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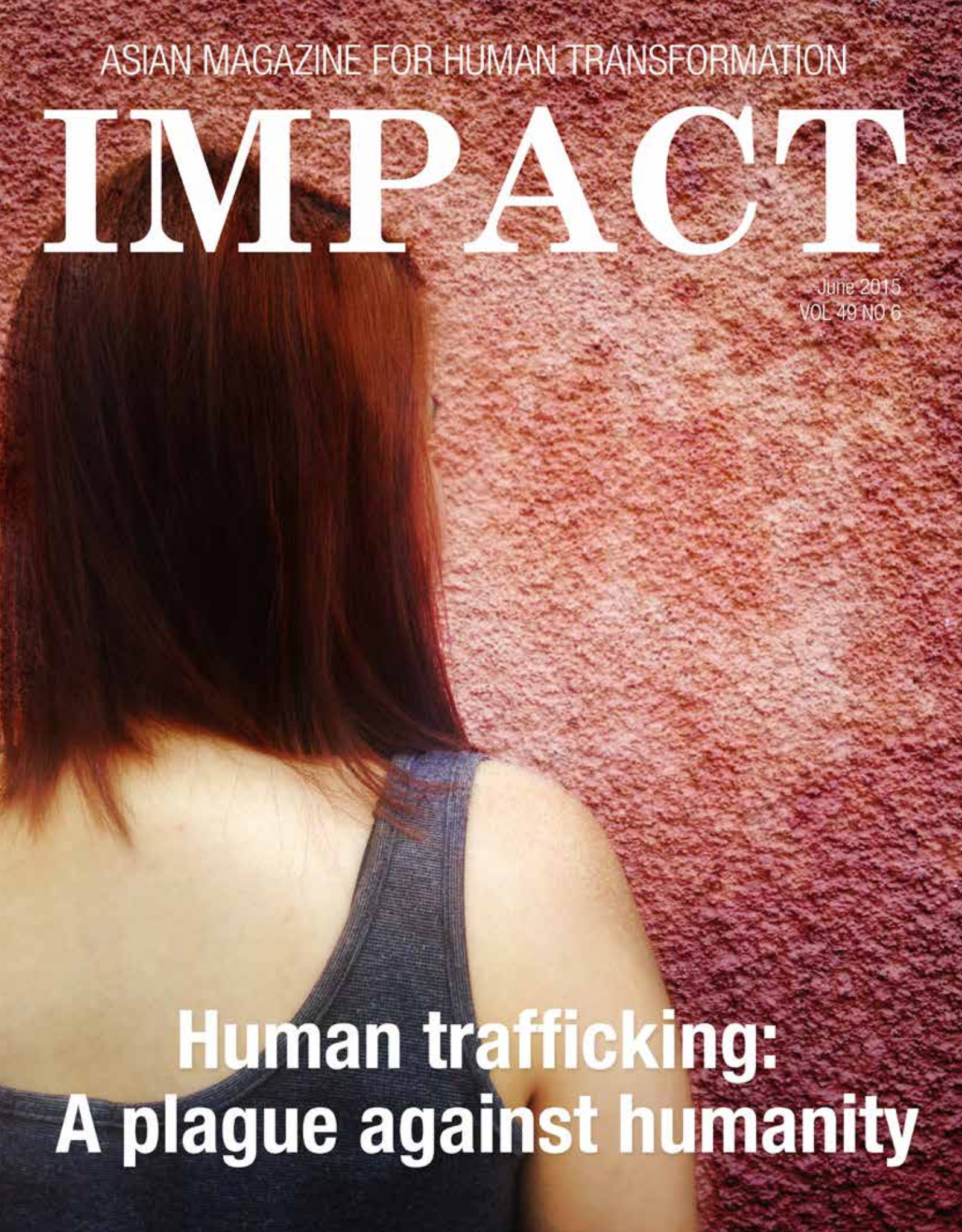

Human trafficking: A plague against humanity

IMPACT

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AREOPAGUS SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ASIA, INC.

Editor
PEDRO QUITORIO III

Associate Editor
NIRVA'ANA DELACRUZ

Staff Writers
CHARLES AVILA
EULY BELIZAR
ROY CIMAGALA
ROY LAGARDE
LOPE ROBREDILLO
CARMELO ACUÑA
KRIS BAYOS

Sales & Advertising Supervisor
GLORIA FERNANDO

Circulation Manager
MARCELITA JUANITE

Design Artist
RONALYN REGINO

COVER PHOTO BY SKY ORTIGAS

Editorial Office: Ground Flr., Holy Face of Jesus Center & Convent, 1111 F. R. Hidalgo Street, Quiapo, Manila • Tel (632) 404-2182 • Telefax (632) 404-1612 • Visit our website at www.impactmagazine.net For inquiries, comments, and contributions, email us at: impactmagazine2012@gmail.com

EDITOR'S NOTE

LAST week the House of Representatives has passed on second reading the so-called economic charter change bill, formally known as Resolution of Both Houses 1 (RBH-1). Co-authored by Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr., and Senator Ralph Recto, RBH-1 seeks to enable the removal of Constitutional restrictions on foreign ownership of Philippine businesses and property through the insertion of the phrases "unless provided by law" into the pertinent provisions of the Constitutions.

The Resolution that was well-endorsed by administration lackeys of both Houses of Congress provides "that a voice of three-fourths (3/4) of all its Members, each House voting separately, and pursuant to Article VII of the Constitution, to propose amendments to Articles XII, XIV and XVI of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, with the following proposals…"

Judging from posts in social media and from comments of independent groups and individuals, this move to change the Constitution is emerging to be very unpopular. For one, this administration and its party line is plunging into the pit of a serious credibility crisis. They never bothered even to approximate their promised legislations that could have substantiated their slogans and probably propel this country towards real prosperity—the likes of the anti-poverty bill, the freedom of information bill, the anti-dynasty bill and a couple more. Some well-meaning citizens harbor suspicions of some sinister plot from somewhere in the corridors of power that stand to benefit once the country open wide its doors to foreign capitalists.

But granting that amendments to the economic provisions of the Constitution happens, this will only be a formality of a "de facto" invasion of foreign capitalists that has been wreaking havoc on the Philippine economy for some years now. Through the labyrinth of intricate corporate layering and dummies, foreign tycoons from neighboring Asian countries are in control of the country's economy by being the majority owners of the Philippines' public utility enterprise. These tycoons are presently the controlling stockholders of the country's biggest public utility firms in electric power, communications, water, transportation and, more so, other big businesses such as mining.

Thanks to the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, who rushed to pose these questions: 1. What do we, as a nation, stand to gain from relaxing the provisions now deemed restrictive? 2. How are we assured that the resources of the country, both natural and human, benefit Filipino nationals principally? 3. What are the human, social and environmental costs of lifting present limits to foreign participation in Philippine economic and business affairs?

Truth to tell, whenever moves to amend the Philippine Constitution are in the offing, one can be more or less certain that they are meant to advance a political agenda that is not inclusive. This country has not yet reached a political maturity wherein the common good is given prominence. The Philippine political culture is what needs changing, not the charter.

This issue opens with Sonny Africa's article on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Our cover story is written by our feature writer Kris Bayos on the scourge of human trafficking. Read on.

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QUOTE IN THE ACT

"Statistics on waste are very concerning: a third of food products end up under this heading."

Pope Francis, in his message to the members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in an audience last June 11, 2015; after disclosing that consumerism will be a key theme in forthcoming encyclical on environment, he bewailed food waste and the indifference of many nations when faced with issues of hunger.

"What do we, as a nation, stand to gain from relaxing the provisions now deemed restrictive?"

Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan and president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in a recent statement exhorting a more exhaustive study on the economic provision of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines in the face of the calls by the leadership of both Houses of Congress to amend the economic provisions of the Charter.

"One year before the national elections, it would be timely to stop the proliferation of loose firearms to ensure a peaceful election and to eradicate 'private armies' who serve as goons during elections."

Isabelo Abarquez, Crispin Varquez, Emmanuel Trance, Bishops of the island of Samar in the Philippines; in la etter to President Simeon Benigno Aquino, appealing to stay the recent spate of killings in Calbayog City.

"Now, Nepal is safe."

Kripasure Sherpa, Nepal's minister for culture, tourism, and civil aviation; at the opening of government heritage sites on June 15, in a bid to recover tourism revenues in the region hit by the recent earthquake; but United Nations officials are worried that the buildings are not entirely ready.

"She is too slow, too closed to be able to deliver a timely message to her people at a time like this."

Choi Jin, director of the Institute of Presidential Leadership in Seoul, South Korea; on the plummeting image of president Park Geun-hye for fumbling in her efforts to contain an outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, just a year after her administration was criticized for its response to the ferry sinking that killed 304 people.

APEC's epic fail: Philippine underdevelopment

The organization is unabashed in pushing for neoliberal policies, the biggest reason for the exclusion and worsening of conditions for so many in the world in the last decades

BY SONNY AFRICA

The "FuntaSea" theme of the show for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) senior officials held last weekend and its venue, at Boracay's premier resort Shangri-La Boracay, were inadvertently appropriate. They reflected what the Philippine government's hosting this year of APEC appears to be grounded on: a certain amount of fantasy and exclusion.

World-famous Boracay was the venue for the most recent of the series of APEC meetings to be held in the Philippines this year which will culminate in the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in November. The Summit meeting of APEC's heads of state will be the Aquino administration's last big international event before the May 2016 elections.

Pushing globalization

Year-round meetings are the lifeblood of APEC and important venues to push its aging and discredited agenda of 1990s globalization. These are well-attended by leaders, officials and other bureaucrats of APEC's 21 member countries. Just concluded on the most exclusive resorts on the famed island of Boracay were the 10-day 2nd APEC Senior Official Meeting (or SOM2, after the first one wrapped up in Clark and Subic in February) and the 2-day APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) meeting. Some 1,500 delegates reportedly attended.

The theme of the Philippine hosting of APEC in 2015 of "Building Inclusive Economies, Building a Better World" is a fantasy in coming from an organization that is unabashed in its push for neoliberal free market policies of globalization. More than anything else—even more than corruption—these policies have been the biggest reason for the exclusion and worsening of conditions for so many in the Philippines, Asia-Pacific, and the rest of the world in the last decades.

Founded in post-Cold War 1989, APEC has always been about pushing the globalization agenda so beneficial for the advanced capitalist economies, their biggest transnational corporations (TNCs), and their junior corporate partners in the Third World. In 1994 its member states committed to "complete the achievement of our goal of free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific no later than the year 2020" with the industrialized economies achieving this "no later than 2010" and the so-called developing economies "no later than 2020".

The 21 members constitute a large part of global economy at some 40% of the world population, around 50% of international trade, and up to 60% of global gross domestic product (GDP). Much of these are accounted for by its three biggest economic powers: United States (US), Japan and China.

There was a relative slowdown in APEC activity after the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its agreements in the mid-1990s, upon the Asian crisis of 1997, and especially with the US distracted by its dot-com bubble and crash in 2000, as well as its "war on terror" after 2001. There has been renewed activity in APEC since the late 2000s though with the US giving greater attention to it in line with its pivot-cum-rebalance to Asia versus a rising China.

Positive-sounding economic analysis and mechanical use of textbook neoclassical economics is complemented with a heavy dose of GDP, foreign investment and export figures to make the whole pro-globalization package seem scientific and grounded in reality. Asia is reportedly becoming the world's economic center of gravity with a dynamism unleashed by the removal of trade and investment barriers since the 1980s. This has supposedly resulted in development although the numbers for these, curiously, are not as forthcoming.

The Philippines in particular is portrayed as the poster child of this globalization-driven era of development, prosperity and progress. The Aquino administration is happy to promote this fantasy with relatively rapid GDP growth being its most consistent propaganda peg to claim political legitima-

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Philippines 2015 will focus on "Building inclusive economies, building a better world." **GOBIERNO DE CHILE**

cy amid all the controversies surrounding it. It is also quite willing to spend for the illusion.

The government will spend Php4.6 billion on its hosting of APEC this year which is almost as much as the entire Php4.8 billion international commitments fund budget last year (the budget item that APEC is charged to). This does not even include other budgets for improving airports, roads and tourism sites in and around APEC venues.

Boracay outcomes

What have the recent beach-setting meetings been about? APEC is not a negotiating platform that takes up and reaches binding agreements. Yet, it still has a significant influence in pushing economic policy changes. It provides not just the high-level political venues such as its leaders' meetings but also has numerous, frequent and sustained technical meetings year-round. These have apparently gone far in facilitating and even pushing binding agreements in more formal negotiating venues such as the WTO, as its Director-General Roberto Azevêdo affirmed when he was in Boracay last week.

