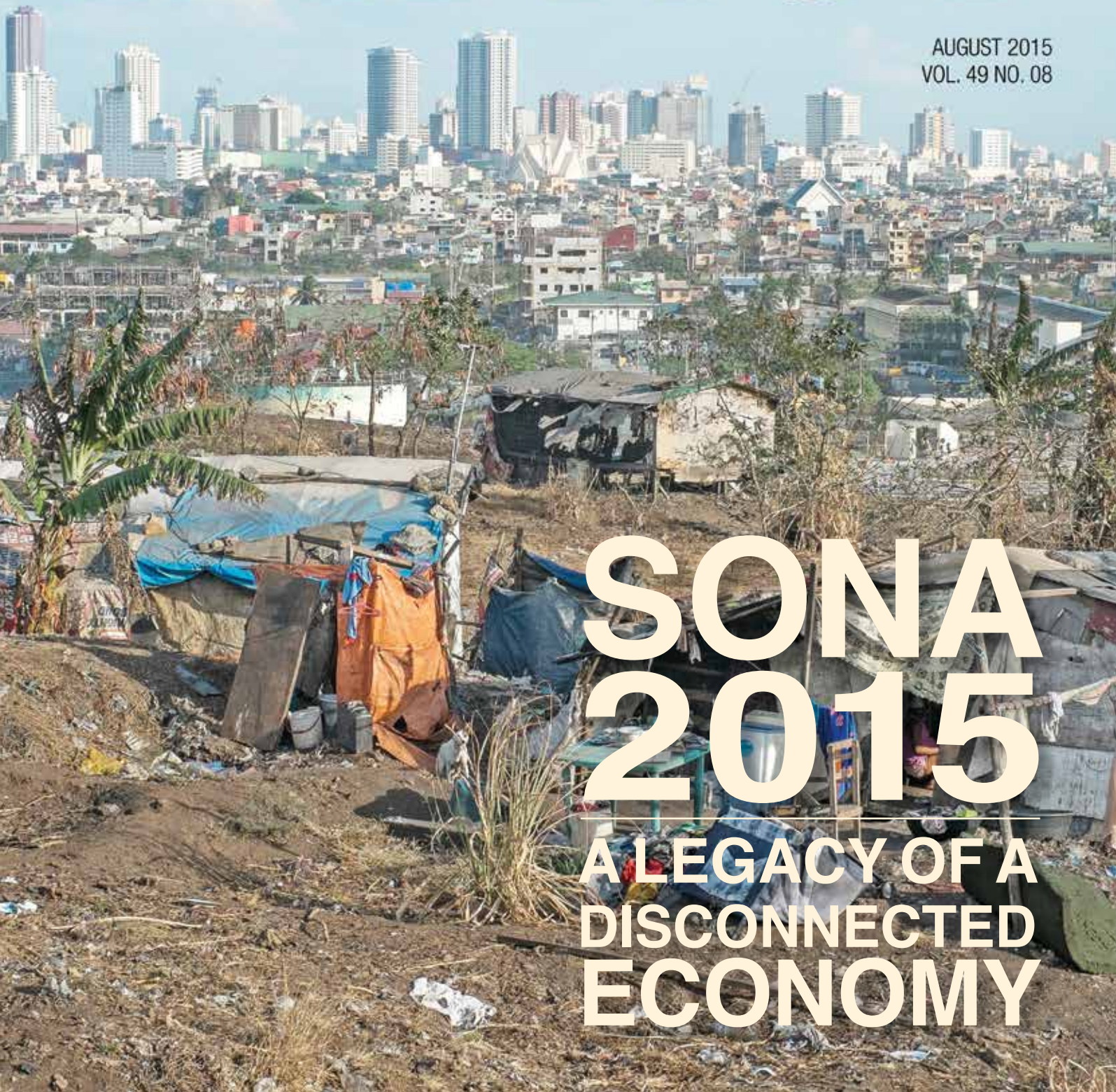
ASIAN MAGAZINE FOR HUMAN TRANSFORMATION

IMPACT

AUGUST 2015
VOL. 49 NO. 08



SONA 2015

A LEGACY OF A DISCONNECTED ECONOMY

IMPACT

ISSN 0300-4155 / Asian Magazine for Human Transformation Through Education, Social Advocacy and Evangelization / P.O. Box 2481, 1099 Manila, Philippines

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Published monthly by
AREOPAGUS COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE fifth and the final State of the Nation Address of President Benigno S. Aquino III, delivered last July 27, was by far the longest--two hours and ten minutes, or so--in recent memory. But, disputably, it may have been the shortest in truthfully reporting the real situation of the country. Again for the nth time, it opened by blaming the past administration as if his past five years did nothing to correct whatever irregularities he inherited, and concluded by lengthily thanking his cohorts, including his personal aides, but not a word for those who have given their lives for this administration, obviously the so-called SAF 44. In-between was, in the words of Manila Times columnist Yen Makabenta, "his untruthful presentation...of the state of the nation after five years under his watch...by claiming non-existent reforms and achievements..."

That is an exaggeration, of course. But since past administrations, delivering "state of the nation" addresses has mostly been political instead of a sincere act of governance—such as one that a head of state has to dutifully do as a CEO does to the members of a the board of, say, a corporation. That being the case, SONAs have seemingly been extensions of political campaigns during elections. They are a masterful concoction of PR companies full of promotional pieces that are not reflective of truth. On the side, SONAs have become the best time to exhibit fashion and extravagance of the "honorables" in a country that groans in poverty and want.

In an array of so many half-truths, the honorable president of this republic has reported a lot of achievements that were true, in fairness. The only rub was, those were of little consequence to the misery that the Filipino people are now suffering from. To daringly regard the Philippines, for instance, as one that has economically transformed into "a darling of Asia" or as Asia's newest economic miracle is hard to take. Or to claim that fiscal management is one of the major achievements of the Aquino administration verges on fantasy. Without even mentioning economic fundamentals, the Supreme Court's verdict that Aquino's Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) is unconstitutional is enough to topple this claim.

Anti-corruption campaign has apparently been the centerpiece program of the Aquino government. Despite government claims to the contrary, corruption has never abated in present dispensation. The recent survey of Radio Veritas, for instance, showed that four in ten Filipinos believe that Aquino's anti-corruption program is a failure. Ground realities say corruption has even worsened under Aquino. True, a few high-ranking government officials were jailed for corruption, but they mostly came from the opposite political party. Besides, it is only through overhauling a corrupt system that the anti-corruption campaign will give a dent—jailing a few corrupt officials will not. Unfortunately, the Aquino administration which is now at its tail-end does not have a blueprint of a systematic anti-corruption program.

Our cover story which is written by Sonny Africa is entitled "SONA 2015: A Legacy of A Disconnected Economy. Read on.

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Quote in the Act

"Government and corporate figures remain items of cold statistics until they are translated into better lives by those now most disadvantaged."

Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan and president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in a recent statement "Bringing Christ to Politics" where he urged "lay persons to be actively engaged in the apostolate of evangelizing the political order."

"Creating safer conditions for miners as is called for by others is no longer a moral option when mining itself has become an act of social injustice and environmental destruction."

Edione Febrero, a Catholic priest who heads the Social Action Center of the diocese of Antique; in a recent statement calling for the closure of Semirara coal mines where 9 miners died on July 27, 2015 after the north wall of the open pit collapsed.

"It is a painful reality that one ethnic race that speaks the same language turn against each other for 70 long years."

Andres Yeom Soo-jung, Cardinal archbishop of Seoul; in a timely message issued on the occasion of the 2015 feast of the Assumption of Mary, which marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Korea from Japan and the division of North and South Korea which recently saw increased military tension after landmine blasts and artillery fires were exchanged at the Demilitarized Zone.

"The Aquino government lacks compassion and respect for OFWs."

Ruperto Santos, Bishop of the diocese of Balanga and Chair of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant People; saying further that the issue on balikbayan boxes is adding insult to injury.

"When are they going to release these funds? Are they waiting for 2016?"

Edu Gariguez, executive secretary of Caritas Philippines; on the popular perception that unused funds donated by foreign governments for Yolanda victims maybe used for the 2016 national elections; A recent study by Caritas and other humanitarian organizations showed that only Php 73.15 billion of the total Php 170 billion fund has been released as of March 2015.

Striving for just a peace, the moral road

(Statement of CBCP Plenary Assembly Adopting the Mindanao Catholic Bishops' stand on the BBL and the Peace Process)

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

Our Common Stand

Questions and varying opinions about the peace process and the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) abound at all levels of Mindanao society.

As religious and moral teachers we, Catholic bishops of Mindanao, stand on common moral ground on the issues.

We do not intend to endorse or not to endorse any draft BBL being discussed by the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives. But we intend to envision a BBL that is based on and guided by social moral principles.

We note that:

1. Christianity and Islam are religions of peace;

2. The vast majority of Muslim, Christian, and Indigenous People communities in Mindanao aspire for peace; and

3. All-out war is not the answer to the Mindanao situation.

Ever since colonial times, Muslim leaders have expressed three major grievances: the reduction of their ancestral territory, the erosion of their cultural identity, and the loss of self-determination in the development of their communities.

At the basis of the deep fundamental Bangsamoro aspiration to self-determination in an autonomous region is the moral principle of social justice. Social justice implies the other moral principles of just peace and inter-religious harmony.

This is the moral framework from which we view the peace process and the draft BBL.

A Social Climate of Mutual Mistrust, Bias and Prejudice

The present social context is one of mutual biases and prejudices, of mutual charges of injustice. Such social climate demands moral consideration.

For the Christian disciple, the fundamental wake-up call to conscience would be: Would Jesus approve our biases and prejudices that create unpeace?

Bias and prejudice are part and parcel of the deep mistrust between Christians and Muslims, two peoples coming from the same Abrahamic faith.

It is this climate of mistrust that the horrible human tragedy at Mamasapano, Maguindanao, has resurrected. It has placed the peace process and the proposed BBL in limbo. But we believe that the Mamasapano disaster must not be equated with the BBL.

A BBL We Do Not Want

Everyone wants peace, everyone wants some kind of BBL.

On our part, viewing the issues from a moral angle, we do not want a BBL that does not effectively address the root causes of social injustice.

We do not want a BBL that does not achieve the centuries-old Bangsamoro aspiration for self-determination.

We do not want a BBL that makes the proposed Bangsamoro area of self-determination less autonomous than the ARMM it is meant to replace.

We do not want a BBL that discriminates by not effectively protecting and promoting the rights of minorities, indigenous or not.

We do not want a BBL that will foster ethnic, religious, political, and economic discrimination.

A BBL We Want

Like everyone else we, Bishops, want a just and lasting peace.

For this reason, we want a Bangsamoro Basic Law that is rooted in social justice and promotes social justice.

We want a BBL that effectively addresses the injustices suffered by the Bangsamoro as well as the injustices suffered by indigenous peoples and various religious minorities within the proposed Bangsamoro area.

We want a BBL that concretely achieves the self-determination of the Bangsamoro in an identified area that remains part and parcel of the territorial integrity and under the national sovereignty of the Philippine Republic.

We want a BBL that promotes harmonious relationships between peoples of various ethnic groups and of different faiths.

We want a BBL that effectively protects universal human rights, particularly the rights of IPs already enshrined in law, and the rights of Christian minorities who fear harassment and further marginalization.

We want a BBL that responds concretely to the concerns, hopes and aspirations of all stakeholders, of various Bangsamoro groups, and of non-Moro citizens within the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

We want a BBL whose provisions are clearly Constitutional, without betraying the intent and spirit of peace agreements.

