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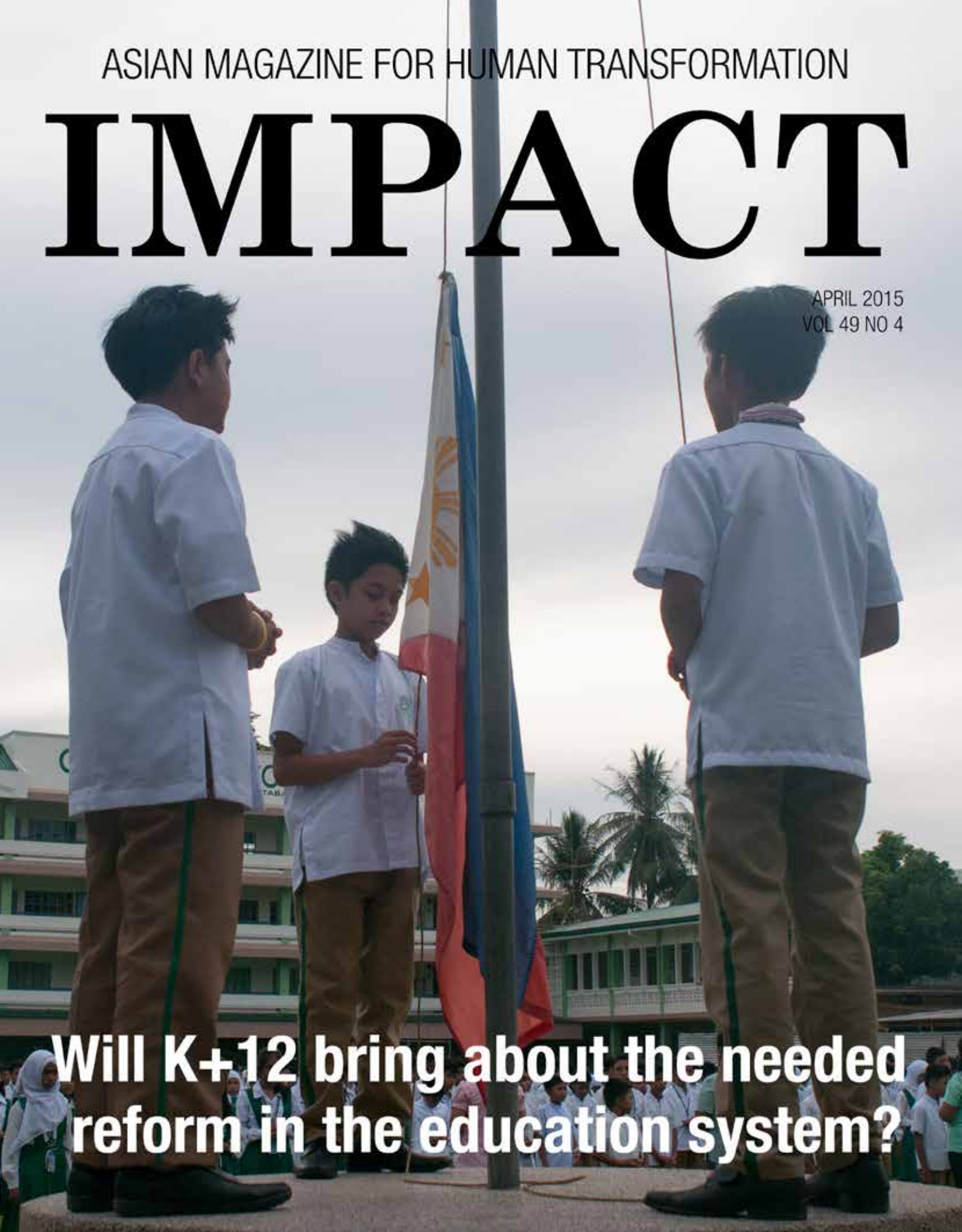

Will K+12 bring about the needed reform in the education system?

IMPACT

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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 Dec. 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, and will conclude on Nov. 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 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 the 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.

Our cover story, "K+12: is reforming the education system a bitter but necessary pill?, is written by Carmelo Acuña. Aside from additional financial worries of parents, this augurs a couple of more hitches. Not least among them is the displacement of thousands of teachers. But is this havoc worth the educational reform that this new educational system is aiming at? Read on.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

27 | The Philippine Political Scene
EDITORIAL

16 | K+12: Is Reforming the Education System a Bitter but Necessary Pill?
COVER STORY

ARTICLES

4 | Love Has Triumphed Over Hatred, Life Has Conquered Death

8 | Next Phase of Agrarian Reform

9 | The Quest for Divine Mercy

10 | The Hell Fires of Climate Change

11 } PH Remains Among Poorest Performers in Southeast Asia

12 | *NEWS FEATURES*

22 | *STATEMENTS*

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

28 | *FROM THE INBOX*

29 | *BOOK REVIEWS*

30 | *CBCP CINEMA*

31 | *ASIA BRIEFING*

"QUOTE IN THE ACT

"Remember Yolanda. Remember Mamasapano. Remember the frustrating unsolved problem of government corruption. Remember the loneliness of our loved ones toiling abroad. Our memory is full of broken hopes and dreams. The litany of frustrations is endless. But we have hope."

Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan and president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in his Easter Message for 2015

"The people of Mindoro do not deserve this kind of betrayal from the government, the very same that should be upholding and protecting our rights and our environment."

Fr. Edu Gariguez, executive director of National Secretariat for Social Action of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; on the reinstatement of the government's Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) in favor of Mindoro Nickel Project of Intex Resources

"Our government should stop telling lies to our people that contraceptives are really safe."

Ligaya Acosta, regional director of Human Life International for Asia and Oceania; on what she calls the "contraception deception" that hides under the veneer of the controversial Reproductive Health Law.

"Today, too, we are experiencing a sort of genocide created by general and collective indifference."

Pope Francis, in his address at the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian "Metz Yeghern," or Armenian "Martyrdom", where he referred to the mass killing of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915 as "the first genocide of the twentieth century."

"The reality is that a taxi driver in Beijing, unskilled, can make more money than a new university graduate."

Jurgen Condrad, head of the China economics unit at the Asian Development Bank in Beijing; on the changing scenario of China's job market, which according to economic observers is driving a labor mismatch as a result of fast urbanization and continuing economic transformation.

"Love has triumphed over hatr

DEAR Brothers and Sisters, Happy Easter!

Jesus Christ is risen!

Love has triumphed over hatred, life has conquered death, light has dispelled the darkness!

Out of love for us, Jesus Christ stripped himself of his divine glory, emptied himself, took on the form of a slave and humbled himself even to death, death on a cross. For this reason God exalted him and made him Lord of the universe. Jesus is Lord!

By his death and resurrection, Jesus shows everyone *the way* to life and happiness: this way is *humility*, which involves *humiliation*. This is the path which leads to glory. *Only those who humble themselves can go towards the "things that are above", towards God* (cf. Col 3:1-4). The proud look "down from above"; the humble look "up from below".

On Easter morning, alerted by the women, Peter and John ran to the tomb. They found it open and empty. Then they drew near and "bent down" in order to enter it. To enter into the mystery, we need to "bend down", to abase ourselves. Only those who abase themselves understand the glorification of Jesus and are able to follow him on his way.

The world proposes that we put ourselves forward at all costs, that we compete, that we prevail... But Christians, by the grace of Christ, dead and risen, are *the seeds of another humanity*, in which we seek to live in service

Vatican City - April 5, 2015. Pope Francis gives a blessing for the city of Rome and the entire world on April 5, 2015 in St. Peter's Basilica. © L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

ed, life has conquered death!”

to one another, not to be arrogant, but rather respectful and ready to help.

This *is not weakness, but true strength!* Those who bear within them God’s power, his love and his justice, do not need to employ violence; they speak and act with the power of truth, beauty and love.

From the risen Lord we ask the grace not to succumb to the pride which fuels violence and war, but to have the humble courage of pardon and peace. We ask Jesus, the Victor over death, to lighten the sufferings of our many brothers and sisters who are persecuted for his name, and of all those who suffer injustice as a result of ongoing conflicts and violence. There are many!

We ask for peace, above all, for Syria and Iraq, that the roar of arms may cease and that peaceful coexistence may be restored among the various groups which make up those beloved countries. May the international community not stand by before the immense humanitarian tragedy unfolding in these countries and the tragedy of the numerous refugees.

We pray for peace for all the peoples of the Holy Land. May the culture of encounter grow between Israelis and Palestinians and the peace process be resumed, in order to end years of suffering and division.

We implore peace for Libya, that the present absurd bloodshed and all barbarous acts of violence may cease, and that all concerned for the future of the country may work to favor reconciliation and to build a fraternal society respectful of the dignity of the person. For Yemen too we express our hope for the growth of a common desire for peace, for the good of the entire people.

At the same time, in hope we entrust to the merciful Lord the framework recently agreed to in Lausanne, that it may be a definitive step toward a more secure and fraternal world.

We ask the risen Lord for the gift of peace for Nigeria, South Sudan and for the various areas of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. May constant prayer rise up from all people of goodwill for those who lost their lives—I think in particular of the young people who were killed last Thursday at Garissa University College in Kenya—for all who have been kidnapped, and for those forced to abandon their homes and their dear ones.

May the Lord’s resurrection bring light to beloved Ukraine, especially to those who have endured the violence of the conflict of recent months. May the country rediscover peace and hope thanks to the commitment of all interested parties.

We ask for peace and freedom for the many men and women subject to old and new forms of enslavement on the part of criminal individuals and groups. Peace and liberty for the victims of drug dealers, who are often allied with the powers who ought to defend peace and harmony in the human family. And we ask peace for this world subjected to arms dealers, who earn with the blood of men and women.

May the marginalized, the imprisoned, the poor and the migrants who are so often rejected, maltreated and discarded, the sick and the suffering, children, especially those who are victims of violence; all who today are in mourning, and all men and women of goodwill, hear the consoling voice of the Lord Jesus: “Peace to you!” (Lk 24:36). “Fear not, for I am risen and I shall always be with you” (cf. Roman Missal, Entrance Antiphon for Easter Day);

(Following his blessing, the Pope said these words:)

Dear brothers and sisters,
I would like to give my wishes for a Happy Easter to all of you who have come to this square from various countries as well as those who have connected through means of social communications. Bring to those in your homes and whom you meet the joyful announcement that the Lord has risen, that He is the Lord of Life, bringing with Himself love, respect and forgiveness.

Thank you for your presence, for your prayers, and for the enthusiasm of your faith on a day that while very beautiful, but also very ugly because of the rain. A special and recognizing thought goes for the donation of flowers, that this year comes from the Netherlands.

I wish you all a Happy Easter, pray for me, and have a good lunch. Arrivederci!

Ten Easter Challenges for Peace in Mindanao

Young people join a peace rally to mark the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 2014. OPAPP

BY ARCHBISHOP ANTONIO J. LEDESMA, S.J.

As we start the Easter season recalling Our Lord's triumph over injustice, violence and death, let us also pray and work together for a just and lasting peace in Mindanao. Ten propositions for peace challenge us to look to the future of Mindanao with hope—but only through the path of our own sacrifices and commitment.

1. Christianity and Islam are both religions of peace. In their sacred scriptures, the call for peace is strong and persistent: "Blessed are the peacemakers…" In our interreligious dialogues, bishops and ulama are one in calling for peace and reconciliation, and an end to armed conflicts in Mindanao.

2. The vast majority of Muslim and Christian communities in Mindanao aspire for peace. Many communities have directly experienced the ravages of war and internal conflicts. In particular, the first and most vulnerable victims of war are the women and children. It is for them and future generations that we need to build structures for peace today.

3. All-out war is not the answer to the Mindanao situation. It has been tried before and failed. The major outbreaks of war in the early 70s, and the years 2000, 2003, and 2008, have brought about widespread destruction and dislocation of families but no end to the armed conflict.

4. Leaders of Muslim communities have pointed out three major grievances: the diminution of their ancestral territory, the erosion of their cultural identity, and the loss of self-determination in the development of their communities. The creation of a Bangsamoro autonomous entity addresses these grievances and has been found acceptable by the MILF panel. In their continuing struggle, this is a significant concession for Muslim leaders from their primordial stand for an independent state.