So it is meaningful, albeit predictable, that the trade ministers at Boracay this weekend reaffirmed their "commitment to promote trade and investment liberalization [and] building an open economy in the Asia Pacific region". They also declared "the centrality and primacy of the multilateral trading system under the auspices of the WTO" and their support for concluding the WTO's Doha round of negotiations. There were also additional steps towards eventually creating the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), specifically the groundwork in terms of the studies for this to be completed by 2016.

After some three decades already

of globalization policies meant to deal with chronic crisis, there is by now much less to expect in terms of drastic changes to trade and investment policies. Liberalization has already advanced greatly and much of the trade- and investment-related work now is in its details.

The just concluded APEC meetings tackled opening up trade specifically in environmental goods and services. But it also took up such other matters as more aggressively bringing in micro, small and medium enterprises into big TNC-dominated global processes, rules of origin requirements, trade facilitation, global supply chains, connectivity, using information and communication technologies, developing a labour force attuned to TNC needs, regulatory coherence, and many others.

This is not to say that the new mega-deals on the horizon like the FTAAP and, looming larger, the China-centered Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the US-centered Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) are not going to introduce anything drastic. On the contrary, the TPP for instance is unprecedented in its breadth and intrusiveness in national economies beyond the accustomed trade and investment liberalization free trade deals so far. Among others it meddles in government enterprises and seeks to give foreign corporations rights that override the breadth of government regulatory powers. This is aside from the strident defense of monopolies on technology and so-called intellectual property.

Philippine underdevelopment

Is APEC's unrepentant and unrelenting advocacy of globalization justified? We can just take the case of the Philippines as an example. The country has been liberalizing recklessly since the 1980s and is the worst off for it.

The average most-favored nation (MFN) applied overall tariff today of a little over 6% is less than one-fourth of the rates of over 25% at the end of the 1980s. It is also lower than tariffs in neighboring Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia and even lower than in economic powers South Korea and China. Foreign investors are allowed from 60 up to 100% ownership in all but a handful of sectors. There are restrictions in telecommunications, power, transport, agriculture, and mass media. But even if countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and China did not also have similar controls, the need for these restrictions for national development would still be there.

The Philippine government will spend Php4.6 billion on its hosting of APEC this year which is almost as much as the entire Php4.8 billion international commitments fund budget last year.

But what has globalization wrought in the country? Growth has certainly picked up from an annual average of 2% in the 1980s, to 2.8% in the 1990s, to 4.6% in the 2000s, to 6.3% in the period 2010-2014. The current 5-year average places the 2010s on track to being the second fastest decade of economic growth after the 7.1% clip in the 1950s. Foreign investment has also increased. The annual average stock of US$2.3 billion in the 1980s (around 6.2% of GDP) increased fourteen-fold to US$32.5 billion in 2013 (12% of GDP).

Yet the country's production has dropped precipitously since the start of the 1980s. The country's production sectors are composed of agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and mining and quarrying. These collectively accounted for around 60% of GDP in the pre-globalization decades 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. However their share in the economy started falling from 1980 upon World Bank structural adjustment programs and more and more trade and investment liberalization. The share of these production sectors fell to 57% in the 1980s, 52% in the 1990s, and 48% in the 2000s. Rebasing of national income accounts reduced this even more to 42% in the 2000s and to 39% in the period 2010-2014.

The Philippines is now a service and trading economy more than a producing economy. This is not to say that we have "leapfrogged" to a first world economic structure, as was argued by pro-globalization economists before, but rather that our third world backwardness has only intensified upon globalization.

This collapsed production is the reason why joblessness and poverty remain so stubbornly high. Employment generation was much more rapid in the pre-globalization era even increasing from an annual average of 2.7% growth in employment in the 1960s to 4.1% in the 1970s. This trend markedly reversed upon the globalization that APEC is still pushing so vigorously—slowing down to 2.8% in the 1980s, 2.4% in the 1990s and 2000s, and then to just 2.3% in the acclaimed rapid growth period 2010-2014. This poor performance in the last five years places the 2010s on track to being the worst decade of employment generation in the country's history. Jobless growth is not just under the current Aquino administration but is a long-term structural problem.

The collapse of domestic production explains the poor job generation, which explains the record unemployment and exodus of overseas Filipino workers, and also explains the unremitting poverty. That all this is happening amid fantastic leaps in wealth of a few families and in profits of a few big domestic firms and foreign TNCs only underscores the structural exclusionary and inequitable nature of Philippine growth under globalization.

The government will spend Php4.6 billion on its hosting of APEC this year which is almost as much as the entire Php4.8 billion international commitments fund budget last year

Benefiting From Declining Global Population

BY BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS

FILE PHOTO

In an article entitled "Population Decline and the Great Economic Reversal" by George Friedman, Chairman of Stratfor, a leader in the field of global intelligence, there is a prediction of an inevitable decline of population all over the world, both developed and developing. Friedman presents solid evidence that in virtually all societies, from the poorest to the wealthiest, the birthrate among women has been declining. By the end of the twenty first century, all countries will be at 2.1 births per woman or below (that is, at or below the rate of replacement or what is needed for Zero Population Growth). The forces behind this irreversible trend are captured in the following succinct explanation: "It is primarily a matter of urbanization. In agricultural and low-level industrial societies, children are a productive asset. Children can be put to work at the age of 6 doing agricultural work or simple workshop labor. Children became a source of income, and the more you have the better. Just as important, since there is no retirement plan other than family in such societies, a large family can more easily support parents in old age. In a mature urban society, the economic value of children declines. In fact, children turn from instruments of production into objects of massive consumption. Children cost a tremendous amount of money with limited return, if any, for parents. Thus, people have fewer children."

The worst case scenario is that there will be massive economic dislocation because of a rapidly aging population. There will be a relatively small number of workers supporting a very large group of retirees, particularly as life expectancy in advanced industrial countries increases. Some actuarial scientists estimate that by the middle of this century, the average life expectancy can be over 90 years. What do you do with so many senior citizens and relatively very few young people to take care of them and financially support them? There is also the problem of the debts incurred by the older generation. The smaller, younger generation will have to pay them off. Finally, there is also the view that a country's political might could contract with the population since a smaller population would lead to fewer soldiers for the military force.

Mr. Friedman proposes immigration as the obvious solution. He sees some obstacles, however: "The problem is that Japan and most European countries have severe cultural problems integrating immigrants. The Japanese don't try, for the most part, and the Europeans who have tried—particularly with migrants from the Islamic world—have found it difficult. The United States also has a birthrate for white women at about 1.9, meaning that the Caucasian population is contracting, but the African-American and Hispanic populations compensate for that. In addition, the United States is an efficient manager of immigration, despite current controversies."

Fortunately for the Philippines, any possible decline in population will still be towards the end of the twenty-first century. There will be opportunities for those born in the Philippines to freely choose to live and work in the advanced countries suffering from serious demographic winter. They will do so no longer out of economic necessity. Their decision will be based on the freedom to choose to reside wherever

YEN OCAMPO

they please. A good number may still choose to work abroad, bringing their families with them, for at least most of their working lives and then decide to retire in the Philippines where it will always be "more fun." I agree with Mr. Friedman that countries like Japan, Germany, Spain, Italy, Canada, and other countries where Filipinos are more welcome than migrants from other cultures will not suffer a decline in GDP per capita even if their population is declining. As he rightly points out, "there is no reason to think that GDP would fall along with population. The capital base of society, its productive plant as broadly understood, will not dissolve as population declines. Moreover, assume that population fell but GDP fell less—or even grew. Per capita GDP would rise and, by that measure, the population would be more prosperous than before" It would be reasonable, therefore, for some Filipino families to freely decide to reside and work in these more prosperous countries, even if the Philippines would already have eradicated poverty in the next twenty years. Filipinos will always be the preferred immigrants in practically any culture because of their extraordinary human qualities. This includes the fact that English is widely spoken in the Philippines.

For those who do not want to migrate to other countries, there will still be the almost unlimited opportunities in such industries as Information Technology and Business Process Management, tourism (including medical tourism), retirement, and other human resource-intensive industries that will expand in response to the demand for these services by the ageing advanced economies. The shortage of young people in these countries will make the Philippines a continuing haven for BPO and shared services. As long as we invest in improving our infrastructures over the next twenty years, we will attract numerous retired people from abroad to have their medical treatment in our hospitals and even spend a good number of months in the year in our retirement resorts. The Philippines will be to the advanced world what Spain was to the rich Northern European countries in the last century. There will be many opportunities for those young people today specializing in the hospitality industry. Professionals in the health care industry will also be in great demand, both within the Philippines and outside.

Friedman ends his essay with the following strategic insights: "The argument I am making is that population decline will significantly transform the functioning of economies, but in the advanced industrial world it will not represent a catastrophe—quite the contrary. Perhaps the most important change will be that where for the past 500 years bankers and financiers have held the upper hand, in a labor-scarce society having pools of labor to broker will be the key." This suggests another sunrise sector in the coming years: the executive search industry, manpower recruitment, executive coaching and other forms of skills training and professional development programs tailored to the needs of the labor-short economies. Given a young, growing and English speaking population for at least the rest of the century, the Philippines can be an educational center for the rest of the world. Let the entrepreneurs seize these opportunities.

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

The Big Irish Mistake: **What the Philippines Should Never Emulate**

Christ Church Cathedral, seat of the Archbishop of Dublin **WILLIAM MURPHY**

BY ROBERT Z. CORTES

Not everything historical is cause for jubilation. One just so happened in Ireland--and the Philippines would do well not to ape it.

Some 62% of voters in Ireland brought human history across a Rubicon

of sorts when they voted yes to add the following clause to the Irish Constitution: "marriage may be contracted in law by two persons without distinction as to their sex". Ireland's present Justice and Equality Minister, Aodhan O'Riordain, may have even alluded to this historical event when he said that Ireland won't "ever to go back to the way things were." His statement was met with cheers and jubilation.

But I'm not sure if Mr. O'Riordain really meant to say "can't" instead of "won't." After all, it's not up to him or to Ireland to actually be able to do so--i.e. "to go back to the way things were"--even if they wanted to later on. Why would they want to? Because it is almost a sure thing that decades from now they and we will all witness the devastating effects of what was either an arrogant disregard for the real nature of marriage or a naïve and superficial evaluation of it. I doubt there'd be cheers or jubilation then.

What makes us so sure? This: the fact that the 62% chose the wrong thing. One always ends up badly when one chooses the wrong thing; all our favorite movies tell us that, from "It's A Wonderful Life" to "The Avengers." I am not saying that those who voted yes were malicious, or naïve, or ignorant. I'm simply saying that those who did so, in fact, chose something that is totally false, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. One doesn't have to be especially evil to choose a

rainy day for a class picnic, but the fact remains that because one chose that rainy day for the picnic, the class didn't get to have a picnic in the end. For both the picnic and marriage, the result from choosing a wrong thing is a sorry thing.

One website promoting the Irish Yes vote, "Vote With Us", displays

this error and falsehood egregiously. It said, "The vote is not about 'changing' marriage, it's simply about giving more committed couples access to it--so that any two adults who want to get married will be able to do so on the same basis as every other loving couple."

That sentence is at best naïve, or so well-crafted to hide the real intention of same-sex "marriage," it could have been composed by Satan himself, meaning, the father of lies. Because what that sentence is really saying is, "The vote is not about 'changing' marriage, it's simply about changing marriage." Nothing lost in translation there; if that "translation" sounds ridiculous, that's because the original is, in fact, ridiculous. Meaning, false.

Because by "giving more committed couples (really only meaning same-sex

Instead of strengthening the institution of marriage, "marriage equality" will instead lead to the eventual abolition of marriage, for the same reason that making everything important makes nothing important.

couples) access to it" one is, in fact, attempting to change marriage--meaning, what marriage really is. Why? Because marriage is, by its nature and definition, only between man and woman. It's not that marriage must be between man and woman; marriage is between man and woman. How do we know? We know it the way we know a dog, even if it can't bark; or a tree, even with half of its branches removed; or love, even if it's perverted; or lust, even if it's glorified. In other words, the human being is intelligent enough to grasp what a thing is. And humanity quite grasped the man-woman thing about marriage since the dawn of history until this very progressive age even without ever coming together to "agree" on it one fine day.

Thus, whatever romantic negotiation may be between two men or two

women, even if it means having sex ("consummation") after a nice and dainty exchange of I-do's at City Hall ("ceremony"), or the other way around, it is not marriage and, in fact, will never be. It is whatever it is, but it is not marriage. And certainly, two men's or two women's desires for a "lifelong commitment with each other" cannot change what marriage is in the same way as one's desire to make one's dog a cat certainly won't change the dog's dogness--even if one dressed the dog with all of cat-dom's furs and installed a meow-machine in the dog's larynx. One can claim that the dog's dog-ness was simply invented by society, one can even call the dog Lily (favorite cat name for 2015) and convince all one's friends to do so--but nope, in the end, Lily is a dog.

