious life. Pope Francis observed that "wherever there are consecrated people, seminarians, men and women religious, young people, there is joy, there is always joy! It is the joy of freshness, the joy of following Jesus; the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us, not the joy of the world."

This joy which sustained our missionaries in the past continues to this day as our religious participate in the ministries of the various dioceses: schools, parishes, orphanages, hospitals, youth centers, catechetical centers, etc. The religious in our country are not only active in the administration of the various spiritual and corporal acts of mercy but are courageous in defending human rights, as their predecessors did before them. Increasing number of religious are now sent as missionaries to other countries, including places where their institutions were born in Europe and the Americas.

Fourthly, an important service of consecrated people to the church is their witness to the importance of Christ in our life as based in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. May all the faithful be challenged by the religious that Christ can fill up our life with joy and he is the reason of service to the world.

So as we remember with gratitude the past and embrace the future with hope, we look toward Mary, model of consecrated life who remembered the great acts of salvation and who always hoped in God's gracious providence in her heart. May she who gave birth to the Holy Child Jesus (the Santo Niño) in Bethlehem and who followed Jesus to Calvary be the constant inspiration and guide of our men and women in consecrated life as they live out joyfully their religious consecration in the Church today!

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines,

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS, D.D.
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
CBCP President
January 22, 2015

Massacre

MASS slaughter, carnage, butchery or anything the like when human lives are considered cheap, if not worthless or evil even and therefore done away with ease and comfort—this is "Massacre" in substance, in its common understanding. No. It is not just a matter of one, two or three human lives that are deliberately and wantonly terminated or readily wasted. It is the perfect example of the inhumanity of man to man—some individuals nonchalantly killing and eliminating others as a matter of course. Suicide—someone taking his own life—is harder to do than massacre that precisely does away with the lives of others while mass murderers avidly keep theirs. This makes massacre the core and summit of inhumanity. And when life itself is done away with, human dignity is a big inanity, human rights are but downright vanity.

Sad to say but truth to remember, the present administration is now famous or infamous for no less than three downright massacres. If some more are in the making, few—if any—really know, would actually say.

There is the Quirino Grandstand Massacre to start with. It revealed the incompetence of uniformed public officials. It manifested the insensitivity of their Chief-in-Command. And so it angered the co-nationals of those thus massacred.

There is the Atimonan Massacre next. It demonstrated how law enforcers can readily violate the law not only by engaging in unlawful activities but also in actually killing one another. Their chief-in-command was nowhere.

And there is the Mamasapano Massacre lately. Honorable and courageous PNP-SAF constituents were killed supposedly by the would-be allies of the government at the initiative precisely of the same Chief-in-Command.

This is saying nothing about the infamous Mendiola Massacre where some 22 individuals were gunned down to uphold and protect an hacienda when Land Reform was supposedly the core of then incumbent government.

So it is that there is not only progressive poverty in the country, children not going to school, more citizens leaving for work abroad, more criminals freely roaming the street, more women selling themselves.

So it is that more and more people are digging into garbage cans, begging in the streets, sleeping on sidewalks. In the same way, more and more families are getting not only worried but in fact are also desperate and angry.

And so it is that demonstrations against the Malacañang Chief Occupant are becoming more in number and anger, more in bitterness and defiance. When will they stop? who can make them stand still? No one really knows.

The ground reality of the said progressively common dismay and consequent unrest is gradually but definitely turning into the clamor for someone to step down, to go away—please!

The work begins

AFTER a truly successful pastoral—caring, teaching, leading—visit of the good and lovable, wise and holy Pope Francis, the renewed pursuant implementing Pastoral Ministry of the Church in the Philippines begins by working for the deeper understanding and consequent observance of his reminders, advisories and mandates. It was great to see him! It was a big experience to witness his kindness, humility and concern! It was a blessing to listen to him! According to him:

The poor are crying for help. They are all over the land—in urban and rural areas, in the slums, in the streets begging, in the pavements sleeping. Children are begging for food, shelter and clothing, for care, safety and education. Their parents have no work. Meanwhile, there is much gambling among the people, not to mention the reign of criminals, the proliferation of drugs and addiction thereto.

