ASIAN MAGAZINE FOR HUMAN TRANSFORMATION

# IMPACT

MARCH 2015
VOL 49 NO 3

## "Render Social Justice to Farmers"

# IMPACT

ISSN 0300-4155 / Asian Magazine for Human Transformation Through Education, Social Advocacy and Evangelization / P.O. Box 2481, 1099 Manila, Philippines
©Copyright 1974 by Social Impact Foundation, Inc.

Published monthly by
**AREOPAGUS SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ASIA, INC.**

Editor
**PEDRO QUITORIO III**

Associate Editor
**NIRVA'ANA DELACRUZ**

Staff Writers
**CHARLES AVILA**
**EULY BELIZAR**
**ROY CIMAGALA**
**ROY LAGARDE**
**LOPE ROBREDILLO**

Sales & Advertising Supervisor
**GLORIA FERNANDO**

Circulation Manager
**ERNANI RAMOS**

Design Artist
**RONALYN REGINO**

Photographer
**TIMOTHY ONG**

COVER PHOTO BY CBCPNEWS

Editorial Office:470 Ge neral Luna St., Intramuros, Manila • Tel (632) 404-2182 • Telefax (632) 404-1612 • Visit our website at www.impactmagazine.net
For inquiries, comments, and contributions, email us at: impactmagazine2012@gmail.com

# *EDITOR'S NOTE*

ON the second anniversary of his election, on March 13, Pope Francis announced the celebration of an extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy that will commence on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, and will conclude on November 20, 2015, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

The surprise announcement came at the traditional penitential liturgy celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica as Pope Francis opened the Lenten prayer initiative "24 Hours for the Lord." At about the tail-end of his homily he said: "Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary Jubilee that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (cf. Lk 6:36)." According to the Vatican, the official and solemn announcement of the Holy Year will done on April 12, Divine Mercy Sunday (2nd Sunday of Easter) with the public proclamation of the Bolla in front of the Holy Door.

Mercy and compassion seem to be the overarching theme of Pope Francis' Petrine ministry. This was the theme of his apostolic journey to the Philippines this January. This prevails, too, in most of his homilies and messages. In an interview conducted by Antonio Spadaro, S.J., editor in chief of La Civilta Cattolica, in September 2013, Pope Francis, albeit simplistically, trail-blazed a rather experiential ecclesiology by looking at the Church as a field hospital. He said: "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up."

The confessional is a favorite of Pope Francis. His photo kneeling in confession has become viral and has inspired Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He describes the confessional "not as a form of torture but rather as a liberating encounter, full of humanity, through which we can educate in a mercy that does not exclude, but rather includes the just commitment to make amends, as far as possible, for the sin committed."

Mercy and compassion has been in the Church from day one. But the way Pope Francis does it is revolutionary. To borrow the observation of John Allen, the Vatican analyst who recently launched a book The Francis Miracle, "If there is a "revolution underway it's at the level of the pastoral application of doctrine, not revisions to that doctrine itself." One cannot but be excited how the Holy Year of Mercy will proceed.

This issue opens with the Pastoral Moral Guidance on the Antidiscrimination Bill issued by the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Archbishop Socrates Villegas. Penned by our staff writer Kris Bayos, our cover story is on the protracted issue of agrarian reform that surfaced lately principally because of a letter of Philippine Catholic Bishops to the Executive Department and the Legislature seeking the legislation of two house bills on the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. Read on.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


27 | Citizen's Political Involvement
*EDITORIAL*

16 | 'Give CARP a New Lease on Life, a Chance for a Glorious Finish'
*COVER STORY*

*ARTICLES*

4 | Pastoral Moral Guidance on the Anti-discrimination Bill

7 | Grieving, Doing Justice, Working for Peace

9 | Pope Denounces 'Scandalous Inequalities' in the Philippines

10 | Some Notes on Poverty

11 } Pushing Muslim Mindanao to Independence

21 | 81 Bishops Renew Church's Call for CARP

13 | *NEWS FEATURES*

23 | *STATEMENTS*

26 | *FROM THE BLOGS OF BP. OSCAR V. CRUZ*

28 | *FROM THE INBOX*

30 | *CBCP CINEMA*

31 | *ASIA BRIEFING*


# "QUOTE IN THE ACT

*"The sisters have forgiven but the justice is to be made visible."*

Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on the case of a 70 year-old old who was raped by one member of a group of robbers who ransacked the convent of Jesus and Mary on March 14; Christians, who make up 2% of India's population, are apprehensive over recent violence against them, including attacks by vandal on churches in New Delhi.

*"The IS militants have no right to kill our Christian brothers and sisters in other countries."*

Carmal reberio, a sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Mission; in peaceful march held in Dhaka, India, by lay people including Catholic nuns, priests and some Muslims to protest the killings of Christians by militants of the Islamic State (IS); the sister called on world leaders "to protest strongly in order to stops the killings by the IS."

*"Let not emotions, biases and prejudices prevail over objective reason and over our most cherished Christian values of justice and peace, truth, love and harmony."*

Orlando Quevedo, Cardinal Archbishop of Cotabato in the Philippines; in his recent "Letter to Christians" entitled "Grieving, doing justice, working for peace" where he appealed for a clearer understanding of the Bangsamoro Basic Law that is held pending at both Houses of Congress in the wake of the Mamasapano clash.

*"I never saw him (Aquino) when he was senator to have participated in rallies I had attended with his mother demanding Arroyo to resign the presidency."*

Eliseo Mercado, a peace advocate who belongs to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate; commenting on the Philippine president Benigno Simeon Aquino who faulted the Catholic Church for being "silent" during the alleged corruption cases under the Arroyo administration, adding "then he had the gall to say this during the Pope's visit … I thought then that the man had selective memory."

# *Pastoral Moral Guidance on the Anti-discrimination Bill*

CONGRESS of the Philippines is poised to pass into law that was earlier known as the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity bill, which is now more generally referred to as the anti-discrimination bill. We are grateful that the CBCP was earlier asked by the relevant committees of the houses of Congress to submit its comments, and we did so. But now, we deem it opportune to express ourselves collectively on the matter.

***Non-Discrimination is a Christian Imperative***

If discrimination means that certain individuals, because of sexual orientation or gender identity, are systematically denied fundamental human rights, then any measure that counters discrimination of this kind is a gesture of charity, one that reaches out to all and recognizes them in their inherent dignity as sons and daughters of God, called to new life in Jesus Christ.

This then is also the propitious time for us to call on all pastors throughout the country to be as solicitous of the pastoral welfare of all our brothers and sisters regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Their exclusion from the life of the Church, their treatment as outcasts, their relegation to the category of inferior members of the Church worthy only of derision and scorn certainly does not conform to Pope Francis' vision of the Church as the sacrament of Divine mercy and compassion.

In this regard, the Church has much to contribute towards the education of Catholics to be more accepting of others and to see through appearances the Lord present in each brother and sister. There can therefore be no more approval of parents who imbue in their children the loathing and disgust for persons with a different sexual orientation or with gender identity issues. In Catholic institutions, there should be zero-tolerance for the bullying and badgering of persons in such personal situations.

***Christian Anthropology and Consequences for Pastoral Care***

The Church remains firm in its teaching however that reason discerns in the process of human evolution, the perpetuation of humankind, and the complementarity of the sexes, as well as from the very nature of sexuality itself that God's image and likeness is found in either man or woman. The Church therefore compassionately reaches out to persons with orientation and gender identity issues so that they may clearly discern, with a well-formed conscience, and in the light of the Divine plan for humankind, how they ought to live their lives.

In this regard, a common fallacy has to be contested. Today, it is not uncommon to hear the assertion that the way a person chooses to live his or her life and with which gender to identify is purely a matter of personal sovereignty and choice. Much is left to choice, but much is also a matter of human givenness, a matter of human facticity. From the perspective of Divine Revelation, much is not of the person's doing but must be counted as God's gift. Among these are sexuality and gender.

While contemporary psychology and psychiatry are far from unanimous on the causes of orientation and identity issues, it is as clear that the individual is not helpless in this regard. There are decisions a person can and must make. There are mind-sets a person must either acquire or discard.

On the basis of its understanding of the human condition, the Church cannot encourage persons to "choose" their gender, orientation, and sexual identity as if these were matters at the free disposal of choice. The Church therefore looks to mature parents, school counselors, community workers, professional psychologists and personality experts, as well as to her own priests engaged in pastoral counseling, to help in the resolution of what, it must be admitted, are very difficult personal issues, always with understanding, compassion, acceptance of the inherent worth of the human person and attentiveness to what has been revealed to us about the human person.

We must also insist on the distinc-

tion between "orientation" and overt acts. No one may be excluded from the life of the Church and its sacraments merely because of avowed orientation or identity. However, the disapproval of homosexual acts remains part of the Church's moral teaching, a consequence in fact of its understanding of human dignity. If "gay rights" movements, for instance, encourage free and unbridled sexual relations between persons of the same sex, the Church cannot lend its support, for in its view, they ultimately do a disservice to our brothers and sisters. What gay rights can legitimately champion is justice for all, fairness that must extend to all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

***The Proposed Law***

Before anything else, CBCP must ask whether or not the proposed non-discrimination bill is itself a manifestation of that pernicious form of "colonization" to which Pope Francis referred in his recent visit to the Philippines. Is this the "importation" into our country of values, behavioral norms and attitudes that the West has championed and peddled?

To the legislators who consider through future legislative initiatives giving legal recognition to same sex

*Rep. Linabelle Ruth R. Villarica, Chairperson of the Committee on Women and Gender Equality, in one of congress deliberations.* CONGRESS.GOV.PH

unions, the Church declares there is no equivalence or even any remote analogy whatsoever between marriage between a man and woman as planned by God and the so-called same sex unions.

Insofar as the proposed piece of legislation renders illegitimate the relegation of persons with sexual orientation and gender identity issues to citizens of a lower category enjoying fewer rights, the CBCP cannot but lend its support to this proposed legislative measure.

However, there are certain matters that the Church considers to be within its exclusive sphere of competence such as determining whom should be admitted to priestly or religious formation, who should be ordained and received into Holy Order, or who should be professed as members of religious communities and orders. The Church asserts its exclusive right to determine its own criteria and to exclude even on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity if it finds these to be hindrances to the fidelity that is expected of ordained or consecrated persons. We believe that the Constitution of the Republic guarantees this under the "free exercise" clause of the fundamental law of the land.

In respect to Catholic schools and the guidance and counseling that it extends to its students, the CBCP herewith expresses its position that our Catholic schools remain at liberty to determine their own admission and retention policies on the basis of the manner in which the Supreme Court of the Philippines has developed the constitutional guarantee of academic freedom. We must however reiterate that none must be demeaned, embarrassed, or humiliated for reasons of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Persons with homosexual orientation are sons and daughters of God; no less than any of us is. Discrimination against them is contrary to the Gospel spirit. Verbal and physical violence against them is an offense against the good Lord Himself. Through honest dialogue and pastoral accompaniment, it should be our goal to assist them to respond to the demands of chastity and that purity of body and heart that Jesus, in the Gospels, calls 'blessed'. When they wish to make an offering to the life of the Church according to their talents, abilities and gifts, the Church as mother provides for them.

***Conclusion***

We foresee that CBCP will be reproved for not going "all out" in its approval of homosexual and transsexual orientation and identity. But we pray that all will understand that the deposit of faith is not owed to us, nor is it something we are free to modify or tailor to suit fad and fancy.

We conclude by reiterating our position that your bishops and priests welcome all of God's sons and daughters, that there is room in the Church for all, whatever our personal conditions, gifts as well as burdens might be, and the Church will be tireless in extending its support and care for those in the midst of personal conflict who must make crucial decisions for themselves in the light of the new life Christ offers us all!

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, March 3, 2015

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

# Grieving, doing justice, working for peace

## *(A letter to Christians)*

Fellow Disciples of Christ:

Greetings of peace in the Lord!

As a Filipino and Mindanawon, I grieve profoundly for our gallant SAF troops who sacrificed their lives in pursuit of justice in Mamasapano. I grieve deeply with their families.

As a disciple of Christ I likewise grieve for the other Filipinos, Bangsamoro civilians and combatants, who perished in the same horrible tragedy. I grieve deeply with their families.

With the families of all the victims I demand that justice be done, that answers to the many questions raised by the whole nation be forthrightly answered. Those responsible for the tragedy must be brought to justice without fear or favor. The attribution of guilt must not be one-sided. It is now coming to light from the ground that inhuman brutalities were committed by both sides. Guilt is on both sides of that fateful, clearly avoidable, combat.

Yet in the face of outrage and calls for all-out war for the manner by which our law enforcers lost their lives, I call for peace. I call for rationality rather than emotionalism. I call for justice that is not selective. I call for openness and fairness rather than bias and prejudice.

For in the wake of Mamasapano our age-old Christian biases and prejudices against Moros have quickly and most sadly resurrected. Biases and prejudices have colored and clouded our judgment.