In other words, no force on earth can change what marriage is--not even a human being's willfulness or pigheadedness. We can change what we think marriage is, but that doesn't really change what marriage is. Meaning, anyone can say what Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny, said "This decision makes every citizen equal and I believe it will strengthen the institution of marriage," and all the rest of the 62% can say "amen!" loud enough to silence everyone else, but that will not make a whit of a difference to the fact that gay "marriage" will only have the consequences opposite to his claim. Instead of equality, even right now in several places, what we have are Catholics and non-Catholics alike already being bullied out of their freedom of conscience and religious freedoms. Instead of strengthening the institution of marriage, "marriage equality" will instead lead to the eventual abolition of marriage, for the same reason that making everything important makes nothing important.

And then, of course, there's the question of children. Marriage has always been about raising children, and even some gay people affirm this fact. Those who don't nevertheless tacitly admit this by their equally passionate fight to have the right to raise children. Yet where will all these children come from in gay "marriage" since gay relationships are inherently sterile? Either from surrogacy or adoption. But surrogacy now is generally acknowledged as evil, even by progressive feminists. On the other hand, the summary of the New Family Structures Study (NFSS) of the University of Texas, tells us (among other things) that children raised by gay parents, "reported the lowest levels of perceived safety in their childhood home while those of their intact biological parents reported the highest levels," and "statistically significantly higher levels of depression."

In summary, it is simply untrue or disingenuous or naïve to say that

the 62% of Ireland who voted Yes, did not "change marriage" because they actually did, wittingly or unwittingly. Unfortunately, it will not only be the Irish who will suffer the consequence of this mistake, in the same way that it was not only Pandora who suffered the evil she released when she opened "The Box." Indeed, the itch for the same dangerous social experiment is making its way to the Philippines.

But all is not lost to the world. Even Pandora's story didn't end in tragedy with the appearance of Hope. And the Philippines may yet be the source of hope for the world. I don't say this from a sense of messianic delusion, but rather from the remarkable fact that the Philippines is now the only nation in the world that has resisted both the trap of divorce and the evil of abortion. We are also probably the only nation in the world where a legal document categorically states

that life begins at conception. Maybe in the issue of upholding the truth of marriage we will be the only nation left standing.

Many so-called "progressives" are putting pressure on Filipinos to ditch this "medieval" way of thinking. But this is Western imperialism all over again, now more anti-life (Pope Francis calls this "contraceptive imperialism"). But Filipinos should be smart enough not to believe all this bull, and courageous enough to stand up to all the bullying. There's even a Filipino word for that: astig.

(Robert Z. Cortes is a PhD Student in social communications at the Pontificia Universita della Santa Croce in Rome.)

Human trafficking is an intrinsic evil and a crime against humanity

BY FR. SHAY CULLEN

The small twelve-year old boy that I met along the Road in Sacatihan Subic town, Philippines coming from the hills was barefooted and wearing only shorts and carrying a heavy sack of charcoal on his back. He looked emaciated, tired weary, and sickly.

I stopped and asked him who he was working for, whether he was paid, and if he went school? Where was his family? Come with me to the Preda youth home near-by and get rest and food I said. His answer was a shake of his head: "No". Clearly afraid, he staggered off across a field before I could help him. I wanted to find and confront his master and owner. In all likelihood, Jose is a modern-day slave and Preda social workers are on the lookout to rescue, free him, and give him a better life.

Daisy was only 14-years old when she was first noticed by retired Australian federal police volunteers from Australia doing undercover work in the sex bars of Olongapo and Subic .When the bar was later raided and arrests were made several underage girls and women were rescued. I learned that she and others were being forced to work as a child prostitutes.

The young 19-year old girls were held against their will and forced into prostitution through fear of violence against their family members in a distant town. Others had debts for food, transportation, and lodging and had to work in the sex bar to pay them off or were threatened with being jailed. They are victims of forced bonded labor. They returned home. These and millions more around the globe are the victims of human trafficking or modern-day slavery.

When Preda social workers brought charges against the bar owners in Olongapo City, Subic Bay, the victim witnesses were contacted by the bar operators and threatened with retaliation if they testified. They were too frightened to take the stand and the traffickers and sex bar owners walked free. However, the rescued minors in the Preda shelter are testifying against the US national who sexually exploited them.

This is one of the reasons that there are very few convictions of the modern day slavers in the Philippines today. Besides the corruption and bribe-taking practice of some prosecutors and judges who refuse to prosecute and convict traffickers, the reality of abusers and pimps is another disgraceful reality that enslaves children in lives of abuse and institutionalized slavery and rape.

It takes up to two years of therapy and shelter for these unfortunate children to regain normal childhood and have hope for a dignified future.

The Philippines will remain in the disgraceful Tier-Two of the US trafficking in Persons (TIP) index. The Philippine government witness protection program and compensation for victims is allegedly mired in corruption and fraud. Without protection and assistance as witnesses there can be few convictions and no end to the crimes against children and women.

Thousands young girls, many of them as young as 14, continue to suffer as victims of modern day slavery. Sex tourists from rich countries seem to be encouraged by the authorities. They are not closing sex clubs and prosecuting human traffickers .

When defenders of children's rights exposed the abuse of children with photographic evidence they were dismissed by the authorities as fake. Such blatant denial of the truth and reality and the failure to bring the child abusers to justice and hold them accountable, is, in effect, condoning the abuse of children. Silence and inaction in the face of crime against children is a form of consent.

I am writing this from the Washington D.C. where I have been invited by the United States Congressional Subcommittee on human rights to present information about modern day slavery and human trafficking in the Philippines. It is ironic that the United States Congress is open and willing to hear the truth and act to save the children but Philippine legislators are not.

Working as a missionary with the Society of St. Columban for the past 46 years combating human right abuses, human trafficking and sex slavery of children and women, I have some knowledge of the extent of the human suffering of trafficked victims.

The practice of the rich and powerful dominating and controlling the impoverished, weak, and vulnerable people is still widespread today. And although slavery was banned hundreds of years ago by the British parliament; formally done away with after the American Civil War; and outlawed by the United Nations everywhere, it still continues in various forms thinly disguised but ignored by corrupt politicians and controlled by criminal gangs and individuals who enslave domestic helpers, agricultural and factory workers, and fishermen.

Unregulated labor practices and racist attitudes continue the abhorrent abuse and exploitation of poor migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and the downtrodden through discrimination, racism, bonded labor, and kidnapping by criminal gangs. The victims of this criminal trafficking and selling of people into extremely low paying jobs or bonded labor are treated by authorities as criminals rather than exploited victims.

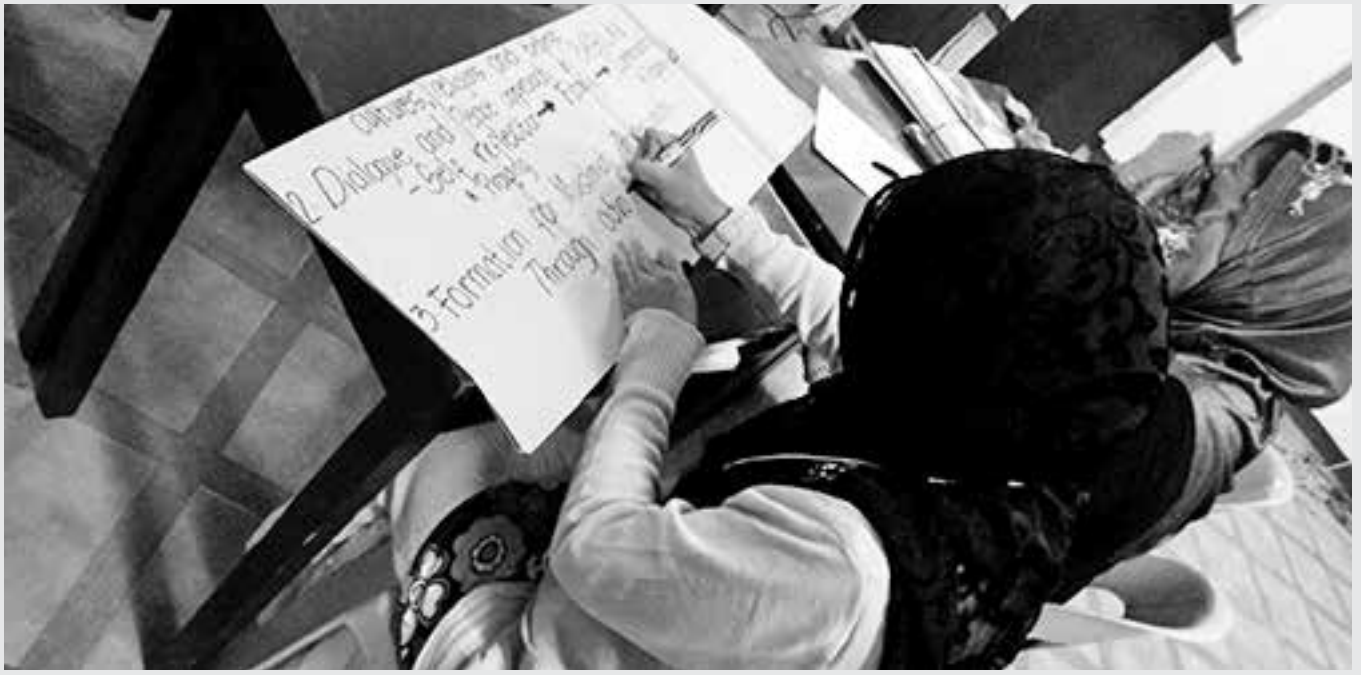
Even migrant children are criminalized and jailed. Street children in the Philippines are frequently exploited as beggars and drug couriers, and then accused and jailed. Police allow syndicates to operate with impunity and claim to have solved the crime when the kids are behind bars.

Pope John Paul II (Veritatis Splendor) said slavery is an inherent evil, and that nothing can ever justify it under any circumstances, while Pope Francis, during an interfaith meeting at the Vatican, in December 2014 declared that human trafficking is "a crime against humanity." Pope Francis and the leaders of other major faiths across the globe vowed recently to work to eradicate slavery by 2020.

However, despite his much-acclaimed visit to the Philippines last January 2015 that message has fallen on deaf ears. We have to shout it from the rooftops and take action to save the victims and bring the criminals to justice.

shaycullen@gmail.com

Priest to Muslim leaders: Save peace process in 'Ramadan spirit'



A group of Basilan teachers undergo the Culture of Dialogue Path to Peace MUSLIMAH on August 13, 2014 at the Harmony Village, Pitogo, Sinunuc, Zamboanga City. **SDM**

ZAMBOANGA CITY, June 2, 2015—In view of the upcoming holy month of Ramadan for Muslims, the founder of the Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM) has called on leaders of Muslim communities to save the peace process in Mindanao.

In the face of heated deliberations on the creation of a Bangsamoro territory in Southern Philippines, Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME, issued a message to Muslims, especially their religious leaders, to shun religious violence.

"We appeal to those in authority, especially Muslim religious leaders, to move with more determination against all forms of extremism emerging here and there in the name of 'Islam.' This is urgent to protect the identity of the Islamic religion and to save the peace process in Mindanao," D'Ambra said.

No peace built on fear

The Italian priest likewise reminded Muslim leaders that "building peace on fear cannot help the peace process," adding that a culture of dialogue coupled with respect and love for all will help keep hope alive for peace in Mindanao.

"Muslims and Christians are called to emulate each other in goodness, if we wish to save the world. Peace in the world and in Mindanao cannot be built on money. Only love and respect with an honest and creative vision of goodness, guided by sincere leaders willing to serve all, will save us and build peace in our midst," he said.

Citing the violence perpetuated by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), D'Ambra said religious violence is still prevalent in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao.

"In a time when people are killed because they belong to a specific religion or group, it is important to recall the value of life, reaffirm our common origin that gives us the same dignity as creatures of the same God. While nations claim to advocate for human rights we need to reflect on the new and alarming issues of violence in this time of history. This alarming situation is present in the Philippines and especially in Mindanao," he pointed out.

Search for mercy

D'Ambra urged perpetrators of religious violence to change in the spirit of Ramadan and in view of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

"Christians are united with Muslims in search for God's mercy. Thus, the Silsilah Dialogue Movement appeals to those who cause so much suffering in our midst to change life in the spirit of Ramadhan and in the spirit of the Jubilee Year of Mercy," he said.

"We wish that the month of Ramadhan will really be a time of the 'Great Jihad' that brings about the 'great struggle of purification' of the hearts and minds, since any form of violence starts from the heart and the mind. This is the spiritual journey that Islam proposes and reaffirms, especially during the month Ramadhan and which Christians appreciate and respect," he added.

The end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, on July 18 is considered a national holiday. ***(CBCP News)***

Tagle: Care for environment key element of disaster preparedness

MANILA, June 1, 2015—Calamity and disaster preparedness starts from one's concern for others and the environment, said Caritas Internationalis President Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle.