5. The draft Bangsamoro Basic Law represents a reasonable, practicable and carefully crafted formula for attaining a just and lasting peace in Mindanao. In the long history of peace-building negotiations in Mindanao, it comes at the end of 18 years of failed negotiations with Muslim militant groups and almost a half-century since the first MNLF

uprising. It has undergone five years of widely-publicized peace panel talks under the present Administration.

6. Ongoing questions on the BBL with regard to territory, sovereignty, Sharia Law, police force, natural resources, etc. may need to be clarified and aligned to our Constitutional principles.

On the other hand, the surviving members of the Philippine Constitutional Convention of 1987 have affirmed that the BBL does not go against any Constitutional provision and that the core spirit of the Constitution is Social Justice. We trust our legislators and courts to review these issues from a historical, statesmanlike, and non-partisan perspective.

7. The Mamasapano incident should not be equated with the BBL. Mamasapano in the short term represents the failure of leadership, the breakdown of trust, and the resurgence of biases and prejudices. The BBL addresses the root causes of injustice and provides for the institutions needed for the long-term development of Muslim communities.

8. Instead of viewing the MILF as enemies, the BBL makes them and the envisioned Bangsamoro entity partners for peace and development in Mindanao. The internal security of the Bangsamoro entity regarding the presence of other armed groups—such as the Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, and elements of the MNLF—can best be handled by Muslims themselves with the support of the national government.

On the other hand, the surviving members of the Philippine Constitutional Convention of 1987 have affirmed that the BBL does not go against any Constitutional provision and that the core spirit of the Constitution is Social Justice.

9. The alternative to scrapping the BBL would be a return to square one a generation ago and may ensue in continuing violence and unrest in Mindanao. The only ones who stand to gain are arms dealers and some politicians who attract attention by polarizing communities. Media people are also challenged to engage in peace journalism, particularly for uninformed audiences in Luzon and the Visayas as well as in Mindanao itself.

10. All-out peace can open the doors for all-out development of Mindanao. It can create the conditions for inclusive growth, particularly for Muslim Mindanao. Many local and international investors have signified their interest in harnessing the peace dividends in Mindanao. A climate of peace, development and solidarity can bring about greater stability for the Philippines in an integrated ASEAN region and a wider world confronting threats of international terrorism.

Next Phase of Agrarian Reform

Philippine agriculture thrives on high-value crops like rice, corn, coconut, sugar, coffee, cacao, rubber and palm oil. FILE PHOTO

BY BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS

The redistribution of land ownership to the farmers in the first phase of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was a well-intentioned move of our former leaders to address the extreme inequities in wealth and income that have been the result of centuries of feudalistic and monopolistic practices in our country. One does not have to be a "leftist" to acknowledge that the primordial principle of the "universal destination of goods of this earth" has been honored in Philippine society more in the breach. Millions of landless farmers and rural workers have suffered from extreme poverty while a few families have wallowed in wealth by controlling the ownership of huge tracts of land that their forebears received from our former colonizers or feudal lords. There is no question that some form of agrarian reform or another was absolutely necessary to promote social justice.

The fragmentation of large tracts of land, especially in the rice, corn, and coconut sectors in the densely populated regions of Luzon was a completely necessary condition for attaining social equity. It is not true, as some landlords are claiming, that small holdings are always counterproductive and cannot yield sufficient incomes for the farmers. The success stories of Taiwan, South Korea, and Thailand demonstrate that small farms can be productive if the beneficiaries of agrarian reform are endowed with the necessary infrastructural support (both hardware and software) by a responsible and efficient State. As one of the most knowledgeable and experienced agribusiness entrepreneurs, Ernesto Ordonez, recently wrote in an article: "Agrarian reform in the Philippines has failed because it has never been tried." This is where government did not give the necessary support services mandated by law to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs). But where these support services were given, agrarian reform succeeded in both increasing agriculture productivity and farmer incomes." He presented evidence showing that in the exceptional cases where the State was able to provide support services to the small farmers, both agricultural productivity and farmer incomes increased. Unfortunately, the general rule was that the government failed miserably in constructing farm-to-market roads, irrigation systems, post-harvest facilities and other infrastructures needed by the farmers.

Those who are clamoring for continuing the process of fragmentation argue that we should just compel the State to do what they were unable to do in the past. This is easier said than done. It is clear that even in the reformed Administration of President Benigno S. Aquino III, the State has been woefully remiss in implementing infrastructure projects, even those that already had sufficient funding, not to mention those that were lined up for the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) program. In an understatement, Mr. Ordonez concluded "realizing the government's poor track record in this area (providing support services), the private sector must now get involved."

In fact, as former Secretary of Agrarian Reform Carlos (Sonny) Dominguez pointed out to me, the sectors in which the private firms were creative enough to develop models of farming in which the farmer beneficiaries were able to lease their lands to large agribusiness corporations in Mindanao, the Philippines became a global leader in the cultivation for export of bananas and pineapples, benefiting thousands of small farmers who were redeemed from poverty. With some tweaking, the lease-back, joint venture or cooperative models that worked well in Mindanao should also succeed in improving the lot of small farmers in such crops rice, corn, coconut, sugar, coffee, cacao, rubber and palm oil, not only in Mindanao but in the most impoverished regions of Quezon, Aurora, Bicol, Cagayan, and Eastern Visayas. In the case of sugar which requires land consolidation for mechanized farming, the example of Taiwan should come to mind. During the time of Chang Kai Sek, the Taiwan Sugar Corporation was exempted from land fragmentation, despite the very strict implementation of land redistribution. We should allow sugar lands to be consolidated with greater ease if we want our sugar industry to be competitive with our ASEAN neighbors under the ASEAN economic community.

Those in Congress who are crafting the law that will cover the next phase of agrarian reform should seriously consider the nucleus estate model that Malaysia has perfected in the growing of palm oil. It is the most efficient way of getting large agribusiness investors to work closely with small landholders in a symbiotic relationship. Although the Malaysians applied the model to palm oil and rubber, it can also work with other high-value crops such as coffee, cacao, and other tree crops, including coconuts. We have to learn from our own failures and the successes of our neighbors in agricultural development. Only then can we attain inclusive growth in the most important regions where poverty incidence is the highest.

For comments, my email address is bernardo.villegas@uap.asia.

The Quest for Divine Mercy

BY FR. ROY CIMAGALA

NYEHOB

I have started to read Pope Francis' document called Misericordiae vultus (The face of mercy) that announces the Jubilee Year of Mercy that will begin on December 8 this year, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and will end on November 20, 2016, Solemnity of Christ the King.

I am going to read and re-read it to savor the many fine points it contains and that deserve to be given due attention. I am sure these fine points will trigger more helpful insights and considerations. I hope more and more people get to read it as well if only to join in this common quest for divine mercy that sometimes can be very elusive.

I believe this pontificate of Pope Francis would like to be known, more than anything else, as that of mercy and compassion. It's a papal thrust that I believe the world today needs most. But it's also one that sparks and stirs some controversies that really need to be resolved.

Already in paragraph 2 of the document, we are asked to constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy. With those words, we are somehow told that there is still much of divine mercy that needs to be discovered and learned, lived and spread. Each one of us and the whole Church in general have to be up to par with God's mercy.

What is implied is that our current ways of dispensing divine mercy, whether done individually or collectively, socially or politically, personally or sacramentally, confidentially or pastorally, attitudinally or legally, etc., may need some updating, an "aggiornamento" of sorts that characterized the spirit of Vatican II and is, in fact, always an ongoing concern.

We should never think that what we already have and are doing insofar as living the spirit of the mercy of God is concerned is already complete and perfect. This spirit of God's mercy is a living thing that, while it is already quite well known and made available to us in abundance, can still spring new surprises.

This is, of course, a very delicate matter that has to be approached, studied and acted on with utmost care and prudence. That's why I would strongly suggest a lot of moderation and restraint in expressing our views on the matter.

While everyone has the right to express his views, we should also not forget that many times the discussion is better left first in the hands of experts who are in a better position to sort out the issue.

It cannot be denied that the issue at hand is a very complex one that has to be approached from different angles. Thus, we should always presume good intentions in everyone who expresses his views, no matter how different or opposed his is to ours, or no matter how convinced we are that his positions are wrong.

Of course, it is also presumed and strongly suggested that anyone who wants to participate in the discussion is motivated by the best of intentions and equipped with all that he can get to support his claims. We should try to avoid reckless and trivial comments that can only muddle the discussion.

We need to pray a lot, asking for enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, and always having a good grip on our emotions and passions, lest they flare up unduly. We should be open to the idea that the Holy Spirit is always guiding us and is pointing us new ways

to tackle new challenges, even if there are permanent and unchangeable things involved.

Yes, indeed, we need to re-examine which part of the current practices with respect to asking and dispensing divine mercy need to be purified and updated. The temper of the times have changed, the sensibilities of the people are not as they were even a few years ago.

We have to be wary of a new pharisaism, marked by rigid legalism and traditionalism that can fall on us without noticing it. This is always a possibility and can afflict those of us who are quite sure of ourselves so as to be close-minded instead of always being open-minded.

Pope Francis always talks about the God of surprises. We may already know him a lot, but what we don't know about him is much more than what we already know. We should always keep this caveat in mind. God will always open new ways while retaining the absolute truth which in the end is his great love and mercy for us.

Thus, we have to continually embark on a quest for divine mercy.

The Hell Fires of Climate Change

BY FR. SHAY CULLEN

The "Gates of Hell" is how Dan brown described Manila in a recent novel and how right he is. The air pollution has grow excessively with thousands more vehicles belching black smoke and a thick, sooty smog swirls over the city. Millions of Filipinos inhale the death-causing particles that clog up their lungs and they cough and puke their sickly way to the hospital or are carried swiftly to the cemetery. Thousands of children are gasping for fresh air as they struggle with asthma. The situation is truly hell on earth.

The Anti-Pollution law and Clean Air Act of 1999 are clear and have the strongest provisions that are to protect the citizens, give the right to clean air and have a pollution free environment. The law of 1999 expresses the will of the people in granting these rights:

a) The right to breathe clean air; b) The right to utilize and enjoy all natural resources according to the principle of sustainable development; c) The right to participate in the formulation, planning, Implementation and monitoring of environmental policies and programs and in the decision-making process;

d) The right to participate in the decision-making process concerning development policies, plans and programs projects or activities that may have adverse impact on the environment and public health; e) The right to be informed of the nature and extent of the potential hazard on any activity, or project and to be served timely notice of any significant rise in the level of pollution and the accidental or deliberate release into the atmosphere of harmful or hazardous substances;

f) The right of access to public records, which a citizen may need to exercise his or her rights effectively under this Act; g) The right to bring action in court or quasi-judicial bodies to enjoin all activities in violation of environmental laws and regulations, to compel the rehabilitation and cleanup of affected area, and to seek the imposition of penal sanctions against, violators of environmental laws.

Not only is this law generally ignored but industries, backed by the judiciary, actually seem, or create the perception that they work together in a manner that does not benefit the people, but only enrich the elite and provide electric power for their factories and business. The poor get poorer and choke on the pollution of from the hell fires of the coal-fired stations.

That is how many citizens in the Subic bay Freeport zone and Olongapo City saw it when the restraining order issued by the lower court was overturned by the Supreme Court.

This recent decision was very much in favor of the energy tycoons making and spending billions of pesos to build coal-fired power plants across the country. We hope and pray the Supreme Court will hear all the arguments and change their decision.

These plants belch billowing fumes tons of deadly particles of chemicals that will create a choking, smoke-filled environment in the now pristine Subic rain forest. The fumes and smoke will blow across the bay and more of it will be absorbed by the waters of Subic Bay .It will become one acidic pond killing off fish and their food sources. The fumes have mercury content, which will make swimming and water sport hazardous.

So after a year of belching smoke stacks, the fresh air of Subic bay and the rain forest will be a smog of killer fumes and particles.

Coal-fired plants are the most deadly producers of CO2, the green house gas that blocks the escape of the earth's heat and which is causing global warming and climate change at an ever increasing rate. The planet is being driven toward the point of no return. If the earth will heat up another 2 degrees there is no reversing the trend. The scientists have recoded 2014 as the hottest year ever recorded.