We hear ourselves say, we cannot trust the Moros. We cannot trust the MILF. We cannot trust them to lay down their arms, we cannot trust them with the money they need for development, we cannot trust them to go after terrorists once they have their own government, we cannot trust them to practice democracy, we cannot trust them to govern well. We simply cannot trust them.

The bottomline of the Mamasapano tragedy is mistrust—on both sides of the conflict.

It is sheer human tragedy that such sentiments come from the dark side of our hearts. And as a Christian religious leader, I grieve also for this eclipse of the Christian heart. From an anguished heart I ask the Lord to forgive us.

*The Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) holds a prayer rally to mourn the deaths of both the PNP-SAFF and the MILF and BIFF members who died in a bloody clash in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Jan. 25, 2015.* PCPR

Our biases and prejudices have brought us to convictions and conclusions that are totally wrong:

• We lump all Moro armed groups together (MILF, MNLF, BIFF, Abu Sayaff group, private armed groups) as lawless groups that advocate secession and independence ;

• We believe that the MILF claims the whole of Mindanao;

• We conclude that the Bangsamoro government will have agencies that will be totally independent of their national counterparts;

• We assert that the MILF will become the police force of the Bangsamoro;

• We dismiss as sham the conversion of MILF from a secessionist movement into a principled partner for peace. We persist in calling them "secessionists."

• We threaten to do away with provisions that protect a proposed fledgling Bangsamoro government from the negativities of warlordism and clan domination. Yet it is so easy to ask our own peace negotiators why it is necessary for the Bangsamoro to be "MILf-led" in the short term.

• We mistrust the MILF's determination to govern well and thus to reverse Bangsamoro political history.

On the contrary, my brothers and sisters in Christ, the following are at the heart and soul of the BBL:

• Bangsamoro self-determination will be exercised within a limited territory under the sovereignty of the Philippines. National sovereignty and territorial integrity will be preserved;

• The over-all principle that governs the BBL is the Catholic moral and social principle of subsidiarity, a principle already enshrined in our own Constitution. The principle requires the intervention of the national government and its various entities when the common good of all requires it. Therefore, no entity of the Bangsamoro government, such as a Bangsamoro auditing department or police force, is abso-

*The Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women - MPC welcome Cardinal Quevedo upon his arrival in Cotabato City after the consistory in Rome in February 2014.*
*ARCHDIOCESE OF COTABATO*

lutely independent of their national counterparts.

My fellow disciples of Christ, self-determination has been the cry of the Bangsamoro for centuries. They struggled to preserve it against the Spaniards and the Americans. They insisted on it in the face of our government's efforts to neutralize and domesticate it by democratic processes and the lure of economic development.

Rightfully we are outraged by the manner by which our valiant SAF forces were killed. But in the past 100 years the Bangsamoro have seen hundreds of their own people, including women and children, massacred in mountains and mosques. And we did not open our eyes and ears to see and hear their plaintive cries for justice.

The lesson of history is not one we can sweep under the rug – the fundamental aspiration of a "nation" for self-determination does not die. It will seem to fade away with the passing of old leaders but if unrealized the drive for self determination will rise with the radicalization of younger generations.

I have been a missionary among Muslims for the most part of my priestly life. I have been a parish priest in Jolo. I taught Muslims and Christians in a Catholic University which now has a predominantly Muslim student population. I have witnessed a harmonious dialogue of life among the students. Many of our soldiers and high ranking officers studied in our Catholic schools. So, too, did members and leaders of the MILF. They are not terrorists. Terrorist have in fact broken away from them. The MILF only aspires and struggles politically for a place under the sun in freedom and dignity. The BBL was negotiated painstakingly with stops and detours for at least five years. It is not an agreement that was hurriedly done. It fulfills the Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination. It preserves our fundamental principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Yes, by all means we must refine the BBL so that it will hew closely to our Constitution. But let there be consensus among constitutional luminaries on what is constitutional and what is not constitutional among the provisions of the BBL. Let us make sure that we do not "improve and strengthen" the BBL such that the idea of self-determination that is imbedded in various provisions of the BBL becomes once more an illusion, a desire begging despairingly to be realized.

I am for peace, the peace that God grants to people of good will. I am for the peace that God gives through the collaborative work of men and women who work conscientiously for the good of the whole country. By focusing on the good of a Bangsamoro minority in the "peripheries" who have suffered social injustices for centuries, they are working for the common good of all Filipinos. They are healing historic wounds that have caused great suffering to all Filipinos.

And so must I grieve for our courageous SAF troops who have lost their lives. I must also grieve for all the other Filipinos who perished in Mamasapano. I grieve and pray for the families they left behind, their inconsolable widows and children, for their uncertain future. For their sake I seek justice and accountability.

I beg you as fellow disciples of Christ, the Prince of Peace, to pray and work together for peace so that Mamasapano will not repeat itself. Let not emotions, biases and prejudices prevail over objective reason and over our most cherished Christian values of justice and peace, truth, love and harmony.

It is the Spirit of God that gives hope and infuses love and harmony among peoples of different faiths and cultures. With God's Spirit we can soar over tragedies, we can restore trust for one another, we can strive together for harmony and peace. Ultimately it is in the enlightened heart where love and peace begin.

May the God of Justice, Peace and Love bless us all.

+Orlando B. Cardinal Quevedo, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Cotabato
March 8, 2015

# *Pope Denounces 'Scandalous Inequalities' in the Philippines*

***BY FR. SHAY CULLEN***

WITH the wind blowing around the pope and rain falling as a tropical typhoon again approached Tacloban Pope Francis is speaking without a written speech in a homily from the heart and reminding all of us that Jesus of Nazareth has endured all the human trials and tribulations and suffered as we do. He became as one of us so God would be among us understanding and in union with all our hardships.

Jesus of Nazareth was executed on the cross for his compassion and oneness with the poor teaching equality ,justice and non-violence.

He gave us value and dignity in doing this and every person is therefore precious.He said. Many thousands of the faithful covered with yellow rain coats. bravely endured the rain as another tropical storm approached. It was a reminder of the terrible most powerful super-typhoon to hit land in living memory. The people of Samar and Lyete suffered and endured great pain and loss.

In all the tragedies Jesus is as a great brother,with his Mother, Mary are with us and we are not alone who in this time of tragedy like what happened here we are feeling that we are all brothers and sisters because we help each other. "When I saw this tragedy 14 months ago I felt I had to be here with you,He said."Now I am here,a but late, but here". He echoed the words of Jesus when he calmed the storm and told his followers

***"Do not be Afraid"***

"This is coming from my heart and sorry of I have no other words to express this, Jesus will never let you down and the care of Mother Mary will not let you down. We will always walk together as brothers and sisters united in the Lord". Pope Francis said.

With his message of love and compassion for the poor and the outcasts Pope Francis has made a powerful impression of light and goodness in the dark world of irresponsible rich, corruption and the shocking poverty it has created.

In a previous speech he called on government to end corruption and poverty and denounced the "scandalous social inequalities". In his speech to politicians he called on them to "hear the cries of the poor ,and break the bonds and oppression that give rise to glaring and indeed scandalous social inequalities". he said.

Those chains of oppression and inequality and brutal cruel torture were clearly seen in the photographs that were on many a newspaper and social media across the world showing a little girl handcuffed to a post in a Manila government child detention center known as Reception Action center just a short distance from City Hall.

Her eyes filled with tears and crying her heart out. It caused outrage and anger. Other Photographs released by Mail On-line on the same day the Pope arrived in Manila show Francisco, his namesake lying naked and starving in the same center. Secretary Corazon Soliman said she will close it down.

The same Mail On-line story showed an 8 year old held behind bars with older boys. sexual abuse is rampant in the cells and the younger ones are forced to preform sex acts on the older. Even girls held in the same facilities have sexual encounters with the inmates.

A government social worker told Mail Online that the children were been rounded up and held in detention centers in advance of the Papal visit to stop them begging from the Pope. Catherine Scerri of Bahay Tuluyan, a street child center in Manila, said Social workers were doing it as they did many times.

This is outrageous child abuse and illegal detention in sub-human conditions. These truths are supported by extensive photographic evidence. The plight of the children in prison have been published frequently in this column in The Sunday Times and available on www.preda.org and Preda Foundation Facebook.

Government officials countered in saying some of the pictures were from past months confirming that the child abuse exposed in the government centers was not an isolated incident as others tried to claim. No one has been held responsible or called to answer before the law for the outrageous abuse of our children. These are the little brothers and sisters that Pope Francis says he is in solidarity with as one family. During his speech on the family he repeated to the people in the Asian Mall complex where a Preda representative was present to "protect your children".

The immediate occasion of the popes visit is his concern for the victims of Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) fourteen month ago. He is expected to publish a encyclical on climate soon.Why such great climate disruption ? What is happening? The hundred years of burning coal, oil, wood, creates a a shroud of CO2 and methane gas, around the planet the sun is beating down and heats the earth,the hot air cannot escape trapped beneath the shroud of gases. The ice sheets are melting fast, the sun's rays cannot be now reflected back into space and instead they heat the oceans and waters rise up to flood millions of homes.

With a warmer world the more ocean water will evaporate to fill the skies, the cold and hot air streams collide and gigantic rain and wind storms -typhoons come raging in destroying everything and everybody in their deadly paths.

As I write this the rain is pouring down in Tacloban, Pope Francis has referred to this terrible dangerous situation of climate change and global warming which created the greatest storm that hit Tacloban.

He comes to heal the wounded,comfort the bereaved, call for justice for the most vulnerable of all -the poor and the jobless,the hovel dwellers and the downtrodden. We all need to put our faith into action and be fully alert,aware and alive, to save the planet,the poor and ourselves. shaycullen@preda.org

# Some notes on poverty

*BY FR. ROY CIMAGALA*

FILE PHOTO

IT'S obvious that we have to do all we can to combat bad poverty. That's the poverty that dehumanizes us, that undermines our dignity as persons and as children of God. Anything that stands in the way of what we ought to be, both in the natural level and with respect to our supernatural destination, should be rooted out.

And in this Year of the Poor, it's understandable that we are called upon first to do something about the plight of the many people suffering under some yoke of human misery like hunger, unemployment, ignorance, injustice, and other forms of privation.

These in themselves are already a very formidable task that deserves our immediate action. We need to pray and offer a lot of sacrifices for these causes, sparing nothing to resolve them. But our understanding of poverty would be gravely deficient if we regard poverty exclusively in this light.

There's a lot more to poverty than this common and most wonderful sense of empathy and sympathy with our fellow citizens in dire necessity. There's a good poverty that is actually a virtue to be desired and cultivated.

It's the poverty that makes us more and more human, and that fosters our relationship with God and with others. It gives us the proper attitude toward all earthly goods and our temporal affairs, delineating how these ought to be pursued, used and developed.

It's not true that good and Christian poverty is averse to possession of material things or to involvement in business, politics, arts, fashion, etc. Or that it has to be lived exclusively in the original Franciscan style of austerity. In this case, only the Franciscans who follow the original charism would live Christian poverty.

Good and Christian poverty is very much compatible with being a millionaire or billionaire, with a lot of possessions, etc., but whose heart is completely detached from them. He only uses them exclusively for God's glory and for the good of all men.

He who lives good and Christian poverty, even if he is a millionaire or a billionaire with lots of possessions, would certainly stay away from any form of ostentation, vanity, and arrogance. He lives a simple life despite the many things he owns. He avoids idleness and ego-tripping. Rather he is always busy for God and for others.

He knows that all earthly goods, whether naturally endowed or acquired through human labor, come from God and belong to God. He knows that they are meant for God's glory and that they have a universal destination for the good of all people.

He is not averse to exploiting these goods to their maximum potentials, following God's command to our first parents to "subdue the earth," and doing this exploitation of the earthly goods always in accordance to God's natural law and the law of love and justice.

Since he has a lot of possessions, he knows he has to give a lot more. He knows he has to be generous, sharing not only what is in excess of his needs. He knows he has to give everything, following that indication Christ gave to the rich young man in the gospel "to go sell what you have…and come follow me." (Mt 19, 21)

Good and Christian poverty therefore knows how to use material things. We have to disabuse ourselves of a misconception of good poverty that links it with a certain pettiness and mall-mindedness.

An example of this is the suggestion that as much as possible, the churches and the liturgical celebrations should be using the minimalist style—few or no candles at all, few or no flowers, altars, reredos, vestments and vessels should be as bare as possible, etc.

While I can see a certain value to this approach, it should not be imposed on all of us, and especially with the insinuation that the use of rich ornamentation in churches and in the liturgical celebrations is per se against Christian poverty.

All these things need not be mere decorations that only tend to show off. They can be the magnanimous efforts of a lover who wants to show his love with material things to his beloved who, in this case, is God, Jesus Christ, our Lady, all the saints.

Remember that gospel episode when a woman brought precious oil to bathe the feet of Christ. Someone murmured that it was wasteful and that it could have been used to help the poor. But Christ corrected him.