That is the BBL we envision on the basis of social moral principles of social justice, harmony and peace. It is a vision that goes beyond the proposals now being discussed in our legislature.

The Constitutional Issue

On both sides of the constitutional issue are legal experts and constitutional luminaries. One group defends the constitutionality of BBL provisions and

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their root-documents, the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The other group rejects them as unconstitutional.

In the light of these divergent expert opinions we note the scrutiny of the BBL by Ad Hoc Legislative Committees.

We pray that the Ad Hoc Committees seriously and fairly consider these contrary expert opinions so as not to imperil the requirements of social justice for the Bangsamoro.

The suggestion of many experts, we believe, is wise—that such issues be left to the Supreme Court for judicial review. If left out through substantive revisions, the Supreme Court can no longer re-insert them.

The Need for Trust in Waging Peace

Through many years of intense, and often adversarial debates, the relationship between our government peace panel and the MILF peace panel has evolved from suspicion and hostility to mutual trust and understanding.

Theirs was a labor of partnership and they have produced, they believe, an agreement that, though imperfect, is a pathway to a just and lasting peace.

Let us then transcend the negative emotions of human tragedy and continue on the road to peace by way of dialogue, based on mutual trust, openness, and respect.

Conclusion

We reiterate the fundamental intention of this statement. It does not intend to be either for or against the various drafts of the BBL being discussed in our Legislature. It simply presents social and moral principles and envisions, in general terms, a BBL that flows from the same principles.

The moral imperative to lasting peace is this: Christians, Muslims, Lumads and members of other faiths have to begin trusting in one another.

Continuing mistrust is the road to continuing violence and unrest in Mindanao. Trust is a moral pre-requisite for justice, harmony and peace.

Mary is eminently honored in both the Qur'an and the Christian Bible as the Virgin Mother of Jesus, whom we Christians call "Our Peace." To the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Peace, we commend all our striving for a just and lasting peace.

On the Occasion of the
CBCP Plenary Assembly
Pius XII Center, Manila
11 July 2015

Human Trafficking and Christian Faith

By Fr. Shay Cullen

The peace and compassion, freedom and dignity championed by Jesus of Nazareth are ideals that give purpose and meaning to human existence. Slavery, the selling, abduction or control of humans for exploitation, of any kind by any means is a deprivation of what makes us preciously human: thoughtful free choice. When this unique attribute of personal freedom to choose is taken away it becomes a crime against the person.

It is free choice that sets us apart from all other living creatures. When it is taken from us, our human dignity is diminished, our rights are denied, and we are being treated as less than human.

That's why the captivity that goes with human trafficking is devastating to human beings. Their self-esteem is taken from them, and their will to live is weakened. Many turn to suicide. Without the freedom to choose, to exercise free will, to decide for oneself how and where to live without the chains of debt, paralyzing fear and threats, the helpless captive is reduced to the state of a silent caged bird, the chained creature.

Last April, as many as five hundred men from Thailand were rescued and freed form human bondage on a Indonesian island. They were taken there against their will and forced to work on fishing boats and never allowed to leave. Some died on the island, their graves were discovered.

An Associated Press journalist uncovered the syndicate running the human trafficking operation.

During a hearing on human trafficking with the US Congress committee headed by Representative and human rights advocate Chris Smith, they were commended for their brave and courageous exposé that led to the rescue of the slaves. That is only the tip of the monumental iceberg where millions are enslaved in the modern world.

When Jesus declared in his home town that his mission was to fulfill the promise and prophecy of Isaiah to uplift the poor, open the minds and hearts of those blinded by tradition and ignorance, and declare a Jubilee year when all captive slaves would be freed and debts be cancelled and forgiven, and land would be returned to its rightful owners, there was an angry uproar from the elders, landowners, and the wealthy.

His message was clear to the astute teachers of the law and the Biblical scholars. To them, he was going to turn the power structure of society on its head, deliver it to the poor and the downtrodden, and give power to the freed slaves. The rich were outraged, and the poor were delighted.

The mission statement of Isaiah was adopted word for word by Jesus. In the synagogue of Nazareth, he was invited to read the scripture. He opened the scroll, looked for the passage from Isaiah and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind: to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. (Luke 4:16-19).

No wonder the authorities were outraged. What an audacious, arrogant statement to make! We can imagine their response: 'Who is this son of a carpenter to claim he is equal to the great Isaiah and that he would implement and fulfill the prophet's mission?'

This was pure fantasy if not blasphemy to them. But it was also dangerous and subversive. Talk of freeing captives and slaves was treason to the Romans, and the proxy rulers of Palestine feared losing their religious power and wealth if they lost their positions.

It was much like today's world, run on the bonded labour of an estimated twenty million people.

Advocating openly for equality and freedom for the captives and the poor was a dangerous mission. Jesus' challenge to the system and denunciation of corrupt hypocrites

MARCELLO CASAL JR.

eventually led to his execution.

While the Sermon on the Mount was a powerful social and spiritual declaration for the rights of the poor, he taught most forcibly by example. He washed his disciples feet, called them friends, not servants. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, opposed child abuse by saying the "little ones" were the most important (Matt. 18;1- 8)

He related as a concerned friend to the downtrodden and the rejected. He established before the world their worthiness as God's children and their inalienable rights to be free from all bondage, imprisonment, domination, and control by others. Women and children are the most vulnerable; the sex trade destroys lives, hopes, and dreams of millions.

We all need to be awakened to slavery and human trafficking .It is the worst crime against the poor and the hungry. They are seeking employment and a life of dignity free from poverty and too often are enslaved. We must oppose it and work for human rights and dignity.

The Truth About Liberation Theology

By Bernardo M. Villegas

I am amused at the way some international journalists are jumping to conclusions about the "revival of Liberation Theology." On the occasion of the beatification of the murdered Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero last May 23, there was speculation in the international press about "views of a scorned movement shifting as Pope Francis focuses on the poor." I think I know a little more than these Johnny-come-lately commentators about the history of liberation theology because when I came back from my studies in the U.S. in the mid-sixties, I went right into the eye of the storm of the controversy generated by the teachings of Father Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian priest who is known as the founder of Liberation Theology. As a professor of development economics in both De La Salle University and the University of the Philippines, I had to confront the misguided interpretations of the social doctrine of the Church being given by a few vocal professors, priests, nuns and, student activists under the name of liberation theology.

I can understand why the head of the Jesuits in 1973, Fr. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, thought liberation theology was too political and why when he was named Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he decided to focus on those unfortunate souls left behind by Argentina's economic upheaval. I am sure he saw what I experienced in my dealings with the proponents of liberation theology. Some of my students who became very passionate about the poor (a good thing in itself) started to renounce their Catholic faith and got bitten by the materialist dogma of Karl Marx, who did not believe in anything spiritual. Even some priests and nuns, some of whom fled to the hills to fight with the Communist rebels, stopped teaching Catechism to the poor, maintaining that "doctrine cannot be eaten." Their entire focus was to liberate the poor from economic deprivation, using the defective Marxist theory about why there are poor people. In fact, I had to explain to them that even from a scientific point of view, the Marxist theories about the "immerisation" of the workers in the process of industrialization did not have any empirical backing. Because of the introduction of social security and labor legislation, especially in countries like Germany and the United States, the Marxist prediction about the eventual downfall of an economy based on private ownership did not materialize. The liberation theologists were so obsessed with applying class struggle to Christian apostolate that they ended up recommending the very unchristian attitude of "hating the rich" in order to help the poor.

That is why Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his capacity as the Prefect for the Doctrine of the Faith had to come out with two documents assessing the Theology of Liberation in the light of Catholic doctrine. In those documents, he emphasized that there is a liberation theology that is very much in keeping with the teachings of Christ: the liberation of every human being from sin. In fact, even if it is true that there are sinful structures (unbridled capitalism, monopoly capitalism, legislation allowing abortion and same-sex marriage, etc.) eliminating those structures will not necessarily lead to a just and humane society if individual citizens do not liberate themselves from personal sins, such as those of greed, injustice, lust, and pride. The only lasting liberation theology is that which liberates individuals from personal sins through the help of the supernatural means procured for mankind by Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection. As Pope Francis wrote in the "Gospel of Joy", "the great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interest and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor."

Blessed Oscar Romero exercised the legitimate preferential option for the poor without falling into the excesses of those who misinterpreted liberation theology. As the future Pope Benedict XVI emphasized in the documents he wrote, preferential option for the poor should neither be exclusive nor excluding. It should not be exclusive in the sense that the love for the poor should move us to work for their "integral human development." In addition to caring for their material needs, we should provide for their spiritual needs and help nurture their Christian faith. Man does not live by bread alone, a dictum that Karl Marx completely repudiated. Furthermore, authentic Christian charity should not give a social reformer license to hate the rich in the name of liberation theology. That is why liberation theology faithful to Christian doctrine should not be excluding, i.e. one cannot exclude the rich from the love we owe to everyone.

One final word about Blessed Oscar Romero. If the writers who make snide remarks about "conservative" Catholic institutions like Opus Dei did a little more investigative journalism, they would have found out that the former Archbishop of San Salvador appreciated very much the apostolic works of this Personal Prelature in his diocese, especially those in favor of the poorest of the poor. In the Philippines, for example, those who still maintain that Opus Dei is "elitist" and is not concerned about the plight of the poor choose to ignore such social enterprises organized and managed by members of Opus Dei and their friends, such as Dualtech in Manila; CITE in Cebu; Punlaan and Anihan in Calamba and San Juan, Metro Manila, respectively, and many others, which are benefiting thousands of young men and women from the poorest households by providing them with a variety of technical skills that make them highly employable. No one should be surprised, however, that in practicing the preferential option for the poor, members of Opus Dei do not make the mistake of "hating the rich", who after all also have souls to be saved. For comments, my email address is bernardo.villegas@uap.asia.

The Cultural Battleground

IKV DOCU TEAM 2015

By Fr. Roy Cimagala

We need to be aware of this human need. We have to take care of our culture. If we want to grow and develop as authentic human beings, culture is both unavoidable and indispensable in our life.

Can we really say that we are conscious of our duties and responsibilities toward our culture? Do we know what are involved in this task? In our life's continuing struggle for meaning, culture is one of the main fronts to attend to.

A cursory look around would indicate that there's hardly any deliberate effort to take care of our culture. It is somehow presumed that we have a culture, but we are quite ignorant of how caring for it has to be carried out.

First of all, we need to understand its nature and character. It has both objective and subjective dimensions, spiritual and material aspects, global and local scope, etc. More importantly, it has both passive and active parts, and we need to know how to handle its many requirements.

We cannot be totally passive in our attitude toward it, though we cannot help but be receptive to it in our daily life. That's because culture is like the air we breathe. This time, though, we need to realize that we also have a role to play in creating that air, or at least in purifying it and putting it in conditions proper to us.

We just cannot allow culture to grow on its own. It needs our intervention. We have to understand that culture, like everything else in our life, is both a gift we receive and a project we have to do and develop.

Especially these days when the pace of development is getting faster and more complex, there's now a greater need for us to take fuller responsibility over it. We have to do things in such a way that we can say we make our own culture, even if culture also to a certain extent makes us.

Our problem now is that we seem to be falling for a mindless lifestyle of activism, guided mainly by values that are not deeply rooted enough on our true human dignity. In fact, this reference of what our true human dignity is has become impertinent to many people.