According to the prelate, along with disaster preparedness, proper management of environment goes a long way in reducing the risks associated with typhoons and other calamities.

"The most valuable preparation is taking care of the environment and taking care of our fellowmen even if there are no typhoons or earthquakes coming our way," Tagle told Radio Veritas in Filipino.

He added that indifference to others and to the environment is a "big hindrance" to disaster preparedness.

"Love the environment, it is from God and love others because your fellowman is the summit of the Lord's creation," he explained.

"That's why hopefully, it's not just relief goods that are prepared… That's also important. But true preparation is needed everyday when it comes to the environment and others," Tagle added in Filipino.

The cardinal is among the leading church's advocates against climate change.

He said that taking of the environment is a Christian responsibility and campaign to address the effects of climate change should be supported by actions. ***(CBCPNews)***

Priest: IPs 'coerced' for Tampakan mining consent

MANILA, May 30, 2015—The director of the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Marbel (SAC Marbel), Fr. Joy Pelino appeals to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to investigate its regional offices' activities in obtaining the IPs' consent to mining, saying they are being forced to agree to something they clearly do not want.

"We call on the NCIP to immediately and judiciously respond to the call of the IP. If activities are pursued this comes out to be a continuous betrayal of the IPs rights and also of NCIP policies—we have yet to be clarified if what should be implemented in Tampakan is the 2006 or the 2012 FPIC Guidelines. And we continuously urge for the clear en banc decision on the matter," the priest said in a recent statement.

No consent

According to an Alyansa Tigil Mina statement (ATM), B'laan tribes people have initially submitted a petition for NON-FPIC coverage where they stated they do not consent to the Tampakan Copper and Gold Mining Project.

Five leaders of the B'laan tribe from Bong Mal in Tampakan, South Cotabato went to Cagayan de Oro on May 27 to submit a position paper to the NCIP, requesting an immediate postponement on any free prior and informed consent (FPIC)-related activities in their area.

"We are not ready for the FPIC processes because of unresolved cases of human rights violations, where two of the victims are my father, Bong Fulong Anting Freay, and my brother-in-law Sonny Boy Planda. This is also one of the many reasons why we are against mining in our territories," said Eking Freay. Freay was a victim of an ambush in 2013 by Task Force KITACO, which was formed to secure the mining project area.

Human rights abuses

According to the ATM statement, the B'laan people particularly object to the NCIP Region XI and XII offices' persistence in obtaining their consent to the Tampakan mining project even in the face of unresolved human rights abuses, as well as what they consider "violations of B'laan tradition and culture."

"In the end, what we seek is NCIP to be advocates for IP rights and be the voice of the IPs, and not facilitators of mining projects and other development aggressions," Pelino added.

SAC Marbel, SOCSKSARGEND CARE and ATM are part of Tampakan Forum, a technical working group on the Tampakan mining issue. ***(Yen Ocampo/CBCPNews)***

Bishops urge Aquino to act against Samar killings

MANILA, May 28, 2015—Catholic bishops in Samar have brought their concerns about the series of politically-related killings on the island to Malacañang's doorstep.

In a letter to President Benigno Aquino III, the bishops urged the government to act against the killings, particularly in Calbayog City which, according to them, has reached at an "alarming" level.

"Mr. President, we seek your immediate assistance to resolve the killings the soonest possible time," reads part of the letter signed by Bishops Isabelo Abarquez of Calbayog, Crispin Varquez of Borongan, and Emmanuel Trance of Catarman.

A year before the national elections, they also called on Aquino to stop the "proliferation of loose firearms" and to "eradicate private armies" who serve as "goons" during polls.

"This is the only way to avert further violence--to serve justice to the perpetrators of these crimes--so that peace may once again prevail in our provinces and to lessen many unsolved impunities until now," they wrote.

The incidence of "political violence" was among the issues discussed during the assembly of the Samar Island Partnership for Peace and Development (SIPPAD) held in Calbayog on Wednesday.

SIPPAD is a partnership of the Church, government, academe, and civil society in the provinces of Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, and Western Samar.

At least two barangay chairmen and a councilor were killed in two separate shooting incidents in Calbayog last week alone.

The bishops said police reports revealed that the gunmen were unmasked, wore no bonnets to hide their faces, and that the fatalities "belonged to opposite camps".

On May 9, the village chief of Nagppacao in Matuguinao town of Western Samar was also killed by still unidentified attackers.

In December 2014, several village officials were murdered in Calbayog; not a single case has been resolved to this day.

Avarquez earlier appealed to local authorities to help secure justice for the victims and their families.

"We are alarmed that these killings may be the start of a wave of political violence in our province in the island of Samar," the bishops said.

The prelates added that the provinces are still in the processes of rehabilitating communities following the havoc brought by typhoons Yolanda and Ruby.

"And peace is essential in our development process," they said. ***(Roy Lagarde/CBCPNews)***

Pakistan election chief nullifies male-only election

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, June 2, 2015—Election authorities in Pakistan today nullified the results of a by-election held in a remote district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province last month that barred women from exercising their right to vote.

Masroor Shah, a lawyer representing human rights activists and who challenged the legality of the elections, said that Chief Election Commissioner Justice Sardar Raza Khan has declared the by-elections of Lower Dir null and void and has ordered new elections.

"Women from Dir have testified before the three-member inquiry commission that they were not allowed to vote," Shah said. "The announcements had been made from a mosque's loud speakers to stop women from participating in the elections."

Shah added, "Surprisingly, even the district woman president of one of the contesting parties had not cast her vote."

Aizaz-ul Mulk, a candidate for the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, had won the provincial assembly seat vacated by his party head Siraj ul Haq following his elevation to the Senate.

The constituency has approximately 54,000 registered women voters, but not a single one was allowed to vote on polling day, prompting protests from rights campaigners.

Rights activists led by Farzana Bari, director of the Gender Studies Centre, held a demonstration outside the commission and formally filed a petition to seek cancellation of the male-only election.

"No election can be deemed as open, free and fair and in consonance with the law when the voices of more than half the electorate is stifled, so it is thus bound to be declared null and void," the petition said.

On Monday, Pakistan's independent human rights commission condemned the denial of women's rights to vote in the local government elections held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province last Saturday.

In its initial findings from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts where observers from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan monitored elections in selected village and urban neighborhood councils, the Commission noted that compared to male voters, very few women reached the polling stations to cast their votes.

Despite the denial by political and religious parties and independent contestants about the traditional agreements to bar women from voting, a very low turnout by female voters indicated that women were not free to exercise their right to franchise, the Commission's findings said. ***(UCANews)***

In Timor-Leste, mobile phones combat pregnancy complications

AILEU, Timor Leste, June 2, 2015—What Maria Marquez wants is common among pregnant women. She would like to have regular health checkups, no complications or hemorrhaging, and easy access to healthcare facilities.

Instead, she hardly had any direct contact with a doctor or midwife and rarely received advice on her pregnancies.

"I already have three children and am expecting the fourth child. But I'm always worried every time I get pregnant," Marquez, 30, told ucanews.com in an interview in Bandudato village, Aileu district, approximately 50 kilometers from the capital Dili.

Her anxiety is reasonable, because during her previous pregnancies she did not have much time to get assistance or advice from medical workers. Like most rural Timorese women, she stays busy cultivating crops and selling her produce at a local market.

With this pregnancy, however, Marquez has had rare access to healthcare thanks to a three-year-old, mobile phone-based program being rolled out across the country. Initiated by Health Alliance International (HAI)—an NGO that helps the Timor-Leste government in enhancing services to women and newborn care—Liga Inan (Mobile Moms) sends twice weekly messages that remind mothers to eat nutritious food, supplements or to see a midwife.

For Marquez, the service is like an answered prayer allowing her to receive health assistance without leaving behind home and work.

"The problem is that I have to help my husband, even when I am pregnant. And if I don't help my husband farming we won't have money to buy basic needs," she said.

Lack of funds is the main reason why Marquez can't see a nurse often, but the nearest clinic is also 5km away—making it a difficult trek to undertake.

Local leader, Armindo de Araujo, 51, said Marquez's experience is typical of many Timor-Leste women, who are affected by a shortage of public transport, poor road infrastructure, a lack of health facilities, shortage of medical workers, shortage of electricity and clean water. "Thousands of women like Marquez do not get a chance to have assisted pregnancy," he said.

According to Maria Lourdes da Silva, a doctor at the Aileu District Hospital, Timor-Leste needs a breakthrough in reaching out to pregnant mothers. The Cuba-trained doctor said the problems facing pregnant women are many-faceted. Apart from facing constrains over inadequate health facilities; they also cannot focus on their pregnancy because they are breadwinners for their families.

"So, telling expectant mothers what to do through mobile phones is effective, because it is not easy to have them come voluntarily to hospital. There is no awareness among women to have their pregnancy checked regularly," she told ucanews.com.

Da Silva said the mobile phone service is "a doctor's wish come true" in a country that is still in the process of rebuilding its health system. Most of its facilities were destroyed during the 1999 fight for independence that led to its freedom in 2002, after 24 years under Indonesian occupation.

Che Katz, country director of HAI, said recent developments in the country's mobile phone industry are promising, and now about 60 percent of people are using mobile phones, including mothers.

Timor-Leste's major mobile providers include Timor Telcom, a subsidiary of Portugal Telcom, Telcomcel, a subsidiary of Indonesia's Telkom, and Telemor.

"We took advantage of progress in cellular phones to be able to reach out to as many pregnant mothers as possible," said Katz.

Mothers play a key function in developing a healthy and sustainable community. But many mothers have risked their lives during their pregnancies or when giving birth. According to Katz, in 2010—before Liga Inan started—Timor-Leste had one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates at 557 per 100,000 live births. Its infant mortality was a staggering 45 per 1000 births.

"It was a huge problem that caught our attention," Katz said.

HAI and technology group Catalpa International, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, started Liga Inan in Manufahi district three years ago. It now has expanded to the districts of Liquica, Ainaro and Aileu, with a membership base of more than 4,000 mothers.

Paul Vasconde, HAI program director, said there is a possibility the service will be expanded to more districts. The program also works on training midwives and health workers in order to be able to give better service to expectant mothers.

"We continue to work with the government of Timor-Leste to improve the skills of health workers throughout the country," he said.

The government of Timor-Leste has instituted a strategic development plan (2011-2030) to further improve maternal health so that by 2015, 70 percent of pregnant women will receive antenatal care and 65 percent of women will have assisted delivery.

Last year, the government allocated US$67.2 million for the Ministry of Health, up from $64.3 million the previous year to support the implementation of its health policy and the construction of 39 village health clinics.

According to Katz, amid a shortage of skilled medical workers, training is crucial to the healthcare system.

But problems with the highly centralized government pose another challenge to the implementation of health projects in rural areas, particularly in connection with the availability of ambulances and fuel to transport expectant mothers from their homes to health facilities. ***(Siktus Harson/UCANews***

BY KRIS BAYOS

THE SCOURGE OF HU

While Mary Jane Veloso may have evaded execution last April, receiving both a chance to clear her name and a new lease in life, widespread poverty across the Philippines and all over the world continues to force many to fall easy prey to prostitution, forced organ donation, modern-day slavery and other forms of human trafficking.

It is not any wonder Indonesian President Joko Widodo was convinced that Veloso, a 30-year old Filipino domestic worker, was worth the reprieve. Indonesia, like the Philippines, has citizens facing execution in other countries due to alleged drug smuggling. Veloso was one of the nine prisoners scheduled for execution last April 29. But Veloso's recruiter, whom she accused of duping her to fly to Indonesia five years ago with a suitcase filled with 2.6 kilograms of heroine, surfaced and turned herself over to authorities before the scheduled execution. Human rights groups, migrant advocates, and inter-religious communities helped convince Widodo that Veloso, like many Indonesians lined up in death rows overseas, was innocent and was a victim of human trafficking.

While Veloso lives, there are 88 other Filipinos queued on death rows in other countries, most of whom face the death penalty for drug-related crimes. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, 34 Filipinos are facing execution in Malaysia; 28 in Saudi Arabia; 21 in China; two in the U.S.; two in Vietnam; and three in Kuwait, Indonesia, and Thailand. Prior to Veloso's supposed execution, Sally Ordinario-Villanueva, Ramon Credo, and Elizabeth Batain were executed in China for drug smuggling in 2011, as well as a 35-year old Filipino, whose name was withheld upon his family's request. Another 35-year-old Filipina was executed in China in 2013.

Regardless of the sentence these overseas Filipino workers received and the consequence that came with it, labor remains the main export of the Philippines while OFW remittance continues to be the backbone of the consumer-driven Philippine economy. In fact, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration reported that 243,045 job orders were approved, while 519,029 contracts were processed during the first three months of 2015. For its part, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas observed that OFWs' cash remittances increased by 5.5 percent year-on-year to USD 5.79 billion as of end-March from $5.49 billion the same time in 2014.