The families are threatened by parents leaving their children behind to find work abroad. Decent housing, they do not have. How to satisfy their needs, they do not know. How to send their children to school, they have not the means. So is it that the answer of the government to all these is to prevent the birth of children through all possible ways and means to impede the coming of life.

The country is suffering not only from corruption and consequent mal-development but also from ideological colonization. While the former guarantees the continued poverty of Filipinos, the latter undermines their sound cultural traits and moral value system. Un-Filipinos they ultimately become.

So the work begins:

The Clergy have to minister to the people not only by attending to their spiritual but also material needs, not simply by catering to their heavenly quest but also by looking after their earthly preoccupations. This pastoral ministry is in perfect accord with the two fundamental commandments of love of God and love of neighbor—neither simply one or the other, but both.

The Religious have to look after human welfare—the mental, ethical, social—requirements of those committed to their care, those who ask and need their attention, those who are lost and need their care. More than anything else, the active religious vocation is meant for serving others. It is in serving others that they find their real self.

The laity have to be attentive to the cries for help of their fellow laymen and women, their fellow married couples, their fellow fathers and mothers. More than the clergy and the religious, they understand better the aspirations of those who have the same vocation. The laity is the wealth of the Church—particularly in the Philippines.

Will the BBL bring peace?

TO listen and discern in the light of faith, to speak and to act with the urging of hope, to wait and to bear with the strength of love, this is the standard stance of the Church in general and the CBCP in particular, especially in conjunction with big and sensitive issues with human dimensions and social implications. Such is precisely the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) which is presently still undergoing ardent and urgent scrutiny especially in the face of the "Mamasapano Massacre".

It is good to take note of the phenomenon that as the Catholic Church is universal in constituency and concern, the CBCP cannot but know and feel not only the blessings but also the problems, not merely joys but also the lamentations of the people of the Philippines as a whole—those in Luzon, the Visayas, and in Mindanao—all of whom are human beings with human dignity and human rights, human needs and human demands, irrespective of their different beliefs, customs and traditions and all of whom are either "Muslims, Christians, Indigenous Peoples, peoples of other religious persuasions". It is not hard to notice three general groupings of people specifically cited as far as the BBL is concerned: 1) Those who support and those who oppose it; 2) Those who claim that there has been sufficient or lack of consultation; 3) Those who are within and those outside the Bangsamoro territory. The mere reality and presence of such three-fold dividing factors among those concerned with the BBL, in effect, already forward the real and fundamental truth that the proposed Basic Law separates not unites, alienates not harmonizes people. And this living fact by itself sadly undermines instead of promotes national unity among the People of the Philippines. And supposing that the said Law initiated and promoted by the Executive Department were subsequently approved in substance by the Legislative Department and eventually adjudged altogether constitutional by the Judicial Department, several questions come to mind: Would there be peace especially in Mindanao? Would there be socio-economic development especially in Mindanao? Would the Filipinos be but one people with one vision under one aspiration?

Rain Washed

A LITTLE girl had been shopping with her Mom. She must have been 6 years old, this beautiful image of innocence. It was pouring outside. The kind of rain that gushes over the top of rain gutters, so much in a hurry to hit the earth it has no time to flow down the spout. We all stood there under the awning and just inside the door of the mall.

We waited, some patiently, others irritated because nature messed up their hurried day. I am always mesmerized by rainfall. I got lost in the sound and sight of the heavens washing away the dirt and dust of the world. Memories of running, splashing so carefree as a child came pouring in as a welcome reprieve from the worries of my day.

The little voice was so sweet as it broke the hypnotic trance we were all caught in, "Mom, let's run through the rain," she said. "What?" Mom asked.

"Let's run through the rain!" She repeated.

"No, honey. We'll wait until it slows down a bit," Mom replied.

This young child waited about another minute and repeated, "Mom, let's run through the rain."

"We'll get soaked if we do," Mom said.

"No, we won't, Mom. That's not what you said this morning," the young girl said as she tugged at her Mom's arm.

"This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?"

"Don't you remember? When you were talking to Daddy about his cancer, you said, 'If God can get us through this, he can get us through anything!'"