For many of us, the main principle that shapes our lifestyle seems to be pragmatism, and all its cohorts—popularity or fame, wealth and power, vanity and pride, etc. The inputs of faith and religion, so indispensable in figuring out who we really are, that's supposed to be basis of our culture, are hardly considered.

We need to correct this anomaly. We have to dismantle the so-called tyranny of relativism that a priori disposes anything that has to do with religion. That's unfair. That's completely undemocratic.

With this defective attitude, we cannot help but generate a thoroughly secularized culture that is allergic to spiritual and supernatural realities. That would compromise the flowering of a culture that is proper to us.

That is why these days, many people find it hard to relate what they are doing professionally, socially, politically, etc., to God. Their activities do not bring them closer to God. In fact, the reverse is true. Their activities bring them farther away from God.

There ensues a growing awkwardness in our relation with God. Religion becomes frozen in some formalistic rituals and customs, emptied of its vital substance.

With that predicament, what can we expect? For sure, the temptations to deception, injustice, etc., cannot be avoided. The stronger ones in worldly terms simply dominate the others. Our weaknesses, like our laziness and our concupiscence, cannot be properly addressed and healed. They tend to fester.

We need to create a culture that is proper to us as persons and ultimately as children of God. It is a culture that embraces both the spiritual and material dimensions of our life, our temporal affairs and eternal goal. Nothing less is needed.

For this, we need to help one another. The creation and development of culture is a universal concern. It has to involve all of us. Thus, we need to be more aware of what we call here as the cultural front of our life's struggles. We should avoid being indifferent to it.

At the moment, we can ask for, example, if we know how to place this new phenomenon of the Internet technology in the pursuit of developing a culture proper to us? Has our fascination for it led us closer to God and to the others? Has it built up more solidarity, justice, and charity?

"Consecrated Life at the Service of New Evangelization in Asia"

(Final Statement of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Consecrated Life Symposium IV, held at the Redemptorist Center, Pattaya, Thailand on July 20-25, 2015)

IN this year of Consecrated Life for the universal Church, we, the 101 delegates of Religious Women and Men, members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, Priests, and Bishops, representing 17 countries of Asia, shared our experiences and reflected on the theme of "Consecrated Life at the Service of New Evangelization in Asia."

Through an earlier questionnaire, FABC-OCL asked religious congregations about their understanding and concrete experiences of New Evangelization, the challenges and megatrends confronting them in Asia, and the pastoral resources, priorities and prophetic role of their communities.

We noted Pope Francis' call to "wake up the world" through communion and mission, and three characteristics of a Church engaged in New Evangelization: to be a Church of joy and mercy; to be "a Church which is poor and for the poor"; and to be an open Church.

We listened to the addresses of Cardinal Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai, SDB, Secretary of the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples.

We listened to country reports that gave us an appreciation of the distinctive context of each country, as well as the common challenges confronting all of us. In Pattaya, we also visited and learned from church-affiliated centers for orphans, differently-abled persons and marginalized women. But most of all, we listened to each other's stories and peak experiences of God's goodness and mercy at the heart of our vocation. We have developed friendships and

a feeling of belonging to one family. In this light, we reiterate the call to fidelity, to communion and to mission.

I. Fidelity to Jesus Christ and to the charism of each consecrated community

The New Evangelization thrust of the Church calls us consecrated men and women to return to our "first love", who is God in Jesus Christ to whom we are consecrated and to whom we are to be configured. This means to encounter the person of the Son anew and allow the Spirit to transform us into his likeness so that we can bear witness to him and to the Gospel for all peoples. This implies:

- An integral and life-long formation, which focuses on radical living of the Gospel nurtured by a life of prayer, simple lifestyle, humility, and docility;
- Owning and living our charism;
- Undergoing a process of conversion which involves us as persons and as communities, as well as our structures and institutions;
- Rediscovering the beauty of consecrated life with its joys, hopes and challenges;
- Becoming prophetic in living the Evangelical Counsels;
- Deepening an awareness of God's readiness for reconciliation and our forgiveness at all times;
- Experiencing God in real-life situations (natural and human-made disasters, political issues, etc.) as sources of hope and mercy.

II. Communion

Taking up the Holy Father's directive to religious to be "experts in communion" and prophetic witnesses living by Gospel values, we commit ourselves to living the inclusive love and solidarity that Jesus taught and lived by:

- Promoting a genuinely open and fraternal life in our communities, appreciating the uniqueness of persons and cultures, and helping all persons to grow up to God's dreams for them;
- Appreciating multiculturalism as a value, not as a burden; learning the richness of the cultures and settings where people come from;
- Treating our colleagues, employees and domestic help as treasured partners, creating the atmosphere and the structures for competent lay persons to work with us with justice and respect;
- Promoting unity and healing where there is division, bigotry or violence against groups.

III. Mission

As "missionary disciples," all Christians, particularly religious communities, are urged to "go forth to the existential peripheries." (Pope Francis to all Consecrated People, Nov 21, 2014). We are asked to move from our comfort zones to the margins, from mediocrity to passionate commitment.

The new evangelization is to be carried out by means of attraction, not by proselytizing (EG, 114). This means that we do mission following the via pulchritudinis, the way of beauty. It is through loving service that the beauty of the Gospel and the Christian faith shines through.

Trusting in God's enabling grace to respond with creativity and effectiveness, we face several megatrend challenges in Asia such as:

- Massive poverty and caring for the least and the lowly;
- Migrants, refugees and human trafficking;
- Indigenous people and preservation of cultures;
- Religious freedom and peace building;
- Family life and responsible parenthood;
- Youth and new ways of communication;
- Care of the environment and the earth as our common home.

We need to persevere in our dialogue with the poor, with peoples of other cultures and religions, as well as with the youth and faith-seekers.

We trust in our brothers in the hierarchy as well as our co-workers among the laity to regard us as equal partners in responding to the signs of the times. We need a profound prayer life and contemplative eyes to see Christ in the faces of the poor and the marginalized.

Commitment

We, consecrated men and women, are being challenged anew to turn our eyes towards the world, "to share the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of women and men of this age, especially those who are poor. . . who are afflicted [discriminated against, and marginalized]. " (GS, No. 1) Pope Francis has sounded the call for us, consecrated persons, to wake up the world and shine with the radiance of joy.

We recognize that we often appear as spiritless, lacking the fervor of a radical follower of Jesus Christ. We fix our gaze on Him, and allow Jesus to touch us daily. And He will come to us again, bless us, giving us a new heart.

To be faithful to our vocation as consecrated persons, we need to be:

- Mystics: women and men for whom God is our first love and the source of our joy and strength;
- Prophets: Convinced disciples for whom the non-negotiable absolute is the Gospel of Jesus;
- Servants: Loving and humble men and women who truly put the needs of others above our comforts, and who want to make a difference by creating a world of mutual respect, care and compassion.

Jesus came among us in tender compassion, drew strength from oneness with God, walked through the world excluding no one and used power only to heal and do good. We want to walk through God's world as He did. We rely on God's tender mercy, and on one another, and on all women and men of good will. And we want to support anyone who wants to walk the path as Jesus did.

We seek the motherly intercession of Mary, the best model of discipleship and Star of the New Evangelization. She listened to God's word, trusted God, said a whole-hearted 'Yes'—and then hastened to serve.

Like her, we, too, center our life on God's word, trust God to give us wisdom and strength, and say a full 'Yes.' Then, like her, we hasten to serve those who need us most.

Church official hits looming Semirara coal mine reopening

MANILA, Aug. 19, 2015—A church official in Antique criticized the government's decision to allow the resumption of open pit coal mine operations on Semirara Island.

Fr. Edione Febrero said it was too fast for the government to lift the suspension order it issued against the Semirara Mining and Power Corp. after last month's fatal mine accident.

"The process was just too fast. We want to know why they immediately lifted the suspension order," said Febrero, head of Antique's diocesan social action center.

The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) suspended operations at the mine after the Panian pit collapsed and killed nine workers on July 17.

But in less than a month, the DENR and restored the mining firm's environmental compliance certificate for its Panian mine expansion project on Aug. 10.

The DENR said the incident has no adverse effect or damage to the environment anyway.

While the DOE has yet to lift its own suspension order, the agency said it may base its decision on the DENR ruling.

The Panian mine site is the biggest open-pit coal mine in the Philippines.

Semirara coal mines ROY LAGARDE

Transparency, accountability

A group of climate justice advocates also denounced the DENR decision, saying it is unacceptable to have come from an agency which is mandated by law to ensure proper use of natural resources.

"Even if the mining operations in Semirara are still under suspension by the Department of Energy (DOE), the decision of the DENR clearly reflects the administration's attitude of complacency and neglect of human rights violations," said Glenn Ymata, Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) energy program director.

"While the DENR concludes that the recent landslide in Panian Mine was a 'fortuitous' event, a bigger picture exists," Ymata said. "The environmental impacts of mining in Semirara have been felt for years."

These include loss of vast mangrove forests brought by clearing, land reclamation, and infill dumping, toxic contaminants buildup in surrounding waters, increased particulate matter in the waters and air, coral destruction, and air and water pollution, he said.

Meanwhile, Sanlakas Secretary General Atty. Aaron Pedrosa calls for DENR's transparency and accountability, particularly in their investigations into the mining incidents in 2013 and 2015.

"The DENR and the present administration must be held accountable for the environmental impacts of mining in Semirara," he said. "They must release the results of the 2013 investigation and involve more civil society groups and people's organizations in the current investigations."

More mining applications

While the province has more pending mining applications, the priest fears that the government may also approve them anytime soon.

"If they were able to decide on the incident that fast, then we are also alarmed that the government will allow more mining operations in our province soon," Febrero said.

Antique has copper, gold, chromite, pyrite, iron, manganese and ferro alloy and limestone deposits.

Antique's social action center was earlier joined by Caritas Philippines in calling for the permanent closure of the coal mining after another major accident in two years.

Deeply pained over the loss of lives, the groups said they do not want another accident to happen and asked the government to ban all forms of mining in the region.

In February 2013, the DOE also suspended the SMPC's operation after a mining accident that claimed five lives but was given a go-signal to resume operations two months later.

World Day of Prayer for the environment

The priest also said they are mobilizing parishioners for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on Sept. 1 as declared by Pope Francis.

Febrero said it will be a solemn assembly of students, lay people, clergy, the religious, and various civil society organizations in the province's capital town of San Jose.

"This is also our way of calling on the government to protect our province's remaining resources," he said. *(R. Lagarde with reports from Oliver Samson/ CBCPNews)*

Groundbreaking ceremony of the Pope Francis Village in Barangay Diit in Tacloban City
CARITAS PHILIPPINES

Pope Francis Village adopts 'participatory approach'

TACLOBAN City, Aug. 16, 2015--550 units of permanent housing for typhoon Yolanda will soon rise in Brgy. Diit in this city, a project by the church-backed consortium "FRANCESCO", which employs a more participatory, pro-beneficiary, bottom-up approach for rehabilitation work.

"It is not enough that they will be provided houses," said Fr. Ed Gariguez, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines – National Secretariat for Social Action (CBCP-NASSA) executive director.

According to him, this model community demonstrates how the beneficiaries collectively decide and participate in decision-making not just about the construction of their houses but about the creation of a holistic environment survivors need, including livelihood.

The priest also explained that having all other basic needs of the community within the beneficiaries' reach makes the resettlement project a model community.

'Bottom-up approach'

Fr. Alcris Badana, director of Caritas-Palo, identified the Pope Francis Village as a prototype of the participatory, bottom-up approach for building entire villages for people displaced by the super typhoon in 2013.