For me, diamonds and precious stones are better used in sacred vessels than when they just dangle on somebody's neck or ear or nose.

# Pushing Muslim Mindanao to Independence?

*GPH Chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer gives her opening statement at the 43rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this session, both parties worked to complete the Annex on Normalization and the Addendum on the Bangsamoro Waters.* **OPAPP**

***BY JOEL TABORA, S.J.***

FOR all serious participants in the discussion on peace in Mindanao, I have recommended as a "MUST READ" the article of UP Professor Dr. Abraham Sakili entitled "Historical Truth and Bangsamoro Autonomy." Prof. Sakili summarizes:

Factors that cause and sustain the Mindanao problem

• "Lack of cultural awareness by the majority of the Muslims' way of life.

• "Exteriorization of Philippine Muslim history in texts of mainstream Philippine history.

• "Unitary setup of the Philippine system, which has proven to be inadequate in administering peoples of different cultures and histories.

• "Unleveled playing field in Philippine sociopolitical and economic affairs, and the inadequate representations of Muslims in the running of government.

• "Economic problems that have reduced Muslim areas into the "poorest of the poor' provinces.

• "Land problems caused by unjust government land and resettlement policies; and

• "Persistence of the negative 'Moro image' in the national psyche, as shown by attitudinal surveys conducted."

Professor Sakili concludes that the Mindanao problem warrants extraordinary measures:

"Considering the complexity of the Mindanao problem, solving it according to former Sen. Wigberto Tañada requires 'extraordinary measures.' He urged the Philippine government to take the lead in enlightening people about the historic roots of the Mindanao problem and (explain) why the rectification of the historical wrongs inflicted on the Moro people requires extraordinary measures (Today, July 3, 1996. p. 11).

"For his part, Dr. Samuel Tan says: 'This is not the time to hide the (historical) facts… this is the time to tell the truth to make us free indeed.'

"Now, a new experiment—the BBL [Bangsamoro Basic Law]—will hopefully be affirmed by the Philippine Congress in its wholeness, so that what the Philippine government and its peace partners tirelessly built through a negotiated

peace agreement would not be stripped of its potentials for making peace."

I too hope that the arduous work that has been invested in the peace process not be brought to naught due to the shallow understanding of policy makers of the historical antecedents of the peace process. I pray that those who are politically empowered to cast votes determining the future of Mindanao cast them not lightly but wisely, allowing themselves if necessary to be enlightened by experts who have invested their careers in studying the complex problems of Mindanao. I pray that for selfish political advantage they do not distort truth and demonize those who have been heroic in searching for peace.

***"Exteriorization" of Philippine Muslim History***

I wish that we educators in the Philippines who are partly responsible for the statesmanship or lack thereof in the national legislature could have done a better job at teaching about the multiple cultures and histories of the Muslim and indigenous peoples of Mindanao. I wish it were possible today through such teaching for all to more easily grasp why there was an "exteriorization" of Philippine Muslim history in the mainstream texts of Philippine history, and possibly also therefore in the mainstream consciousness of Filipinos today.

If history is written from the viewpoint of those who hold power, Philippine history written from the viewpoint of the Spaniards who never conquered the Muslims but sold the Muslim territories to the Americans, or from the viewpoint Christians who needed to convert the Muslims because without Christianity they would be damned to perdition, or from the Americans who in their "manifest destiny" stole the spoils of the Philippine revolution and after they had made the docile "Filipinos" their "little brown brothers" needed to civilize the Moslem "savages" and massacred them at Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak when they refused their civilization, or from the viewpoint of the central government of the Philippines who following the lead of the Americans sent waves and waves of settlers into Mindanao, imposing a land registration system that was foreign to the Mindanaons, through which they were deprived of their lands in favor of settlers from Luzon and the Visayas, has definitely kept Muslim Mindanao exterior to its main narrative.

*Isn't it sad that while national outrage is justified for the deaths in Mamasapano, the general national outrage was for the 44 SAF who perished and not for 68 Filipinos who all belong to the nation. Doesn't this just illustrate how Muslim history and concerns are exteriorized from the national historical narrative and national consciousness?*

That impacts on how reality is picked up today. Isn't it sad that while national outrage is justified for the deaths in Mamasapano, the general national outrage was for the 44 SAF who perished and not for 68 Filipinos who all belong to the nation. Doesn't this just illustrate how Muslim history and concerns are exteriorized from the national historical narrative and national consciousness? For the outrage that was Mamasapano there was no parallel outrage for the Jabidah massacre (remember Senator Marcos?), for the Manili massacre, not even for the war of Buliok, when during the Muslim celebration of Al Ad'ha , the Feast of the Holy Sacrifice, the government bombarded the village purportedly in pursuit of members of the Pentagon Kidnap-for-Ransom gang. The real intention "of the treacherous act against the Moro people" though was to decimate the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

***Government led by Pres. Aquino must take the lead in enlightening the people***

With former Sen. Tañada and Professor Sakili, I wish the Philippine government led by President Aquino himself would "take the lead in enlightening people about the historical roots of the Mindanao Problem" and in defending the peace process as a justified and necessary response to this problem. Whether as commander-in-chief or as chief executive, his role is to pro-actively lead the nation against the antics of those who would derail the peace process and malign its advocates for peace, to draw crucial distinctions between ideologies of the MILF and the BIFF; to discern where there are genuine movements to peace and consolidate them, to courageously lead, encourage and motivate those who have raised arms against the nation to return to the national fold; to staunchly defend reconciliation with the Philippine nation as worthwhile and honorable, and to rally statesmen in Congress beyond political parties to secure the peace for the nation, which includes the Moro and indigenous peoples of Mindanao.

Before the proposed BBL was submitted to Congress for passage into law, President Aquino's legal team took over a month in revising it in to make sure that it was constitutionally defensible. Its revisions needed then to be understood and accepted by the MILF. As some legislators today see unconstitutionality in the draft, the President and his team should be more strident in defending it not only for the sake of the legislators but for the enlightenment of the people.

***Either / Or***

Give Muslim Mindanao peace. Or recognize it is being pushed to independence through its persistent exteriorization. The burden of making peace is on the nation. In crippling the peace process through the President's current lack of determined leadership, the logic of war is enhanced. Where a BBL envisions through a strengthened Bangsamoro citizenry an autonomous political entity that could deal with the forces of extremism, today we confront anew the spectre of continuing war through the AFP's "all out offensive" against the BIFF. Killing BIFF combatants does not stop the rebellion. It only necessitates more killing, and discredits on-the-ground local forces committed to peace. War only brings more war. It inflicts suffering on innocents, beyond the imagination of Manila. Today, in Maguindanao there are now over 95,000 refugees.

# Prelate: EDSA spirit 'empty' without agrarian reform

NAGA City, Camarines Sur, March 8, 2015—The head of the Catholic Church's advocacy, humanitarian, and development arm calls on President Benigno S. Aquino III (PNoy) to make good on the promise of his mother, former President Corazon C. Aquino, to render justice to the farmers, stressing the "spirit of EDSA Revolution is totally empty" without much-awaited agrarian reform.

***Constitutional mandate***

In a statement, Cáceres Archbishop Rolando Tría Tirona, who also directs the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice, and Peace (NASSA)/ Caritas Philippines, reminds the Aquino administration the distribution of all agricultural lands to landless rural peasants is a constitutional mandate the government has a duty to enforce.

As one of the leading clergymen who signed the letter to Aquino pushing for the immediate passage of House Bill 4296 and House Bill 4375, the Carmelite prelate says the Church cannot remain silent hearing the cries of farmers.

***Continuous appeal***

According to him, NASSA/Caritas Philippines is one in decrying the injustices thousands of peasants, most of whom still landless, have suffered for almost three decades since the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was implemented

"We will continuously appeal to the sense of justice and compassion of the President and the Congress. While we welcome his respect for subsidiarity of government agencies, he is also duty-bound to directly look after the rights of the poor which must precede his decisions and actions," the archbishop shares.

***Twin bills***

HB 4296 seeks to renew for two years the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)'s authority to issue notices of coverage and provide adequate funding for support services to agricultural landholdings that have not yet been placed under CARP.

HB 4375 seeks to create an independent Agrarian Reform Commission to review the actual accomplishment of CARP and investigate circumventions and violations of the CARP Law with a view to cause these landholdings to be redistributed to qualified beneficiaries. HB 4375 does not yet have a counterpart measure in the Senate and such needs to be certified by the President as a priority measure.

"Today, we express our prayers and support with the religious groups, lawmakers and civil society organizations as the peasants will intensify their campaign to extend and overhaul the implementation of the 27-year old CARP," Tirona adds.

***House's turn***

In June 2014, PNoy certified as "urgent" the passage of HB 4296, although the House has yet to pass the supposed priority bill on third and final reading eight months after the chief executive's certification.

Meanwhile, Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. assured farmers of his unequivocal support to HB 4296's passage.

The Senate had already done its part by passing Senate Bill 2278 in September. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/ CBCP News)***

# *Group asks PNoy: After K-12, what happens to jobless teachers?*

*As many as 56,771 out of 111,351 college teachers and 22,838 non-teaching staff are likely to lose their jobs due to the dramatic decline in the number of college enrollees starting Academic Year 2016-2017.* ***FILE PHOTO***

MANILA, March 18, 2015—The Association of Major Religious Superior of the Philippines (AMRSP) expresses hope that the government has a clear plan for teachers set to be affected once the controversial K-12 program is fully in place.

In an interview over Church-run Radyo Veritas, AMRSP Executive Secretary Fr. Dexter Toledo, asserted that while K-12 aims to boost the quality of education in the country, the program must not be used to further marginalize the thousands of Filipinos who support themselves by the meager sum they earn from teaching.

***Cost of quality***

"We understand that K-12 only wants to raise the quality of education in the Philippines so that it will already be at par with global standards. But this should not be at the expense of many

educators who will stand to lose their teaching jobs on account of the program," he said.

"We are praying that the government will do its part, and come out with solutions to the impending massive unemployment which will result from the educational reform," he added.

Toledo stressed that even as the government strives to improve the country's education system, it must not forget to look after the welfare of teachers.

***More years in school***

Under K-12, two more years, referred to as senior high school, will be added to

the current education system.

The new system covers Kindergarten and 12 years of basic education: six years of primary, four years of junior high, and two of senior.

During senior high, students are expected to specialize on the career tracks they want to pursue.

***K-12 suspension***

Meanwhile, a group consisting of the Council of Teachers and Staff of Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (COTESCUP), faculty, non-teaching staff, parents, labor unions and faculty associations, earlier urged the Supreme Court (SC) to suspend K-12 implementation pending a review.

In a statement, the Coalition for K to 12 Suspension led by Professor Rene Luis Tadle, says it was formed because "based on the consultations we conducted, we found out that the country's education system is woefully ill-prepared for this program."

***Additional burden***

Tadle explains the majority of Philippine high schools lack classrooms and facilities to accommodate "the additional number of students as a result of this program", describing K-12 as "an additional burden for our already grossly underpaid teachers."

He laments most of the parents are not even aware of the details of this program, let alone the financial burden it will bring them.

"The present system worked for the earlier generations, and there is no reason why it shouldn't work for the present crop of students. We just need to fill in the shortages in classrooms, teachers, desks, and books; and increase the salaries of teachers," he notes.

***80K jobless teachers***

The group estimates as many as 56,771 out of 111,351 college teachers and 22,838 non-teaching staff are likely to lose their jobs due to the dramatic decline in the number of college enrollees starting Academic Year 2016-2017. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

# Libya OFWs' dilemma: Safety vs. better pay—priest

MANILA, MARCH 18, 2015— A better job with risks or safety and unemployment?

This is how a Filipino priest serving in war-torn Libya sums up the quandary Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) there are in, stressing repatriation is an offer they can refuse as long as they only see unemployment and hunger back home.

***Joblessness***

In an interview with CBCP News, Fr. Amado Baranquel, a Franciscan who has been in Libya since 1995, explained the reason why Filipinos there reject the government's repatriation offer despite risks to their lives, is not because they crave martyrdom, but because they dread the loss of employment on which the future of their families and relatives in the Philippines depend.

He stressed the most the government can do now to convince OFWs to go home is to assure them they can as easily fly back to Libya once the conflict there is over, or at least there are better opportunities awaiting them in the Philippines which will make overseas employment no longer attractive.

***Depressing, stressing***

Baranquel, who heads the Maria Immacolata Parish in Benghazi, lamented he could only pray for and listen to fellow Filipinos whose situations he described as "depressing" and "stressing."

YVONNE LIBANAN LOSTE

"I often hear them asking themselves what will happen when they're already home ... they're still full of hope that things will improve here," he said.

***Red tape, fees***

More than stray bullets and shrapnel, the Bicolano missionary pointed out OFWs fear the government red tape and the agency fees which are part of the process each of them has to undergo.