The entire crowd stopped dead silent. I swear you couldn't hear anything but the rain. We all stood silently. No one came or left in the next few minutes. Mom paused and thought for a moment about what she would say. Now some would laugh it off and scold her for being silly. Some might even ignore what was said. But this was a moment of affirmation in a young child's life. A time when innocent trust can be nurtured so that it will bloom into faith.

"Honey, you are absolutely right. Let's run through the rain. If God let's us get wet, well maybe we just needed washing," Mom said.

~Author Unknown

The Obstacles in Our Path

IN ANCIENT times, a King had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the King for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the King indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway.

The peasant learned what many of us never understand—"Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition."

The Seven Jars

LONG ago there lived in Northern India a merchant whose wife had died and who went daily from his lonely house in the foothills to the town below, for buying and selling. "I must have a holiday," he said to himself one day, and he began to climb up into the hills to enjoy the view and the sounds of the forest.

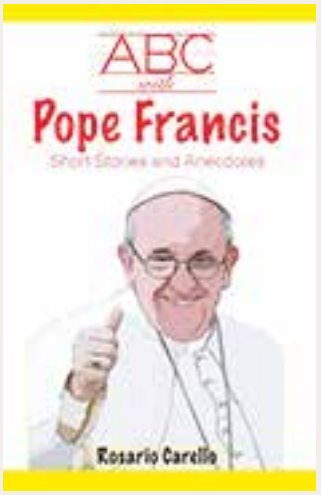
In the hot afternoon, feeling sleepy he looked for a quiet place for a nap. Soon he discovered a kind of hole in a cliff, actually a cave; so he lay down in the dark interior and slept. Waking up, he felt there was something with him, in the cave. Crawling back inside he found a large earthen jar. Then another, and another and another—there were seven jars there, altogether! Now the merchant wondered if he dared to open them. There was no sound of anyone about, still it seemed a bit risky. But curiosity, as you know, is powerful indeed.

He found he could lift the lid of the first jar. What do you know! It seemed to be full of gold coins. So were the second, third, fourth and fifth. Under the lid of the sixth jar he found an aged piece of paper. On it was written, "Finder, beware!! The seven jars of gold are yours, but there is a curse. No one who takes them with him can leave the curse behind." Now, next to curiosity, greed is the most powerful urge. Our merchant overjoyed with his luck, wasted no time in borrowing a two-wheeled cart to carry the jars of gold to his house.

It was exhausting and next to impossible. Bulky and hard to lift, they had to be taken two by two; in the dark of night he lugged them to his house. On the last trip, with the seventh jar alone thankfully the load was lighter, and he noticed nothing. "Let me count the coins," he thought, "and see how great my fortune is." But when that seventh jar was opened he found it was only half-full. "What!" he cried, "I was promised seven jars!" He had thrown the note away and forgotten about the curse. The merchant was overcome and obsessed by a spirit of grasping and greed.

Now, in the town, he went at his money-making hand and fist; it was all he lived for. "I must fill the seventh jar with gold," this was his constant thought. Yet the more he put into the jar, strangely the more it remained half-full.

He lived some years more, but never did he enjoy spending the gold he had found, because it was never enough.



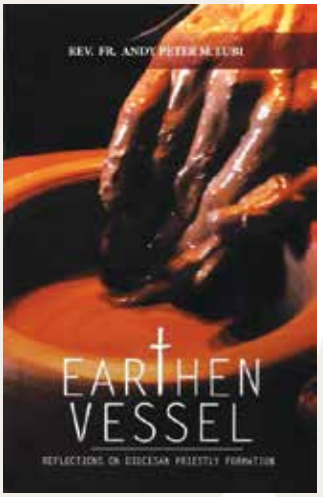
ABC with Pope Francis

Short Stories and Anecdotes

Rosario Carello

APPARENTLY, his recent pastoral and state visit to the Philippines was just some sort of introduction to what looks more like a long-term relationship of affection and loyalty—between the Pontiff and the Filipino people. Millions of people who were part of the crowds at the numerous papal events were not just charmed by the "very human" and spontaneous Pope Francis, but were provoked by his messages on "going to the "peripheries" to serve the marginalized, the sick, the abandoned children, and the needy. But before he became pope, who was Jorge Mario Bergoglio?