As this trend continues, crops will fail, more devastating droughts and forest fires will devastate nations. Gigantic storms are the other extreme causing more extensive floods and disasters everywhere.

With a warmer climate, the ocean currents will change direction and there will be more monster storms and typhoons like Yolanda (Haiyan) that wiped out Tacloban and dozens of Philippine towns on Nov. 8, 2013.

The poor will be the most affected as they live along the coasts and with sea levels are rising as the polar ice melts. They can barely survive and a slight climate variation can mean crop failure and death. It's all because of our greed and materialistic demands for economic growth and the power and wealth that it brings to the few. A few hundred billionaires together have more money than entire nations.

Millions of Filipinos inhale the death-causing particles that clog up their lungs and they cough and puke their sickly way to the hospital or are carried swiftly to the cemetery.

They profit most by the life-threatening, hellish coal-burning power stations. The tycoons ignore the renewable sources of power generation like wind farms, solar power and geo-terminal power plants.

Pope Francis said human kind has given nature a slap in the face, Soon his encyclical on climate will challenge the conscience of the world leaders to act decisively to reduce global warming by curbing the burning of coal and other fossil fuels. The law says we can protest and demand justice and so we should act powerfully without backing down. Climate justice is what the people want and the courts should recognize that and rule in favor of the people not the tycoons.

(Comments: shaycullen@gmail.com)

PH remains among poorest performers in Southeast Asia

FILE PHOTO

BY IBON NEWS

REACTING to Pres. Aquino's speech on the country's economic achievements despite negative news reports, research group IBON said that Philippine development performance still compares poorly with its neighbors in the region. This is despite having the fastest economic growth in Southeast Asia and record foreign direct investment (FDI).

Recent trends in unemployment, poverty reduction and human development index (or HDI, a composite of health, education and income indicators) show that the country's performance is not as exceptional as with other Asean countries. For instance, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam have been able to reduce their poverty rates more than the Philippines, which is lagging seventh in terms of improvement in HDI.

Pres. Aquino in his speech before foreign investors in Makati City listed the "impressive growth and all-time high FDI" as among successes under his administration. Research group IBON has earlier pointed out that overall economic growth has been slowing (to 6.1% in 2014 from 7.2% in 2013) despite increasing FDI since the start of 2014. It also debunked the President's claim of a soaring economy, noting how the slowdown in growth reflected the artificial drivers of the relatively rapid growth in the last two years (i.e. real estate and construction).

The group also noted that the slowdown is happening in the absence of any major economic shock, unlike the trend of past administrations which were marked by external economic shocks towards the end of their terms (the 1991 global recession under Pres. Corazon Aquino, the 1997 Asian financial crisis under Ramos, and the 2008 global financial turmoil under Arroyo). This indicates that the slowdown is not external but in the nature of the growth sources itself. Despite growing rapidly for a period, the growth sources could not build momentum for the economy and instead are tapering off on their own.

Malacanang has been emphasizing so-called economic successes in its effort to counter growing public criticism over the Mamasapano fiasco, the controversy over the pork barrel and Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP), among others. However, IBON said that highlighting these achievements despite difficult social realities will not arrest but could add to the public unrest further.

PCUP chief: Forcing poor to use condoms,pills 'unacceptable'

Thousands gather at the EDSA Shrine to protest the RH Bill in 2013. FILE PHOTO

QUEZON City, April 17, 2015—The head of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor (PCUP) has cried foul over the way the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) allegedly forces poor Filipinos, particularly beneficiaries of its Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Program, to use contraceptives, calling such acts "unacceptable."

No compulsion

"Assuming the allegation is true, then they need to do some explaining. The RH [Reproductive Health] Law states clearly that couples cannot be compelled to use contraceptives," said PCUP Chair Hernani Panganiban in a Radio Veritas report.

He explained that in its approved version of the law, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that couples are free to pursue the method of family planning they prefer.

Unacceptable

"Now, if DSWD sees in CCT a means by which it can promote contraceptives, then that's when the trouble begins. No matter where you look at it, whether you're pro-RH or anti-Rh, it's unacceptable," he added.

Panganiban further stressed that the government cannot deprive couples of their right to plan their families, and the way they intend to do this.

SC ruling

Meanwhile, a local coalition of pro-life and pro-family groups remain steadfast in its appeal for government compliance with the SC's decision on RH.

"While in many instances we disagreed with the way this law was impressed upon the people as legally legitimate, though morally infirm, socially damaging, and fundamentally risky to vulnerable individuals, we respected the inevitable," Pro-Life Philippines shared.

Sanctity of conjugal act, life

The Catholic Church maintains that Natural Family Planning (NFP) Method is the only morally acceptable way couples can responsibly determine the size of the family they desire.

In the 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae" ("Of Human Life"), then Pope Paul VI reinforced the Church's longstanding opposition to artificial contraception, teaching that life, as well as the procreative and unitive nature of conjugal relations, is sacred.

The controversial document reads in part: "Love is total—that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions and not thinking solely of their own convenience. Whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself." ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News with reports from Reyn Letran)***

CBCP chief: Don't silence groups excluded from BBL

DAGUPAN City, Pangasinan, April 14, 2015–The head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has called on the Philippine government not to silence nor ignore those groups in Mindanao that claim they were brushed aside from the deals leading to the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), saying such a move will not help forge peace in the region.

"The sectors that claim they were not included in the deals leading to the BBL [Bangsamoro Basic Law] should not be silenced. Neither should they be ignored. I refer in particular to the MNLF [Moro National Liberation Front] and to indigenous cultural communities, as well as to Christian communities in Mindanao. No agreement that is perceived to be favorable to one sector alone will ever bring the sought-after peace for Mindanao," says CBCP President Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan in an April 9 letter.

Armed, dangerous

The prelate expresses worry over what he describes as the "BIFF [Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters] phenomenon," with its members who are "armed and dangerous."

"They have given the nation concrete demonstration of the trouble they can cause. Shall we negotiate with them later and hammer another deal? While the MILF has promised to keep them in check, it has also been relevantly pointed out that relatives, though be-

longing to different organizations and associations, will not so easily restrain each other!" he notes.

Villegas observes likewise of the remnants of the Abu Sayaff Group (ASG), as well as of the Jemmayah Isalmiyah (JI), which while many judge to be already a "spent force," its presence or demise in Mindanao has yet to be ascertained.

The prelate also asks what will be the future of traditional institutions in Mindanao be under BBL like the sultanates which seem to have been left out of the conversation.

Thousands of Bangsamoro supporters converge at the Cotabato City Plaza to express joy over the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014 in Malacañang. OPAPP

Arguments from history

Noting some BBL advocates invoke historical arguments to back their claims for the existence of the entity known as the Bangsamoro, Villegas points out such "arguments from history are always tricky."

"In fact, international law has rejected this approach altogether by the doctrine of uti possidetis…in respect to the drawing of boundaries, they stay as they are found," he explains.

"Appealing to history in respect to claims of political power and autonomy will only confound issues more. Once upon a time, Soliman ruled over Muslim Manila. That piece of history is certainly no sound argument for Shari'a in Manila. I am not against Shari'a. I am only saying that some arguments are helpful, others are only distracting!" he adds. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

Mercy, compassion inspire 'Yolanda' survivors' trauma care

TACLOBAN City, April 9, 2015—Two years after, houses may be built, but for some, if not many, the trauma caused by super typhoon Yolanda will require psycho-spiritual care, especially inspired by mercy and compassion.

A faith-based research and training group called Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture (ISACC), which started to provide psycho-spiritual trauma care to super typhoon Yolanda survivors for disaster risk reduction and management, practices mercy and compassion in pursuing its mission.

"We do not just give gifts but we have to cultivate compassion…We have to have compassion to our selves first to be compassionate to other people," said Dr. Christian Chan, who is part of ISACC.

Psychological first aid

Dr. Melba Padilla Maggay, president and founder of ISACC, compared what the group does to the Bible account of Jesus feeding the five thousand, besides women and children, with the five loaves and two fishes given by his disciples.

ISACC, did not have much funds at that time, she said, to mount a full-scale post-disaster response for the survivors as the disaster happened towards the end of 2013.

In spite of this, ISACC volunteers went to Tacloban at their own expense. According to Maggay, with "faith that God will multiply their resources" in order to realize their mission. They traveled to Tacloban several times to provide psychological first aid.

According to her, the team's faith in God and resolve to be of assistance to those in need of post-disaster psychological first aid kept them determined to stay on and help.

Prayer, faith

Maggay stressed that ISAAC's compassion for the survivors continued to move them 18 months after Yolanda, even as international NGOs started packing up after carrying out relief and rebuilding efforts.

Prayer and faith she pointed up are among the factors that make aid services succeed.

"There is a God who watch us over to whom we are accountable after all, Maggay said, making reference to the Biblical acccount on Jesus' Parable of the Talents.

ISACC now conducts training to persons who could eventually replicate the same kind of psycho-spiritualcare to others. Traumatic incidents happen unexpectedly, she explained, because of either man-made or natural causes. ***(Eileen Nazareno-Ballesteros/CBCP News)***

'Implement SC version of RH Law' – Pro-life groups

Pro-lifers gather at the Quiapo Church in Manila in November 2013 to express disgust over the RH Bill's multi-billion funding, which they believe should be channeled to education. FILE PHOTO

QUEZON City, April 8, 2015—Several pro-life and pro-family group have joined forces in an attempt to convince the Philippine government to enforce the Reproductive Health (RH) Law as it was ruled upon by the highest court of the land.

n a document published on its website, Pro-Life Philippines lamented that pro-life and pro-family advocates have yet to see the issuance of definitive implementing rules and regulations of the RH Law that incorporate the changes that should have been made based on the Supreme Court (SC) ruling.

Prayer rally

"We have made representations on various instances to the Department of Health but to no avail. Instead, we have been informed by our allies on the ground that contraceptives are being distributed, given out or applied to the unknowing public absent compliance to the requirements of the law that ensures that the methods, oral, mechanical or otherwise are non-abortifacient and are safe to the health of those who are subjected to the process," the group says.

Led by Pro-Life Philippines, the alliance is scheduled to deliver their manifesto to the Department of Health (DOH)-Food and Drug Administration (FDA) during a prayer rally on April 10, Friday, across the FDA compound in Alabang, Muntinlupa City, inviting interested parties to bring rosaries and placards, and take part in the event.

"We have likewise seen and were told that Implanon, a known abortifacient are now being implanted on our women under dubious circumstances and under imposed conditions. The same is true with the continuous application of intrauterine devices on our women without the appropriate information about the risks associated with its use," it adds.

'Less than appropriate'

According to Pro-Life Philippines, Congress passed the RH Act under what it describes as "less than appropriate and acceptable procedures" and was signed into law on a largely similar circumstance.

It further notes that following a series of petitions and arguments, SC's decision stresses RH Law is "not unconstitutional."

"While in many instances we disagreed with the way this law was impressed upon the people as legally legitimate, though morally infirmed, socially damaging and fundamentally risky to vulnerable individuals, we respected the inevitable," the group explains.

However, Pro-Life Philippines points out state imposition was delimited given that the judiciary made it clear religious freedom and the exercise of one's free will remained paramount and cannot be abridged.

SC's emphases

The group says some of the points SC has emphasized are as follows:

- respect for parental supervision over the rights and welfare of their children;
- spousal consent on the use of contraceptive technologies;
- free exercise of conscientious objection of medical and allied health practitioners over state sponsored reproductive health methodologies;
- strict adherence to processes involved in the licensing and accreditation of contraceptive technologies ensuring that the same are not abortifacients nor with abortifacient properties and will not pose any risk to the health of its users;
- free and informed consent of those who are the subject of reproductive health programs.

To read the whole text, visit http://www.prolife.org.ph/?p=6821. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)***

15 Muslim migrants arrested for throwing 12 Christian refugees into the sea

PALERMO, Italy, April 17, 2015–Italian police have arrested 15 Muslim migrants after they were reported to have thrown 12 Christian refugees into the high seas. The 15 arrested are accused of multiple homicide, aggravated by "reasons of religious hatred". The police became aware of the incident by interviewing some of the refugees who survived the crossing, who burst into tears as they described the violence.

According to data notified by the police, those arrested are from the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali and Guinea; they include a minor. All of them were on a boat carrying 105 migrants, who left the coast of Libya, on April 14, and arrived in Palermo the next day.