According to Baranquel, the government must issue a memorandum ordering the creation of a support program for repatriated OFWs.

***Exemption, priority***

Under this program, he said, those still interested to work abroad will be automatically exempted from the usual red tape and associated fees, provided they can show a proof of previous employment.

The priest said the memo must also give priority to repatriated OFWs in case there are job openings in safer countries.

***Libyan Church***

Moreover, Baranquel reminded the Philippine government that the Catholic Church in Libya can only do so much.

"The government should really be the one taking the initiative because it has the means and the structure," he added. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

# Quevedo calls for openness not 'anti-Moro biases' in BBL

AMID growing resistance to the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) due to the Mamasapano tragedy, Cotabato Archbishop Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, OMI urged Filipinos, especially Christians, against succumbing to their anti-Moro biases in order to appreciate the overall principle behind the BBL.

Contradicting sentiments questioning the legality of the creation of a Bangsamoro political entity, Cardinal Quevedo said the underlying principle behind the proposed BBL is enshrined in the Constitution and is even inspired by Catholic moral principles.

***Bangsamoro self-determination?***

In a letter addressed to all Christians, Quevedo argued that under the proposed BBL, Bangsamoro self-determination will be exercised within a limited territory under the sovereignty of the Philippines. Hence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity [still] will be preserved, contrary to the qualms of BBL critics.

"The over-all principle that governs the BBL is the Catholic moral and social principle of subsidiarity, a principle already enshrined in our own Constitution," he stressed out. "The principle requires the intervention of the national government and its various entities when the common good of all requires it. Therefore, no entity of the Bangsamoro government, such as a Bangsamoro auditing department or police force, is absolutely independent of their national counterparts."

The Philippine Congress initially targeted to pass the draft law of the proposed BBL this month but a recent meeting of the Upper and Lower House leaders postponed the deadline until June. Congress is set to adjourn on March 21 for the Holy Week but the second regular session of the 16th Congress will last until June 12.

***Public anger***

Despite being championed by no less than President Benigno Aquino III, many believe passing the proposed BBL in Congress will require an uphill effort after the Jan. 25 clash between police forces and Moro militants in Mamasapano, Maguindanao province. At least 44 Special Action Force commandos perished during the fire fight along with 18 Moro rebels and five civilians.

The public's anger over the Mamasapano tragedy has virtually suspended the Congress' work in deliberating over the BBL, with some saying that justice must be served first to the victims of the firefight before BBL is passed into law. However, Quevedo countered this, calling on lawmakers and Christians against letting emotions, biases and prejudices to prevail over objective reason so that the Mamasapano incident will not repeat itself.

"In the face of outrage and calls for all-out war for the manner by which our law enforcers lost their lives, I call for peace. I call for rationality rather than emotionalism. I call for justice that is not selective. I call for openness and fairness rather than bias and prejudice," he said.

"The BBL was negotiated painstakingly with stops and detours for at least five years. It is not an agreement that was hurriedly done. It fulfills the Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination. It preserves our fundamental principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Quevedo added. ***(CBCPNews)***

## *Vietnamese authorities threaten to tear down a church and expel its priest*

KON TUM, Vietnam, Mar 16, 2015–Fear still prevails among Catholics who attend a makeshift church in Dak Jak, Kon Tum, in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. For several weeks, provincial authorities have been trying to get rid of the structure and expel the local priest.

On 7 January, the local government issued orders to expel Fr Dominic Tran Van Vu, and tear down the church built by the faithful through hard work and sacrifice.

The building itself dates back to 1965, at the time of the Vietnam War. It was built with salvaged materials since locals were very poor, and survived over the years despite the harsh persecution of Communist authorities.

In recent weeks, thousands of Catholics (at least 6,000 according to local sources) staged demonstrations and protests to defend their church (pictured) as well as their right to religious freedom.

In view of such opposition, the authorities have suspended the demolition and police relented their crackdown. However, the faithful still fear a new attack that could lead to the demolition of their church.

Since the affair began, various incidents have involved local Catholics, including abductions, assaults, as well as threats against those who visit the church to pray or attend Mass.

The bishop of Kon Tum, Mgr Michael Hoang Duc Oanh, noted that the diocese has repeatedly sought permission to build a permanent place of worship, to accommodate thousands of faithful, but never got an answer.

Meanwhile, further south, in the diocese of Xuan Loc, the authorities have agreed to build a new Marian shrine, in addition to that in La Vang, Quang Tri.

According to the Vietnamese government, the site would welcome the Pope and the faithful when the pontiff undertakes an apostolic visit in the near future.

However, there are no plans for a papal trip and China "would not allow it," a Church source said. "Such rumours help instead drive up local real estate prices."

Vietnam's 87 million people include 48 per cent Buddhists, more than 7 per cent Catholics, 5.6 per cent syncretistic and 20 per cent atheist.

As a small, albeit significant minority, the Christian community is particularly active in education, health and social affairs.

Conversely, religious freedom has steadily eroded in recent years. Under Decree 92, more controls and restrictions have been imposed on religious practice, boosting the power of the Communist Party and the one-party state.

The authorities have targeted religious leaders, including Buddhist and Catholic leaders, as well as entire communities.

In 2013, media and government carried out a smear campaign and targeted attacks against the bishop and ordinary Catholics in the Diocese of Vinh.

More generally, government repression tends to touch everyone who defends civil rights and the right to religious freedom. ***(AsiaNews)***

# ‘GIVE CARP A NEW LEASE ON LIFE, A CHANCE FOR A GLORIOUS FINISH’

*Bishops reiterate appeal to Aquino and Congress*

FILE PHOTO

*BY KRIS BAYOS*

AS if taking its cue from a broken record, the country's Catholic leaders are singing the same tune in asking the government "to give a new life" to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). But the Filipino bishops do not mind reiterating their appeals for social justice, adding that tolerating the "quiet death" of CARP will mean disenfranchising at least 1 million farmers and stripping them the chance of rising out of poverty.

In a two-page letter dated January 19, 2015, leaders of 86 dioceses nationwide urged President Benigno S. Aquino III and the members of the 16th Congress to immediately pass two proposed laws that will "give new life and a glorious finish" to CARP, an appeal the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) made back in January 22, 2014 before the land acquisition and distribution (LAD) component of CARP expired last June 30, 2014.

Led by Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) president Archbishop Socrates Villegas, 15 archbishops, 59 bishops and seven Church administrators have asked government to enact House Bill 4296, which seeks to renew the Department of Agrarian Reform's authority to issue notices of coverage and provide adequate funding for support services to agricultural landholdings that have not yet been placed under CARP.

The signatories also want Congress to pass into law House Bill 4375, which aims to create an independent Agrarian Reform Commission to review the actual accomplishment of CARP and investigate circumventions and violations of the CARP Law with a view to cause these landholdings to be redistributed to qualified beneficiaries.

President Aquino may have

FILE PHOTO

certified as urgent the passage of House Bill 4296, but the House of Representatives is yet to pass the supposed priority bill on third and final reading despite the fact that the Senate had already passed the counterpart Senate Bill 2278. On the other hand, House Bill 4375 is still pending at the Lower House and lacks a counterpart bill at the Upper House, suggesting its need to be certified as a priority measure by the President.

***For the sake of the poor farmers***

According to the bishops, "not extending CARP and ensuring the gains of the program is tantamount to disenfranchising at least a million farmers of their rights to own the land they till, equitably share in the fruits of their labor, and find a path out of poverty. It also means the country's failure to break up the unjust concentration of land ownership in a few and thereby not achieve inclusive growth."

Citing government data, the bishops said on top of the Land Acquisition and Distribution (LAD) balance of at least 708,000 hectares (as of August 2014), an estimated 1,000,000-1,500,000 hectares claimed by the DAR as distributed are not under the control of farmer beneficiaries and are suspect as evasions of the law, such as lands under collective Certificate of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) and long-term leaseback agreements and lands "distributed" as voluntary land transfers (VLTs) and voluntary offer to sell (VOS).

"Unless these transactions are voided and the land distributed to legitimate farmer beneficiaries, the landowners and DAR personnel complicit in the evasions will be rewarded for defying the law. It would also be unfair to the landowners who allowed their lands to be really distributed to poor tillers, with some of these landowners still to be compensated," the prelates argued.

In a bid to bring home the point, the Catholic leaders echoed Pope Francis' statement during his visit to Malacañang Palace last January 15. The Pope, who championed the CBCP's Year of the Poor observance this year, said "the great biblical tradition enjoins on all peoples the duty to hear the voice of the poor. It bids us break the bonds of injustice and oppression which give rise to glaring, and indeed scandalous, social inequalities. Reforming the social structures which perpetuate poverty and the exclusion of the poor first requires a conversion of mind and heart."

For their part, the bishops called on the people's representatives in Congress, saying, "please do not allow the agrarian reform program to die a quiet death before its noble mission to finally emancipate and liberate our farmers is fully achieved."

***All sorts of noise***

To recall, farmers from across the archipelago have made all sorts of noise in order to call the government's attention to the State's apparent abandonment of CARP. They went on hunger strikes, barefoot marches, camp outs and demonstrations, some of them were even arrested and harassed for pushing for justice that is due them. Some even failed to live long enough to get a hold of their elusive CLOAs.

Aware of the plight of the farmers, civil society groups and Church leaders have rallied to support moves to further extend CARP. Atty. Monsod, representing the Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on Agrarian Reform, and Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo, then representing the CBCP National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace, were among the numerous signatories in a January 22, 2014 letter urging Mr. Aquino to extend CARP for two more years and to see the full implementation of the program until he steps down from the presidency in 2016.

"They missed the point, agrarian reform is not about numbers or deadlines. It is about the outcome. Have the lives of the farmers improve? Has rural poverty been reduced?" Monson said, "Give CARP a chance. Imagine what that can do to the morale of the poor farmers?"

For the CBCP's part, Pabillo said the Church would continue to rally behind the farmers in pursuing their rights under CARP. The CBCP NASSA has been instrumental in arranging farmers' meetings with government officials, providing food and lodging to farmers during their marches and camp outs.

"According to the social teachings of the Church, the earth belongs to all and not only to some. It is not justice if only a few have lands while the majority are landless," he said in an earlier interview with CBCP News. "Until justice is not met, the Church's support to the poor and oppressed will continue."

Pabillo lamented the government's lack of resolve in implementing agrarian reform and the Aquinos' real intentions for not making CARP succeed. "Is it by design or by incompetence that the CARP is not completed?" the prelate asked. "I don't know if it is just a lack of resolve or if there is really an intention to not make agrarian reform succeed."

According to the DAR, issuance of NOCs has ended last June 30 and unless the period is extended, the agency can no longer issue NOCs on the remaining landholdings that were not placed under CARP coverage. In a press release dated March 26, 2015, the DAR claims to have awarded a total of 40,423 hectares of agricultural lands to 20,312 farmer-beneficiaries in the province of Agusan del Norte since the implementation of CARP in 1988.

# *Render Social Justice to the Farmers: A Call for the Full Implementation of Agrarian Reform*

19 January 2015

To His Excellency, the President of the Republic of the Philippines and to the Honourable Members of the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives:

Shalom!

We, bishops of the Catholic Church, are reiterating the appeal in the attached letter signed by 86 bishops to the President on January 22, 2014 to give new life and a glorious finish to the agrarian reform program. In particular, at this time, we appeal to the President to certify, and to the members of the two chambers of the Congress to immediately pass, the two proposed laws mentioned in the letter which are in various stages of consideration in the Senate and the House of representatives, namely:

(1) a bill to renew the Department of Agrarian Reform's authority to issue notices of coverage and provide adequate funding for support services to agricultural landholdings that have not yet been placed under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP);

(2) a bill to create an independent Agrarian Reform Commission to review the actual accomplishment of CARP and investigate circumventions and violations of the CARP Law with a view to cause those landholdings to be redistributed to qualified beneficiaries.

On top of the Land Acquisition and Distribution (LAD) balance of at least 708,000 hectares (as of August 2014), an estimated 1,000,000-1,500,000 hectares claimed by the DAR as distributed are not under the control of farmer beneficiaries and are suspect as evasions of the law, such as lands under collective CLOAs and long-term leaseback agreements and lands "distributed" as VLTs (voluntary land transfers) and VOS (voluntary offer to sell). Unless these transactions are voided and the land distributed to legitimate farmer beneficiaries, the landowners and DAR personnel complicit in the evasions will be rewarded for defying the law. It would also be unfair to the landowners who allowed their lands to be really distributed to poor tillers, with some of these landowners still to be compensated.

*Cagayan de Oro Bishop Antonio Ledesma and Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo join a press conference on agrarian reform updates with representatives from the government.* ***FILE PHOTO***

Not extending CARP and ensuring the gains of the program is tantamount to disenfranchising at least a million farmers of their rights to own the land they till, equitably share in the fruits of their labor, and find a path out of poverty. It also means the country's failure to break up the unjust concentration of land ownership in a few and thereby not achieve inclusive growth.