How then can a significant export sector receive the least support when the going gets tough? Reports continue to pile up about OFWs, mostly women, who suffer from abusive employers or those who complain about nearly non-existent legal assistance overseas. Veloso's case reminds us of this vicious cycle of poverty forcing Filipinos to work overseas and to suffer abuse, maltreatment, and even death. Her story of almost being raped by her employers in

UMAN TRAFFICKING

CNA

Dubai and her transit between Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia in search of a livelihood that will feed her family only made headlines weeks before her execution.

But as Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Dagupan-Pangasinan said, "One Filipino victim of human trafficking alone is one victim too many for us as a Christian nation." In his pastoral letter dated Dec. 9, 2014, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines urged the authorities to curb human trafficking as this transnational crime violates human dignity, saying "we should have zero tolerance for this evil."

Highly profitable

Data from the United Nations reveal that 2.4 million people are trafficked at any given time and their exploitation generates up to USD 32 billion in annual profits for traffickers. Meanwhile, the Global Slavery Index estimates that nearly 30 million people worldwide are living in slave-like conditions.

"So long as there are huge profits to be made from human trafficking, this transnational crime will continue to defy national and international laws, and religious and moral strictures and norms. The evil is so pervasive and the perpetrators are so determined that utmost cooperation is needed between Church and State, between the citizens and the instrumentalities of government, to make sure that the will and the forces needed to combat it should never be less strong than those committed to promoting it," Villegas said.

Citing global records, Villegas said about 150,000 of the 800,000 children, women, and men who were trafficked across international borders around the world are reportedly Filipinos. Given the statistics, the prelate pointed out that "we must never for a moment forget that we are each our brother's keepers, and that a part of ourselves is trafficked every time a brother or sister of ours is."

Villegas also reminded the Catholic faithful that "'we have been bought at a great price,' Scripture reminds us, and we cannot allow anyone to enslave another whom our Lord, by his death and resurrection, has set free."

"It is, therefore, our Christian duty to do everything we can to prevent anyone in our midst from being trafficked, and to make sure that those who have fallen into the traffickers' trap are set free and are able to come home and resume their normal lives with their families, friends and community. As serious a duty this is of individual Christians, even more serious is it the duty of the State and society. Beyond that, charity and compassion demand that Christians exert every effort to free human traffickers from the motives and attractions of their illicit trade and to draw them back to genuinely good and beneficial pursuits. To drown evil in an abundance of good, and convert the wrongdoer into a source of good is the ultimate triumph we should aim for in this fight," the Church leader added.

CBCP Pastoral Letter on Human Trafficking

"For through faith, you are children of God in Christ Jesus… There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male nor female for you are all one in Christ." (Gal. 3:26, 28)

CBCP president Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas **FILE PHOTO**

GOD created man in His own image and redeemed him from sin through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sacred and inviolate, therefore, is his human dignity. Yet, time and again, this dignity has been violated in unspeakable ways. Human trafficking is one such violation that directly assaults such dignity.

What is human trafficking?

It is a form of modern-day slavery, not less dehumanizing and cruel than any old form of slavery. It is the illegal trade in persons, inhuman organs, in human values, as though these were commercial commodities. Through the use of force, deception, violence, and taking advantage of the vulnerability of victims, men and women are exploited physically, sexually, psychologically, morally, spiritually for the material gain of the traffickers. The victims are our brothers and sisters whom we know and do not know.

In today's "globalized" and "consumeristic" world, the most vulnerable among us are sold as slaves, prostitutes, organ-donors, and pawns in criminal enterprise, armed activities and conflicts. The Holy Father describes human trafficking as an "open wound on the body of contemporary society," a "scourge upon the body of Christ," a "crime against humanity," and a "grave violation of fundamental human rights."

"It is a disgrace," says Pope Francis that people are treated as "objects, deceived, raped, often sold many times for different purposes and, in the end, killed or, in any case, physically and mentally damaged, ending up thrown away and abandoned." But it would be a more terrible disgrace if we who hear or read about the fate of victims could only think of ourselves lucky that we have been spared from such fate, but feel no compulsion to share or mitigate the suffering of the victims or wish to curb it. A Christian should be willing to sleep on the floor if his brother has no roof over his head, and forego his meal if his brother has nothing to eat.

Every year about 800,000 children, women and men are trafficked across international borders around the world. Some 30 million people are presently enslaved. About 150,000 of these are said to be Filipinos, most of them children who are physically exploited and sexually abused. Every year, many Filipino men and women who migrate abroad for work end up in conditions of involuntary servitude. Happily, this does not characterize the general condition of the Filipino diaspora, which now counts some ten million Filipinos in various parts of the world. But one Filipino victim of human trafficking alone is one victim too many for us as a Christian nation. We should have zero tolerance for this evil.

In the middle of their sufferings, the victims often find themselves alone and lost, with no one to turn to but their God, our Lord. There is no greater comfort than to seek solace from our Lord. Especially so when no human relief appears to be on sight.

Even the Pope

From the Vatican, the Holy Father encouraged the work against human trafficking during the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking marked last Feb. 8, which coincided with the feast of Saint Josephine Bakhita, the 19th century Sudanese nun who as a child had been a victim of slavery. On different occasions, Pope Francis described human trafficking as a "plague against humanity" and "a scourge upon the body of Christ", calling on governments to "remove the cause of this shameful wound... a wound unworthy in a civil society" and to act on the rehabilitation of victims.

In response to the challenge of Pope Francis and the CBCP leadership to address the issue of human trafficking, the CBCP Office on Women, in collaboration with the CBCP Commissions on Social Action; Justice and Peace; Youth; Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People; Culture; and the Legal Office, organized a National Conference on Human Trafficking last Feb. 27 to 28. The event provided a venue to teach participants how to combat human trafficking all the way to the remotest areas of the Philippines.

The CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women also published a primer on the basic facts of human trafficking in the Philippines and acknowledged the modern form of slavery—abuse of children through cybersex dens—which is already rampant in the country given cheap internet access. Citing global data, the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women said the Philippines has been identified as one of the top 10 cybersex hotspots in the world.

Describing human trafficing as a "complex" problem in the Philippines, the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women cited the low rate of prosecutions and convictions of traffickers and the corruption of law enforcers who allow traffickers to escape apprehension, accept bribes to downgrade charges or even facilitate illegal departure of workers. The CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women also decried the poor rehabilitation services that government and non-government organizations offer human trafficking victims that prevent them from completely reintegrating back into their communities.

Data from the United Nations reveal that 2.4 million people are trafficked at any given time and their exploitation generates up to USD 32 billion in annual profits for traffickers. **IMAGENS EVANGÉLICAS**

In its "Let's Move! Knock Out Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery" primer, the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women stressed out the role of poverty in the prevalence of human trafficking. "Poverty and unemployment foster desperation and make people accept huge risks to their lives and safety. Natural disasters and armed conflict also displace people from their homes and destroy their livelihood, which increases their desperation to migrate for work. The Church is the beacon of social justice and can help lead the fight against social inequality to reduce the factors that push people into exploitative labor," the Commission said.

The CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women further stated that "the Church has a strong presence in both source and destination countries for modern-day slaves. It is well-positioned to counter the resources and networks of traffickers. The Church can mobilize communities to identify potential victims and protect themselves against modern day slavery. Through dioceses, Catholic schools and learning institutions, and partner organizations, the Church is also capable of influencing a shift in the 'fields of culture and communication,' as Pope Francis says, to fight against norms that view human beings as objects, which allow humans to be 'bought and sold like merchandise.'"

United action

Citing the United Nations' Framework for action against trafficking in persons, the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Women stressed the importance of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership in order to address the problem holistically.

"Addressing the root causes of migration such as lack of economic opportunities, unequal development, and lack of infrastructures for development" will prevent more children, men, and women from falling prey to traffickers in the long run. It is also not enough to increase awareness about the crime of human trafficking without "changing cultural biases and misconceptions" about gender equality. It would greatly help to "build public awareness about the anti-human trafficking legislation and the potential dangers of migration, especially among at-risk groups, such as youth who lack access to schooling and experience abuse inside the family, people in areas affected by conflict and disaster, indigenous people, and urban poor communities."

The protection component of the drive against human trafficking is aimed at "turning victims into survivors." "Protection measures ensure that human trafficking victims are provided access to health care, counseling, legal, and shelter services in ways that are not prejudicial against victims' rights, dignity, or psychological well-being. Victims need to be immediately assured that they are being rescued and not arrested. Interventions need to be holistic and incorporate healing, rehabilitation, and strategies to

But sometimes their sufferings are compounded by the negligence, indifference and downright abuse of those who are otherwise tasked to provide solace and help. The problem has reached such proportions that in his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis could not help but lament:

How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" (Gen. 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity. (EG, 211).

Seeing how this evil has spread and threatens to scatter the flock, we can only cry with the Good Shepherd, "This cannot go on! It must stop!"

As in the times of old, God wishes us all to be free. Even now, God speaks to us as He did to those who suffered under the lash in Egypt: "I saw the affliction of my people and have heard their cries; set my people free!" (Ex 3:7-8).

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Our Lord came down to die on the Cross in order to set His people free. Free from the bondage of sin, but free also from the evil one that preys upon every human weakness, every vulnerability of the individual and society. "We have been bought at a great price" (cf. 1 Cor 6:20), Scripture reminds us, and we cannot allow anyone to enslave another whom our Lord, by his death and resurrection, has set free.

It is, therefore, our Christian duty to do everything we can to prevent anyone in our midst from being trafficked, and to make sure that those who have fallen into the traffickers' trap are set free and are able to come home and resume their normal lives with their families, friends and community. As serious a duty this is of individual Christians, even more serious is it the duty of the State and society. Beyond that, charity and compassion demand that Christians exert every effort to free human traffickers from the motives and attractions of their illicit trade and to draw them back to genuinely good and beneficial pursuits. To drown evil in an abundance of good, and convert the wrongdoer into a source of good is the ultimate triumph we should aim for in this fight.

The worship of creatures and the idolatry of money are the first obstacles the society and the individual must deal with. So long as there are huge profits to be made from human trafficking, this transnational crime will continue to defy national and international laws, and religious and moral strictures and norms. The evil is so pervasive and the perpetrators are so determined that utmost cooperation is needed between Church and State, between the citizens and the instrumentalities of government, to make sure that the will and the forces needed to combat it should never be less strong than those committed to promoting it.

There is no substitute for turning to the Gospel as we respond to this scourge. So let us do it. In this Year of the Laity when we commit ourselves anew to the spirit of evangelization of every heart and home, we must never for a moment forget that we are each our brother's keepers, and that a part of ourselves is trafficked every time a brother or sister of ours is. But not only should we see ourselves in the face of every victim, we must above all see our Lord in every victim's face. And because we cannot allow to see our Lord trafficked, neither can we allow the least of our brethren to be so exploited. For our Lord has said, "whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did unto me" (cf Mt 25:40).

Reposing our hopes and our trust anew in our Blessed Mother, Comforter of the Afflicted and Help of Christians, and invoking the intercession of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of the victims of human trafficking, we pray that our nation, by which we mean everyone of its citizens, find the grace and the courage to lead in this fight against human trafficking until it is extinguished from our daily lives. We call upon all the faithful to join hands in every possible endeavor at every level of society, from local to national to international, in the pursuit of this objective.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, December 14, 2014

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

improve prospects for reintegration to minimize the risk of re-victimization," the primer added.

The CBCP Commission on Women pointed out that "the Church can commit to improve its capacity to assist survivors by supporting women religious with existing and planned centers for survivors of exploitation; developing a strong volunteer training program amongst existing hospices, hospitals, crisis/rehabilitation centers, and youth centers; providing parents of rescued victims with aftercare support such as counseling to decrease their vulnerability to threats and intimidation; and building the capacity of the members of Catholic Lawyers Guild and paralegal counselors in Social Action Centers in coordination with local members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines."

Subsequently, facilitating access to justice will "ensure the creation and implementation of laws that address the continuum of labor exploitation and the pursuit of criminal punishments for such cases." Furthermore, "partnerships should be utilized throughout every stage of the prevention, protection, and prosecution processes" since it "brings together diverse experiences, amplify messages, and leverage resources, thereby accomplishing more together than any one entity or sector would be able to alone."

Finally, as the CBCP marks the Year of the Poor this 2015, Villegas recently issued a pastoral exhortation decrying the "scandal of poverty", calling for the Church to address poverty. He said, "the poor are not just the unlettered, the unwashed, the uninitiated, the uneducated, the unhealthy, the naked, the exploited, the trafficked, and the infirm gazing into our eyes for human recognition. They are those about whom Jesus said, 'Whatever you have done or not done to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters that you have done or not done to me' (cf. Mt. 25:40). Jesus makes himself one with the poor. From his Cross, Jesus gazes into our eyes and touches our hearts with love. It is his love which calls forth our response in love. It is his love which allows us to admit our personal faults in our shared social woundedness. It is his love which quietly says: 'Go forth, and heal!'"