According to Badana, the locals were consulted even on the design of the Pope Francis Village houses to be built as well as on site development.

Badana said the model community is only one of those where the local Caritas is currently extending help to Yolanda survivors.

"While reaching out to those needing help, Caritas Palo is enhancing the capabilities of its manpower and also of the beneficiaries to ensure sustainability," Badana disclosed.

FRANCESCO consortium

For now, talks are underway with companies that will supply the necessary utilities. The whole project might take more than one year due to become fully functional.

The consortium of organizations called FRANCESCO is composed of the Urban Poor Associates (UPA), Canadian Catholic for Development and Peace (CCDP), CBCP-NASSA, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and the Archdiocese of Palo through Caritas-Palo (RCAP Relief and Rehabilitation Unit).

It aims to establish a permanent in-city relocation site acceptable to the affected communities where they could build better, more resilient houses, restore their sources of livelihood, and continue to strengthen their organizations so that they can fully participate in community governance as well as to effectively engage with the local government, according to a FRANCESCO source. *(Eileen Nazareno-Ballesteros / CBCP News)*

'Corruption co-exists with political dynasties' – priest

PALO, Leyte, Aug. 16, 2015--"Corruption persists because [political dynasties] are not removed from power."

This is what CBCP-National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) executive director Edu Gariguez commented in answer to the issue of political dynasties prevailing in the country's political system.

In an exclusive interview, Gariguez underscored the need for the electorate not to choose from candidates who always get elected, especially those belonging to the same clan, although the Church does not endorse any candidate for the synchronized national and local elections next year.

Integrity, motivation to serve

"The Church constantly appeals against political dynasties," the priest said, stressing further the continued call to the public to choose candidates who deserve to lead because of his integrity and genuine motivation to serve.

"The problem is some are running with varied motivations and once in position they use it for their personal advantage," Gariguez noted.

He likewise reminded the people to select beyond popularity, using the same principle the church uses, that is to see, judge, then act.

"We should also contemplate that it is not the one who has given even a little during election time who should get our votes if that is our standard in voting, because even the smallest given will be taken back from us and this is the reason for them to [be] corrupt," Gariguez said.

CHAMP elections

In a similar vein, President Benigno Aquino III in his final state-of-the-nation address talked against political dynasty.

"We cannot be assured if the intention of those who will succeed is pure or if they only intend to keep on ruling for their personal interest. It is time to pass an Anti-Dynasty Law," said Aquino in his State of the Nation Address (SONA) last month.

The Archdiocese of Palo has yet to intensify the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting drive for honest, orderly, peaceful, and clean elections next year. *(Eileen Nazareno-Ballesteros / CBCP News)*

Lack of anti-dynasty law 'regrettable' – CBCP chief

DAGUPAN City, Pangasinan, Aug. 14, 2015 —Echoing the call of many Filipinos, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) expresses regret that the lawmaking body has failed to pass a law that will end a system of political dynasties.

Congressional failure

"It is regrettable that Congress has, despite prompting by the Filipino people themselves, failed to pass a law that gives life to the Constitutional rejection of political dynasties," notes CBCP president and Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas in an Aug. 11 statement.

The prelate observes there is nothing much that could be done about a culture that allows members of the same clan to run for office if the legislative branch itself refuses to define exactly what political dynasties are.

"Until Congress defines what dynasties are in a manner that fulfills the policy embodied in the fundamental law, we have nothing more but an inert provision of the Constitution that accusingly points at the refusal of Congress to act!" he adds.

'Economic inclusiveness'

Meanwhile, while he concedes there are figures proving that investments indeed have risen, Villegas was alarmed at what he saw as the "inclusiveness of economic gain," dismissing government and corporate figures as items of cold statistics that are no good until they are translated into better lives for the poor and disadvantaged.

On the other hand, the prelate lauds the earnestness of lawmakers in addressing the problems besetting Mindanao, stressing the need for a peaceful and just settlement that will be acceptable to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

"The ongoing disagreement between supporters of different versions of the organic law for the region are not worrisome. If anything, they are proof of the earnestness with which our Legislature addresses nettlesome issues. There would be nothing more prejudicial to the peace process than a resurgence of violence and lawlessness. We urge all to allow the institutions of our democracy to craft a solution, in dialogue with all, to this challenge," he explains.

Evangelization of political order

Months ahead of the approaching presidential elections, Villegas underlines the importance of lay participation in the apostolate of evangelizing the political order, and recognizes the initiative of people who take time screening candidates, listening to them, and endorsing those the movement deems worthy of support.

"While the CBCP and the Catholic Church in the Philippines will never endorse a particular candidate or a particular party, leaving the consciences of voters sovereign in this respect, in keeping with long-accepted moral teachings of the Church, we commend efforts such as these to arrive at a collective discernment on the basis of Catholic standards and principles, that are not necessarily sectarian!" he says.

Public debates

Moreover, Villegas encourages debate among the candidates, and hopes that the various dioceses will organize public fora that will allow voters to familiarize themselves with the positions, platforms, plans, beliefs, and convictions of the candidates.

"All of these meetings, however, must be permeated by a genuine sense of fairness, consecration to the truth and, above all, charity," he adds. *(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)*

'Cut red tape, help poor faster' – Franciscans to Pnoy

PALO, Leyte, Aug. 9, 2015 -- Assailing the government's inability to fully address the needs of the poor and less fortunate in the country, the Secular Franciscan Order (Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis) clergy and prelate members call on the Aquino administration to aid the poor faster by getting rid of excessive bureaucracy.

In an interview, newly appointed Bishop-elect Oscar Florencio of the Archdiocese of Palo, who is an active member of the OFS, blasted how government procedures and protocols delay and at times, deprive the poor of government help due them.

According to Florencio, this prodded the OFS, who gathered recently for the 4th National OFS Clergy Gathering in Cebu, to include in their collective stand a call for the government's prompt response to the needs of the poor, doing away with "red tape" and misconceptions about the separation of church and state that often become reasons for the delayed release of aid, especially to calamity survivors, such as super typhoon Yolanda victims.

Voice of the poor

At the same event, member-priests of the congregation passed a resolution intensifying their advocacy to care more for the poor and to live the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi in the Church of the Poor.

They likewise decided to "discuss more thoroughly ways to help and give voice to the poor, deprived and oppressed of our society and look at the possibilities of making an open letter about the peoples' concerns to the government agencies to be published in the news paper."

In this OFS convention statement, the congregation likewise urged all clergy, especially the OFS members in the country to commit themselves to "the process of transformation into becoming God's gift to the church, especially the poor and to live a joyful life of simplicity, focusing on our complementariness than desiring for equality thereby achieving oneness as the living body of Christ (Eucharistic)."

According to Florencio, the passage of the resolution was "inspired by the Holy Spirit and the life of St. Francis," as the clergy reflected on the inputs given to them during the gathering and on their exposure to the poor and the sick in the care of the Missionaries of the Poor.

Messages on the poor's rights

The OFS clergy likewise resolved to make themselves "holy and worthy of [their] responsibilities and ministries by consciously trying to attach [their] motivations and actions to the one that is Holy; live a life of gratitude, realizing that everything is a gift of God; strive to reap the fruits of our Franciscan Spirituality: Peace, Joy and Love that are truly the pillars of [their] life of witnessing; be like the Samaritan woman with empty bucket but with hope of finding fullness and fulfillment of life and to bring others to Jesus Christ, the well-spring of life."

"We make these resolutions so as to allow experiences of the grace and the sacramental presence of the church concretely accessible by multiplying wells of goodness where the thirsty are invited to drink of the love and mercy of Jesus. Accompanied by Mary, we need to go forth with a new sense of mission; bearers of light and capable of healing division and weaknesses.

We have to become the face of the Poor, the face of Christ," the OFS convention resolution further stated.

Florencio, who will soon be installed as Auxiliary Bishop of Cebu after his episcopal ordination this September, said the convention statement was likewise inspired by the Pope Francis' messages on poverty and protection of rights of the poor during his visit to South America in July this year.

St. Francis, though born in a rich merchant's family, opted to live a pauper's life, finding fulfillment in serving the poor, emulating Christ's ways with special fondness for animals, nature, and the sick. ***(Eileen Nazareno-Ballesteros/CBCP News)***

For Caritas India, Laudato si' provides the country with an opportunity for growth, development

NEW DELHI, Aug 12, 2015– Fr Frederick D'Souza, executive director of Caritas India, spoke to AsiaNews about Pope Francis' Laudato si' encyclical two months after its publication.

"Although India's economy has doubled since 2008, the growing disparity between rich and poor is appalling. In fact, India is still home to a third of the world's poor," he said. In view of this, "The encyclical addresses this concern very well, and we believe it can be a tool to solve at least half of the problems with which we live."

"The encyclical is a very pragmatic document," the priest noted. It "lists many fundamental questions about justice for the poor and the environment. The fact that it was written by the pope gives an advantage over many other research presented in the past by scientists and academics.

"Our hope is that the suggestions presented in Laudato si' can find room in people's hearts, thanks to the personal influence that Francis has on them, regardless of faith."

For Caritas India, the encyclical "is also an opportunity to encourage people to take action and support our cause. They can support us in many ways: young people can become volunteers, Church leaders can give moral support, governments can favour and boost cooperation in nation building, and the media can tell our stories."

The Catholic charity has focused on two main areas: development and disaster management. "Many of the issues and suggestions made by Pope Francis (like his call for integral ecology, a covenant between humanity and environment, justice) are already part of Caritas India's mission," Fr D'Souza noted. "For this reason, the document is an opportunity to show people that our work is consistent and in peace with nature, and that in the long run it pays more than other systems."

One important example is the work done with farmers, who have one of the highest suicide rates in the country. "Presently, our Natural Resource Management team is involved with more than 43,000 small farmers across India with zero suicide rate," he explained.

The team that deals with health has also had great success: cancer in Kerala, HIV/AIDS in Gujarat, malaria control in the northeast of India and now in Odisha, and a training course for health workers in Bihar.

In addition to its successful activities, Caritas India is planning new things to meet the challenges mentioned by Pope Francis.

"With the help of volunteers, we are organizing various events to circulate the encyclical as much as possible," Fr D'Souza said. Similarly, "We are also discussing the possibility of preparing a couple of TV shows. Meanwhile, our programme team is planning to measure the work done by Caritas India in the last ten years."

CARITAS INDIA

Last but not least, the charity wants to "promote a campaign for reforestation by planting a million trees across India. Every million trees can potentially cut carbon emission by 6.2 million kilograms."

At the same time, "we are planning to create a team of volunteers to promote solar energy, hoping to attract funding from private companies and the government." ***(AsiaNews)***

SONA 2015

A LEGACY OF A DISCONNECTED ECONOMY

By Sonny Africa

PRES. Benigno S. Aquino III will give his last state of the nation address (SONA) at the opening of Congress next week. After so many political controversies, with the heads of state of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) members arriving for their summit in November, and with the May 2016 elections on the horizon, the president will likely play up the state of the economy under his watch. It is important not to take the claims that will be made at face value.

Achievements?

The Aquino administration's hype about the Philippine economy is straightforward: the Philippines is one of the world's fastest growing economies and the last five years have shown what good governance can do for the country. The government is not yet claiming that the growth is already inclusive – there are too many poor Filipinos for it to do that. But it insists that it is seeking "inclusive growth" and that there is already progress.

Its approach is familiar by now. The overarching framework is so-called good governance. One part of this is the popular drive against government corruption which wastes public resources, enriches bureaucrats and causes inefficiency. The other part is making the economy more business- and foreign investor-friendly because, it is argued, greater private profit-seeking and being "competitive" is the key to national development.