Witnesses say that at some point during the crossing, a fight broke out between a group of young Muslims and a group of Christians; the former threatened to kill the Christians and throw them into the sea "because they are Christians." After wounding one of them with a knife, the group of Muslims threw 12 Christians—Nigerian and Ghanaian—into the high seas, where they are believed to have drowned. Another group of Christians—those who later testified—risked the same fate but formed a "human chain" to withstand the onslaught.

Yesterday, the Italian navy rescued four survivors – a Ghanaian, two Nigerians and a man from Niger from the seas: their rubber dingy was carrying 45 people from Libya, but sunk.

In the last few days at least 10 thousand people who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea fleeing war and misery have been saved. Italy has long called for the help of the European Union to manage the crisis.

So far this year, at least 500 refugees from Africa and the Middle East have died in the crossing to Europe. Earlier in the week it was reported that a boat carrying 400 people had sank. *(Asianews)*

In Taiwan, Catholic volunteers celebrate Easter with people living with HIV/AIDS

TAIPEI, Apr 10, 2015–Easter celebration in Taiwan is a time to raise awareness about the situation of those who are suffering and the most marginalised.

Paul and Jiachyi are the executive directors in the Taiwan Lourdes Association (社團法人 台灣 露 德 協會), an association dedicated to caring for people, especially young people, living with HIV.

Starting this weekend, they are preparing a series of meetings to widen further their field of action and increase the number of people involved, especially in the Catholic community, in this kind of mission.

"In 1997 we started our work by setting up the Taiwan Lourdes Association," said Paul Hsu (徐 森杰 秘書長), the association's executive director.

"The association's goal was HIV and AIDS prevention and the creation of a community of people focused on taking care of people at risk and those who had already contracted the virus."

"At that time, I had started to think about how best to use my talents," he said. "Although I had received several job offers in the volunteer sector, we threw ourselves into this new field working with the sisters of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity (天主教 仁愛 修女 會).

"After about 18 years I am happy with my work, which enables me to live with those afflicted by the immunodeficiency disease, and often, it is sad to say, the discrimination of those who are narrow-minded."

"The Daughters of Charity have always been the backbone of the movement," added Yang Jiachyi (楊家琪 小姐). "As far back as 1960, they opened a 'Lourdes Home' for orphans and disadvantaged children."

"Starting in 1997," she added, "as the number of HIV-positive patients ballooned, the service focused on supporting them and their families. The need to give stability to this mission led us to register the association as a non-governmental organization in 2006."

"This generated even wider visibility and greater support. Thus, more people came forward to volunteer their time or provide financial resources. Thanks to this, we were able to involve a very large number of volunteers. The basic work is to create ties, and prevent loneliness among those who feel marginalized."

"We are involved in various support centers across the island because the people who need our service and care know that with us they can find support and understanding, as well as medical support," Yang explained.

"The campaigns we are preparing concern raising funds and especially awareness about the problem," Paul said with regard to the meetings scheduled for the coming weeks.

"We want to show how the Christian community is involved at the forefront of this mission and heeds the call of those who are marginalised because of their illness."

"Fortunately, even within the Church, people are moving more and more from an attitude of condemnation to one of acceptance. This overcomes many ideological barriers and favours working together for the good of those most in need. "

The Lourdes Association's educational outreach is best seen in the fact that, in the past two years, 11,754 people, mostly teenagers, have taken part in the training and prevention courses it sponsored. *(AsiaNews)*

K+12:

Is reforming the education system a bitter but necessary pill?

BY CARMELO M. ACUÑA

In 2013, the Philippine government passed into law an act enhancing the country's basic education by strengthening its curriculum and increasing the number of years for basic education in what is known as Republic Act No. 10533.

As there are two sides to a coin, the same holds true for the implementation of what was then described as a long-overdue measure to address the lack of competitiveness in the field of education.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report (2014) said on a scale of 7.0 in mathematics and science education, the Philippines placed fourth with a rating of 4.1 behind Singapore (6.3), Malaysia (5.2) and Indonesia (4.6). Thailand and Vietnam share the fifth slot with a rating of 3.9.

In the global rating, Singapore topped the list with Malaysia in 16th place, Indonesia at the 36th slot while the Philippines placed 70th. Thailand and Vietnam garnered 81st and 82nd spots, respectively.

The influential Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce, in its "Arangkada Philippines' 4th Anniversary" assessment said the Aquino Administration significantly increased the education budget though it still lags behind on the percent-to-GDP ratio.

They also cited the Department of Education (DepEd)'s hiring of some 39,000 teachers to address the growing basic education enrollees.

"For the past four years, close to 110,000 new teachers have been absorbed though it had little effect on the teacher-student ratio due to the large student population entering elementary schools nationwide," the business group added.

It has been programmed that senior high school would introduce three tracks for students to seriously consider, the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), HAB or Humanities-Arts-Business and the Tech-Voc popularly known as technical-vocational education.

However, the same business group noted the DepEd's manner of implementing senior high school from 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 with the introduction of Grades 11 and 12 in successive years would "put tremendous strain" on the financial position of universities and colleges "which may lead to a shakedown in the sector."

Forward-looking, in 2020 and 2021, "the lack of college entrants four to five years earlier will result in...very minimal college graduates," the JFCC noted.

Concerns raised

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, in its statement signed by its president Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas last June 26, 2014 expressed concern that in 2016, higher education institutions, colleges and universities, "will have no freshmen."

He said students who have completed four years of high school education "will move on to senior high school, following any of the tracks presently open to them, only one of which leads to university or college level education."

Villegas said the debate whether to adopt the K to 12 scheme is over and "must now cope with the challenges that it has engendered."

He expressed concern about Catholic educators, academic and non-academic partners who will have no students to attend to, "the first year of implemen-

CBCP Statement on Catholic Schools and K to 12 Program

In 2016, higher education institutions (HEIs), our colleges and universities, will have no freshmen. In that year, the students who complete four years of high school move on to senior high school, following any of the tracks presently open to them, only one of which leads to university or college-level education. The debate on whether we should adopt the K to 12 scheme is behind us. We have accepted it, but we must now cope with the challenges that it has engendered.

Obviously, the most pressing problem has to do with our Catholic educators—both academic and non-academic partners—who will have no students to attend to in the first year of higher education, for the first year of the implementation of K to 12, and then for the first two years, in the second year of the scheme's implementation.

Labor Law, of course, makes available the options of the redundancy and retrenchment provisions, provided legal conditions are complied with.

But charity is a law for Catholic schools that takes precedence over all human law, for its origin is the very reason that our Catholic schools exist—the Lord Jesus. Turning away many of the faithful co-workers we have had who have been loyal to our schools and to the local Church for all these years is a most unwelcome prospect, and we dissuade our Catholic school administrators

tation of K + 12 and then for the first two years, in the second year of the scheme's implementation."

He urged existing colleges to set up senior high schools when deemed feasible and appropriate.

The prelate reminded the government that its assistance to private schools "must not be given grudgingly but should be generous as our Catholic schools have been generous in helping build the nation."

Optimism from DepEd, CHEd and Philippine Normal University

During Tapatan sa Aristocrat's focus on K+12 Program, Education Secretary Bro. Armin A. Luistro, FSC expressed belief the introduction of the senior high school will be the legacy and defining program of President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III's administration.

Luistro foresees more problems should the K+12 program be stopped or suspended. For Commissioner Maria Cynthia Rose Banzon Bautista, historically, the Commonwealth period had Grade 7 and four years of high school education.

"Other modifications were introduced later but the government feared additional expenses," she explained. However, in 2004, while the government prepared for its implementation, vehement opposition was heard from both parents and school owners and being an election year, the program was suspended.

"We had to settle for bridging programs for those who failed to pass the exams," Bautista added.

While Luistro admitted it would take time for the education reform program to bear fruit, the next generation will definitely reap its benefits. He remained optimistic the Supreme Court will not hold the implementation of the reform measure.

He also downplayed statements about a lack of prior consultations about the program.

"Nagkaroon ng mga konsultasyon mula noong 2010 at hindi pa nako-configure kung anong gagawin sa batas at Implementing Rules and Regulations," (There were consultations in 2010 when the law itself and the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) were not configured yet) Luistro explained. He added they had the time to consult every sector. He also acknowledged the

support extended by the late Congressman Salvador H. Escudero III who facilitated regional consultations.

He further said what is needed is to discuss matters which were not included in previous consultations as there is still time to address these concerns.

"What's important is nobody says K+12 is not needed in the country," noted Luistro.

According to him, some 30,000 classrooms have appropriations for 2014 and 2015 with construction beginning this summer, saying whatever needs arise, the government can "immediately respond."

What about the teachers?

Dr. Rene Luis Tadle, convenor of the Coalition for K+12 Suspension said labor-related issues would continue to stalk its implementation. During the same forum, Tadle said thousands are set to lose jobs as Catholic educational institutions have already retrenched their teaching staff.

He anchored his arguments on the "alarming lack of preparation" of concerned agencies. He further claimed there were neither IRR nor the education transition fund proposed by the Commission on Higher Education to ensure the full protection of labor sector.

Tadle said while the Philippine Constitution promotes work creation or protection and not displacement or loss, should the K+12 program be implemented, education workers "face the risk of early separation, forced retirement, constructive dismissal, diminution of salaries and benefits, labor contractualization and a general threat to self-organization."

He added the IRR, the Joint Guidelines and the DepEd Memorandum No. 2 dated Jan. 13, 2015, which "were subsequently formulated have no basis under K+12 law." He explained there are provisions on lower compensation upon transfer to senior high school and retrenchment. Tadle and his group found the issuances "contrary to law and jurisprudence as education workers are forced to suffer from unjust labor practices."

CHED Commissioner Bautista said a transition fund is being prepared to respond to budget requirements for teaching and non-teaching personnel. She said they believe some may be displaced but would not lose their jobs. They will appropriate some Php 6 billion for those who will be displaced.

Villegas took note of the country's Labor Law, which provides options for redundancy and retrenchment, "provided legal conditions are complied with."

He reminded everyone that charity is a law for Catholic schools that takes precedence over all human law. He added terminating many faithful co-workers who all have been loyal to schools and the local Church is a "most unwelcome prospect" and "we dissuade our Catholic school administrators from finding recourse in these provisions of law all too easily."

He called on Catholic school corporations and school officials to be creative in providing opportunities for the "retooling and re-training" of instructors and professors in tertiary education to be able to handle subjects in the academic track of senior high school.

CHED Commissioner Bautista said in "a worst case scenario," 56,000 teaching and 14,000 non-teaching personnel may be affected by the education reform program. However, she added about 14,000 plantilla positions will be created in state universities and colleges nationwide.

The CHED official further said they received assurances from private universities they would not retrench a significant number of faculty members despite the minimal turnout of college students beginning 2016.

She admitted middle-aged college professors may find it difficult to get employed hence the need for an inter-agency task force to assist them.

Luistro said his office would prioritize displaced college teachers who would consider government employment for senior high school.

Still, Tadle said the K+12 program would make college professors in private institutions "contractual employees" after being retrenched. He fears job security would be at stake.

Alliance of Concerned Teachers Party List lawmaker Tinio said there would be no more time to pass measures to cushion against the ill effects of the K+12 program, even with a Php 29-billion budget on paper. He said Budget Secretary Florencio Abad has made no commitment about the sourcing of the needed funds.

It cannot be sourced from the so-called Sin tax law as it would be contrary to the purpose of its passage.

He expressed concern not all enrollees will have free high school education because out of three million expected entrants, about 60% would be accommodated in public school facilities. He said despite the Php 22,500 tuition subsidy, this would not be enough to cover the whole cost of senior high school fees.

The Council of Teachers and Staff of Colleges and Universities in the Philippines or CoTeSCUP went to the Supreme Court of the Philippines in a petition known as CoTeSCUP, et. al. v. Secretary of Education, et.al. (G.R. No. 216930) seeking a temporary restraining order and/or writ of preliminary injunction among others, for the K+12 program.

Without citing the merits of their petition, Tadle, in his letter to Senator Pilar Juliana S. Cayetano, chair of the Committee on Education, Arts and Culture said the program failed to fully protect employees' interests, neglecting to promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities as guaranteed by the Constitution.