This book aims to bring to light more stories about the Holy Father's courage, faith, warmth, and humility—even before he was thrust into the spotlight. The reader can relish close to a hundred true stories and adventures full of humor, concern for others and love for Jesus Christ. In 80 anecdotes that range from the funny to the profound, this 160-page book shows the person, as well as glimpses of the pastoral genius of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, once a bouncer, teacher, son of Italian immigrants, football fan, priest with one lung, Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires and now, earthly shepherd of the Roman Catholic Church.



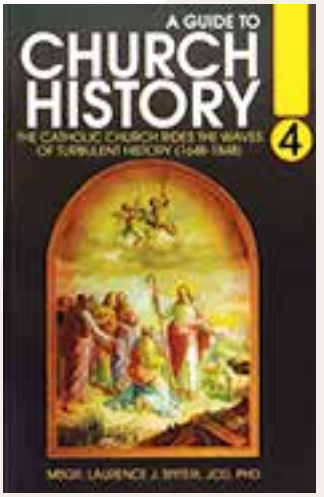
Earthen Vessel -

Reflections On Diocesan Priestly Formation

Rev. Fr. Andy Peter M. Lubi

"O, HOW great is the priest! If he realized what he is, he would die, not of fright, but of love... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host..." Who else could utter such passionate words of love for his vocation than the 17th century French priest St. John Marie Vianney, patron of diocesan priests?

It is with similar sentiments that this book by Fr. Lubi captures insights into the journey of diocesan priestly formation, drawing inspiration from the imagery of an "earthen vessel". This 153-page book is already meriting good reviews like one from Bishop Warlito I. Cajandig, DD, Apostolic Vicar of Calapan, Mindoro, who says: "We thank God for this gem of a book which could serve as a vademecum for our diocesan seminary formators. Indeed, the learning of Fr. Andy as a formator could be a great help in formation of seminarians."

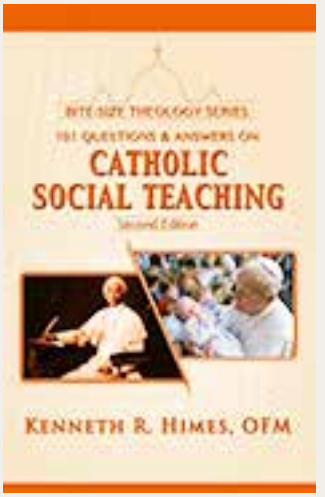


A Guide To Church History Volume 4

Msgr. Laurence J. Spiteri, JCD, PhD

THE two centuries from 1648 to 1848 was marked by a dizzying tug of war among Catholic princes and other secular authorities, trying to control the Church and to limit her influence. Despite the seemingly secular nature the Papacy and the Catholic Church had taken on, admirable developments throughout Europe and in other lands were taking place. Divine providence brought up great saintly men and women, churchmen, preachers, missionaries, scholars, and artists to swell her ranks.

This fourth volume of Church history provides the reader with a quick, reliable and concise reference to some of the highlights of the era, which began in the mid-17th century, the year of the Peace of Westphalia, ending in 1848, when revolutions swept across Europe. The Church survived the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon to see the restoration of the Society of Jesus and the founding of many new religious communities, and the record growth of the Church in many newly emerging nations in the Americas and eventually, in Asia. History shows us that God, the Lord of all times, is always, the Master of events and their outcomes.