The 1987 Constitution mandates the state to give "highest consideration to promote social justice" to move the nation toward "industrialization based on sound agricultural development and agrarian reform." This constitutional principle serves as the guiding light to the full implementation of Republic Act 6657 (CARP) of 1988 and Republic Act 9700 (CARPER) of 2009.

To the Filipino peoples' representatives: please do not allow the agrarian reform program to die a quiet death before its noble mission to finally emancipate and liberate our farmers is fully achieved.

In closing, we draw inspiration and solidarity from the words of Pope Francis:

"The great biblical tradition enjoins on all peoples the duty to hear the voice of the poor. It bids us break the bonds of injustice and oppression which give rise to glaring, and indeed scandalous, social inequalities. Reforming the social structures which perpetuate poverty and the exclusion of the poor first requires a conversion of mind and heart. " (Pope's Message in Meeting with the Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, Malacañang Palace, January 15, 2016)

For justice and peace,

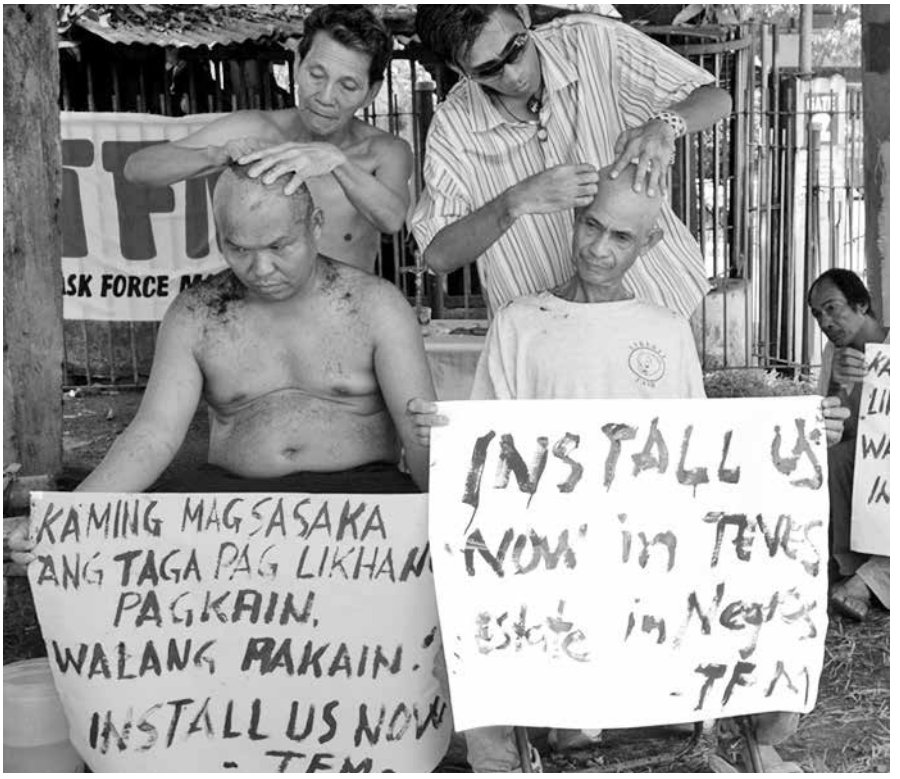
1. Most Rev. Jose F. Advincula Jr, DD, Archbishop of Capiz and CBCP Permanent Council West Visayas Representative

2. Most Rev. Paciano B. Aniceto, DD, Archbishop Emeritus of San Fernando, Pampanga
3. Most Rev. Ramon C. Arguelles, DD, Archbishop of Lipa
4. Most Rev. Fernando Capalla, DD, Archbishop Emeritus of Davao
5. Most Rev. Romulo T. dela Cruz, DD, Archbishop of Zamboanga
6. Most Rev. Angel N. Lagdameo, DD, Archbishop of Jaro
7. Most Rev. Florentino G. Lavarias, DD, Archbishop of San Fernando, Pampanga
8. Most Rev. Antonio J. Ledesma, DD, Archbishop of Cagayan de Oro
9. Most Rev. Jose S. Palma, SJ, DD, Archbishop of Cebu
10. Most Rev. Marlo M. Peralta, DD, Archbishop of Nueva Segovia
11. Most Rev. Orlando B. Cardinal Quevedo, OMI, DD, Archbishop of Cotabato
12. Most Rev. Rolando J. Tria Tirona, OCD, DD, Archbishop of Caceres
13. Most Rev. Sergio L. Utleg, DD, Archbishop of Tuguegarao
14. Most Rev. Romulo G. Valles, DD, Archbishop of Davao, CBCP Vice President
15. Most Rev. Socrates B. Villegas, DD, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, CBCP President
16. Most Rev. Isabelo C. Abarquez, DD, Bishop Calbayog
17. Most Rev. Narciso V. Abellana, MSC, DD, Bishop of Romblon
18. Most Rev. Guillermo D. Afable, DD, Bishop of Digos
19. Most Rev. Gerardo A. Alminaza, DD, Bishop of San Carlos
20. Most Rev. Benjamin J. Almoneda Jr., DD, Bishop Emeritus of Daet
21. Most Rev. Ireneo A. Amantillo, DD, Bishop Emeritus of Tandag
22. Most Rev. David William V. Antonio, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Nueva Segovia
23. Most Rev. Pedro D. Arigo, DD, Vicar Apostolic of Puerto Princesa
24. Most Rev. Ricardo L. Baccay, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Tuguegarao
25. Most Rev. Filomeno G. Bactol, DD, Bishop of Naval
26. Most Rev. Jose Colin M. Bagaforo, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Cotabato
27. Most Rev. Sofronio A. Bancud, Bishop of Cabanatuan, CBCP Permanent Council Central Luzon Representative
28. Most Rev. Jose S. Bantolo, DD, Bishop of Masbate
29. Most Rev. Arturo M. Bastes, SVD, DD, Bishop of Sorsogon
30. Most Rev. Joel Z. Baylon, Bishop of Legazpi
31. Most Rev. Rodolfo F. Beltran, DD, Bishop of San Fernando, La Union, CBCP Permanent Council North Mindanao Representative
32. Most Rev. Patricio A. Buzon, SBD, DD, Bishop of Kabankalan
33. Most Rev. Emmanuel T. Cabajar, C.SS.R.,DD, Bishop of Pagadian
34. Jose A. Cabantan, DD, Bishop of Malaybalay, CBCP Permanent Council North Mindanao Representative
35. Most Rev. Severo C. Caermare, DD, Bishop of Dipolog
36. Rev. Warlito I. Cajindig, DD, Vicar Apostolic of Calapan
37. Most Rev. Precioso D. Cantillas, SBD, DD, Bishop of Maasin
38. Most Rev. Carlito J. Cenzon, CICM, DD, Bishop of Baguio
39. Most Rev. Julito B. Cortes, DD, Bishop of Dumaguete
40. Most Rev. Bernardino C. Cortez, DD, Bishop of Infanta, CBCP Permanent Council South East Luzon Representative
41. Most Rev. Pablo Virgilo S. David, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of San Fernando, Pampanga
42. Most Rev. Edwin A. dela Pena, MSP, DD, Bishop Prelate of Marawi
43. Most Rev. Francisco M. de Leon, Auxiliary Bishop of Antipolo
44. Manolo A. delos Santos, DD, Bishop of Virac
45. Most Rev. Reynaldo G. Evangelista, DD, Bishop of Imus
46. Most Rev. Buenaventura M. Famadico, DD, Bishop of San Pablo
47. Most Rev. Elenito G. Galido, DD, Bishop of Iligan
48. Most Rev. Leopoldo C. Jaucian, SVD, DD, Bishop of Bangued
49. Most Rev. Jacinto A. Jose, DD, Bishop of Urdaneta
50. Most Rev. Angelito R. Lampon, OMI, DD, Vicar Apostolic of Jolo, CBCP Permanent Council South Mindanao Representative
51. Most Rev. Roberto C. Mallari, DD, Bishop of San Jose, Nueva Ecija
52. Most Rev. Jose R. Manguiran, DD, Bishop Emeritus of Dipolog
53. Most Rev. Wilfredo D. Manlapaz, DD, Bishop of Tagum
54. Most Rev. Renato P. Mayugba, DD, Bishop of Laoag
55. Most Rev. Joseph A. Nacua, OFMCAP, DD, Bishop of Iligan
56. Most Rev. Vicente M. Navarra, DD, Bishop of Bacolod
57. Most Rev. Nereo P. Odchimar, DD, Bishop of Tandag
58. Most Rev. Honesto P. Ongtioco, DD, Bishop of Cubao
59. Most Rev. Broderick S. Pabillo, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Manila
60. Most Rev. Honesto Chaves Pacana, SJ, DD, Bishop Emeritus of Malaybalay
61. Most Rev. Patrick Daniel Y. Parcon, DD, Bishop of Talibon
62. Most Rev. Juan de Dios M. Pueblos, DD, Bishop of Butuan
63. Most Rev. Lucilo Quiambao, DD, Bishop Emeritus of Legaspi
64. Most Rev. Antonio R. Ranola, DD, Bishop Emeritus of Cebu
65. Most Rev. Gabriel V. Reyes, DD, Bishop of Antipolo
66. Most Rev. George B. Rimando, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Davao
67. Most Rev. Jose Corazon T. Tala-oc, DD, Bishop of Kalibo
68. Most Rev. Antonio R. Tobias, DD, Bishop of Novaliches
69. Most Rev. Julius S. Tonel, DD, Bishop of Ipil
70. Most Rev. Emmanuel C. Trance, DD, Bishop of Catarman
71. Most Rev. Leopoldo S. Tumulak, DD, military ordinary
72. Most Rev. Crispin B. Varquez, DD, Bishop of Borongan, CBCP Permanent Council East Visayas Representative
73. Most Rev. Mylo Hubert C. Vergara, DD, Bishop of Pasig
74. Most Rev. Ramon B. Villena, DD, Bishop of Bayombong
75. Rev. Edito S. Bano, Apostolic Administrator of Mati
76. Rev. Elino S. Esplana, Administrator of Boac
77. Rev. Carlito R. Garcia, Administrator of Kidapawan
78. Rev. Msgr. Jose T. Lagdameo, HP, JCL, Administrator of Gumaca
79. Rev. Daniel O. Presto, Administrator of Iba
80. Rev. Rey Jose D. Ragudos, Administrator of Alaminos
81. Rev. Joseph W. Requino, Vicar Apostolic of Bontoc-Lagawe

# 81 bishops renew Church's call for CARP

*BY RAYMOND A. SEBASTIÁN*

IN what is perhaps their biggest public appeal to date, 81 Catholic Church leaders have resounded their plea to the country's chief executive and to Congress to "give new life and glorious finish" to the 27-year-old Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) by passing the twin measures House Bill 4296 and House Bill 4375 for the sake of Filipino farmCers.




*After the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) has expired in June 2014, the Department of Agrarian Reform continues to be haunted with protests from farmers who carry the burden of government's poor implementation of the program, as this one in photo who shaved their heads in 2009. FILE PHOTO*

***Immediate passage***

In a recent two-page letter to President Benigno S. Aquino III (PNoy), the prelates led by Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) President Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, call on members of Congress to "immediately pass the two proposed laws... which are in various stages of consideration in the Senate and the House of Representatives."

HB 4296 seeks to renew the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)'s authority to issue notices of coverage and provide adequate funding for support services to agricultural landholdings that have not yet been placed under CARP, while HB 4375 aims to create an independent Agrarian Reform Commission to review the actual accomplishment of CARP and investigate circumventions and violations of the CARP Law with a view to cause these landholdings to be redistributed to qualified beneficiaries.

***Priority measure***

In June 2014, President Aquino certified as urgent the passage of HB 4296. While the House has not yet passed the supposedly priority bill on third and final reading, eight months after the chief executive's certification, the Senate had already done its part by passing the counterpart Senate Bill 2278.

HB 4375, which is still pending at the House, lacks a counterpart measure at the Senate, and needs to be certified by the President as a priority measure.

***Disenfranchised farmers***

"Not extending CARP and ensuring the gains of the program is tantamount to disenfranchising at least a million farmers of their right to own the land they till, equitably share in the fruits of their labor and find a path out of poverty," the prelates stress in their letter.

"It also means the country's failure to break up the unjust concentration of land ownership in a few and thereby not achieve inclusive growth," they explain, asking the Filipino people's representatives not to allow the agrarian reform program to "die a quiet death" before its noble mission to finally "emancipate and liberate our farmers is fully achieved."

The prelates lament about 708,000 hectares of agricultural landholdings have yet to awarded to CARP farmer-beneficiaries based on the Aug. 2014 data of DAR.

***Not under farmers***

According to them, roughly 1 million to 1.5 million hectares being claimed by the DAR as distributed "are not under the control of farmer-beneficiaries and are suspect as evasions of the law such as lands under collective CLOA (certificate of landownership award) and long-term leaseback agreements and lands distributed as VLTs (voluntary land transfers) and VOS (voluntary offer to sell)."