However, the National Youth Commission in a statement, called on lawmakers not to take "two steps back" on the K+12 program.

Chairman Gio Tiongson said there is a need to seriously consider the impact of any drastic move to stop the K+12 program "now that it is on its fifth year with the senior high school as its last mile."

Despite the glitches in its implementation, the NYC maintains that DepEd and various stakeholders will be able to address the problems.

"If the Department of Education can assure us that the loss of jobs in the higher educational institutions (HEIs) can be avoided, we should put our trust in the program," Tiongson further said.

They likewise called on teachers and faculty unions to take legal courses of action should colleges and universities implement lay-offs due to expected financial losses.

He cited a statement from an official of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) who was quoted as saying no company is allowed to lay off employees in lieu of anticipatory loss as it would violate Article 283 of the Labor Code of the Philippines.

Luistro remains optimistic despite the fact that some 20,000 in the gen-

from finding recourse in these provisions of law all too easily.

We urge the trustees of our Catholic school corporations and school officials to be creative. We strongly exhort our school administrators to provide opportunities for the re-tooling and re-training of our instructors and professors in tertiary education to be able to handle subjects in the academic track of senior high school. Our Catholic school teachers and instructors should not be left to their own devices. Our priests who serve on positions of school directorship, must, in all charity and solicitude, aid them so that they may continue as our partners in the apostolate of Catholic education.

Consequently, we also urge that our existing Catholic colleges apply, where deemed feasible and appropriate, to operate senior high school. Since most of our diocesan colleges also offer secondary school education, this should not be a problem. And in the design of the curriculum for the additional years of high school, we direct that Catholic schools keep ever in mind the raison d'etre of our Catholic schools: evangelization and formation.

In this respect, whatever the purposes of the government might be—many of which are laudable—our Catholic schools cannot excuse themselves from the responsibility of tailoring curricula to fulfill their mandate of evangelization and formation by slavish adherence to model curricula.

I also appeal to our Catholic school teachers, instructors and professors. It is a problem commonly confronted by our school administrators that many teachers seek employment in our Catholic schools while waiting for more lucrative offers from higher-paying institutions. We exhort graduates of teacher education courses who qualify themselves to teach by passing the requisite licensure examinations not only to be committed to service, but to take to heart—and as the prime motive for applying with Catholic schools—the command of the Last Supper: to love with such an unconditional love that we can wash each other's feet.

By accepting appointment and engagement with our Catholic schools, a Catholic teacher is given the opportunity to truly serve God's people, especially the young. This should not, however, lull our school administrators into complacency about the legitimate needs of our Catholic school employees. The Catholic school must be person oriented and mission driven.

We must also remind the government that since our Catholic schools provide the education that the State is mandated by the Constitution to provide, the Church in fact provides service to the State. It is not unreasonable to declare that the assistance to private schools from the State must not be given grudgingly, but should be generous as our Catholic schools have been generous in helping build the nation.

The Church's roster of saints gives us innumerable examples of men and women, gifted by God with incisive minds, capacious intellects and also generous hearts who, responding to the Spirit, made of their lives an oblation through a life-long dedication to Catholic education.

The Catholic educator who chooses to continue serving even when material rewards may not be hefty are assured by God's Word of the abundant harvests of the Spirit.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Manila, June 26, 2014

+SOCRATES VILLEGAS, D.D.
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
President, CBCP

eral education curriculum may lose their job as his department needs some 30,000 teachers for them to receive Php 22,500.00 a month. They will need some 5,000 school principals, too.

"Mayroon kaming trabahong iaalok kung gugustuhin nilang magtrabaho sa DepEd (We have jobs to offer if they want to work in DepEd)," Brother Armin explained.

Bautista said permanent employees in state colleges and universities would not be affected by retrenchment as community colleges will have technical vocational education as mandated by the DepEd.

Philippine Normal University President Dr. Ester B. Ogena said they have already began a program for would-be teachers for their baccalaureate program. They have also launched their trisemester program.

She added they have a laboratory school where the fields of English, Science and Math are implemented to further support the K+12 program.

"It is a feasible program and we are now on our second year," she further explained.

Luistro, a former De La Salle University president said the last thing private institutions would want is to dismiss faculty members from employment as he called on those advocating for a suspension of the program to "sit down and talk about their concerns."

Impact on religious formation

The K+12 program will also affect religious formation in seminaries across the country. Fr. Maxell Aranilla, Secretary for Academic Affairs of the CBCP's Episcopal Commission on Seminaries said minor seminaries will begin to have two separate departments beginning school year 2016-2017, the Junior High School and the senior high school under the same rector, principal and procurator. However, each department may have different directors or prefects of seminarians and spiritual directors.

He said the first batch of Grade 11 will be the present Grade 9 minor seminarians and junior high school graduates from other institutions will be accepted for school year 2016-2017.

However, the formation year for school years 2015 to 2017 will be open to accept high school graduates for school year 2015-2016; with college undergraduates and college graduates

coming in for school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

According to Aranilla, they will take the regular existing one-year formation year program before they proceed to the regular existing four-year college program.

They expect "very few seminarians" for these school years since most formation-year seminarians are fresh high school graduates.

Beginning school year 2018-2019, seminarians under the formation year will take specialized subjects of the minor seminary's senior high school curriculum for a year. This will serve as "bridge program" in preparation for BA Philosophy because they would be graduates from senior high schools from other institutions with different tracks.

For their regular college programs, the college department will run existing four-year AB Philosophy programs for school year 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 for the formation year graduates and "returnees." They also foresee fewer college seminarians during these school years. Should the Commission on Higher Education impose a three-year BA program, the designed–three-year BA Philosophy program will be used by the college department beginning in the school year 2018-2019.

There were two simultaneous workshops for seminary formators recently to formulate a uniform minor seminary program across the country. Though a three-year BA Philosophy program was designed and approved by college seminary deans last September 2013 in Zamboanga, it does not automatically imply a three-year college seminary formation program though it fulfills the civil and ecclesiastical academic requirements. Bishops may retain the four-year formation program or shift to three-year formation program.

Aranilla said should the four-year college seminary formation program be retained, there will be a year of Spiritual and Pastoral formation, additional Philosophy subjects leading to BA Philosophy and a ladderized BA-MA Philosophy program which can be accomplished in four years and a summer.

For them to accomplish these goals, the Theology Department should be involved in the preparations.

Aside from structural expenses, additional regular expenses are expected for the seminarians, as well as for employees' and teachers' wages.

"Here in Manila, the senior high school seminarians will be temporarily housed in one side of San Carlos seminary which will be vacated," Alarilla added.

In other dioceses, seminarians will still have their living quarters in the minor seminary buildings.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Luistro recently said his department is doing "everything it can" to make sure that all stake holders' ancieties and fears will be addressed in the next 11 months to a year.

The education official said his office issued provisional permits to some 1,122 private schools which will offer senior high school.

He added after years of planning and engaging education stakeholders, his department identified and mapped over 5,800 public schools set to offer senior high school together with private schools and other institutions in 2016.

They estimate some 1.2 to 1.6 million public school students will enroll in senior high school in 2016.

They also projected some 800,000 to 1.1 million will proceed to senior high school, while some 400,000 to 500,000 will enroll in non-DepEd senior high school.

Luistro said public school students and Education Service Contracting grantees, who will enroll in non-DepEd facilities of their choice, will receive a subsidy from the government for school feels through the proposed DepEd's SHS Voucher Program.

ACT party list lawmaker Tinio said the voucher system may only amount to Php 22,000 and would require a thorough review as poor families may not be able to cope because of the expenses for the SHS program.

Luistro said teachers' salaries for senior high school remains comparable with the monthly salary of college instructors nationwide.

Philippine Normal University head Dr. Ester B. Ogena said they have already began their Outcomes-Based Teachers Education Curriculum (OBTEC) to prepare pre-service teachers for the K+12 curriculum. She said there would be no retrenchment because their professors will be required to finish their post-graduate studies during the lean years of 2016-2017.

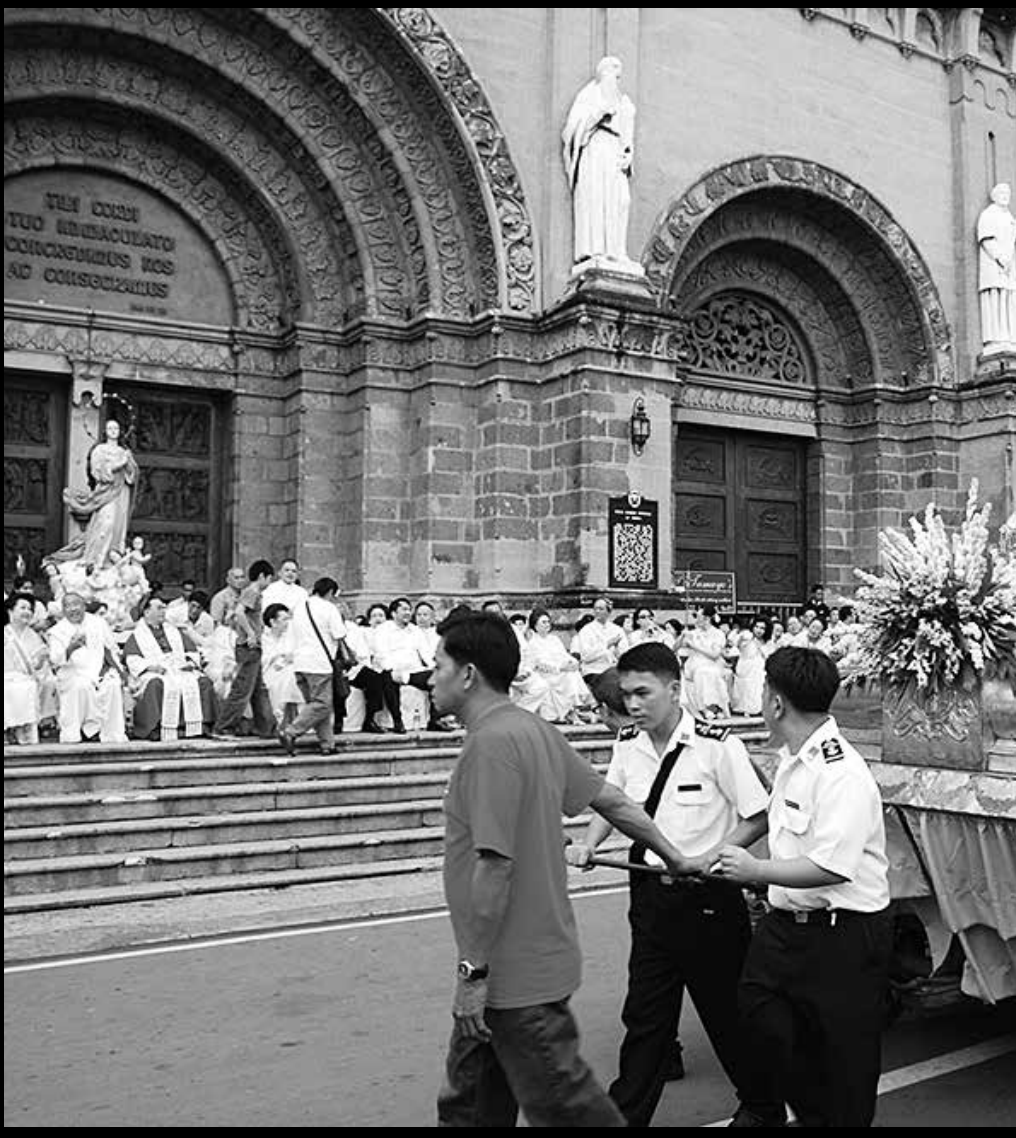
She expressed confidence that if the labor issues are addressed sooner, graduates would truly become at par with their ASEAN neighbors. Ogena added the K+12 program will enhance the ASEAN integration beginning Jan. 1, 2016.

While the government executives assure all and sundry of K+12's optimum effects, still teaching and non-teaching personnel, especially in the private sector, could only hope for a much better deal in the coming months.

Luistro said concerned parties should sit down and talk and offer solutions to specific issues for the program to succeed.

It seems the K+12 program is a bitter but necessary pill for everyone to take.

Queen of Heaven Rejoice Alleluia!



REJOICE and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia! For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia!