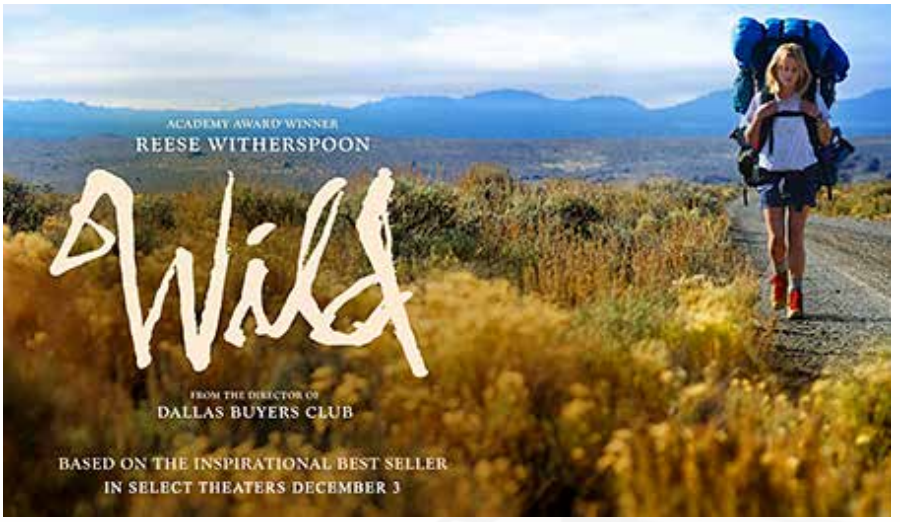
101 Questions & Answers on Catholic Social Teaching Second Edition

Kenneth R. Himes, OFM

WHAT'S the "best kept secret of the Catholic Church"? Its Social Teachings, of course. This slim book of 140 pages has the objective of answering some of the most asked questions on the Catholic stand on issues that range from contraception to economic justice to environmental conservation.

The original version of this book, first published in 2001, under the title Response to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching, has since then been updated to take into account the countless, more recent writings and pastoral letters, including other Vatican and papal documents, thus providing a thoroughly up-to-date overview of the rapidly evolving field of Catholic social justice.

Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation



Wild

DIRECTOR: Jean-Marc Vallee
LEAD CAST: Reese Witherspoon, Laura Dern, Thomas Sadoski, Michiel Huisman, Gaby Hoffman
SCREENWRITER: Nick Hornby based on Cheryl Strayed's memoir
PRODUCER: Bruna Papandrea, Bill Pohlad, Reese Witherspoon
EDITOR: John Mac McMurphy, Martin Pensa
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Clint Mansell
GENRE: Biographical Drama
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Yves Belanger
DISTRIBUTOR: Fox Searchlight Pictures
LOCATION: United States
RUNNING TIME: 115 minutes

Technical assessment: 4
Moral assessment: 3
MTRCB rating: R 16
CINEMA rating: V 18

Wild is the story of Cheryl Strayed, based on her best-selling memoir, Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail. Reese Witherspoon (of Legally Blonde fame) brings her to life as one who "had diverged, digressed, wandered, and become wild." Devastated by her mother Bobbi's (Laura Dern) untimely death due to cancer, Cheryl spirals into self-destructive behavior (read infidelity, carefree sex, drugs, an abortion), and divorces her loving husband Paul (Thomas Sadoski). Coming to her senses, she embarks on the Pacific Crest Trail in order to find, in her own words: "the lost vision of the woman my mom raised me to be."

Strayed takes us with her on the 1,100-mile-journey (from the California-Mexico border to Canada) as she struggles to carry a humongous backpack, Monster, faces all types of danger from animals, the changing seasons, the rugged terrain, hunger, and other hikers. Through impressive cinematography Wild does not present a woman-against-nature journey. Instead it shows the terror of a solo woman hiker for 94 days: taking one step after another in the most gruelling trek, facing one's demons, accepting one's savage nature and finding one's place in the wilderness of our complex world. We see an amateur Strayed struggling with her pack, her boots, her lack of food and just about everything, but she never gives up in spite of her fears. Slowly, her past life unravels through well-placed flashbacks. Witherspoon, sans hairdo and makeup, captivates in her gritty performance, thanks to Jean-Marc Vallee's direction. Laura Dern authors Bobbi's all-encompassing love and optimism with passion and joie de vivre. The music adds to the adventure, and although there's more to be desired in the conclusion, the entire movie effectively shows Strayed's monumental journey.