ROY LAGARDE

The greatest flaw of K to 12

BY RHEA PADILLA

The K to 12 program has been in effect for more than three years now but the program continues to gather widespread criticism. The confusion and unpreparedness have caused parents' groups, teachers, and students organizations to call for a review of the K to 12 system. In July, Sen. Antonio Trillanes also called for the suspension of the K to 12, saying that the government should address basic necessities in education and provide a conducive learning environment instead.

Beyond the critique of the chaotic implementation, budget constraints, teachers' welfare, etc., a critical focus on the K to 12 is its design. The K to 12 program, a result of lobbying by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB), is similar to major education reforms made in the past: it is designed and implemented using foreign funds and reflecting foreign interests. Like other education projects, the program adds further stress on attuning the skills of the students to the needs of foreign corporations over the needs of the country to attain real progress.

In fact, the additional years in the tertiary are designed at acquiring technical and vocational skills, which are geared towards meeting the labor demands of the global market. This is despite long-standing demands of progressive educators and students to reorient the educational system so that it can contribute to real development.

The effort to expand the cycle of basic education to supposedly address the lack of global competitiveness among the Filipino youth has been going on for decades. But the underlying intent of "decongesting the curriculum" is to reduce the learning time spent on studying history, culture and heritage under Social Studies to give emphasis on English, Math and Science. These subjects are considered "learning areas" that will prepare the students towards "global competitiveness". Building of nationalist values and promoting self-reliance are set aside for the objective of molding students to cater to the workforce requirements of foreign corporations.

Moreover, the K to 12 program meets the goal of the Aquino government to reduce state support for education. Budget allocations for state universities and colleges (SUCs) have been declining, and they are encouraged to find other sources of funding such as partnerships with private corporations. Alongside this is the increasing privatization and commercialization of colleges and universities.

Under the K to 12, however, government is set to promote college education as merely an option for high school graduates. The program, with its vocational and technical courses, encourages students to join the workforce right after high school. This will further liberate the government from its responsibility of allocating funds for SCUs, justify the entry of private-public partnerships (PPPs) in education, and redirect public funds for debt servicing, etc.

As a consequence, the education system is bound to produce Filipinos that are proficient in technical skills, but are lacking in critical thinking, humanities and sense of community and nationalism. It will produce workers who are ready for the global market, but absent in skills and values needed to develop basic industries, new technologies and inventions, and deeper forms of knowledge.

This is the greatest flaw of the K to 12 program: the curriculum changes remain unsupportive of a progressive and self-reliant economy that will bring about genuine national development for the people. The present strategy of relying on exports, remittances, and unregulated foreign investment and promoting labor export has proven to be a failure in bringing about genuine progress. But the direction of the K to 12 program only serves this kind of economic set-up.

It is the role of education to keep the Filipinos' aspirations for a strong national industry and real economic progress aflame. But it is the design of the K to 12 program to wipe away these aspirations from the consciousness of succeeding generations. ***(IBON Features)***

Let us be circumspect

Pastoral Statement on Amending the Constitution

ERIC JAMES SARMIENTO

LATELY, we have been urged by different prominent persons and influential sectors to consider the amendment of the Constitution.

While amendments having to do with the form of government are matters that we, your bishops, leave to politicians and to their discernment, proposed amendments in respect to economic provisions bear directly on issues of social justice. The social encyclicals of the Church bear witness to the fact that the Church has always considered social justice an area of her competence and solicitude.

It has been advanced as a reason for the call to amend the provisions of the Constitution that the restrictive provisions limiting foreign participation in the Philippine economy have in fact been prejudicial to economic growth. Foreign investment and the infusion of foreign capital into the country have been held at bay by what some characterize as the unduly stringent provisions of the Constitution.

We will not forget of course, that the framers of the 1987 Constitution -- and even the members of the Constitutional Convention that drafted the 1973 Constitution -- had one purpose in enshrining those restrictions, a purpose fully in accord with the precepts of social justice: preserving the wealth and resources of the country for our countrymen.

Rightly, we have always steered away from the prospect of foreigners enriching themselves by the country's resources and our labor force, transferring their earnings overseas, and leaving us none the better because of their presence and their exploitation of our resources, both natural and human! This should remain a paramount principle.

Now, however, we are told that limiting foreign control of some corporations, such as banks, media, advertisement, including the operation of public utilities and the exploration, development and utilization of natural resources has been counterproductive. It is claimed that we have so many resources that remain untapped—beneficial to none—because local capital is just woefully insufficient for capital-intensive ventures.

Before we rush into amending the Constitution, we, your bishops, urge all responsible to conduct serious studies in economics, sociology, the law and in related disciplines including the Catholic social teachings, that should provide us with clear answes to the following questions:

1. What do we, as a nation, stand to gain from relaxing the provisions now deemed restrictive?
2. How are we assured that the resources of the country, both natural and human, benefit Filipino nationals principally?
3. What are the human, social and environmental costs of lifting present limits to foreig participation in Philippine economic and business affairs?

We urge competent Catholic lay persons to study these questions, and others that they may find relevant, with assiduousness and diligence, and to share with us, particularly with the CBCP, their findings. We welcome the truly scholarly and diligent analyses of all. With these studies, we can more wisely look at the move to amend the Consttution in the light of our Christian faith.

Only then shall we be prepared to take a moral stand in respect to the proposed amendment of the Constitution.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, June 8, 2015

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

Elections and the duty of the Christian

IT is not difficult to feel the election fever—even if the 2016 elections are still so months away. It has always been complained that the efforts of the Church and other non- political groups to educate voters come too late. It is the reason for this letter, this early—so that it may never be again said that we spoke too late.

The exercise of the right of suffrage is not only a political right. It is also a moral obligation. For the Christian it is one of the most meaningful and effective means of contributing to the flourishing of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and love. And so while politicians plan and strategize, and, this early, find ways of circumventing the law against pre-mature campaigning, the Church cannot be remiss in its obligation of forming the consciences of Catholic and Christian voters.

Vote for the right reasons. Vote, not because you have been paid, or promised bounty, not because you or your relatives have been promised employment or privilege but because you trust a person to lead the community and to lead the country. Just as the discerning voter will not be easily won over by all the flattery in favor of one candidate, neither should a voter allow 'demolition jobs' to dissuade him from choosing a person who is truly fit for office.

Reject the notoriously corrupt, but neither should one readily jump on the bandwagon of condemnation in the absence of incontrovertible evidence, for, these days, one's reputation, so painstakingly built by sincerity and honesty over the years, can so easily be tarnished by the truly evil work of "spin-doctors" in the payroll of one or the other political aspirant!

End political dynasties. Do not vote for family members running for the same positions as family members before them to perpetrate the family's hold on public office. When it is clear that one politician clings to public office, seeking election to some other position after he has run the length of the permissible number of terms in one elective office, the Christian voter should prudently choose others who may have equal if not superior abilities and competencies for the position.

FILE PHO

There is no monopoly on ability for government, and truly no one in government is indispensable!

Ask the right questions as basis of your selection among candidates. Do not demand to know of a congressman or a senator what his or her local projects have been. Legislators are not supposed to have local projects. They are supposed to legislate, to attend congressional sessions, rise to debate and actively take part in committee hearings. Ask, rather, whether or not they have attended the sessions of the Lower House or of the Senate diligently and regularly. On the other hand, do not make 'kapit sa taas' a criterion for the choice of local elective officials, because a local official leads by his own charisma and leadership skills. We reject a government by patronage!

A person who aspires for high office but who, because of inexperience, will be totally dependent on advisers is not the best possible candidate for national positions, but we should be willing to repose trust on those who, we are convinced, are capable of leading and of serving with probity, high above suspicion and with skill, competence and wisdom that comes from abiding faith. That a person is a firm believer, and that he or she practices her faith should be a crucial consideration for the Catholic voter.

Every vote a Christian casts is not only an instance of the exercise of those liberties and rights we have as free citizens. Because the Kingdom of God is God's gift, inaugurated, as Lumen Gentium teaches, in the world by the life, ministry, death and Resurrection of Jesus, The Lord, we are commissioned to do what is within our ability to make God's Kingdom a living experience for all of his people. And a vote wisely and virtuously cast is a fulfillment of that commission!

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, June 5, 2015

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
President, Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines

Statement of condemnation on the series of killings in the City of Calbayog

THE Diocese of Calbayog through the Justice and Peace Desk of the Social Action Center strongly condemns in the strongest terms the series of killings happening in the City of Calbayog.

The taking of human life, and the inflicting of injury and suffering on anyone, whether as an act of aggression or revenge, can never be justified.

The Diocese of Calbayog does not tolerate any form of repression especially through extra judicial killings. The right to life is a gift for everybody and no one has the right to take it. The wheel of justice is the proper venue for resolution of any case.

We therefore call on the proper authorities to conduct a thorough and speedy investigation on the series of killings in Calbayog City and bring into the bar of justice the ones responsible.

We share the grief of the families of all the victims of senseless killings, offering them our condolences and prayers for the eternal repose of the souls of their loved ones and for comfort in their bereavement.

May Love, Truth, justice and Peace reign in our hearts, families and Christian Communities!

Done this 24th day of May, 2015, Pentecost Sunday, Social Action Center, Diocese of Calbayog— Calbayog City, Samar.

+ISABELO C. ABARQUEZ, D.D.
Bishop of Calbayog

Letter to President Benigno C. Aquino III

Dear Mr. President,

Greetings of peace from the Island of Samar!

We, the members of the Samar Island Partnership for Peace and Development, now convening here in Calbayog City for our 29th island-wide Assembly, would like to express our concern over the spate of killings that have rocked the city of Calbayog in the past week.

Last Week, barely a year before the national elections in 2016, peace in Samar province, still reeling from the devastation of Typhoon Ruby, was broken. Gunmen killed the Punong Barangay of Barangay Carayman last May 27. A few days later gunmen boldly barged into a barangay session in Dagum, Calbayog City and repeatedly shot the Punong Barangay and another Barangay Kagawad. Police reports said that the gunmen were unmasked, wore no bonnets to hide their faces and that the fatalities belonged to opposite political camps.

We are alarmed that these killings may be the start of a wave of political violence in our provinces of the island of Samar.

One year before the national elections, it would be timely to stop the proliferation of loose firearms to ensure a peaceful election and to eradicate "private armies" who serve as goons during elections.

Mr. President, we seek your immediate assistance to resolve the killing the soonest possible time. This is the only way to avert further violence—to serve justice to the perpetrators of these crimes—so that peace may once again prevail in our provinces and to lessen many unsolved impunities until now.

Samar Island has been devastated by a series of ferocious typhoons in the past two years. We are still in the process of rehabilitating our communities, the infrastructures in our towns, restoring our livelihoods and environments. And peace is essential in our development process.

We urge you, esteem President of nation, to resolve these killings before these bring more violence.

Your partners in Samar Island for peace and development,

+ISABELO C. ABARQUEZ, D.D
Bishop of Calbayog

+CRISPIN B. VARQUEZ, D.D.
Bishop of Borongan

+EMMANUEL C. TRANCE, D.D.
Bishop of Catarman

May 27, 2015

GOVERNMENT OF THAILAND

Refugees—the 'anawim' of the Lord today

DECADES ago, the Philippines was host to the "boat people", hundreds if not thousands of Vietnamese fleeing their homeland, following the fall of what was then called Saigon. Our country then served as some kind of a way-station, because our Vietnamese guests soon found their way to other parts of the globe. One of them, in fact, rose through the ranks of ecclesiastical academe to become dean of theology at one of Rome's Pontifical Universities. It was a glorious chapter in our history, and we thank God that many of our priests and religious received the privilege of serving them.

Once more, refugees in flimsy boats, are making their way to our shores, having endured appalling conditions aboard these vessels. Doubtlessly, many lost their lives in the attempt to find some haven. They navigate into our waters tired, famished, desperate—many of them carrying the dead bodies of their children in their arms.

It is however a saddening fact that some countries in our Southeast Asian region have turned these refugees away, refusing them the comfort of even just a temporary stay. Ironically, the countries that turn refugees away view with each other for tourists and investors! In many instances, coast guard and naval patrol vessels tow these boats, brimming over with their load of our hungry, sick and desperate brothers and sisters back to the high seas, there to face the elements, and often, sadly, to perish!

The Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" has passed on our moral obligation in respect to refugees:

Progress in the capacity to live together within the universal human family is closely linked to the growth of a mentality of hospitality. Any person in danger who appears at a frontier has a right to protection. In order to make it easier to determine why such people have abandoned their country, as well as to adopt lasting solutions, a renewed commitment is needed to produce internationally acceptable norms for territorial asylum.(9) Such an attitude facilitates the search for common solutions and undercuts the validity of certain positions, sometimes put forward, that would limit acceptance and the granting of the right of asylum to the sole criterion of national interest. (n. 10)

PIERRE PRAKASH

While it may be true that there is no legal obligation on the part of the Republic of the Philippines or that of any other country to grant asylum to every refugee or displaced person, there is a moral obligation to protect them from the harm they flee from. There is a legal obligation not to forcibly repatriate them. And by all precepts of morality and decency, there is an obligation not to leave them to the mercilessness of the elements on the high seas.

In the Old Testament one of the sternest commands God gave his people was to treat the stranger with mercy and compassion because, God reminded his people, "you too were once strangers in the Land of Egypt." If anything at all, the plight of displaced persons and refugees makes clear to us how the artificial boundaries that we establish between ourselves—principally geographical and political boundaries—can in fact become barriers to that hospitality towards the other that makes us human, that marks us out as sons and daughters of an ever-welcoming Father.

We laud our government for its attitude of hospitality towards refugees, even as we urge other nations in the region, in the name of our common humanity and the common Father we recognize, to allow these refugees succor and assistance. For while our own economic resources may not allow us to to welcome every migrant as a permanent resident of our country, still there is always room for the weary and burdened to rest on our shores before they continue on their journey.

Once, our land was resplendent not only because of tourist spots and destinations, but because we welcomed refugees with the hospitality that has made us famous the world over. God gives us this chance once more to bind the wounds of body and spirit, warm the hearts and embrace in solidarity our brothers and sisters who come to us from troubled lands. Let the Philippines be a place where they can dream of a future of promise, possibly in other lands and where helping hands and generous hearts may make their dreams come true.

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
President, CBCP
May 19, 2015

Wanted: Able candidates. Wise voters. Trustworthy COMELEC.

IT is not a secret that the Philippines has one government after another filled up with public officials--especially in the legislative and executive departments from the local, to the regional up to the national--many of whom are either incompetent or self-serving, insensitive or infamous, dishonest or downright corrupt--or all of the said shameful personal traits combined. The over-all result of such socio-political misfortune for the majority of the people of the Philippines is not a secret: widespread poverty and misery even. Discontent and disgust as well. Resentment and anger too. Hopelessness or downright despair. So it is that as the big majority of politicos are holding power and might, are wallowing in wealth and luxury, most of the Filipinos are finding it hard to find enough food to eat and clothing to wear, to fund a good education for their children.

It is said that in a real democracy, the Country is the people and the people make the Country as the holders of sovereignty. While this is not only inspiring but also poetic, it is experience confirmatory of the ground reality that it is the government itself that builds or destroys the Country, that serves or takes advantage of the people. No. This is in no way meant to say that the people are free to do nothing for the good of their Country, for their own good as well. It simply intends to emphasize the living truth that the government--filled up and run by key public officials elected by the people as but their representatives – either serves or enslaves the citizens themselves. Though it is sad to say and probably even harder to accept, Filipinos in general are at the mercy of their government – run by public officials majority of whom are incompetent, dishonest, hedonists. There are three basic wants mandated by both reason and ethics to make the Philippines a better Country, to make the Filipinos somehow a blessed people as well:

Wanted: Able Candidates

No to candidates who only know how to read and write, who are but wallowing in popularity, who simply have money to buy votes. Their competence and industry, honesty and veracity are very much needed.

Wanted: Wise Voters

No to voters who are gullible, who vote for whosoever is around, who sell their votes even. Let them remember that their votes are no less precious, no less valuable than those made by the rich, the famous and powerful.

Wanted: Trustworthy Comelec

Please: No more Comelec officials who are tarnished in their integrity and credibility, who preserve and nurture political ties. No more to Counting Machines that do not count or that give wrong (magical) tallies.

Are the above desiderata all but a dream?!

'Hocus PCOS'

"The Philippines is a democratic and republican State. Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from the people." (1987 Philippine Constitution, Art. 2, Sec. 1)

To this date and time, there are still certain individuals who think and in fact experience that the Philippines is an aristocratic and dynastic State, and that sovereignty resides in the wealthy and the powerful wherefrom government authority in effect emanates. So is it that while the Philippines is a noble Country and the Filipino people are an honorable citizenry, the living reality however is that the Filipinos have a markedly pro-self government plus salient pro-dynastic public officials. So it is that while the "Declaration" of a Principle from the Philippine Constitution itself as above-cited is both noble and ennobling, the truth however in ground reality is exactly its living opposite--a contradiction incarnate.

In no way does it mean that the Philippines is a forever doomed Country, that the government is a permanently damaged entity, that the Filipinos are forever a condemned people. But the sad truth is that the present government with its erratic functions and sickening options – like decimating the Country in favor of warlords, taxing its citizens from the womb to the tomb, selling public utilities outright to business enterprises, worshipping foreign investments, and other anti-Filipino agenda, rests under the corrupt and corrupting command of majority of infamous public officials who are not really elected by the sovereign citizens. Instead they are holding public offices, enjoying their perks and filling their bank accounts here and abroad, for having shamefully cheated in the elections through their highly paid minions.

Remember the 2010 and 2013 PCOS fiascos. Look out for the 2016 HOCUS PCOS!

One thing is certain. If sovereignty really resides in the people and government authority truly emanates from the people, how come the Filipinos have a government that is not only incompetent but also corrupt? How come majority of their public officials from the local, the regional and up to the national level are pro-selves and wherefore self-serving? Answer: First, the Filipinos allowed themselves to be cheated in the election such that their votes for their chosen candidates are in fact counted in favor of others. Second, the People, however, acted as if they were blind, deaf, and dumb. Third, the Citizens of the Philippines are definitely not sovereign, even but taking to account the dominion of the infamous trio of "Guns, Goons and Gold" in the Country, especially so during elections.

Given the above observations, the People of the Philippines who have the sovereignty in the Country and from whom all government authority emanates, better wake up, stand up, and be counted for a really clean and truly honest 2016 elections--watching out in particular how their votes will be counted. Otherwise...

Political dynasty

THE 1987 Philippine Constitution expressly and categorically prohibits "Political Dynasty" (Art. 2, Sec. 26) whose meaning up to now—no less than some 28 years later—is not yet legally defined neither in substance nor in incidentals. This is not difficult to understand—even but considering that a good number of "honorables" in both the legislative and executive branches of government have straight and/or collateral, dynastic/sanguine affiliations also in government.

In fact, by way of example, there is one well-known high-ranking public official in the land who has a daughter in the Senate, another daughter in the House of Representatives, plus a son heading a local government as some kind of an heir to his mother who previously held the same public office. This appears to be one of the best and concrete examples of dynastic politics—without the least even but insinuating something more, particularly in conjunction with the forthcoming 2016 National Elections.

What is however more interesting to know and intriguing to analyze is the phenomenon known and noted by an intelligent and respectable media-man who found out an interesting fact and had the courage to bring to the attention of the general public something that can be called as "Administrative Dynasty" in the Executive Department under the presently reigning aristocrat. Just imagine what this means and how it manifests more concretely during the term of the now still reigning administration. With but the intention of somehow exposing the delusion of the now infamous hurrah of "Matuwid na Daan," there is this disturbing, as well as exasperating phenomenon among nothing less than an illustrious member of the Cabinet of Chief-in-Command himself.

There is the well-known and very powerful Cabinet Member who is said to have no less than nine (9) relatives in government. There is the wife, plus three nieces, plus four nephews. In addition, the said wife herself listed seven more relatives likewise under government employ. There are other Cabinet Members each with also a sizable number of relatives in government.

But since this political dynasty provision has not yet been defined—and not one among the legislators and those populating the palace are a bit interested in defining it for obvious reasons—people can only harp on the basic route of propriety or delicadeza of which not one of the current breed of politicians is known for. In most cases, Philippine politics continue to be family business with nary any qualms or concern for the country or the common good.

The Sands of Forgiveness

A STORY tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face.

The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand:

TODAY, MY BEST FRIEND SLAPPED ME IN THE FACE.

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him.

After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone:

TODAY, MY BEST FRIEND SAVED MY LIFE.

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

LEARN TO WRITE YOUR HURTS IN THE SAND AND TO CARVE YOUR BENEFITS IN STONE.

The Window

TWO men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.

And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water, while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band--he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed.

One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

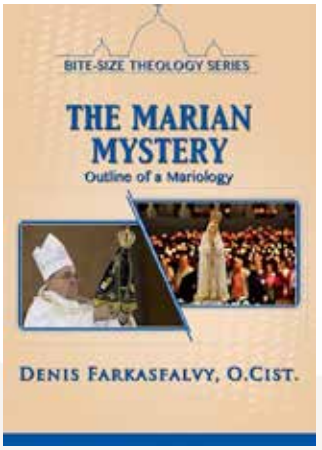
The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

Epilogue. . . .There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all of the things you have that money can't buy. "Today is a gift, that's why it is called the PRESENT".

Sensus Fidelium and Canon Law

Anthony Ekpo

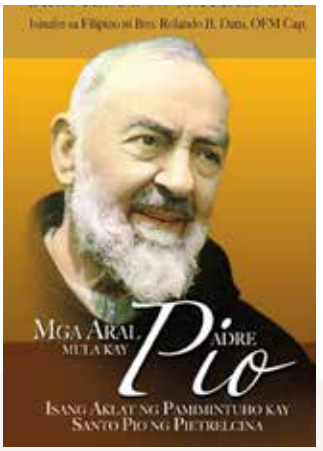
SENSUS fidelium. A sense of the faithful. Without it, the Church's life would grind to a halt. It was during the Second Vatican Council that more people came to understand and see a wider perspective of what it meant for a Catholic to see things "with the eyes of faith." This book shows us just how much Canon Law relates to "the sense of the faith of the whole people of God." According to Archbishop of Brisbane Mark Coleridge, "The sensus fidelium is a term often invoked but not always well understood. Here Anthony Ekpo throws light on a term which is never mentioned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council but which, as he explains, takes us to the heart of what the Council taught about the Church. He also shows how theology and canon law, so often seen as different worlds, can work together to consolidate the understanding and experience of the Church as communion. This is a book which helps us cross borders in more ways than one." Rev. John J. Burkhard, OFM, Conv, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology, The Washington Theological Union, USA calls Ekpo's work "a worthy addition to the ever-expanding literature on the 'sense of the faithful.'"



The Marian Mystery - Outline of a Mariology

Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist.

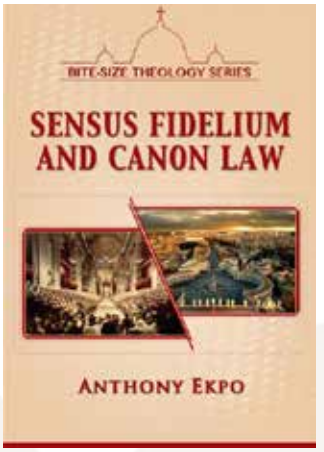
WHO is Mary? Do Catholics merely tolerate her? While Scripture mentions Mary and events in her life a considerable number of times, this book aims to shed light on the development of Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary. "It begins with a biblical and patristic inquiry about the place and meaning of Mary in salvation history with reference to the Hebrew Scriptures," says a recent review, describing this work by Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist., a research scholar of Theology. Mindful to seemingly small yet telling details, this approach recognizes that Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 cannot be read "in isolation from the Mariological tradition of the second century which emphasized the Mary/Eve parallel from Genesis." Farkasfalvy follows the tradition of eminent theologians as Origen, Athanasius and Ambrose who believed in and defended the universally acknowledged article of faith regarding Mary's perpetual virginity. Essentially, the book can only lead us to believe even more deeply that the roles of Blessed Virgin Mary and of Jesus are invariably intertwined and interconnected. The book also recognizes the contributions of the Eastern Churches to the deepening of the Church's teachings on Mary and her role as Mother of God or the Theotokos, "The God-bearer". The author also sought to address complex issues brought about by the Protestant Reformation.



Mga Aral Mula Kay Padre Pio

Bro. Jesus N. Matias, OFS

BORN May 25, 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy, this 19th century priest would impact many more generations even years after his death. Who would have known that the stigmatic Padre Pio, who suffered being ostracized by his own confreres for demonic harassments early in his religious life would become a steady and relentless voice of conversion for believers the world over? This modest yet brave little book by Bro. Jesus Matias or Bro. Jes, as he is fondly called aims to pay tribute to St. Padre Pio in a mightily personal way by sharing lessons and insights gleaned from the saint's life and sayings. Padre Pio's voice calls the faithful back to God irresistibly when his words are remembered: "I will stand at the gates of Heaven and I will not enter until all of my spiritual children are with me."