We celebrate the Resurrection with a host of joys: the brilliant light of the Paschal candle piercing through the veil of darkness; the heart-thumping Alleluia that breaks the grief of Good Friday and the gloom of Black Saturday; the refreshment of water after a long draught in the desert of sin and penance. For us Filipinos, all these joys peak at the ***"salubong"***, the ***"encuentro"*** where the Blessed Mother, Mary, meets her risen Son, Jesus Christ, and her veil of human grief is lifted by an angel, and henceforth there will be no longer sadness but joy!

The ***salubong*** is nowhere in the Bible. It is a Filipino Church tradition that interprets life as a series of departures and "salubongs", birth, death and rebirth. We cry at every leave-taking, most especially at departures from this life. But our hearts burst with joy when we welcome loved ones, when our eyes catch their coming, when our arms enfold them in salutation. A departure is "death" and the ***salubong*** signals life.

At the ***salubong*** Mary raises her hands to Jesus and bids Him, "Welcome, my Son."

In this Year of the Poor Mary raises her hands to the poor, the dukha, "Welcome, my children!" and she enfolds each one in her loving embrace, and whispers to each one, "Rejoice, the Lord is Risen! My Son is here. There is nothing to fear!"

That is the context of our Easter ***salubong*** with the poor especially this year. Mary welcomes the poor, us, and she brings Jesus to the poor, to us, every time.

Easter in the Year of the Poor

This Easter in the Year of the Poor we turn to Mary, harking to the words that the Holy Father Pope Francis uttered in Tacloban on January 17 to the hundreds of thousands who were wounded and bereaved by the cruelty of a violent storm, a merciless earthquake, and a brutal conflict, and to the millions elsewhere in the country, tuned in to him on that day.

"Let us look to our Mother and, like a little child, let us hold onto her mantle and with a true heart say, 'Mother.' In silence tell your Mother what you feel in your heart. Let us know that we have a Mother, Mary, and a great Brother, Jesus." There were words on the prepared homily that he carried, but he spoke from his heart, in his beloved native language. "Turn to Mary" he gestured with his hands pointing at her image in the altar he fixed his eyes tenderly fixed on her.

The Church of Mary is a Church of the poor

The Mother of God shows the Church a Marian style of evangelizing.

Every time we look at Mary we return to believe in the revolutionary strength of tenderness and affection. In her, we see the humility and the tenderness that are not virtues of the weak but of the strong and who don't need to mistreat others in order to feel self-important. (Cardinal Pietro Parolin, November 20, 2014)

Mary knew from the beginning that to make her heart perfect she must be poor; she must know their yearnings; suffer their sufferings; feel the pain of their destitution; experience the helplessness of their powerlessness; and be so empty that only God can fill the emptiness. There is no poverty that our Blessed Mother does not know. St. Al-

phonsus Liguori said that the Blessed Virgin Mary also told St. Bridget, "All that I could get I gave to the poor, and only reserved a little food and clothing for myself."

The Church of the poor that does not take Mary as mother is an orphan, said Pope Francis. Mary's poverty is generous; it gives and gives and leaves only what is sufficient. Mary's poverty allows her to journey and accompany the poor. Mary's poverty makes her present in the poor, with the poor. That is why her poverty is her strength.

Our Church of the Poor should be like Mary: poor but generous; suffering but compassionate; reserving only what is sufficient for a simple life. In our poverty we are rich.

Pope Francis explains this in Evangelii Gaudium…

"For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor 'his first mercy'. This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have 'this mind… which was in Jesus Christ' (Phil 2:5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a 'special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness'. This option—as Benedict XVI has taught—'is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty'. This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor."

The Church of the poor is a joyful Church

The Church of the Poor is a joyful Church because of the "***salubong***", the encounter with Jesus Christ, who does not shower His people with popularity, earthly power, money, pleasure, but with peace, hope, faith and love. He promises salvation, life everlasting.

This is not to romanticize the poverty of the world today: hunger, homelessness, nakedness, ignorance and aimlessness. These are not the poverty of God but are the fruits of man's inhumanity to man; of selfishness, greed, sloth, lust, gluttony…the capital sins. We assume the poverty of God if, like Mary, we are always ready for our "***salubong***" with Jesus Christ. This is the source of our joy, our happiness: our deep encounter with Jesus, our Savior.

We all know this but we often refuse to accept it. Lent was the season to examine our lives and the poverty we cause others. But we rationalize that development and progress will end poverty; that a robust economy will lift people out of poverty; that globalization will enable us to keep in step with the modern world. Yes, they can, but only if they bring us to Easter, to our "***salubong***". Mary shows us the way to encountering Jesus Christ: it is to be poor like her and to be joyful in our poverty.

The Church of the Poor stands by the feet of Jesus forsaken

The Church of the Poor stands bravely with Jesus Crucified. She is Mary, the Mother of Him who hangs on the Cross. She is at the foot of the Cross, suffering with Him. The Church works with the people made poor by society's unjust structures, discrimination and prejudices. The Church makes her voice heard on moral principles that must govern the conduct of business and government because immoral business practices and government policies make people poor.

On that wood of the Cross her Son hangs in agony as one condemned. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows…he was despised, and we esteemed him not": as one destroyed (cf. Is. 53:3- 5). How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God's "unsearchable judgments"! How completely she "abandons herself to God" without reserve, offering the full assent of the intellect and the will"39 to him whose "ways are inscrutable" (cf. Rom. 11:33)!

Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self- emptying. For "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men": precisely on Golgotha "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self- emptying. This is perhaps the deepest "kenosis" of faith in human history. Through faith the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death; but in contrast with the faith of the disciples who fled, hers was far more enlightened. On Golgotha, Jesus through the Cross definitively confirmed that he was the "sign of contradiction" foretold by Simeon. At the same time, there were also fulfilled on Golgotha the words which Simeon had addressed to Mary: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also."(Redemptoris Mater, 18)

The Church of the Poor is a Church at prayer

She is Mary at the Upper Room praying with the disciples, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They are filled with fear and anxiety. In their helplessness they pray. Our poverty can lead us to helplessness and only through prayer can we bring up our

need; can we find help. Pope Francis shows us this whenever he asks for prayers, whenever he offers his prayers for those in need and in pain, for those who suffer. In his encounter with families on January 16, he asked families to pray together, to pray with and for the poor. He asked for prayers, acknowledging his own need them.

At the conclusion of his address, he said, "Dear friends in Christ, know that I pray for you always! I pray that the Lord may continue to deepen your love for him, and that this love may manifest itself in your love for one another and for the Church. Pray often and take the fruits of your prayer into the world, that all may know Jesus Christ and his merciful love. Please pray also for me, for I truly need your prayers and will depend on them always!"

In our helplessness we pray for Jesus to come. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the helpless and praying disciples and filled them with God's love and peace. In the words of Pope Francis "Mary, whose 'yes' opened the door for God to undo the knot of the ancient disobedience, is the Mother who patiently and lovingly brings us to God, so that he can untangle the knots of our soul by his fatherly mercy."

May in the Year of the Poor

We enter this Easter season with Mary encountering Jesus. Saying yes to God, Mary carried Jesus in her womb and secured the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. As the mystery of Jesus unfolded she silently pondered things in her heart, keeping faith that she would understand them in the fullness of time. Mary joined the trek to Calvary, meeting her Son at the fourth station of the Cross, her heart full of sorrow. And at the foot of the cross she kept vigil and cried at the supreme mystery of her Son's death.

Pope Francis in his encounter with the youth in the University of Santo Tomas admitted he did not have a ready answer to the young girl who lamented the evil things that happen to children. He said he understood her tears, "Only when we are able to weep about the things that you lived can we understand something and answer something. If you do not learn how to cry you cannot be good Christians." Mary weeps with the poor. She is the Mother of mercy; to her do the poor cry.

Mary rejoices with the poor. She is their "salubong", showing them the fruit of her womb—Jesus. Mary is the cause of our joy. She brings Jesus to the poor.

Pope Francis assured us this in Tacloban:

"Please know that Jesus never lets you down. Know that the tenderness of Mary never lets you down. And holding onto her mantle and with the power that comes from Jesus' love on the cross, let us move forward and walk together as brothers and sisters in the Lord."

The poor will always have Mary, the Mother of God. They will always have her Son, Jesus.

Queen of heaven rejoice for the Lord has truly risen alleluia!

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, April 5, 2015

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
CBCP President

Do not allow worries, cynicism to blind us to the needs of the poor

Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle FILE PHOTO

THE annual commemoration of Jesus' resurrection and glorification gives us a glimpse of the eternal life that He, who became human like us, now possesses—a life that will not be touched by sin, destruction and death again. His risen life is our hope, the pledge of our future glory. But Jesus' resurrection does not cut us off from our earthly life and concerns. It is not an excuse to ignore and to be indifferent toward our world. Rather the light from Jesus' resurrection makes us see more clearly the truth about our complex human condition while urging us on towards a glorious future.

Some words spoken by the Risen Lord during his appearances to various people seem to be addressed to us Filipinos in our present situation. The eternally reigning Lord is speaking to us now. Let us listen to some of these words.

To the disciples gathered in a room he asked, "Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

(Luke 24:38). To a troubled Mary Magdalene he said, "Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" (John 20:15). The Risen Lord offers the same questions to us especially in moments of fear, doubts, distrust and grieving. He leads us to our hearts so we could reflect, explore and find meaning. Outbursts of panic, phobia, worry and sorrow need the calming influence of reflection and meditation. The Risen Lord asks questions that make us pause and look into the reasons (or lack of reason) for our terror and anxiety. Let us listen to Him.

To the disciples still unable to believe that He was indeed alive and standing before them He asked, "Have you anything here to eat?" (Luke 24:41). The glorious Lord comes to us through our humble, simple, poor and suffering brothers and sisters. Even while possessing all authority and power, he deems it worthy to reside among the lowly, those who lack basic necessities of life. He invites us not to allow worries and cynicism to blind us to the needs of the poor among us. Let us behold the Risen Jesus in every needy person and see a neighbor, a brother or sister.

I pray that this Easter we may promptly respond to the Risen Lord's greeting, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21). Let us go to all the corners of our country as missionaries of peace.

+LUIS ANTONIO G. CARDINAL TAGLE
Archbishop of Manila

Move on with the joy of the risen Jesus

EASTER is the greatest and most important feast of our faith. If Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is irrelevant and meaningless, dry and dead.

Easter beckons us to go beyond the customary greetings and feasting. We must continue the mission of the risen Christ by being ready to bring His message to more people.

Be like the risen Jesus. Look at the risen Jesus. Love the risen Jesus. Follow the risen Jesus.

What is it in Jesus that we must carry with you through life? It is His JOY.

We all yearn for joy. We work for joy. Yet, in its quest we have often failed to find it. We are bundles of shattered dreams; or we are showcases of fulfilled dreams, which leave us empty. We have worked hard, but are frustrated; we have struggled, but feel the weight of disappointment. We are victims of calamities, natural or man-made, or victims of our own coldness in the face of overwhelming suffering.

Remember Yolanda. Remember Mamasapano. Remember the frustrating unsolved problem of government corruption. Remember the loneliness of our loved ones toiling abroad. Our memory is full of broken hopes and dreams. The litany of frustrations is endless. But we have hope.

Our calling is to return to the joy that comes from the Gospel and from sharing the Gospel. That is a joy that comes neither from a covetous heart nor from the frivolous pursuit of pleasures, nor from a blunted conscience. It comes rather first and foremost from a renewed personal encounter with the risen Jesus Christ. That is the goal of Christianity—encounter with Jesus Christ in joy.

RAYMOND SEBASTIAN

This joy can be real and deeply personal in our world. Consequently, it is a joy which needs urgently to be shared today in all its fullness-– no matter the danger, no matter the ridicule, no matter the dying that it may entail.

Move on with joy of the risen Jesus. Carry on with the peace of Jesus. The world needs the Lord. May you bring the risen Jesus with you wherever fate may lead us!

From the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist, Dagupan City, April 5, 2015

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS

Social doctrine of the Church

PARTICULARLY on the occasion of this Holy Week—which acquires a special significance, a particular relevance during these difficult times in the country now submersed in poverty and immersed in disunity primarily on account of a questionable governance with its likewise questionable done acts and on-going agenda—it is quite timely and proper to consider certain key teachings of the "Social Doctrine of the Church" even but considering that this distinct and special week in the Church calendar is basically about the love of God for man. And rightly so because He made man as a composite of body and spirit—neither of body alone as brute animals nor as spirit alone as angelic creatures.