The administration likes to highlight certain measures. It repeats the infrastructure theme already so used by the Marcos, Ramos and Arroyo administrations before it. This involves mostly transport infrastructure of roads and railways (especially in and around the National Capital Region or NCR), airports, and sea ports but also some water and other projects. National road projects account for a large part of infrastructure spending and are funded the traditional way with public funds. The highest-profile big-ticket infrastructure projects however will be implemented with profit-oriented Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schemes; only ten out of 54 declared priority projects have been awarded so far.

Unable to resolve the crisis of joblessness, the government's flagship anti-poverty effort is the conditional cash transfer (CCT) dole-out under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). The reported 4.5 million beneficiaries as of end-2014 already includes 218,000 beneficiary families living in the street, displaced by disasters, and in other special circumstances who were added after the regular CCT program was criticized for being too household-based.

The government also boasts about large public investments in social spending. In education it claims to have addressed backlogs in schools, classrooms, desks, textbooks and teachers inherited from the previous Arroyo administration. It does not report new backlogs since 2010 though and uses the controversial shift to K-to-12 to divert from this.

The administration claims to seek Universal Health Care but it does this not through improving the public hospital system but by increased funding for the health insurance scheme Philhealth. The scheme's coverage is greatly exaggerated and Filipinos still pay for some 68% of their personal health care needs out-of-pocket. Worryingly, even these vital social services have been subjected to profit-seeking with breakthrough PPP projects in building schools and in

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privatizing hospitals.

The administration is enthusiastic about its supposed achievements. Over all other indicators it is proudest about economic growth which became second only to China in the region and among the 30 fastest worldwide. Gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an annual average of 6.3% over the 2010-2014 period.

The administration trumpets investment grade credit ratings from the major international ratings agencies Standard & Poor's, Fitch and Moody's. It is also excited about favorable assessments of the country's "competitiveness" by the business-oriented World Bank, World Economic Forum (WEF) and Heritage Foundation. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) increased almost six-fold from 2010 to US$6.2 billion in 2014.

The economy under Pres. Aquino has supposedly broken from its past of just 5% long-term trend growth. Continuity between this government and the next is said to be more important than ever because the rapid growth has to be sustained over the next decade or so for the benefits to really start to be felt widely.

Development?

But rather than being encouraging, this actually draws attention to the exclusionary nature of growth in the last few years. It is apparently acceptable that years of economic growth still mainly benefits just a few rich families, corporations, and foreign transnational firms while the number of poor and unemployed continues to increase. This is acceptable because, experts say, that is how an economy works. Inequality is normal. It takes time for economic gains to "trickle down". Business activity and rising profits are important because these will eventually benefit the majority of poor Filipinos.

The wealth of the 10 richest Filipinos has already more than tripled under the Aquino administration from Php630 billion in 2010 to Php2.2 trillion in 2015, or a 250% increase. The net income of the country's some 260 listed firms on the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) rose from Php438 billion in 2010 to Php583 billion in 2014, or a 33% increase. The net income of the country's Top 1000 corporations grew from Php804 billion in 2010 to Php1.0 trillion in 2013, or a 26% increase.

In contrast, the real value of the

Post-SONA:
Correct solutions based on correct analysis?

IBON Features—A lot has been said about the President's final State of the Nation Address (SONA) including criticisms on the seeming rosy picture it depicted. Malacanang has defended the SONA, saying this was based on the belief of 'correct analysis leads to correct solutions'. However, the President's speech seemed to have been based on a questionable reading of the state of the nation.

The President enumerated the supposed achievements of his administration in uplifting the lives of Filipinos. There were claims of increased foreign direct investments (FDI) that propped up the economy, an improvement in the manufacturing sector, additional job opportunities, a decrease in the number of overseas Filipino workers, succeeding poverty alleviation, land reform and universal health care programs, and improved social services, among others.

Yet the figures clearly point to the reality that during Pres. Aquino's past five years in office, pro-business interests were systematically accommodated by the administration. This was at the expense of millions of Filipinos faced with persistent and widespread poverty, and a resulting lingering economic backwardness.

Inclusive growth? It must be reiterated that economic growth, which has also started slowing down, has only benefited a few. Under Aquino, the wealth of the richest oligarchs increased by more than 250% but poverty levels have remained unchanged over the past five years. This is despite a quadruple increase in the budget of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or government's centerpiece Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) program.

ROY LAGARDE

average daily basic pay of millions of workers nationwide increased by less than Php9 or just 3.5% between 2010 and 2014. The mandated minimum wage is highest in NCR but even here its real value only rose by Php17 or by less than 5% since June 2010.

The number of poor and unemployed Filipinos has continued to swell. Since the start of the Aquino administration the number of poor Filipinos has likely increased by some 2.5 million to 25.8 million poor in 2014, using the very low official poverty thresholds. This is despite Php178 billion being spent on the 4Ps CCT program over the period 2010-2014.

IBON's latest national survey in May 2015 had seven out of 10 respondents (67%) seeing themselves as poor—which would be equivalent to 67 million poor Filipinos. This larger figure is more consistent with the 66 million poor Filipinos earlier calculated by IBON using Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) data for 2012. This massive poverty is despite the government's reportedly augmented Php78 billion CCT budget for 2015.

The number of unemployed Filipinos has likely risen by at least 100,000, the number of underemployed Filipinos by at least a million, and the number of merely part-time workers by at least 1.5 million. IBON estimates 12.2 million unemployed and underemployed Philippines as of 2014 consisting of 4.3 million unemployed and 7.9 million underemployed.

These estimates are not as precise as they should be because of various problems of comparability or incompleteness of available government data. But they are not unreasonable estimates. For instance the rise in poverty is calculated by using annual 2009 FIES data, approximated poverty magnitudes using first semester 2014 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) results, and considering how poverty incidence rose from 24.6% in 2013 to 25.8% in 2014.

The employment estimates compensate for how recent official figures underestimate unemployment and underemployment by excluding or having incomplete Region VIII data. There were already 563,000 unemployed and underemployed in Region VIII before Typhoon Yolanda hit and this can only have grown given still unresolved livelihood and infrastructure problems in the aftermath.

As it is, even the latest comparable official figures for April 2015 (that exclude Leyte) clearly show the quality of work deteriorating. The economy is actually shedding full-time work and officially reported unemployment could be ignoring increasing numbers of discouraged job-seekers. This deterioration is also due to how the share of non-regular and agency-hired workers rose from 37% in 2008 to 44% in 2012, according to the government's latest estimates. The number of contractual and other workers in insecure and poorly-paid work has been increasing in the last two years. As of April 2015, 15.5 million or 40% of employed Filipinos were in just part-time work with likely very low pay and scant benefits.

Economic elitism has been the norm for the economy for decades but the growth in wealth and profits for a few has been striking under the Aquino administration. There can be quibbling about the exact figures but the essential conclusion is ironclad: the years of rapid economic growth under the Aquino administration have made a few much richer while leaving the majority as poor as ever. Worse, the economy has become even more distorted and less able to provide secure jobs with decent pay to millions of Filipinos.

Progress?

All this raises some important questions. Why is there a disconnect between growth and development? And if the current conditions of most Filipinos are bad, are their prospects any better?

There is a disconnect because the economy is being managed by the Aquino administration according to what is immediately profitable for big domestic and foreign corporations rather than what the majority needs in terms of stable jobs and higher incomes over the long-term.

The most profitable opportunities in recent years have been in real estate, construction, finance, business process outsourcing (BPO, especially call centers) and overseas Filipino

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remittance-driven consumer spending. This is because of low global interest rates and the continued demand for cheap Filipino labor. The Aquino administration has relied on these sectors for economic growth rather than take the more strategic view of supporting domestic agriculture and building genuinely Filipino industry. Yet these latter production sectors are the more solid foundations of a strong domestic economy.

In the Top 1000 corporations the sectors which saw the biggest growth in profits between 2010 and 2013 are finance, insurance, real estate and business services (69% increase), wholesale and retail trade (47%) and construction (43%). Agriculture saw less than 14% growth and there was an 11% contraction in manufacturing, Among PSE-listed firms the biggest increase in net income between 2010 and 2014 were in property (26%), financials (26%), and holding firms that are heavily invested in property and construction (41%). There was a 2.1% contraction in the industrial sector.

The problem with real estate, construction, finance, BPOs, and remittance-driven consumer spending is that they are narrow and shallow sources of growth. They account for a relatively small share of total employment. Overall they have weak forward and backward linkages with the domestic economy either as suppliers of purchasers of inputs. They are also heavily concentrated in a few firms and in the NCR, Central Luzon and Calabarzon regions. So while specific businesses here may be very profitable there is actually a weak effect on overall Philippine economic development.

The drivers of growth should be domestic agriculture and Filipino industry, which is not the same as foreign investor-dominated industry. These production sectors have great potential to generate jobs and to support rising incomes. They can be the backbone of an economy in spanning agricultural and mineral raw materials, manufacturing, and high value services. They will drive Filipino science and technology. However production has continued its decades-long fall under the Aquino administration. Agriculture, manufacturing, construction and mining have cumulatively fallen from 39.5% of GDP in 2010 to 39.0% in 2014.

Despite its rich natural resources

Government has also been putting capital on attracting more foreign investments supposedly for more jobs and a more stable economy. Yet at the same time the country experienced its worst jobs crisis in history as well as unchanged poverty levels in the past 5 years. The number of unemployed and underemployed grew to 12.2 million and the number of poor by some two million according to IBON estimates.

Cost-beneficial Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)? Though the PPPs, government spends billions to guarantee private companies' profits; for instance, Php57.2 billion of the 2015 national budget have been allocated for PPP projects. A small group of corporations has cornered awarded projects costing Php189 billion including those owned by Sy, Ayala, Pangilinan and Cojuangco. Meanwhile, more than 3 million fisherfolk and residents are to be affected by the Laguna Lakeshore Development PPP project. The MRT project, of course has become an apparent symbol of the irrationality of PPP. There are, for instance, two times as many MRT service interruptions today than in 2010 as the train system continues to deteriorate.

Better job opportunities? The Aquino administration has further institutionalized contractualization and the two-tiered wage system, undermining the right to work and decent pay. Informal, insecure and low-paying employment comprised more than 90% new jobs in 2014. Part-time jobs grew by 593,000 while full-time jobs fell by 130,000 this year.

For working Filipinos, the real value of average daily basic pay nationwide increased only by Php9 or 3.5% between 2010-2014. Wages barely increased but the prices of commodities and utilities kept on increasing.

Social services? Not even 1% of the 2015 national budget was allocated for housing. Yet there were rampant demolitions on one hand and a real estate/ construction boom on the other. Meanwhile, 6 of 10 Filipinos die every

year without seeing a doctor; 80,000 infants die every year from preventable diseases. PhilHealth coverage of 70% was the lowest in many years, while 82% of Filipinos' health spending still had to be shelled out by patients. Meanwhile, the creation and implementation of the K-to-12 program continues to be questioned as it imposes two additional years in the grading system while backlogs in schools, classrooms, textbooks and teachers persist.

Land distribution? 1.2 million farmers are still in tenancy arrangements while 9 of 10 CARP beneficiaries are landless. The Aquino administration will also leave behind a legacy of having the slowest land distribution rate among post-EDSA administrations.