"Unless these transactions are voided and the land distributed to legitimate farmer-beneficiaries, the landowners and the DAR personnel complicit in the evasions will be rewarded for defying the law," the prelates say.

***Unfair***

"It would also be unfair to the landowners who allowed their lands to be really distributed to poor tillers, with some of these landowners still to be compensated," they add.

# *Support the Genuine Agrarian Reform Law*

WE of the Solidarity Philippines were happy to read the headlines in the Inquirer on March 2 that "Bishops push land reform". Given that 7 out of 10 farmers do not own the land they till, that many are working as tenants, day labourers or agricultural workers on plantations and haciendas, it is clear that land reform is one of the most pressing needs of the farmers. Even in 1991 when the 2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines was held by the Catholic Church, land reform was identified as one of the most pressing issues to lift the farmers out of poverty.

Where we disagree with the Bishops is their proposal to certify as urgent House Bills No. 4296 and 4375 which are just a continuation of the CARP/Carper laws. By their own admission, many lands claimed to have been distributed by DAR in fact have not. A classic example of this is Hacienda Luisita, where, despite a Supreme Court ruling, no land has passed into the hands of the beneficiaries. Instead they have been subjected to harassment, false charges and had crops bulldozed. In other words there can be "evasion and complicity between land owner and DAR personnel" despite coverage under CARP. And this is backed up by force leading to breaches of human rights.

The 27 year old land reform of the government has not broken land monopoly because it was never intended to do so. Firstly, apart from instances like Hacienda Luisita where there is no political will to distribute the land, there are so many schemes included in the law which militate against distribution to farmers. These include corporate schemes and the stock distribution option. Secondly, many agricultural lands are excluded from coverage such as plantations owned by multinational corporations, pasture lands, aquaculture projects, military reservations, lands covered by proclamations for tourism or economic or industrial zones. Many of the lands exempted or converted are prime irrigated agricultural lands.

*While the bishops and farmer groups are prodding the government to legislate HB 4296 and HB 4375, a group called Solidarity Philippines calls for a more radical HB 252 that calls for a genuine agrarian reform. FILE PHOTO*

A third problem is the amortization payment for the lands is beyond the reach of the small farmer. DAR's figures never include the CLOA's withdrawn because of various reasons including inability the farmers to pay. Land Bank figures show a very low rate of amortization precisely because the farmer beneficiaries are poor and are given little help to set themselves up. Then they have the market to contend with which they do not control and so receive low farm gate prices.

Rather than supporting the House Bills mentioned by the Bishops, we would urge them to push for the immediate passing of House Bill 252 or the Genuine Agrarian Reform Law. If we as church people read Leviticus 25, a land reform program in the Bible, we note that one of the main elements is that the land is returned free and that support services are provided. Landowners will be compensated by the government if they have come by their lands honestly. All this is necessary for the farmers to exercise their "right to own the land they till, equitably share in the fruits of their labour and find a path out of poverty". Moreover House Bill 252 ensures there are no schemes to avoid land distribution and that all agricultural lands are covered, including those exempted under CARP.

We once again commend the Bishops for their concern about the majority poor in our country who are the landless farmers, but we ask that they support House Bill 252 which is the only way all our farmers will be able to lift themselves out of poverty.

Solidarity Philippines
c/o Fr. Jesus Dumaual, MSC
solidarityphilippines2014@gmail.com
jesusdumaual@yahoo.com

# Pastoral Statement on the Mamasapano Tragedy

## Ecumenical Bishops' Forum (EBF) - Northern Luzon
## City of Ilagan, Isabela
## March 05, 2015

*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 Teachers' Village.* **MELO ACUÑA**

I. The nation mourns the deaths of 44 Special Action Force commandos of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and 18 MILF insurgents in a recent bloody clash. The EBF joins the nation in offering condolences to their bereaved families, even as all demand knowledge of the truth of the situation and accountabilities involved, not only from the government, but also but also from the MILF leadership.

On Saturday, January 24, commandos of Philippine National Police's Special Action Force (SAF) infiltrated in secrecy Barangay Tukanalipao, Mamasapano, Maguindanao. The area is under the effective control of the MILF. Their mission was to arrest two notorious international terrorists Abdulbasit Usman and Zulkipli Bin Hir, alias Abu Marwan. The mission resulted in the massacre of beleaguered and outnumbered 44 SAF commandos. Eighteen MILF insurgents died in the day-long battle.

Marwan, a member of the Central Committee of the terrorist Jemaah Islamiya, and some of his men were killed, while Usman and his followers, responsible for many bombing incidents in Mindanao, managed to escape. Not supposed to be there, Muslim terrorist groups were in MILF areas, known or unknown to the MILF.

It appears that the tragic event could have been avoided if proper military coordination happened between the PNP and AFP leadership units as well as with the MILF even in the context of mutual trust in the conduct of necessary covert operations. Did the MILF know that the SAF was only after the terrorists, or did they reasonably suspect that the SAF was out to attack its forces in defiance of ceasefire aggressions?

It is indeed sad and abominable that the MILF, outnumbering by far the SAF did not allow the surrender of commandos, especially the wounded, but finished them off. Heads of the dead were split and filled with dirt and weeds. Did the MILF join forces with the break-away terrorist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters? MILF officers did not stop the carnage. Hatred in war, woe!

It is clear from investigations that the covert operation—Oplan Exodus—by the SAF to arrest the terrorists was executed without the proper and necessary coordination between the PNP and the AFP, and between the government forces and the MILF as required by the ceasefire agreements. The operation was with the tacit approval of President Aquino who then left the execution of the plan to suspended PNP Director General Alan Purisima, PNP chief Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina, and SAF chief Director Getulio Napenas. Oplan Exodus—in which the US military was involved—was a guarded secret of the PNP and the US military for fear of it being compromised by the AFP and the MILF and by the BIFF. President Aquino sundered the military and civilian chain of command and allowed usurpation of power by a suspended General.

Authorized by President Aquino, reinforcements from the infantry under Major General Edmundo Pangilinan for a "best effort rescue . . . .not endangering reinforcing troops", failed

to arrive. Not being part of the plan, it was not prepared to back up the SAF in the situation of encirclement by hostile forces. The entire process resulted in tragedy and recriminations. Totally ignorant of Oplan Exodus was DILG Secretary Mar Roxas.

We believe that ultimately accountable to the Filipino people for the tragic event and for putting in jeopardy the peace process and the passage of the Bangsa Basic Law (BBL) is President Aquino as Commander-Chief of the armed forces and Chief Executive of the PNP as a civilian police force. Equally accountable is MILF Chair Al Haj Murad Ibrahim for not calling immediately the attention of the government to the infiltration of the SAF before the firefight, and for not controlling MILF forces during and after the battle. Both prejudiced the peace talks and the proposed (BBL).

Command responsibility for the tragedy and the breaking ceasefire agreements add to many reasons for President Aquino to heed the people's call for him to resign.

II. The bloody Mamasapano fiasco is the latest in a series of presidential activities proving that President Benigno S. Aquino III is unfit to rule and has betrayed public trust. He has reached highest levels of incompetence.

It is right and just that we go beyond the issue of accountabilities to reflect on conditions that occasioned the massacre and the many similar bloody encounters before this. We must delve into the roots of the conflict between the national government and the Bangsa Moro people, of which the Muslim communities, Lumads and Christians are a part, and the MILF as their voice of righteous protest and advocate of their rights. We must ask whether President Aquino has shown presidential intelligence and competence in handling most crucial aspects of the conflict as well as other issues demanding decisive solutions. t is the feeling of the Bangsa Moro people, especially the Muslim people, that their development has long been neglected by the national government in favor of the so-called "majority"; that they are victims of Manila colonialism. Understandable is their struggle for regional autonomy over against assimilation or even independence. It is a struggle which they believe entails the use of parliamentary negotiations and the use of arms as instrument of pressure—peace process and armed resistance.

As with the past administrations, the rule of President Aquino and his allies in congress and the senate, representing big merchant and big landlord interests as well as those of foreign big business, wishes to maintain the semi-feudal and semi-colonial character of the Philippines, and this means ignoring the Bangsamoro people's—Muslims, Lumads, and Christians alike—right to ancestral domain and self-determination, their right to genuine land reform and national industrialization, political participation in decision making, and respect for human rights and indigenous culture. Patience has run low, and thus calls for parliamentary struggle coupled with armed force has emerged against the government. The administration is unable to handle the situation that calls for sincere peace talks and passage of a just BBL.

Revealing is what an MILF representative during negotiations: "If you want us to be part of the Philippines, you have to give us a place where we can feel at home, where our language, our culture are safe… where the mosque will sound five times a day and where we will be given time to pray away from work and so that we will be able to have our long prayer on Friday noon."

The MILF armed and unarmed movement is a people's pressure for a place where Bangsamoros can feel at home.

Other activities inimical to the public interest charge President Aquino with incompetence. In agreeing to the US military pacts, notably the US-RP Mutual Defense Treaty, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), he has shown little or no regard for Philippine sovereignty. His unconstitutional "pork barrel" Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) has been exposed as instrumental in obtaining the loyalty of favored politicians and getting Chief Justice Corona impeached. Because of DAP precious funds for social services for the people and benefits for government employees were suddenly unavailable.

Under Aquino's administration, the country is now a big US military base. In praxis the AFP is under the authority of the US military. Gross violations of human rights continue to be denounced by movements for justice and peace of Church and he NGO community and people's organizations. Poverty and bureaucrat capitalist opportunism have worsened. Disastrous has been his administration's response to natural calamities. Clearly the fault is not in the stars but in an inept President Aquino. THERE IS NO CHOICE FOR HIM BUT TO RESIGN AND STEP DOWN FROM THE PRESIDENCY.

Under President Aquino, the people do not feel at home. In his case, the voice of the master is loud and clear: "Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer" (Luke 16:2). GAME OVER!

Most Rev. Joseph A. Nacua, D.D.
Diocese of Ilagan

Most Rev. Ramon B. Villena, DD
Diocese of Bayombong

Bishop Elorde M. Sambat
UCCP-North Luzon Jurisdiction
Coordinator, EBF Northern Luzon Area

Rt. Rev. Alexander B. Wandag
Episcopal Diocese of Santiago, ECP

Rt. Rev. Hermogenes F. Ranche
Diocese of Eastern Pangasinan, IFI

Most Rev. Deogracias S. Yniguez Jr., DD
Ecumenical Bishops' Forum co- chair

In conformity:

Rt. Rev. Vermilion C. Tagalog
Diocese of La Union, Ilocos Sur and Abra, IFI

Rt. Rev. Ernesto F. Tadly, IFI
Diocese Eastern Pangasinan

Bishop Juan A. Marigza
UCCP Bishop Emeritus

And other clergy and lay of North Luzon belonging to Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, United Methodist Church, Lutheran Church:

Reference: Rev. Fr. Francisco R. Albano
Diocese of Ilagan

# *The Future of Mindanao is in Our Hands*

*43rd GPH-MILF Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur. The GPH peace panel, led by Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer meets with MILF Chief Negotiator Mohagher Iqbal to discuss perspectives on the ongoing issues in Mindanao.* **OPAPP**

WE, the members of the Inter Faith Council of Leaders (IFCL) in Zamboanga City,—Muslim and Christian individuals in different professions and careers who have committed ourselves to the promotion of interfaith dialogue and peace—feel that the peace process in Mindanao is undergoing serious strains. It is like a house on fire and we all must help to prevent a bigger conflagration. We start by taking up wisdom from our Holy Books:

"This is what you must do: 'Speak the truth to one another; let those who judge give peace though honest sentences and do not plot evil in your heart against one another. Refrain from false oath for it is what I detest' Word of Yahweh" (Holy Bible - Zech. 8, 16-17).

"Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: That is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination" (Holy Qur'an - Surah 17, 35).

We know that the people of Mindanao have been divided by strategies from both sides. We know that our perception of history has not always been fair in guiding us. We also know how those who struggle for the same goal of peace are not united stemming from cultural and vested interests. We know these elements have been the reason for much prejudice often colored by religious identity, especially among Christians and Muslims. Meanwhile the Indigenous People have suffered most from both sides.

But we also know that the past and the present, including the January 25, 2015 Mamasapano incident, are part of our struggles and our pains. The Silsilah Dialogue Movement and other groups for more than thirty years, have struggled to promote peace and dialogue. But we can very well ask: "Peace, where are you today in Mindanao?" The dream of peace in Mindanao is more difficult today because of international influences: religious radicalism on one side and on the other the vested interests of more powerful countries which influence and oftentimes manipulate the peace efforts in Mindanao for their own ends. It is time to invite the revolutionary groups, MNLF and MILF, to find solutions for understanding and collaboration in spite of different cultural and leadership concepts. They have to find a way to approach other groups, engaged in the struggle with an Islamic background, to accept possible conditions for peace for a real progress and development within the pluralistic realities of Mindanao.