It is commonly said, and somehow shamefully too, that the "Social Doctrine of the Church" is the "Best-kept Secret in the World". Though sad to hear and to know, it is difficult to say that such is but a downright falsity, especially in conjunction with the People of God themselves—the laity, the religious and the clergy as a whole. And while it can be readily granted that a good number of the members of the clergy in particular know much about Philosophy and Theology with their significant and complementary orthodox sciences, the truth remains that the same Churchmen themselves are not that acquainted with the "Social Doctrine of the Church." Sad but true.

Needless to say, the Church is very much concerned with and attentive to spirituality, religiosity and many other related profoundly moral and supernatural matters. But while the Church is concerned with heavenly truths, She is also attentive to earthly realities. And while the Church first and foremost has God in mind, She is likewise much preoccupied with the concerns of man formed by God to nothing less than His own image. In other words, the Church is definitely concerned with the significance of faith and morals especially in conjunction with the life to come. At the same time however, as already noted, the Church is duly also attentive to the import of reason and ethics in conjunction with earthly realities here and now.

And this brings to mind the three main categories of teaching and practice present in the world today. One, the verticalist approach whereby there is but exclusive reference to divinity and man as most religious sects do—such as the so-called "charismatic" groupings established here and there. Two, the horizontalist perspective where in there is exclusive concern about man and man—such as what basically atheistic movements say and act upon. Three, the genuine and integral Christian vision and mission of the Catholic Church in terms of preaching and acting in the conjunction with God and man in the vertical dimension ("Love God") plus in the sphere of man and man ("Love man") in the horizontal plane. When combined, the teachings thus distinctly proclaim the exact image of the Cross of Christ in terms of its vertical and horizontal composite.

Environment

"The relationship of man with the world is a constitutive part of his human dignity. This relationship is in turn the result of another still deeper relationship between man and God." (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Chap. 10, IV, p. 263 ss)

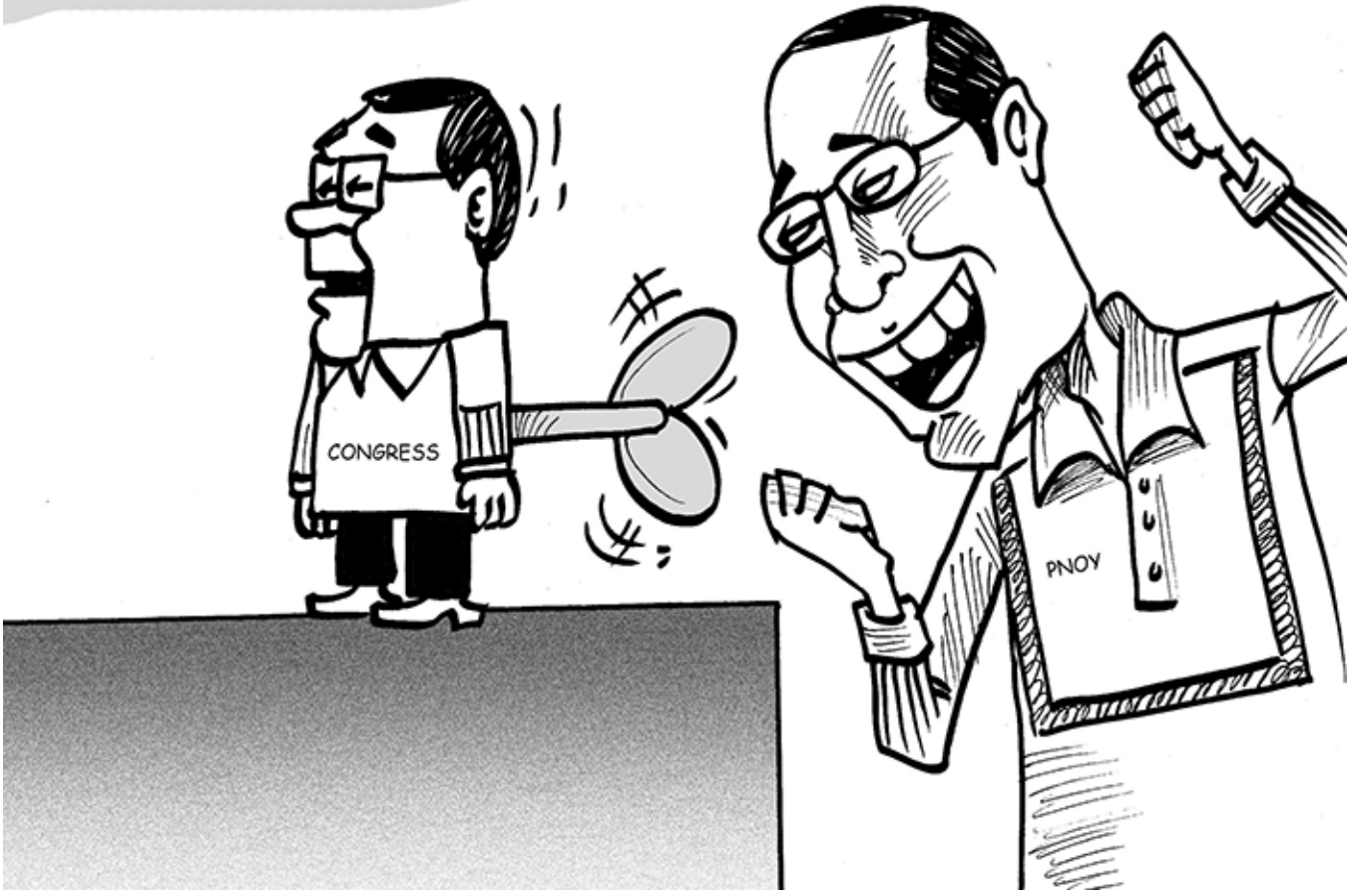
THE above quotation is but one composite truth that is both in the natural order, as well as in the supernal sphere. It consists of some kind of both a simple yet also profound triangle of objective truths—in the following descending order: God-World-Man. The following questions thus come to mind: What is the world for without man and how would man be without the world? Is man for the world or is the world for man? Does the world come from man or does man come from the world? If man does not come from the world and the world does not come from man, where do the world and man come from? More than a mere academic or simple speculative exercise, the above questions raised are worth answering in all sincerity and truth.

All the above queries have the following answers—not only according to the reach of the mind in line with the understanding as well as with the feeling of someone who is realistic and rational, objective and logical: Man who cannot even make but himself, could not have made the world. The world being devoid of intelligence and feeling, could not have brought man about, considering that the latter has a rational faculty, spirit, emotion, and other superior qualitative attributes the world is altogether devoid of. So is it is that if man could not have come from the world, and the world could not have come from man, there is but one objective truth and sound conclusion in the light of human reason and in the sphere of faith: Both the world and man come from God—or from a Divinity.

And considering that the world is for man, man may not but care for the world, viz., caring for the world as required by what nature reveals and dictated by reason and ethics. In the same way, considering that man comes from God, he may not but recognize His omnipotence and goodness. His providence and benevolence. And considering furthermore that the world likewise comes from God, it is incumbent upon man to protect and preserve its natural integrity and connatural features. The above premises and conclusions are neither that profound nor that complex in their respective meaning and implication such that only those who have superior intelligence and supernatural faith could understand and affirm. Honesty and sincerity are also effective means to know the truths not only about the world but also about man and about God.

So is it that just as the world has man to care for, man cannot but also care for the world—simply for their mutual advantage and benefit. And as man attends to and protects the world from being abused and wasted, so does the world in turn attend and protect man from being victimized by a killer world. And GOD? He made the world for man!

The Philippine political scene



IF politics in the country is not really hopeless, neither is it by and large blameless. And while there are some politicians in the Philippines who are still honest, trustworthy and competent, many are downright national liabilities and local impediments to the emergence of truth, the rule of justice, the reign of peace. Hereunder are some of the downright negative, glaring features of the now obtaining Philippine Political Scene:

• The constitutional principle of the separation of powers among the three branches of government is easily set aside by political-reciprocal advantages, especially through the misuse and abuse of public funds.

• The Executive Department successfully and delightfully collaborates with its many political cohorts in Congress in the passage of its pet projects—a given phenomenon that is not wanting in generous grants from the former.

• The interests of some well-identified, politically powerful families and the few, avaricious rich clans are nonchalantly pitted against the common good and public welfare of multi-million poor and helpless citizens.

• The fundamental ethical norm of the equal application of the law, especially in view of the administration of justice in response to even hideous crimes is markedly jeopardized on account of political considerations.

• There is practically no public accountability of the big resources, plus the overwhelming gains of government-owned corporations headed by political protégées, especially in luxurious gambling corporations.

• The electoral process has become systematically subverted by those in tenure of political power such that after everything worthwhile is claimed to have been allegedly corrected, political dynasties still retain their rule.

• The reality remains that even to these times, the Philippine Political Scene is anything but acceptable to have and live with, then there is needs to have a good look at our political culture that can be rightfully considered as the basic cause of the above-described Political Scene.

In more ways than one, all the above-mentioned lamentable political factors plus their accompanying detestable political products in terms of self-serving political figures are inextricably connected with the poverty-stricken economic standing of the Philippines that, in turn, necessarily brings about the miserable social standing of a big number of Filipinos.

As the demonic saying goes on the part of certain powerful, happy and contented politicians: "Keep the people miserable and we remain untouchable." In response thereto, may impoverished and pitiful citizens declare: "We allowed you to go up. We can also eventually bring you down."

The Stone Cutter

There was once a stone cutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life. One day he passed a wealthy merchant's house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. "How powerful that merchant must be!" thought the stone cutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant, enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined, but envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself.

Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. "How powerful that official is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a high official!" Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. "How powerful the sun is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the sun!" Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth, so that his light could no longer shine on everything below.

KHALID MAHMOOD

"How powerful that storm cloud is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a cloud!" Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force, and realized that it was the wind.

"How powerful it is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the wind!" Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it - a huge, towering rock. "How powerful that rock is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a rock!" Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth.

But as he stood there, he heard the sound of a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface, and felt himself being changed. "What could be more powerful than I, the rock?" he thought. He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stone cutter.

Real Meaning of Peace

THERE once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures.

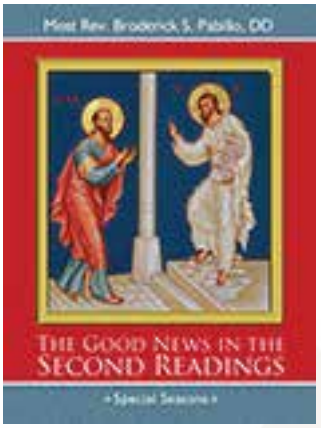
But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them. One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest—in perfect peace.

The king chose the second picture.

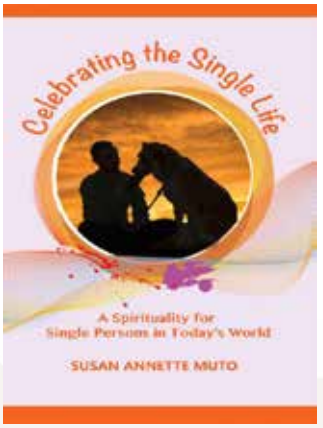
The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.



The Good News in the Second Readings
Special Seasons of the Liturgical Year

Most Rev. Broderick S. Pabillo, DD

IF you are one to take your Sunday Mass reflections seriously, this is the book for you. Bishop Broderick Pabillo's insights into the Second Readings, which are always supporting passages for the Gospel for the day, help deepen and enrich the most important Eucharistic celebration of the week. Not just for homilists, this book will be widely appreciated by the no nonsense Catholic who wants to be grounded on Scripture and to grow in love of God's Word.