Human rights? There have been more political prisoners in Pres. Aquino's five years than during former Pres. Arroyo's 9 years. Human rights violations including extrajudicial killings have been on the rise under the Aquino government. Peasants and indigenous peoples top Aquino's human rights victims as resource-rich sites including farmlands and ancestral domains are heavily guarded by military and paramilitary groups for mining, logging operations and other so-called development projects. This includes 300,000 hectares of land in Mindanao that are eyed by foreign corporations and being facilitated by the Aquino administration. Pres. Aquino is also leaving behind a legacy of dishonoring past substantial peace agreements as with the National Democratic Front (NDF). In violation to the agreement granting safe passes to NDF peace consultants, it has imprisoned the most number of NDF peace consultants along with many other peace and human rights activists.

These are only some of the real situations that showcase erroneous solutions for problems that Filipinos currently face. As critics put it, perhaps a sharpening of analysis from the people's perspective is urgently in order.

FILE PHOTO

the Philippine economy is a service-oriented economy more than a producing one. This is most of all what compromises domestic job generation. Restoring the share of production in the economy to their levels in the 1960s and 1970s for instance could create an additional 2-2.5 million jobs.

The weak production is also what keeps the economy backward, incomes low, and growth slow. This is why the marked slowdown in growth since late 2013 is not surprising and why the administration's blaming supposed government underspending is incorrect and only diverts from the real problem. Sustainable growth that really benefits the majority is impossible without real and significant Filipino production.

Lacking sound fundamentals, the country has just become more vulnerable to the inevitable global economic downturn. The recent financial difficulties in Greece and the rest of Europe as well as the China stock exchange turmoil are reminders of the chronic volatility of global capitalism.

The population will breach the 100 million-mark under the Aquino administration. Without any radical shift in economic policy, the prospects of the overwhelming number of these Filipinos will remain poor. The government has to protect and support Filipino agriculture and industry. The rights of farmers to land and its products, and of workers to an equitable share of their labor need to be upheld. The public education and health care system has to be strengthened and decent housing for all has to be ensured. Foreign trade and investment should serve the Philippine economy and not the other way around.

The continued deterioration of the economy in the last five years of the Aquino administration has made nationalist and pro-people economic development more urgent than ever. The president will report many things in the SONA to distract from how, in the most important things that matter, the economy and Filipinos have become worse off. For this to continue into the next administration is unacceptable.

(Sonny Africa is the executive director of IBON Foundation, Inc., an independent development institution established in 1978 that provides research, education, publications, information work and advocacy support on socioeconomic issues.)

Advancing in wisdom and favor before God and man

Pastoral Letter on the Transition Years of the K to 12 Program

SAINT Luke provides us this glimpse of the "hidden life" of Jesus, in Nazareth where also the dynamics of family and learning played out for Him. Nazareth was the home of the Holy Family and the school of Jesus. We, too, can draw from the interplay and social relationships of the Holy Family in Nazareth in dealing with the changing opportunities and challenges for us today

ROY LAGARDE

"He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man." (Luke 2.51-52)

Times of changes and opportunities

Indeed we live in very challenging times and amid the changes whirling around us, we take on the "lenses" of hope; a hope that moves us to engage in a continuous dialogue (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 18). In dialogue, we show solidarity, respect and affection for the whole human family. It is in the spirit of dialogue that we face the transition years of the K to 12 program of basic education.

The Church, the family and the school are the three institutions of moral stability responsible for the formation, education and training of the young. And for the Church, the integral formation of the young is a commitment to excellence. This excellence is holiness of life. The aim of education in the mind of the Church is "to make saints of our students" (Pastoral Letter of CBCP on the 400 years of Catholic Education). For government, as enunciated by its Department of Education, education should aim at making Filipinos become "maka-Diyos, maka-Tao, maka-Bayan, and maka-Kalikasan."

Curriculum is always in process

A vital tool of imparting knowledge in the school is the curriculum, which is never static but ever dynamic to respond proactively to the needs of the learners and the emerging realities of society and thew orld. In our country, one of these changes is the K to 12 program, deemed by many experts as a necessary response to global situations and ever-expanding knowledge. The Church confronts this change through its education ministry and the many schools she runs. How ready are we to implement this program? In dealing with this question, we begin with an attitude of openness and respect. There are petitions on K-12 in the Supreme Court. We leave the issues on the legality of the K-12 program to the honorable court. Our concern here is on principles that can guide us.

Three principles can guide us to shape attitudes open to the transition phase of the K to 12 program.

First, the family is the "first school" of the young. We have said this time and again" parents are the first educators, first catechists of their children; the home is the first school. The government and its agencies are tasked to assist the parents, and the first school. To this end, the Church says: "Public authorities must see to it that "public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring

unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom. The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice ... The State cannot, without injustice, merely tolerate so called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance". (CSDC 241)

In this regard, we appeal to the Department of Education through the Fund for Assistance to Private Education (FAPE) to increase the subsidy to private schools both for the students (ESC) and the teachers (TSS) especially the Church's mission schools in far-flung areas, that arein heroic "survival" modes in order to transmit excellence to students.

The K to 12 program in basic education should have all the mechanisms in place in order for the smooth transition to happen. Parents should be provided regular "updates" on the transition plan. There will be fewer anxieties and resistance if lines of communication are kept openamong all those involved in the transition. There is no perfect mechanism to effect change but a positive attitude can help all to "weather" these difficulties.

We appeal to parents to get to know the K to 12 program, thoroughly. School and education officials must be ready and capable to discuss it with parents, and even the students themselves in an atmospher of loving dialogue. The K to 12 program is about our children's future. Let us not simply pass on to the school the responsibility of educating them. We all are their educators and formators. Indeed, it takes a village to raise a child.

Second, the Church has a preferential love for the poor. Where are the poor in the K to 12 program? The K to 12 program provides skills and competencies for the poor who may not have access to college education. Employment is no longer the privilege of the college graduate. Rather, through the senior high school program with its varied "trackings" and the academe – industry linkage, the K to 12 graduate at age 18 can enter the work force. This is a big help to the poor! Realistically though we know that there will be many students who will drop out of the whole program. There should be means to help out these dropouts. We do not yet see this issue being addressed in the program.

At the same time Catholic schools must go beyond merely preparing for the K to 12 program and turn their eyes and affection to the poor: the indigenous people, the children in conflict with the law, the streetchildren and the persons with disabilities. Catholic schools must always have a place for them, not merely as outreach, but as part of their education ministry, and members of their learning community.

Third, the principle of solidarity and subsidiarity must be observed. In the Church there is no competition, only communion. This means solidarity and subsidiarity. Saint John Paul II said in Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, solidarity is the virtue of interdependence; it is the new name of peace. It is working hand in hand with each other in the service of the common good. It is to see the other as part of my life; it is to carry one another's burden.

We call everyone to enter the table of fellowship and engage in "appreciative conversations" regarding the education of our youth. Let us listen to one another bare their worries, concerns and misgivings. Let us all walk towards enlightenment and allow charity to permeate our dialogue. As we go through this challenging phase in our work of education let us all, parents, school officials, industry partners and government agencies such as DepEd, CHED, DOLE and TESDA, walk in enlightenment and collaboration and solidarity for the good of our children and a better future for them.

We plead with the government agencies tasked to implement this new policy, to do everything to ensure that all members of the schools are not displaced or unemployed. We call on schools in a given territory or region to discuss the years of "no enrollment" in college and see how best to cope with this reality. One way is through the assistance to be provided by the basic education schools in the area that will offer senior high school. It is not the time for "unbridled competition" among schools – of who can offer the "best". It is the time to activate communion through solidarity and subsidiarity. We caution that the K-12 program should not lead to the teachers and school personnel losing tenure in their employment. Adjustments will have to be made by all but no one should be make to unjustly suffer in the implementation of the program. In line with the principle of subsidiarity the personnel affected by the transition should be consulted and their views and suggestions be given serious consideration. Teachers are not to be considered just as expenses but as partners in the noble mission of education. May this not lead to the contractualization of the teaching personnel.

Prayer

We invoke the Holy Spirit in making this transition to this new program, this new way of learning, smooth and effective. May our Lord Jesus who grew in wisdom, age and grace, under the guidance of Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, inspire and guide all our young people towards the plan of God in their lives.

We entrust all the parents, educators, students, and workers in academe and government, to the Heart of Jesus. And we pray through the intercession of Mary, the Seat of Wisdom that all our efforts may help to form men and women engaged for the service and love of God and country, for the life of the world (pro Deo et Patria – pro vita mundi)

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, July 13, 2015
+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

Addiction, freedom and disciples

CBCP Pastoral Letter on Drug Trafficking and Drug Addiction

TODD HUFFMAN

WHEN Pope Francis visited us in January—those wonderful, faith-filled and joyful days—he asked us not to allow ourselves to be victims of new forms of colonization. He certainly had in mind "imported values" and "borrowed tastes" that threaten our identity, dilute our spirituality and wreck our sense of what is right and wrong as formed by our consciences that have been immersed in the God-loving, God-fearing culture of the Filipino nation.

Certainly, one of the most pernicious forms of "colonization" has to do with the traffic in drugs and their use. Not too long ago, media was abuzz with reports of a new party fix: “liquid meth”, it is apparently called, patronized, peddled and consumed by the wealthy, both the adults and the young. But the poor, too, fall prey to this habit, through shabu, known as the “poor man's cocaine.” It is less expensive than cocaine but still it is something the poor certainly could not afford. Shabu is also daringly ubiquitous, oftentimes peddled openly in parks, bars, and street corners.

Contrary to the Image of God

"Life in man is the glory of God; the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation gives life to all who live upon the earth, much more does the manifestation of the Father through the Word give life to those who see God" (Adversus Haereses, Bk IV, 20, 5-7).

We are not only creatures of God. We are his imago etsimilitudo...his image and likeness. And, above all, we are "hearers of the Word" to whom He has communicated not thoughts, not ideas, but Himself in His Eternal Word, Jesus the Lord.

Social Moral Decay

The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers included an entire section on "Dependency and Drugs" in its Charter for Health Care Workers. It says:

"Dependency, in medical-health terms, is an addiction to a substance or product such as drugs, alcohol, narcotics tobacco -- for which the individual feels an uncontrollable need, and the privation of which can cause him psycho-physical disorders. The phenomenon of dependency is escalating in our societies, which is disturbing and, under certain aspects, dramatic. This is related, on the one hand, to the crisis of values and meaning which contemporary society and culture is experiencing and, on the other hand, to the stress and frustrations brought about by the quest for efficiency, by activism and by the high competitiveness and anonymity of social interaction." (n. 92)

"Drugs and drug-dependency are almost always the result of an avoidable evasion of responsibility...an expression of masochism motivated by the absence of values." (n. 93)

These statements from the Charter sound harsh, but the problem can be addressed resolutely only when it is accurately diagnosed, as the Pontifical Council did.

We are Responsible

The Charter points out that while the drug-dependent cannot be blamed

STEVE SNODGRASS

completely for the addiction, neither is it right to hold him or her as a blameless and helpless victim.

Every individual is free to make decisions, and while we are faced with life's frustrations, hardships, and loneliness, with communities that are no longer held together by faith, many do not turn to prohibited substances. We, your bishops, thus seek to address this matter of individual freedom and discretion.

Talagang ganyan na yan...is a common expression that is related to the problem drug abuse. When one sees things as fated, as something about which a person is helpless, or a fact to which we resign ourselves, then we give up on human freedom and lose the motivation to change. When the person who has become addicted to drugs or the members of his family say of his dissolute ways talagang ganyan na yan, then the most powerful forces capable of breaking the destructive cycle of addiction are neutralized by this terribly mistaken belief!