Wild is the story of a woman who literally walks out of her life, takes even a new name, and journeys into the unknown, totally unprepared and afraid. It shows how complicated life is for a woman and how she must find a way around it. Confronting the wounds of the past, she understands what it means to be human, to love, to grieve, to struggle, and to forgive. And although she experiences the graciousness and decency of people along the way, aside from a threatening few, what saves Strayed is not money, her parents, someone or something. With dogged determination she undergoes both a physical and spiritual odyssey replete with sacrifices and pain, and discovers the beauty in the wild places of her life. In Christian terms, Strayed went on a pilgrimage, not so much to an external holy site, but to the wilderness of her soul and listened to her heart. And somehow she finds peace as she reaches "The Bridge of the Gods."

Wild is a powerful movie that invites the viewer to honestly look inside his/her own life. We wander, we lose our way, we make mistakes and we suffer, regretting many of the choices we make. The movie shows that the wild places belong to all of us and life's greatest secret is having the courage to find the best you can be.

INDIA. Indians rise up to defend Mother Teresa's legacy after attack by Hindu leader

Indians from all walks of life and religions have joined to condemn allegations made against Bl. Teresa of Calcutta by a fundamentalist Hindu leader charging that her sole objective in helping the poor was converting them to Christianity. Mohan Bhagwat, head of the Hindu nationalist organization RSS, said Feb. 23 in India's Rajasthan state that "Mother Teresa's service would have been good. But it used to have one objective, to convert the person, who was being served, into a Christian." Bhagwat was speaking at the inauguration of an orphanage and women's home run by a local NGO, and said, "here we will not provide service like that rendered by Mother Teresa. It is possible that her kind of work was good, but there was a motive behind that service." His comments have evoked fierce reactions over social media, as well as protests. In the national upper house of parliament, the Rajya Sabha opposition parties staged protests which led to adjournment of the sitting. They demanded statements from the ruling government and from prime minister Narendra Modi, whose BJP party is closely aligned with RSS. ***(CNA)***

THAILAND. For new cardinal, secularism is the face of the devil

The main challenge facing the Church today is secularism, according to Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij of Bangkok, who boldly called the phenomenon the devil's face in the modern world. "It is not just a challenge for the Asian Churches … all the world is facing the challenge of secularism," Cardinal Kriengsak told CNA Feb. 20. "Secularism is the new way the devil presents himself in the modern world," adding that the devilish force takes an attractive appearance, rather than a grotesque one: "it seems to people that secularism is a nice devil, not a terrible one." The new Thai cardinal conceded that "there are good things in modern culture," but on the other hand "people are too easily following the wave of secularism … and this does not take place just in Asia, and secularism does not affect only Catholics." ***(CNA)***

CHINA. Chinese Bible association gathers to make Scripture the heart of Church's life

The United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association held its tenth World Chinese Biblical Congress last month in Taiwan, drawing participants from 18 countries to reflect on Scripture and its place in the new evangelization. "The congress was a very touching experience of a new Pentecost with the outpouring of gifts of the Holy Spirit in the company of the Blessed Mother … engendering fresh new inspirations, hope, and vision for all concerned to mark a new page in being biblical missionary disciples in the Church and in the world in creative ways," said Cecilia Chui, secretary of the UCCBA. "The UCCBA is commemorating the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council document Dei Verbum and has resolved to meaningfully live 2015 as a Biblical pastoral ministry year and to dedicate this project to respond to the apostolic exhortations Verbum Domini and Evangelii Gaudium as a humble gift for Pope Francis on the second anniversary of his pontificate," Chui told CNA Feb 24. The biblical congress drew more than 300 participants to Taipei, the capital of the Republic of China, Jan. 22-26 to reflect on the theme "Bearing Witness to the Word for New Evangelization." ***(CNA)***

INDONESIA. Jail, not death: appropriate punishment according to Australia's bishops

With two of their nationals on Indonesia's death row over drug trafficking offenses, the Australian bishops are appealing to the government to stay their executions by firing squad, believed to be imminent. Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran were in a group of nine Australians arrested in Bali in 2005 with more than 18 lb of heroin. Their fellow drug traffickers were sentenced to life in prison, but in 2006 they were given the death penalty. "Justice must prevail and appropriate punishment used for the common good for our societies when such crimes are committed," Archbishop Denis Hart of Melbourne wrote in a recent letter to Joko Widodo, the Indonesian president. "However, we believe that jail sentences, not execution, are the more appropriate means of punishing offenders and deterring those who would consider committing such crimes," Archbishop Hart wrote. "Our concern for the sacredness of life motivates this plea for clemency." ***(CNA)***