It is time to invite Christians in Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines to overcome prejudice against Muslims, a prejudice becoming deeper than ever. The same effort has to be done by the Muslims and the IPs towards others outside their own groups. We still do not have a very clear formula for peace in Mindanao. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) has been offered as one solution and we encourage those in power to consider it, approve it and accept it, introducing the changes that are claimed by many as necessary. We invite the MILF to consider and accept what is offered by the Senate and Congress of the Philippines as a good starting point for a deeper process of reconciliation that has to start first among the Muslim groups and move to the other cultural and religious groups in Mindanao.

We hope and pray that the two sides in the ongoing negotiation will not remain rigid in their positions. We cannot get all we wish for but each side can opt to do the best with what it can get. In this way we start a genuine process of reconciliation and prove that we are sincere and honest in our claims. The world is observing what we are doing. We cannot transform our situation as it has been done in other countries with internal conflicts but we have to demonstrate that we in the Philippines can live together with our variety of cultures and religions.

We, the IFCL members, are in solidarity with the victims of the conflict in Mindanao, those of the past and those of the most recent conflict. We believe that peace is still possible if each one moves with humility and wisdom as part of the same human family created to love each other.

INTER FAITH COUNCIL OF LEADERS (IFCL)
of Zamboanga City.
(Statement Signed by all Members)
March, 10, 2015

# *Ethics and politics*

IN their respective elementary nature and consequent understanding: Ethics forward a Code of Conduct premised on Philosophy, which, in turn, is rooted in reason that affirms what is right or wrong. Politics on the other hand has relevance to the matter of governance, the administration of public affairs or the management of the affairs of the state.

In other words, Ethics points out what is proper or the right thing to do and what is the improper or wrong thing to avoid while Politics is on the matter of basically working for public welfare, providing the common good, promoting national interests.

The rudimentary conclusions from the above fundamental and wherefore basic natures, implications and finalities of Ethics and Politics are the following: Only individuals divested of rational functions would dare say that Ethics is irrelevant to Politics. Only those divested of even but plain logic would dare claim that Ethics is irrelevant to Politics.

Just for the record: Let it be noted that while Ethics is a conclusion of reason, a part of Philosophy, Morals on the others hand is the affirmation of faith, a conclusion of spirituality. The former is in the realm of earthly realities. The latter is in the sphere of spiritual truths. But when Ethics is objectively right and sound, such is rightfully affirmed by Morals. Conclusion: Those who think and act contrary to ethical principles cannot but also believe and live dissonant with moral norms.

Not too long since, with the presence and within the hearing of high-ranking government officials and diplomatic personalities, someone reported to a Head of State, as well as Head of the Universal Church, something to the effect that certain local clerics meddle with local Politics—even about his person and governance included. The assumptions behind such thinking and consequent reporting are the following: One, that there is a separation of Church and State in the Country such that the former should altogether shut up about the latter. Two, that being the highest standing public official in the Philippines, he should be in effect free of any critical observations from such lowly and miserable individuals as good-for-nothing clerics. Three, that Ethics is, in effect, irrelevant to Politics as it is in fact ignored by modern persons with modern thinking such as precisely the politicians of today, over and above whom the reporting stands and presides.

No wonder then that with such thinking and consequent acting, the present government is famous—or infamous—for customary graft and corrupt practices, for great self-admiration vis-á-vis popular disgust and lamentation, for diarrhea of words with misery in accomplishments, for much Pork and good Beef even to date—not to mention self-pride humbled by questionable if not miserable reality performance. If the same government—together with its chief-in-command and cohorts—even dare to think that politics is above ethics, poor Philippines!

# *Principle of the common good*

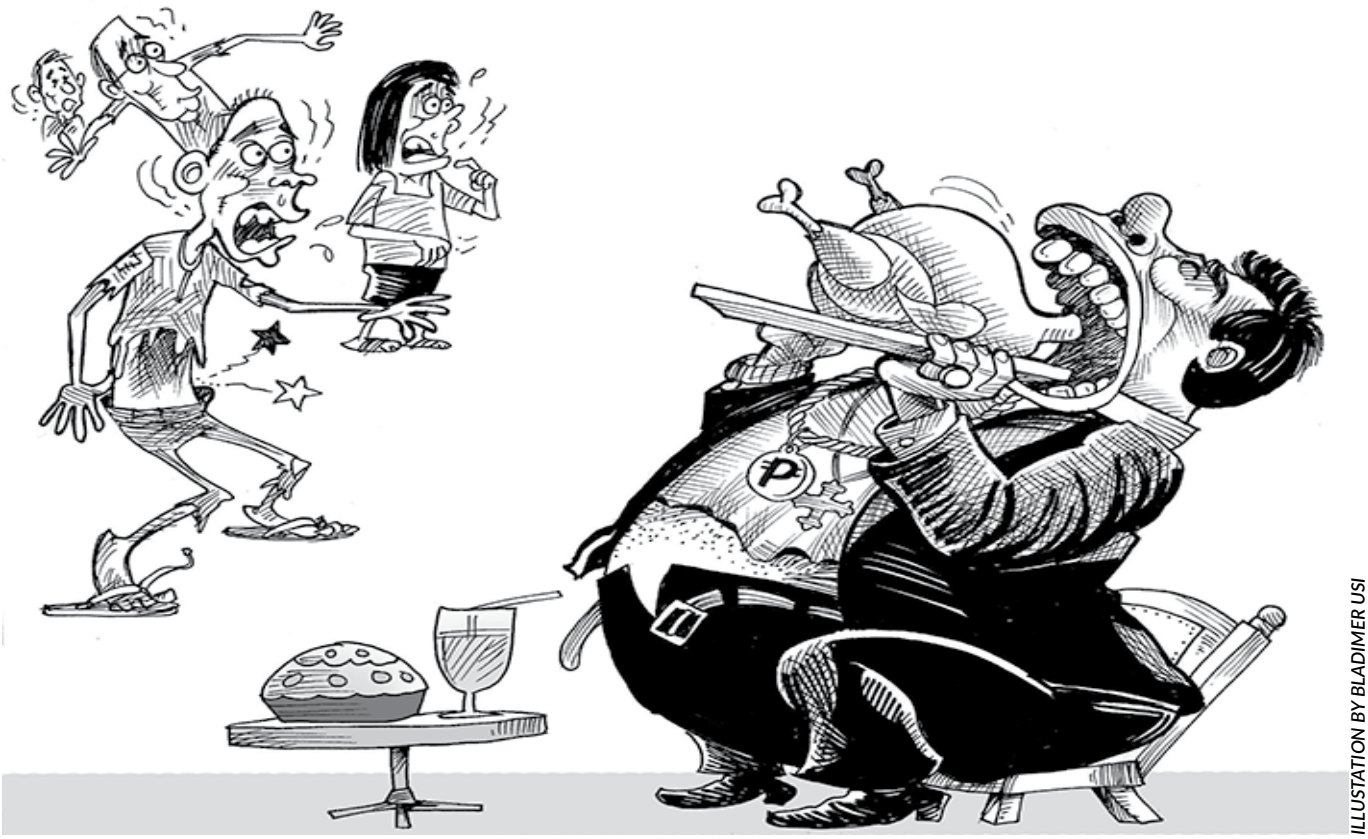
TO say it clearly and briefly, the dignity, unity and equality of all people—it is hereon that the "Principle of the Common Good" squarely rests. In other words, the more people in society live with dignity, live in unity and live with equality, the more felt and manifest is their common good. The reverse is not hard to conclude. When certain individuals in society wallow in wealth and luxury while the rest suffer from hunger and want; when some powerful families look down at everybody else as miserable people with neither rights or rightful claims; when certain public officials lord it over the citizens practically treating these as one big composite inconvenience—then, there can't be anything in the society concerned but the common good.

While it is somehow understandable to say that the good of every individual equals the common good, it is however more proper and right to say that the common good is the opportunity for people to strive and benefit from the opportunities afforded them by public welfare. Equal opportunities, equal possibilities, equal chances—these are the premises of the common good. But then, while the same possibilities for the realization of the common good are present for everyone to accordingly sweat and toil and thus enjoy the fruits of their labor, not all individuals however have the same potentials to be duly benefited by it—for lesser talents and/or strength, for lesser education and/or possibilities.

The reality of the above-said phenomenon is precisely the basis for the admirable pronouncement of a known national leader, saying, "Those who have less in life, let them have more in law." If this proposition of concern and advisory were brought to fulfillment, then the Principle of Common Good for society in general would not only be right but also real, not merely an ideal but also a fact. At this writing and these times, the "Principle of the Common Good" appears to be unheard of and unknown even in some countries, the Philippines well-included—as proven by the following phenomenon: The so-called "Upper Class" of people has become fewer but richer. The "Lower Class" instead has become so distressed that it is not altogether wrong to say that it has become the "Lowest Class". And the socio-economic ID of so-called "Middle Class" seems to have been in effect dissolved and consequently disappeared.

More concretely speaking about the Philippine socio-economic situation, it is not a secret that there are people living by merely collecting and selling garbage, by looking for, picking and eating leftovers from streets to food stalls. This is not to mention families wearing rags, living under bridges, staring at nothing. No wonder then that there are even the phenomena of not only child labor but also child prostitution.

Meantime, a good number of public officials are feasting on public funds by nonchalantly engaging in enormous and repeated graft and corrupt practices, by making politics a great business, a very profitable dynastic venture. All these and other hideous egoistic actuations of a good number of people in government make the common good an impossible dream.



ILLUSTATION BY BLADIMER USI

# Citizens' political involvement

ESPECIALLY for citizens of a "democratic and republican" State, political involvement is not only a signal right but also a distinct obligation to be well concerned with politics—matters affecting their country—as an expression of their commitment to be of service to others. The quest of, care for, and fruition of the common good ultimately means concern for neighbors, protection of public welfare, promotion of justice and development. Politics is definitely much more than election concerns. Among other things, it also means watching over those elected, such as what they do, how they render service or instead promote disservice to the people in general.

Such an active concern in terms of political involvement is translated into seeing to it that elected public officials—including those appointed to public offices—are behaving well and doing right as required by law and expected by the citizenry. The people are not their servants but they are instead the servants of the people. They are not only expected but also duty-bound to act with rectitude, to render service to the people, who are in fact the ones paying for everything they need and want in order to do their jobs well through the payment of taxes of many kinds and in different amounts from birth to death.

It is a big joy and contentment of politicians if the citizens are not concerned by the disservice they render, the thievery they commit, the abuses they make. It is also heaven for politicians when they remain in office notwithstanding the big lies they say, the gross misdeeds they perpetrate, the marked incompetence they show. Keep the people ignorant and poor, make them feel unworthy to confront public officials, tell them not to get involved with politics and such is heaven for politicians.

To the people rightfully belongs sovereignty—not to the politicians. From the people emanates the authority of politicians—not the politicians giving authority to the people. Politicians should serve the people—not the people serving politicians. Politicians are bound to protect the people—not their fellows in the same political party. Even politicians are bound to tell the truth, accept their mistakes, to make amends. Even the Chief Executive should be at the service of the common tao. So is it, too, that even the Commander-in-Chief should be answerable to his lowest subordinate.

Thus is it that when the highest public official in the country is the obstacle to the emergence of truth, the hindrance to the triumph of justice, the liability to the promotion of peace and wherefore the impediment to socio-economic development—what should he do? Smile and walk away? Stay cool and in peace? Do nothing?

Such is precisely the time when people should speak out and accordingly act, when able and commendable individuals should stand and lead, when citizens' political involvement should earnestly take place.

# Testing for gossip

IN ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said, "Do you know what I just heard about your friend?"

"Hold on a minute," Socrates replied. "Before telling me anything I'd like you to pass a little test. It's called the Triple Filter Test."

"Triple filter?"

"That's right," Socrates continued. "Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you're going to say. That's why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?"

"No," the man said, "Actually I just heard about it and ..."

"All right," said Socrates. "So you don't really know if it's true or not. Now let's try the second filter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?"

"No, on the contrary..."

"So," Socrates continued, "you want to tell me something bad about him, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though, because there's one filter left: the filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?"

"No, not really ..."

"Well," concluded Socrates, "if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?"

AGNES IRENE

# The Perfect Heart

ONE day, a young man was standing in the middle of the town proclaiming that he had the most beautiful heart in the whole valley. A large crowd gathered and they all admired his heart for it was perfect. There was not a mark or a flaw in it. Yes, they all agreed it truly was the most beautiful heart they had ever seen. The young man was very proud and boasted more loudly about his beautiful heart.

Suddenly, an old man appeared at the front of the crowd and said "Why your heart is not nearly as beautiful as mine." The crowd and the young man looked at the old man's heart. It was beating strongly, but full of scars, it had places where pieces had been removed and other pieces put in, but they didn't fit quite right and there were several jagged edges. In fact, in some places there were deep gouges where whole pieces were missing.