"I set before you, life and death..."(Deut. 30:19). This is the wisdom of the Scriptures: that it is a fundamental human experience that every person is free; that he or she can make a choice against destructive habits, and turn from sinful ways. If the human person were not free, the call to conversion would be utterly senseless!

Moral Response

There is a social dimension to the slavery of an addicted person. Society has not provided him or her with a moral compass, because society is itself, adrift in so many ways.

Rapidly vanishing is a sense of the worthy and the noble, of what is worth pursuing in life. It is the Church's mission to provide the flock with the vision of a good and full life. The Catechism for Filipino Catholics show what life-everlasting is, that ought to be our hope:

- No longer will we have to lie to ourselves that what we enjoy now will last forever. It will not, but it will be returned a hundredfold.
- No longer must we fear and disguise the reality of death. We will die, but live ever more fully in Christ.
- No longer need we deplore the fleeing, transitory character of time that drains away even the earthly memory of our fragile joys. These momentary sparks of joy will be brought together in the eternal Light of the Risen Christ.
- No longer must we bewail twisted limbs, withered by age, or dread the revelation of our sinfulness—we shall be made whole in a new creation of body and soul.
- No longer will solitary emptiness and loneliness threaten us: we will be received in the company of all Christ's joyous members. (n. 205)

Let us remember the question of Glyzel to Pope Francis at the University of Santo Tomas, "There are many children neglected by their parents. There are also many who became victims and many terrible things happened to them, like drugs or prostitution. Why is God allowing such things to happen? Why are there only a few people helping us?"

The youth cry for meaning. That meaning can only be found in God. We

must not get tired of answering that only in God can we find life's meaning.

Sustained Pastoral Programs

How can this answer reach the youth? Humbly we admit that we are not doing enough to fight drugs because we have failed in bringing God to the youth as the only way to happiness.

The dioceses and parishes must invigorate and energize their youth ministry to make them more creative, pro-active and responsive and come up with judiciously planned activities and programs for and by the youth with the help of and in collaboration with youth ministers both priests and laypeople. There must be an effort by the adult Church people to listen to young people and become familiar with their temper, moods, language and "norms."

More importantly, the Church, in the spiritual and physical sense, must be a haven for the youth where their restlessness can be quelled and their curiosity assuaged through productive interaction with their peers and with adults who can share with them the Good News in a meaningful and enlightening fashion, and who can show them the fulfilling path of discipleship.

Drug trafficking

The evil of trafficking came to our homes and vivid consciousness through Mary Jane Veloso, the Filipino sentenced to death by firing squad in Indonesia for bringing in, unknowingly, she said, about two kilos of heroin. We pleaded and prayed for her life, and our pleas and prayers were answered when she was granted a last minute reprieve. Her dire situation showed the existence of malevolent people running cartels and syndicates that recruit the young and prey on the innocent to carry out their crimes and elemental human rights to determine. The transporters of their prohibited substances are called "mules" an insult both to the beast who helps human beings in carrying their burdens, and to the humans who are reduced to a beastly, deadly, and criminal task.

In 1992, the Pontifical Council for the Family, writing precisely on drug addiction, had this to teach:

"In today's society an artificial consumerism, which is contrary to the health and dignity of man and favors the spread of drugs, has taken root. This consumerism creates false needs and urges the person, especially the young, to seek satisfaction only in material goods, thus causing dependence on them. Furthermore, a certain economic exploitation of young people easily spreads in this materialistic and consumerist context."

To be sure there are psychological and emotional prompters for the use of and dependency on addicted substances but mostly at the root of the addiction is the "pleasure" derived from it and the momentary escape from the "realities" of life that oftentimes demand responsibility, maturity, respect for others, and many other virtues.

Thus drugs feed the evil in a person and present an alternate reality that further isolates him or her from life. Those of who manufacture and peddle drugs destroy persons and communities, in a much worst way than natural calamities.

Proactive Socio-Civic Pastoral Guidance

The ministries for the pastoral care of migrants and their families should set up desks in every parish where regular seminars can be given to persons who plan to work abroad. The persons manning these desks must be trained in their tasks, and thus should also have gone through the proper related para legal courses with the private and government agencies involved in labor migration and foreign travel.

The ideal is for Filipinos who have families to be with them and work in our country and not have to be compelled by economic reasons to work abroad. But the increasingly global nature of the economy shoulsd also provide and ensure that work and travel should be safe and not be a channel for criminal activity.

More Resolute Action from Government

While the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines reiterates that the Church is against the death penalty, it calls for resoluteness from the police and law-enforcement agencies to prevent the trafficking of drugs; to apprehend those involved in the trafficking of drugs; to dismantle the syndicates and cartels involved in the drug trade, and to make sure that the drugs they seize are not recycled and brought back to the underground market. We call for the relentless prosecution of those responsible for trafficking in drugs and for those who traffic persons to be their drug mules.

Community Vigilance

It has been said that the day we stop buying is the day they stop selling. There is also a need for communities to be formed into being involved in the prevention and persecution of crime. It is the duty of the community to report crime, report the criminals in their midst, and ensure that justice is meted on the guilty through their testimony. The community should be on the lookout for another, especially being conscious of those who bring bad influence to their youth.

Stand as One

The community of the faithful should stand as one and be united in fighting this destructive menace and social evil. We must be firm in our resolve to eliminate it in our communities so that our young can live towards a healthy, productive, and vibrant future, and our adults not be sidetracked in their quest for fullness of life.

We pray with you, calling on the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, who is our guide, our counsellor, the comforter of the afflicted, and the source of perpetual help, to pray for us, our young people, our compatriots seeking work abroad, that we may be safe and kept from harm and the clutches of the evil of drugs and their criminal traders.

We ask the Holy Spirit to constantly shine His light on us, so that we may walk in freedom and peace with Jesus, towards the Kingdom of the Father.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Intramuros, Manila, July 13, 2015

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

Prison bars in waiting

No. This is not about murderers, drug dealers, human traffickers. No. This is neither about rapists and thieves, kidnappers, and hold-uppers. And no. Neither is this about those engaging in pyramid scams, those driving without license, those who grab expensive gadgets, pickpockets and the like. That the prison bars are waiting for them, this is probable. That they deserve imprisonment, this is possible. But there is really a good number of "big fish" in this country that should be held behind prison bars whereas they precisely deserve imprisonment as a just consequence of their many licentious and grave misdeeds.

As of now, there are these men and women who are in this or that branch of government but should instead be imprisoned--for the many and big graft and corruption-riddled dealings they commit. But the same imprisonment awaits someone who bribes these and those government officials, who violates even the Constitution itself but who to these days still talks much and believes he is above even the Fundamental Law of the Land. He gives big smiles in public. He freely waves at people. He thinks and feels as if he is the savior of the Filipinos.

But the living truth is that after so many years thinking and feeling he is some kind of a god and, therefore, remains deserving of public awe and admiration, applause, and accolades, the truth of the matter, however, is that he is just like a common tao who ultimately deserves imprisonment for having done certain things contrary to truth, justice, and/or peace. The same figure apparently thinks he is the people's savior of some kind such that he deserves nothing less than their worshipping admiration and adulation.

What should be the just penalty for somebody violating the Fundamental Law of the Land itself even if only because of ignorance and nonchalance? What would be the proper action taken against someone who freely distributes public funds to his comrades in politics basically in order to support his markedly but self-designed options, finance his own censurable personal designs? In other words, when somebody is no longer holding the reins of supreme power and therefore no longer in command of his underlings in government, will he still remain above the law notwithstanding his gross misdeeds patently contrary to what is right and just?

It is quite interesting to note that there is this now powerful individual whose favorite pastime is to blame his predecessor as the cause of anything and everything wrong in the country today. That individual is long since in chains, so to speak, and now even sick. But the said character now in power delightfully points at the same individual for so many misdeeds contrary to the welfare of the people, against the interests of the country. Questions: When he is out of Office, devoid of power, removed from the Palace, will he remain free as a lark, free to still do what he wants, free from prison bars? Will there be but a continuity of his reign through his alter-ego--or a real change thereof?

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2016 Elections

Few are not the thinking serious people who day after day are losing hope, who no longer care, who no longer mind what the 2016 Elections mean at all. So it is that they are no longer preoccupied how such a political exercise will be held, who are the public officials that will be placed in the seat of power, what difference, if any, can their election make in the day-to-day living of multimillion Filipinos--the poor and the sick, the helpless, and unlettered in particular.

Yes, there were the Martial Law years. Yes, then came the so-called "democratic" governments one after another. And now, here we go again. Political parties are being formed, reformed or deformed. Notorious or unknown political figures are here and there surreptitiously presenting themselves for candidacy. Political butterflies flying here and there when they smell more election honey. Covered-up and even ridiculous political ads are going about through video and/or print. Conclusion: here we go again!

If one were to listen and decipher well the main causes for such ambivalence if not actual indifference, especially among the adults and particularly those in Luzon, there seem to be three major reasons for such a cold view of the forthcoming elections--considering that the previous government was the incarnation of insensitivity while the still present one is the demonstration of incapacity:

1. The potential candidates whose names are repeatedly mentioned and whose faces are usually seen through the tri-media, do not seem that trustworthy, that capable and/or dependable in governance. Yes, some of them are said to be high in approval rating in this or that survey. But who really believes in the alleged results of such "Surveys" paid for by these or those faceless individuals--for political considerations?

2. The COMELEC has still to prove that it knows how to count. So many supposedly smart machines no longer function such that many millions of pesos are again needed to make them work--if ever. There is also now the considered option to use ten fingers to count votes plus the possible use of machines thereafter to un-count them.

3. Not few are the places in all the regions of the country where millions of voters live a hand-to-mouth existence, who by and large depend on hand-outs to fund their day-to-day life. So it is that it is no surprise that their votes are readily for sale--not necessarily to the highest bidders. Poverty--misery in particular--can be anything but the premise of freedom, the origin of free and deliberate vote.

But then, could all the above-mentioned reasons about a hopeless 2016 Elections be nothing more than the expression of negativism, the signs of despair, the posture of defeatism?

Would that they be so!