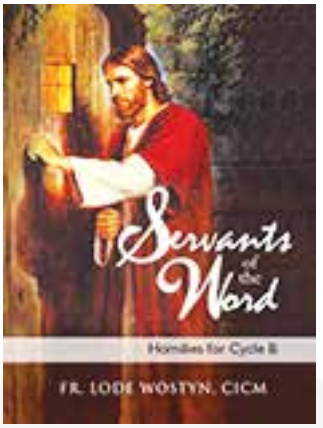


Celebrating the Single Life
A Spirituality for Single Persons in Today's World

Susan Annette Muto

HOW does the modern single person strive to live with a soul on fire for God? This book by Susan Muto is a much-needed resource in a world that often seems oriented towards the romantically entangled or the permanently committed. But what everyone seems to be forgetting is that the single person—the never-been-married, the widowed or separated—is always in a relationship, with God, of course.

Spiritual Book News praises Muto's work saying: "This book will enable all never-married, widowed, or divorced persons to grow as fully human, fully Christian people." The author also proposes a balanced perspective on the single life, not one seen through rose-colored glasses or one of quiet, resigned despair. According to Saint Anthony Messenger, "When the author suggests we 'celebrate the single life' she does not promise that we will never feel loneliness, pain, or frustration. What she offers are gentle proddings toward a life of intimacy with God."

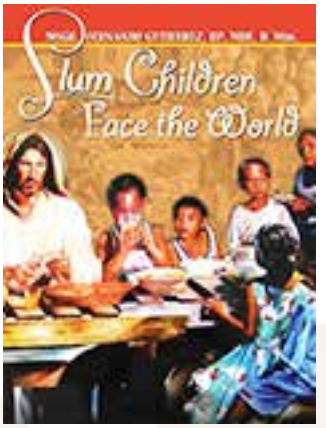


Servants of the Word
Homilies for Cycle B

Fr. Lode Wostyn, CICM

TIMELY. This is one word to describe Fr. Lode Wostyn, CICM's publication Servants of the Word, Homilies for Cycle B (forty-one Sunday homilies Cycle B, 2011-2012). The book is a testament to the riches that often lies hidden and undiscovered in the hearts and minds of preachers, inspirers and wise men and women in the Church. These homilies have been "locked up long enough in Fr. Lode's private file." First given to the Sunday Mass goers of the chapel of Queen of Peace Convent in Quezon City, the homilies can now benefit and fortify countless more. These words of inspiration, are precisely for the "agents of evangelization", from bishops, catechists, priests, and religious to the lay leaders of the BECs, youth leaders and educators.

What place does not need the Word of God? None because "[every where there is an] area of life where the need is great for a creative evangelical response to a changing world." According to Sr. Ma. Ramona Mendiola, ICM, "printing these homilies is laudable, coinciding as it does with Pope Francis' strong and often repeated appeal for the entire Church to go out and bring the message of Jesus to the world. And these homilies are a fitting response to his clarion call."



Slum Children Face the World

Msgr. Fernando Gutierrez, HP, MRE, D., Min

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

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

CATHOLIC INITIATIVE FOR ENLIGHTENED MOVIE APPRECIATION

The Longest Ride

DIRECTOR: George Tillman Jr.
LEAD CAST: Britt Robertson, Scott Eastwood, Alan Alda, Jack Huston, Oona Chaplin, Melissa Benoist, Lolita Davidovich
SCREENWRITER: Nicholas Sparks (novel), Craig Bolotin (screenplay)
PRODUCER: Marty Bowen, H.H. Cooper, Wyck Godfrey, Michele Imperato, Theresa Park, James Paul, Mitchell Smith, Nicholas Sparks, Robert Teitel
EDITOR: Jason Ballantine
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Mark Isham
GENRE: Drama, Romance
CINEMATOGRAPHER: David Tattersall
DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox
LOCATION: North Carolina, United States
RUNNING TIME: 139 minutes

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT: 3.5
MORAL ASSESSMENT: 2.5
MTRCB RATING: R-13
CINEMA RATING: V 18

Luke Collins (Scott Eastwood) is set to reclaim his title as champion bull rider after last year's nasty fall. At a rodeo, he meets Sophia Danco (Britt Robertson), an art student ready for an internship in New York City. They spend time getting to know each other but realized they are worlds apart to make the relationship work. He needs to ride a bull to save their ranch while she needs to fulfil her dreams in the big city. In one of their dates, they rescue Ira Levinson (Alan Alda), a 90-year-old man and his box, from a car crash. While in hospital, Ira (portrayed by Jack Huston as a young man) shares memories of his beloved wife Ruth (Oona Chaplin) and their enduring love. Will Luke choose the 8-second bull ride championship or the 'longest ride called life' with Sophia?

If you've read a Nicholas Sparks' novel or seen any of the film adaptations, you'd know the formula. Girl meets boy from a different background, they fall in love but there's a hindrance. You don't get only one story but two. There's another, older couple who faced the same dilemma, and through letters this older couples' story inspire the younger ones. Tragedy strikes, but it doesn't end there.

The Longest Ride doesn't veer of course. Be that as it may, the film showcases the talents of its actors. Eastwood shows promise and Robertson essays her role well. It is the young Levinson couple, Oona Chaplin and Jack Huston, who bring their endearing 1940s characters to life. Although the film weaves the two stories together, one can't help asking why the young Ira had to write Ruth about something she herself just experienced. There are beautiful scenic shots of North Carolina and the bull riding scenes are gripping. The dialogue can be improved and some scenes are just too long – it would have been better if it were less than 120 minutes.

The Longest Ride, like all Nicholas Sparks' story, is not your typical Hollywood romance. It shows good, old-fashioned chivalry and dedication to duty before self interest. Love is not a one-night-stand that crumbles when faced with difficult situations. "Love requires sacrifice... always." It is noble and true. It allows the beloved his/her freedom and it endures, no matter what. This is not confined to romantic love alone. The film shows care and concern for one's parent, neighbor, and friend, even at the cost of one's life.

The film may garner negative comments from critics for being unrealistic and sappy but it stands firm on its Christian view of love and its four forms: agape, phileo, storge, and eros.

CINEMA gives this film an V18 rating for extended sex scenes/nudity, war and violence.

LEBANON. Greek Orthodox patriarch: World remains silent about missing bishops

Commemorating the second anniversary of the kidnapping of two Syrian bishops, the Greek Orthodox patriarch lamented the indifference of the international community about their fate. "We hope that the bishops are alive, but unfortunately the world is silent and nobody has provided physical evidence," Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X of Antioch said in a statement he read at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy April 19 at Our Lady of Balamand Monastery in northern Lebanon, near Tripoli. The bishops—Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna and Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul, both of Aleppo, Syria—were kidnapped April 22, 2013, in the province of Aleppo. Metropolitan Paul is the brother of the patriarch. Patriarch John called for "the whole community and international organizations to mobilize" to inquire about the fate of the missing bishops. "We tried to negotiate with those who can help in this matter, but unfortunately there was total silence," he said. ***(CNS)***

ISRAEL. In destroyed Israeli village, exiled residents unite at the church

For the elders of Iqrit, their biggest regret in life is not having been able to raise their children together. On April 13, they congregated with the younger generations in the old Church of St. Mary for Easter Monday Mass in this destroyed Melkite village perched on a sloping hill in Western Galilee. As youngsters, they and their families left the village in October 1948, shortly after the Israeli war of independence, at the behest of the fledgling Israeli army, which said they would be allowed to return after 15 days. The villagers had hoisted the white flag atop their church as the soldiers entered, and the village priest received them with a Bible, and salt and bread as signs of peace and rapport. But as Israel, which uses the Jewish calendar for holidays, is set to celebrate its 67th independence day April 23, the people of Iqrit are still waiting to return to their village. A July 1951 Supreme Court decision ruled residents could return due to a lack of evacuation orders. Five months after the court's decision, formal evacuation orders were issued. On Christmas Eve 1951, Iqrit was destroyed except for the church. Villagers were finally allowed to re-enter their village in the summer of 1971. ***(CNS)***

MALAYSIA. One-fifth of country's animals endangered

At least one-fifth of mammal species found in Malaysia is facing extinction. This is revealed by the data provided by the World Bank, according to which in 2014 as many as 70 species out of 336 mammals were in danger. In this special classification Malaysia is the seventh in the world, while in Southeast Asia it is second only to Indonesia which counts 184 species at risk (the first in the world). This makes Malaysia the most dangerous country in the world for species already at risk. The list of endangered mammals include the Sumatra Capricorn, the Sumatran rhinoceros, the dugong, and the Malaysian tiger. Although the World Bank does not specify the causes of this situation, it is assumed that they have to do with activities such as deforestation, over-development, illegal trade and poaching. ***(Asianews)***

SAUDI ARABIA. Protests over execution of Indonesian maid

Siti Zainab binti Duhri Rupa was executed April 14 in Saudi Arabia. Indonesian authorities expressed "deep sorrow" for her death and issued a statement protesting against Saudi Arabia's failure to notify them before carrying out the death sentence. Speaking on behalf of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi expressed "disappointment" for how the execution was carried out, adding that the Indonesian government would "continue to defend its citizens" on death row "in Saudi Arabia and in other nations in the world." Saudi authorities executed the domestic worker—who was convicted in the killing her employer Nourah binti Abdullah Duhem to Maruba—without informing their Indonesian counterpart, a decision that led the Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry to protest. ***(Asianews)***

INDONESIA. Gov't bans alcohol in stores

The display and sale of beer to the public will be prohibited on the Indonesian archipelago; a ban that applies to all commercial sales activities, including shops, malls and street stalls. The Minister for Trade Rachmat Gobel explains that the ban was voted on January 16 and that it has taken four months for the phased implementation of the new norm. Now, there will be no more "changes" or exceptions: offenders will be punished according to law. For decades, the Indonesians have been consumers of discrete quantities of alcohol, both traditional and imported or "Western" drinks, such as beer, champagne, vodka and wine. ***(Asianews)***

PHILIPPINES. Justice elusive for murdered environmental activists

Environmental and human rights groups in the Philippines will mark Earth Day, April 22, by mourning what they describe as the "elusive quest for justice" for murdered environmental activists in the country. "Let us not forget our environmental heroes this Earth Day … by committing to continue searching for justice for our environmental martyrs," said Leon Dulce, spokesman of Task Force-Justice for Environmental Defenders. A report released this week by the London-based watchdog Global Witness showed that almost a third of the 25 environmental activists killed worldwide last year in cases related to mining projects were from the Philippines. The report, titled 'How Many More?', said that in total nine anti-mining activists were murdered in the Philippines in 2014. ***(UCAN)***

INDIA. Debate on anti-conversion law deepens

The Indian government's push for a national law banning religious conversions hit a roadblock this week when the Ministry of Law and Justice said the federal government had no powers to enact such a law. However, the debate continues with the government pressing on. The federal law ministry on April 15 told the government that a national law restricting changes of religion could violate the federal system, as the constitution stipulates that passing laws on such matters rests with individual states, according to local media reports. Religious conversions have become a sensitive subject in India after the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in Delhi a year ago. Nationalist Hindu groups have been clamoring for a national law banning conversions, claiming that Christians and Muslims convert hundreds of poor people every year, attracting converts with promises of social services. Seven Indian states have already enacted laws restricting conversions as a matter of "public order," which is listed in the constitution as a subject for which states can enact legislation. ***(UCAN)***

KOREA. Francis effect sees jump in baptisms, catechumens

The Catholic Church in South Korea has begun to grow, after a small decline from 2010, which saw a drop in the number of new believers. According to the National Conference of Bishops, in fact, in 2014, 124 748 baptisms were celebrated: this is an increase of 5% compared to 2013. Daejeon Bishop Lazzaro You Heung-sik, told AsiaNews: "We are very happy about these numbers. It is a result of Pope Francis' pastoral visit to Korea, a visit that has affected not only Catholics but the entire national society ". According to statistics, the South Korean Catholic population has increased in absolute terms by 2.2%: the faithful are now 5.57 million, or 10.6% of the total population (around 52.4 million). This considering the fact that, according to the last census available, about 50% of South Koreans are self-declared atheists or non-believers. According to Msgr. You, who is also president of the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace, "the days that Pope Francis shared with us in August 2014 contributed to this increase. His love for the outcast, for the families who have lost a loved one in the Sewol disaster, for the disabled and migrant workers had a deep impact on our society". The trend, the prelate concluded, "is increasing. According to partial data, the number of those who have applied to enter the catechumenate has also risen. We expect an increase in baptisms for the upcoming Easter". ***(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