A Love That Never Says Goodbye

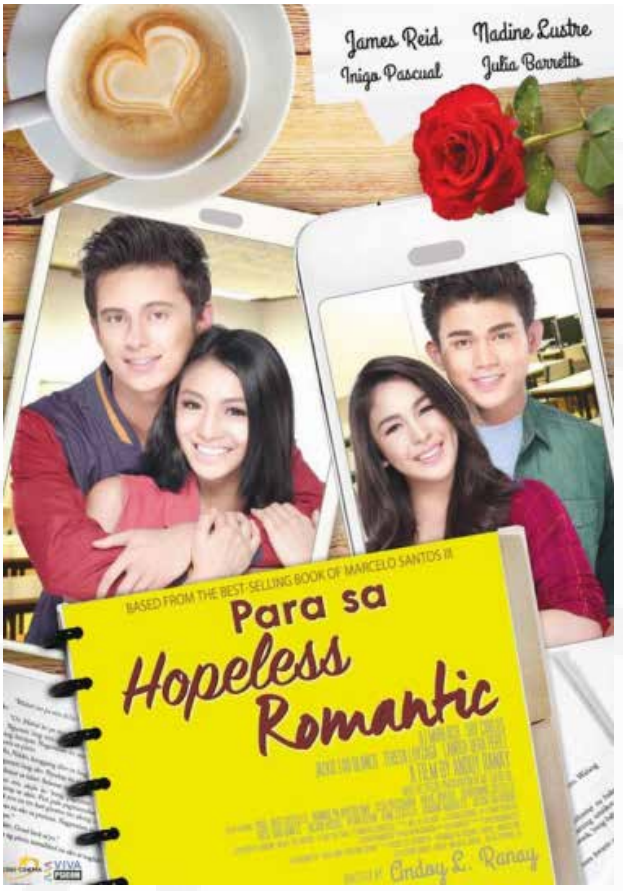
Rodolfo deG Ibanez PhD, MD

WHAT can one learn by unearthing the shared history, coupled joys, and mourning of a family? "The ordinary experiences that you will read in the pages of this book are all stories that have been intertwined from several generations." These generations, the author believes "is brought together by only one, the greatest generation of all, which he would like to refer to as the generation of love." This timeless, boundless story is probably the most repeated story in the world, but far from being a child's bedtime fairy tale, this story is real, impacting time and space, pushing the limits of what was thought to be possible: Man became a child of God. "The Greatest Story Ever Told" can only really give birth to "a love that never says goodbye."

Para sa Hopeless Romantic

Direction: Andoy Ranay; Cast: James Reid, Nadine Lustre, Julia Barretto and Inigo Pascual; Story: Marcelo Santos III; Screenplay: JM Gadingan; Editing: Nacelle Sayr; Cinematography: ; Production Design: ; Producer: .; Music: ; Location: PUP, Manila area; Genre: Teen Romance; Distributor: Star Cinema; Running Time:1:45;

Technical assessment : 3 stars
Moral assessment : 3 stars
CINEMA rating: V13



Hanggang ngayon ay masakit pa rin para kay Becca (Lustre) ang paghihiwalay nila ng kasintahang si Nikko (Reid), kaya naman kahit sa kanyang pagsusulat ng nobela para sa dyaryo ng paaralan ay hindi rin niya mabigyan ng masayang pagtatapos ang kanyang mga tauhang sina Maria (Barretto) at Ryan (Pascual) sa kanyang kwento. Pero muli siyang mabubuhayan ng loob nang magkaroon ng di sinasadyang ugnayan sa taong nakaupo rin sa kanyang upuan sa klase dahil sa pagpapalitan nila ng sulat at kwento.

May kaunting kiliti ang Para sa Hopeless Romantic, lalo sa mga kabataang sumusubaybay sa mga tampok na tambalan. Nakakatuwa rin ang disenyong pamproduksyon, lalo sa unang bahagi ng pelikula, kung saan kulay rosas ang kapaligiran ng ikinathang mundo nina Maria at Ryan, samantalang makatotohanan ang mga kulay sa mundo nina Becca at Nikko. Wala namang bigat na hiningi mula sa pagganap ng mga tauhan kaya't mapapatawad na ang matigas at tila mala-karton na pag-atake nina Reid at Pascual at ang malatang pagganap ni Barretto. Malinis ang pagkagawa sa pelikula at walang mapupuna sa ibang teknikal na aspeto nito. Kung sana ay sinikap pang pigain ang pagganap ng mga tauhan dahil walang “chemistry” ang kani-kanilang tambalan kaya’t ipinagpilitan ng musika at ng mga angulo ng kamera na palabasing nagkakagustuhan sila, para naman kiligin ang mga manunuod sa mga bahaging ito. Mas malaki naman ang kakulangan ng kwento sa pagtalakay sa pag-ibig dahil nauuwi lamang sa romansang pangkabataan ang mga karanasan nito. Sabagay, kaya nga “hopeless romantic” ang pamagat, dahil ipinapapalagay na hindi masyadong pag-iisipan ang panunuorin.

Bagamat wala namang malaswa o bastos sa Para sa Hopeless Romantic, ay may malaking usapin itong binubuksan—lalo na para sa mga magulang. Ang panahon ba ng kabataan ay panahon ng pagkakaroon ng relasyon? Handa nga ba ang isang mag-aaral na nasa high school na harapin ang kumplikasyon ng relasyon at pag-ibig? Tiyak, ang sagot ay hindi, kaya naman kadalasan ang isang kabataang nahiwalayan ng nobyo o nobya ay halos madurog na ang mundo at hirap nang harapin ang iba pang responsibilidad. Heto kasi ang idinidikta at ibinebenta ng media: "kabataan + romansa = takilya". Akala tuloy ng kabataan, pagtuntong nila ng "teen" ay may lisensya na silang magkarelasyon at duon na iikot ang kanilang mundo at buhay.

Ang tunay na pag-ibig ay mahirap matagpuan sa usbong ng kabataan dahil higit pa ito sa kilig, romansa at kulay rosas na kapaligiran. Ang tunay na pag-ibig ay sinusubok ng panahon, hinahasa ng mga tunay na suliranin ng buhay, pinapalalim at pinapagtibay ng karanasan at ng hamon ng pagbubuo ng sarili. Kung manunuod ang mga kabataan, nas mabuting may kasamang nakatatanda na makapagpapaliwanag sa kanila ng konsepto ng pag-ibig.

CATHOLIC INITIATIVE FOR ENLIGHTENED MOVIE APPRECIATION

PAKISTAN. Dozens face murder charges for lynching of Christian couple

In Pakistan's Punjab province, 106 people have been charged with the November 2014 murder of a Christian couple, who were attacked by a lynch mob and burned alive after being accused of blasphemy. Pakistan's anti-terrorism court charged that three Muslim clerics were involved in persistent provocative speech against the couple, while local media reported the clerics stirred up over 400 people against Shahzad Masih and his wife Shama, who was pregnant with the couple's fourth child. The Christian couple were killed and their bodies burned by a mob after they were accused of desecrating the Quran. Another 32 alleged participants in the lynching are still at large, BBC News reports. ***(CNA)***

INDIA. Bishop uses cartooning as a 'powerful tool for evangelization'

Not every bishop is a cartoonist. But Bishop Stephen Rotluanga of Aizawl in northeast India is. He has become known as the "cartoonist bishop of India." That's because at the end of every major gathering of the Indian bishops, Bishop Rotluanga would summarize the proceedings succinctly and strikingly in a large cartoon. And he uses his artwork in his ministry in Mizoram state, where he is the only bishop. "Drawing and painting is my God-given talent and I have a duty to use my talent to spread the word of God," Bishop Rotluanga, 62, said. ***(CNS)***

PHILIPPINES. PH first non-Muslim country certified to export 'halal' products

The Philippines is poised to become the only non-Muslim country that will export "halal" products that meet standards of an international accrediting body. The Philippines, more than 80 percent Catholic, announced June 2 that it had been approved by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to bring its produced goods up to par with "permitted" or "lawful" standards of Muslim law. With food, keeping halal means no pork while other meat must not come from carnivorous animals and should be slaughtered in accordance with Muslim law. In addition, alcohol is banned among other requirements. Non-food products, including cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, also should not have banned elements. ***(CNS)***

MYANMAR. Army releases 51 child soldiers

Myanmar's army on June 4 released 51 children and young people from its armed forces, said the United Nations, which commended the country's progress toward ending the involvement of children in armed conflict. The release was the second batch of child soldiers discharged from the army—known as the Tatmadaw—in 2015, bringing the total to 93 children. Since June 2012, when Myanmar committed to ending the recruitment and use of children in the military by signing a Joint Action Plan with the UN, 646 children have been released by the army, the UN says. ***(UCAN)***

INDIA. Authorities prove death threat against cardinal

Police in India are probing a death threat a Catholic cardinal received this month, allegedly sent by a Maoist group in the eastern state of Jharkhand. Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, the archbishop of Ranchi, the state capital, received a threatening letter this week purportedly from the People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI), which is a breakaway faction of the Communist Party of India. The letter demanded a payment of 50 million rupees, or about US$780,000. It claimed the Church has financially prospered through evangelism. ***(UCAN)***

VIETNAM. Catholic activist on hunger strike against prison abuse

The Vietnamese Catholic activist Maria Ta Phong Tan, imprisoned for "anti-government propaganda" through his blog, has been on hunger strike for at least three weeks to protest against prison abuse. The woman, a former police officer and known internationally for her work online, denounces what she calls "mistreatment" of political prisoners by the authorities, locked up in a detention center in the province of Thanh Hoa. In 2012 she was sentenced to 10 years in prison for her political and social activity. Mary's sister, Ta Minh Tu, visited her in prison last June 3, and following the meeting made public her sister's protest. "She wants to protest—she added—against the mistreatment of political prisoners by the prison authorities." ***(Asianews)***

KOREA. Gov't fails to be forthright on the true risks of MERS—bishop

South Korea's health authorities "were wrong to adopt a policy of non-information on MERS," said Mgr Lazarus You Heung-sik, bishop of Daejeon and president of the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace. "There is little transparency in the country," he said. "People should have been better informed of the risks posed by MERS. By choosing an opaque approach, the government has in fact helped spread rumors and rumors have not helped the situation." On June 11, authorities reported 14 new cases, bringing the total to 122, with nine dead. They also said that 183 people have now been quarantined. An additional 3,389 have been instructed to stay at home. ***(Asianews)***

EAST TIMOR. Faith, youth walk together – PMS Director

The National Director of the Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS) in East Timor, Fr. Mouzinho Pereira Lopez, sees the increase in vocations in the nation a testimony of faith flourishing in families and among youth. "In the young there is the seed of faith. People have trust in the Church and is attracted by the message of Christ," he said with regards to the life of the Church in East Timor. Ninety-six percent of the population in East Timor are Catholics. There are two inter-diocesan seminaries, and over 120 major seminarians and 250 minor seminarians. ***(UCAN)***

CHINA. Catholic leaders detained in China

Authorities have stepped up persecution of underground Catholics in Hebei province with the detention of a bishop and a priest as well as the demolition of an altar that left two laywomen injured, all in separate incidents this month. Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding was taken away by officials on May 12 and then sent back to his cathedral to celebrate Mass on Pentecost Sunday on May 24, according to his priests. It remained unclear why the bishop had been detained for 12 days. Authorities have recently ordered all religious personnel—without specifying which faiths—to report their whereabouts, a UCAN source said. ***(UCAN)***

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Church launches 'zero
hunger bill' petition

By Roy Lagarde

CARITAS Philippines has urged President Benigno Aquino III to certify as urgent a measure that seeks to end hunger in the country in ten years.

Archbishop Rolando Tirona, president of Caritas Philippines, said Aquino should certify the "zero hunger bill" as urgent to expedite and ensure its passage before his term ends next year.

"The early passage of the bill could save many of our brothers and sisters from hunger and death, which is the number one cause of mortality," Tirona said.

Also known as HB 3795 or the Right to Adequate Food Framework Act of 2014, it aims to establish the right to food as a government priority that will entail a comprehensive program to address hunger.

"The right to food is a basic right that must be upheld and fulfilled by the duty-holders, our government," he said.

Signature drive

To show the church's scale of support for the measure, Caritas has also launched a petition to push for the passage of the pending bill in Congress.

The agency is tapping the help of all the dioceses in gathering signatures in their respective parishes in support of the bill.

Tirona said they are also coordinating with other civic-minded groups for the passage of House Bill 3795 or the Right to Adequate Food Framework Act of 2014.

Hunger Bill / A8

Newly elected Caritas Internationalis president Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle speaks during "Caritas Day" where delegates embraced the "One Human Family, Food for All" campaign to end hunger, at the Expo 2015 world's fair in Milan, Italy on May 10. "We are one human family fueled by hunger," said the first Asian to head the confederation of Catholic charities. "It is not just about food but it is the same hunger that unites us."

CBCP exec
links clim
change to
poverty

CARITAS Philip
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WHAT'S

Church says PHL has 'moral