The people stared—how can he say his heart is more beautiful, they thought? The young man looked at the old man's heart and saw its state and laughed. "You must be joking," he said. "Compare your heart with mine, mine is perfect and yours is a mess of scars and tears."

"Yes," said the old man, "Yours is perfect looking but I would never trade with you. You see, every scar represents a person to whom I have given my love—I tear out a piece of my heart and give it to them, and often they give me a piece of their heart which fits into the empty place in my heart, but because the pieces aren't exact, I have some rough edges, which I cherish, because they remind me of the love we shared. Sometimes I have given pieces of my heart away, and the other person hasn't returned a piece of his heart to me. These are the empty gouges—giving love is taking a chance. Although these gouges are painful, they stay open, reminding me of the love I have for these people too, and I hope someday they may return and fill the space I have been waiting. So now do you see what true beauty is?"

The young man stood silently with tears running down his cheeks. He walked up to the old man, reached into his perfect young and beautiful heart, and ripped a piece out. He offered it to the old man with trembling hands. The old man took his offering, placed it in his heart and then took a piece from his old scarred heart and placed it in the wound in the young man's heart. It fit, but not perfectly, as there were some jagged edges. The young man looked at his heart, not perfect anymore but more beautiful than ever, since love from the old man's heart flowed into his. They embraced and walked away side by side. How sad it must be to go through life with a whole untouched heart.

# HOLY TRINITY
## MEMORIAL CHAPELS & CREMATORIUM
(A Subsidiary of Knights of Columbus Fraternal)
Dr. A. Santos Avenue, Parañaque City
Tel. Nos. 825-1291; Telefax No. 825-1314; Trunklines: 8253082-83

**ONE OF THE BIGGEST AND MOST MODERN FUNERAL HOMES IN THE SOUTH**

**NOW ON ITS 29th YEAR OF COMPASSIONATE AND WORLD CLASS SERVICE**

* Top-of-the-line facilities
* Excellent personalized services
* 17 air-conditioned chapels with family room, CRs and bathroom
* Ample parking space and landscaped garden

**OUR ROOTS**

Established by the Knights of Clumbus Fraternal on October 10, 1982 as a mortuary for K of C members, Holy Trinity Memorial Chapels was later opened to the general public.

**OUR VISION / MISSION**

To be the premier provider of memorial care befitting the dignity of a man

To provide compassionate memorial care to the departed and their bereaved families through the delivery of excellent services.

**OUR SERVICES**

* Complete 24-hour funeral & cremation services and a wide range of casket selections, both local and imported
* Two units of state-of-the-art cremation machines with advanced technology that passed US industry and DENR standards for quality and performance
* Accredited servicing mortuary of all major life plan companies

**OUR FACILITIES**

* A three-storey building with homelike chapels complete with family rooms, kitchen, toilet and bath, and extended lobby to accommodate visitors and catering services
* Top-of-the-line funeral hearses (Cadillac and Mercedes Benz)
* The only funeral parlor in the area with a DENR-approved water treatment facility
* Ample parking space

**ACCREDITED LIFE PLAN / PRENEED COMPANIES**

1. Provident Plans Int'l Corp.
2. Prudential Life Plan
3. Legacy Consolidated Plans, Inc.
4. St. Peter Life Plan
5. Lifetime / Pacific Plans, Inc.
6. Coco Plans
7. Paz Life Plan
8. Eternal Life Plan
9. Philam Plans
10. Himlayang Pilipino Life Plan
11. Eternal Life Plan

# Cinderella

DIRECTOR: Kenneth Branagh
LEAD CAST: Lily James, Cate Blanchett, Richard Madden, Helena Bonham Carter, Holliday Grainger
SCREENWRITER: Aline Brosh McKenna
PRODUCER: Tim Lewis & Barry Waldman
EDITOR: Martin Walsh
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Patrick Doyle
GENRE: Fantasy/romance
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Haris Zambarloukos
DISTRIBUTOR: RKO Pictures
LOCATION: UK RUNNING TIME: 105 minutes

Technical assessment: 4
Moral assessment: 4
CINEMA rating: GP

Ella (Lily James) enjoys a short-lived childhood in a comfortable home in an estate, with loving, devoted parents. As a very young girl, Ella is introduced by her mother to a magical world that makes the impossible possible, for instance, conversing with mice, geese and lizards in the family estate. Everything seems endless perfection until illness strikes Ella's mother suddenly, then death follows. Before the fateful moment, however, her mother leaves Ella not jewels, not wealth, but two golden nuggets of advice: "Have courage, be kind." As Ella blooms into womanhood, her father remarries and takes Lady Tremaine (Cate Blanchett) for his wife. The wicked stepmother moves in along with her two daughters Drisella (Sophie McShera) and Anastasia (Holliday Grainger), whose cruelty Ella repays with kindness, even to animals and strangers. Magic becomes reality when the apprentice Kit (Richard Madden) and Ella's Fairy Godmother (Helena Bon Carter) come into her life.

The Cinderella motif has had a long history that reportedly begins with a tale from Egypt in the first century BC. Indeed, even older than Christ, the Cinderella theme has undergone various adaptations, forms, and interpretations, the "modern" one being the fairy tale by French writer Charles Perrault, published in 1697. Since then Cinderellas have come and gone—on film, in plays, operas, and ballets, inspiring pop music, children's bedtime stories and even coloring books. Thus it was with a sigh of weariness that CINEMA met this 2015 version: "What? Another Cinderella?" No—it is not "another" Cinderella. Even in casting and CGI alone, this version tops it all.

The power of fairy tales lies in how well they sweep the audience off their feet—to believe in magic and in never-never lands that promise happy ever-afters, to offer escape from ordinary life and hope for better times. This Cinderella accomplishes all that—but does so without taking advantage of the viewer's gullibility or justifying their romantic notions. This Cinderella extols virtues from beginning to end—justice, forgiveness, patience, faith in man's goodness, love, purity, and yes, courage and kindness. "Have courage, be kind" is mentioned no less than five times on separate occasions, by different characters, nailing in a lesson with a velvet-covered hammer. It makes clear distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, vice and virtue. The good guys are admirable and lovable; the bad guys are pathetic and must be forgiven. In the end, it's not just Cinderella and her prince who live happily ever after, but the citizens of their kingdom. Can a movie get any more Christian than that?

CINEMA

**Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation**

**PAKISTAN. Christians mourn bomb victims, protest lack of security**

Christians in Pakistan are grieving the loss of 15 people who were killed in suicide bomb attacks on two churches in Lahore on Sunday, and are protesting the lack of security provided by the government to the nation's tiny Christian minority. Within minutes of each other, suicide bombers blew themselves up March 15 outside St. John's, a Catholic parish, and Christ Church, a Protestant church, in Lahore's Youhanabad neighborhood, a Christian hub. More than 70 were wounded in the attacks, responsibility for which was claimed by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a Pakistani Taliban group. A police spokesman has said that two policemen guarding the churches were among those killed. Following the attack, protesters blocked roads and burned tires in protest over a lack of protections afforded the Christian population—which is fewer than two percent of Pakistan's population. A mob also beat to death, and then burned, two persons suspected to have been involved in the attacks. The bishops of Pakistan have urged the faithful to be calm, and pray that peace prevails. *(CNA)*

**BURMA. Nuns encourage empowerment of women, end to inequality**

A community of women religious held a workshop in Burma's largest city over the weekend to mark International Women's Day, exploring sex inequality and women's rights in the southeast Asian nation also known as Myanmar. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd's workshop was held March 6-7 in Yangon, and focused on the ways in which forms of violence against women threatens holistic human development and hinders Burma's growth. According to Sr. Elizabeth Joseph, RGS , the reasons the community of Good Shepherd nuns took up the challenge of celebrating International Women's Day was "to empower women's potentials under our care, and to help them realize their dignity and value, because women in Burma are oppressed in many ways." International Women's Day is celebrated March 8 in numerous countries around the world, to inspire women and celebrate their achievements. *(CNA)*

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA. Great task awaits new Wewak bishop**

Next month, a Polish missionary to Papua New Guinea will continue his 23-year ministry to the Melanesian nation with the added responsibility of serving as Bishop of Wewak, on the country's northern coast. On Feb. 6, Pope Francis appointed Fr. Jozef Roszynski, SVD, as Bishop of Wewak; his episcopal consecration is to take place April 25. Fr. Roszynski arrived to Papua New Guinea in October, 1992, where he has since served. He has spent all but two of the past 23 years in the Wewak diocese, serving various parishes. Fr. Giorgio Licini, communications director for the Papuan bishops conference, recounted that the new bishop, who carries vast experience, has to steer through several challenges in the Wewak diocese, especially with the "financial crisis, a number of dysfunctional priests, and many parishes lacking priests." He added that the predisposition to alcoholism common among some of the indigenous tribes along the Sepik river will also be a particular challenge for the new bishop. *(CNA)*

**JAPAN. Synod in Nagasaki, Japan, offers recommendations to church in 'crisis'**

Archbishop Joseph Mitsuaki Takami of Nagasaki, Japan, said Catholics in the archdiocese recognize "with grief, remorse and a deep sense of crisis" that the church is experiencing a slow contraction and a precipitous decline in membership. The assessment was published March 17 in a document from the archbishop outlining the conclusions of the first-ever archdiocesan synod in 2014. The document examines a variety of challenges facing the archdiocese and proposes steps to overcome what Archbishop Takami called the "withering and enervation" of the church, reported the Asian Catholic news portal ucanews.com. Known as the home of "hidden Christians" who secretly practiced their faith despite centuries of persecution, the lack of priests and no access to the Bible for study and prayer, the Nagasaki Catholic Church now must overcome apathy in order to build its future. During the past 30 years, Nagasaki's Catholic population has dropped from 75,000 to 62,000. Of the 267 marriages performed in the archdiocese in 2013, only 44 were for Catholics. "In a majority of households, only one member of the family is Catholic," said Fr Mamoru Yamawaki, president of the synod's core committee. "The discussion has shifted from how to keep the faith as a family to how people can live their faith as individuals." *(CNS)*

**VIETNAM. Nun runs center caring for children with severe disabilities**

Most of the 65 youngsters at Thien Phuoc, a center for children with severe disabilities on the outskirts of this sprawling city, can neither walk, talk nor feed themselves. Most communicate by thrusting their arms and legs as they vocalize sounds to express themselves to draw attention. Each was born with a severe physical or mental handicap -- or both. Nearly all were orphaned early on. Parents who can barely provide for themselves and their families often find it impossible to raise a child with a severe disability. It's not uncommon to drop such an infant off at an orphanage and disappear. In other cases, parents seek whatever help they can find in a country with highly inadequate social services. The children at Thien Phuoc, which translated means "heavenly fortune," are, indeed, fortunate. They have somehow made it to the center and will receive care for the duration of their lives. Initiated by a Vietnamese Catholic priest in 2001, it is run by a Vietnamese Catholic woman religious -- Sister Kim Chi, a member of the Lovers of the Holy Cross congregation. (She asked that her family name not be used). *(CNS)*

**LEBANON. Assyrian Christians who escaped Islamic State seek refuge in Lebanon**

Assyrian Christians from Syria's besieged Khabur region who fled their homes when the Islamic State seized their villages in February are increasingly seeking refuge in neighboring Lebanon. As of March 17, the Assyrian Church of the East in Lebanon had registered 50 families from the region, and more are coming into neighboring Lebanon each day. Michael and Hanna arrived in Lebanon March 11 with their 10-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. They requested that CNS identify them by pseudonyms to protect their identity, because relatives are among the 300 or so hostages taken by Islamic State in the Feb. 23 rampage on Khabur's cluster of 35 villages. So far, Islamic State released about 20 of the kidnapped, but there is no news of the remaining hostages, who include women, children and elderly. "We have not heard anything," Michael said. "We're praying that God will protect them. What else can we do?" Michael and his family were awakened around 3 a.m. by the thundering of Islamic State militants bombarding nearby villages. They waited a while to determine if the militants would approach their village, Tal Maghas. By 5 a.m., it was clear they had to escape. "Everyone was terrified and panicking," Michael said. *(CNS)*

**INDONESIA. Turkey stops 16 Indonesians headed to Syria to join IS**

Turkish authorities have taken into custody at least 16 Indonesians who tried to enter Syria to join the Islamic State group after entering the country as part of a tourist group. Turkish and Indonesian authorities have remained very discreet about the case; however, some reports confirm a broader pattern of Malaysian and Indonesian nationals trying to join the Islamic State group fighting in Iraq and Syria. What is known so far is that Turkish intelligence detained the group of 16 Indonesians - mostly women and children - as they tried to cross the border into Syria. Most of the detainees belong to three families from East Java who travelled in an organised tour. However, after their entry into Turkey, they left the tourist group and went missing. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi confirmed the arrest of Indonesian citizens, but declined to reveal their identity or the reasons for their trip to Syria. *(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