JORDAN. Politician calls for coalition airstrikes to help Syrian Christians

A prominent Syrian Christian political leader has called for U.S.-led coalition forces to use airstrikes to aid fellow Christian and Kurdish fighters battling Islamic State militants following reports of flagrant abductions and church burnings in northwest Syria. "There is a need for immediate action similar to what took place in Kobani," Bassam Ishak, president of the Syriac National Council of Syria, said, referring to a key Kurdish city in Syria. Ishak's appeal to stop the Islamic State advancement has been echoed by Syriac Catholic Archbishop Jacques Hindo of Hassakeh. "I wish to say quite clearly that we have the feeling of being abandoned into the hands of those Daesh (the Arabic acronym for Islamic State)," Archbishop Hindo told the Vatican's Fides news service. On Feb. 27, Ishak said that Islamic State was reinforcing it positions and seemed "to be preparing for a big assault. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Christians and Kurds are at stake. We need action soon before it's too late. Christians in the city of Hassakeh called me. They are very scared." ***(CNS)***

HONG KONG. Employer who tortured Indonesian maid jailed for 6 years

The District Court of Hong Kong has sentenced Law Wan-tung to six years in prison, for beating and torturing her Indonesian maid. In 2013 the case first came to light highlighting the actual situation of migrants in the Territory . The judge who sentenced her, Amanda Woodcock, explained that the woman's attitude was "regrettable" and pointed out that the Law "has not shown any compassion" for her victims. In addition, she called on the authorities of the former British colony and those of Jakarta to investigate the agencies that traffic human beings. The story of Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, 23 triggered a wave of global outrage and has turned the spotlight on the real situation of the approximately 300 thousand migrants from different parts of Asia, who enter the territory in search of work. These people suffer abuse while still in their country of origin, which they can only leave through "specialized agencies" and then only to end up in a nightmare of unpunished crimes and slavery. ***(Asianews)***

JAPAN. Nara, Kasuga temple opens its doors to the public

For the first time in the modern era, the Kasuga Taisha Shinto temple is set to open its doors to the public and showcase its cultural and religious treasures. The structure, recognized as a "World Heritage Site", is located in Nara Prefecture and is normally only accessible to Shinto religious and the imperial family. Inside the temple there is a stone where, according to the local cult, the divinity Takemikazuchi no Mikoto, the patron of the martial arts, rests. Originally the deity was worshiped in the Kashima Jingu temple: here a famous school of kendo and kenjutsu was created. According to tradition, the deity fled on a white deer and now rests in the stone. The deity's most famous devotees include Tsukahara Bokuden, the fifteenth century samurai, who spent most of his life at the temple mastering the art of the sword. The temple will be opened on the occasion of Shikinen Zotai, , a ritual held every 20 years in which aged structures and interiors are replaced. Hirotada Kasannoin, the Shinto abbot, explains that elements of worship have been removed from Kasuga, but the cultural treasures and the stone will be on show for the public. It is the first time that the northern gate has opened in 140 years. The treasures on display from March 29 to April 5, include a painting depicting the flight of the gods from Kashima temple, the indoor gardens and the four pavilions usually reserved for worship for the emperor and his family. ***(Asianews)***

Venerable Fr. Michael McGivney

The Founder of the Knights of Columbus

Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus, serves as a model for the collaboration between the priesthood and the laity that can guide the Church today. When he gathered together the men of his parish in New Haven, Connecticut, to establish the Knights of Columbus in 1882, Father McGivney anticipated the call by the Second Vatican Council for a more active laity.

His vision of charity, unity and fraternity – including service to families, communities and the Church – continues to inspire the Order he founded, which now has more than 1.8 million members worldwide, including 337,000 Knights in the Philippines.

Father McGivney now holds title of Venerable Servant of God, after Pope Benedict XVI approved a decree recognizing his heroic virtue. A miracle attributed to his intercession is needed for Venerable McGivney to advance to beatification, the next step in the canonization

FATHER McGIVNEY OFFICE - PHILIPPINES