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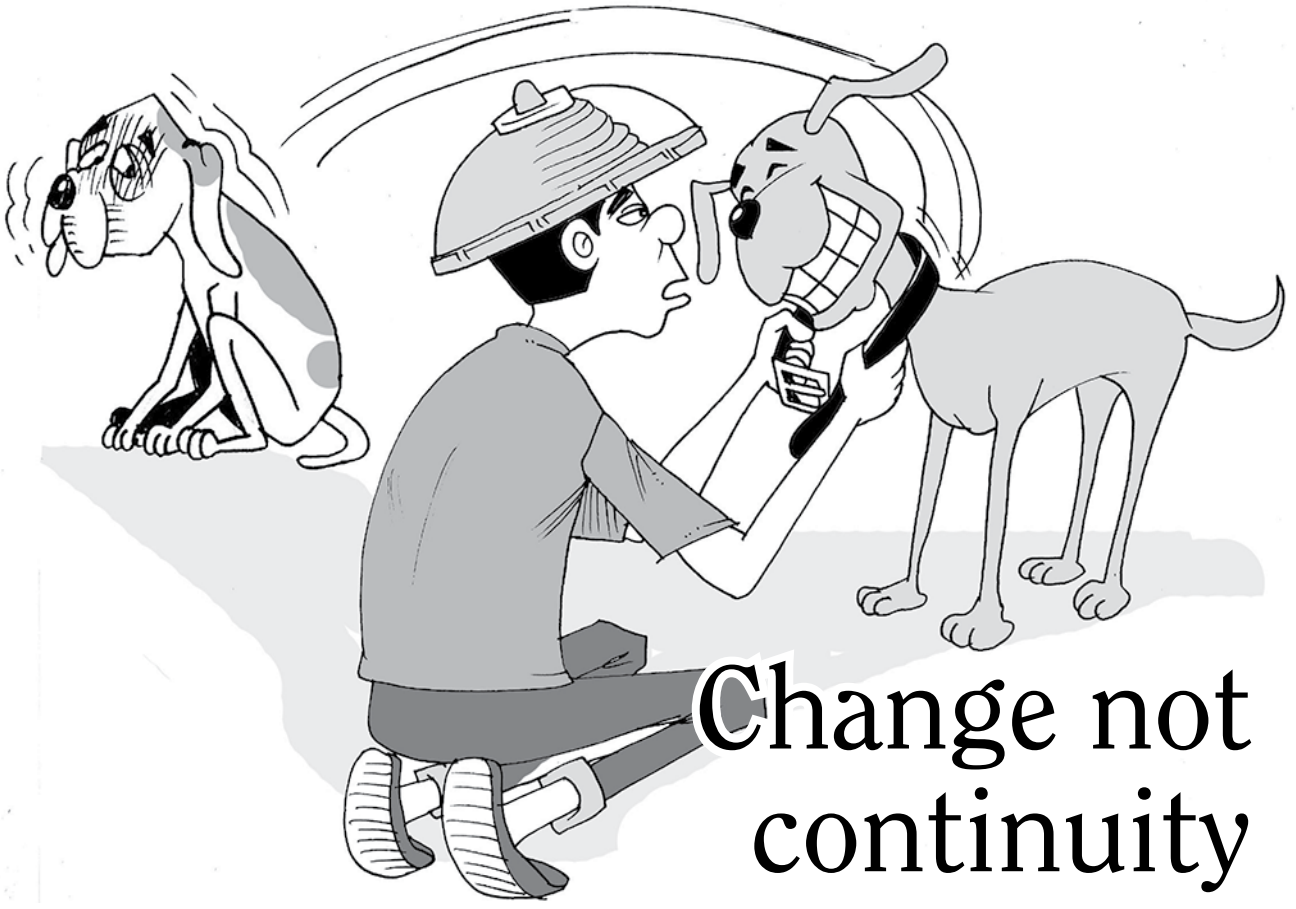


Change not continuity

ILLUSTRATION BY BLADIMER USI

TO change what is foolish, wrong, unjust in the country--this is the rightful demand of Filipinos for the years ahead. Simply to continue aristocratic leadership, incompetent governance, imaginary national achievements, and the like are the last things that the People of the Philippines need in the years to come. They have more than enough of public officials who are proselves instead of pro-others. They have heard enough words plus words and more words. In the times ahead, they crave for more actions than talk, more realities than but imaginations.

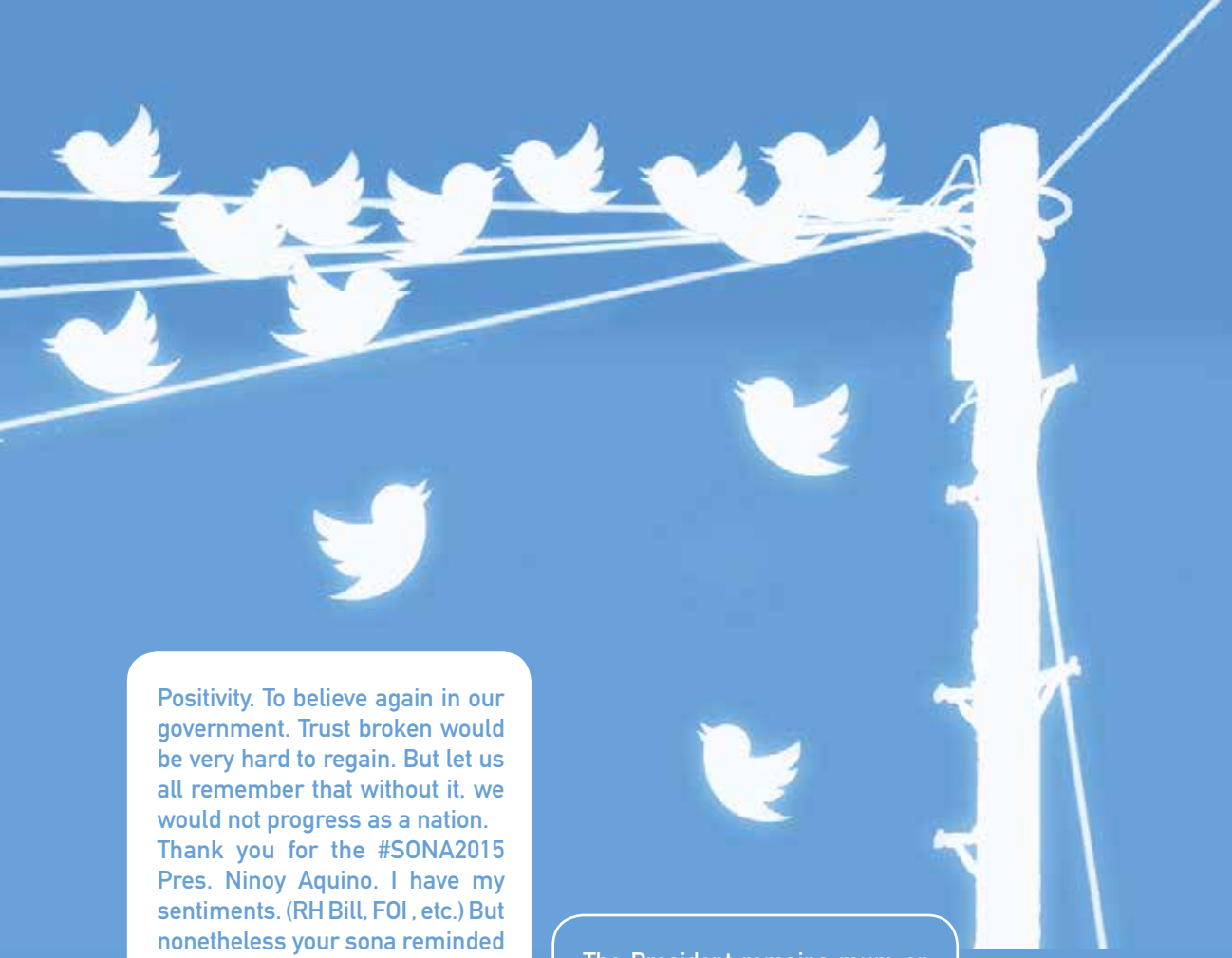
The tiring "Matuwid na daan" leads nowhere really. The infamous "Kayo ang boss ko" is hallucination to say the least. The "Kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap" is one big joke. And there are tiring by-words of "Inclusive growth" which in effect is devoid of ground reality. Furthermore, there are the alleged blessings brought about by the "PPP" whereby the government in fact becomes a business corporation. And the so-called "Peace Process" through the BBL--only simpletons believe it. The still present administration is rich in imagination, poor in actualization.

Continue a government where graft and corrupt practices are the rule? Keep a governance whose expertise is demanding lifetime taxes of many kinds and in many ways from the rich and the poor alike? Go on having an Executive Department that dominates the Legislature through its Pork Barrel system under different names? Keep a Presidential Office that has and spends huge amounts of public funds exempted from accounting and beyond standard auditing? To go on with a governing leadership that abhors land reform, that looks at Filipinos as anything but a sovereign people?

So it is well understandable that the prevailing spirit of the common tao is not the continuity of the faulty thinking and errant agenda of the still reigning administration but precisely its change into a government that is truly by the people, of the people, and for the people. Enough of reigning incompetence in governance, marked insensitivity to the plight of the poor, the miserable, the pitiful. No more of a Malacañang occupant who is but by and large self-preoccupied, simply self-attentive as well as mostly self-conscious.

Most of all: Enough of selective justice--which is downright injustice--for political consideration. Slowly but surely, political party-mates have become exempted from the reach of the arm of the law. Others? Let them be brought behind bars for people to see, for media to publish. Make them the exemplary figures of public graft and corrupt practices. But KKK Members plus proven political supporters, these are beyond reach of the arm of the law. Just for the record, selective justice is the objective expression of falsity, the strong stimulus of dissent and resentment.

No continuity but change in the present system of governance. No continuity but change in the prevailing undependable, incumbent supreme figure in government.



GONE VIRAL

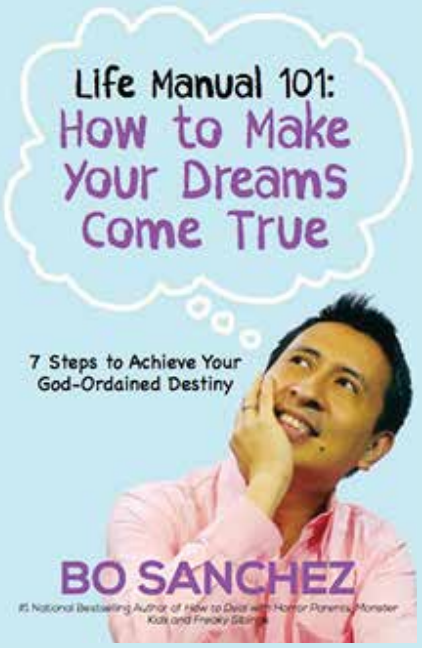
Positivity. To believe again in our government. Trust broken would be very hard to regain. But let us all remember that without it, we would not progress as a nation. Thank you for the #SONA2015 Pres. Ninoy Aquino. I have my sentiments. (RH Bill, FOI , etc.) But nonetheless your sona reminded me that as a Filipino, I should never stop believing in our government. That efforts are being done to battle corruption and alleviate poverty. Congratulations po at maraming salamat. smile emoticon Mabuhay ang Pilipinas. smile emoticon #Affirmation# PilipinoAko ~ Kristian Edsel Santos Amarante

The president blamed UST for floodings in Manila, says the university does not want to cooperate with the government, the university administration raising concerns for its historical buildings. #SONA2015 ~ Rommel Lopez

The President remains mum on FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL. No mention of the controversial bill in any part of his speech. #SONA2015 ~ Natalie Jane Moscoso Malayo

My dear friends and especially students,It is during these moments that we apply our logical minds to examine deeper what is being said vis-a-vis reality. This can shape our future which we often neglect and don't really realize. #becritical #sona2015 ~ Franklin Queñano De Guzman #SONA2015: Quantity over quality ~ Felipe Salvosa II 50: Number of perational MRT trains in 2011
5 to 15: Number of operational MRT trains in 2015 #SONA2015 ~ Tonyo Cruz

I have had expected much in the SONA of the President as this being his last, but was it met? Well, no one can suffice our expectations... even so, what I would have wanted to hear from the President aside from the usual reporting of accomplishments (just like what former presidents did) are his imprimatur on the passing of the FOI Bill, the Security of Tenure Bill to end Contractualization, and other measures that are of relevance in addressing the plight of the poor, the environment, corruption, health, etc. Good thing that he endorsed the passing of the Anti-Dynasty Bill (let's put pressure at both Congress for them to pass this law in toto & not the water down version). ~ Paul Richard



How to Make Your Dreams Come True

By Bo Sanchez

DO you have a dream? I do hope you do because we all should have dreams; we all have our own passion, desires, and we all should pursue our purpose – actually, our God- given purpose. And if you have written all those dreams in your heart, then you should read this book, an easy to read "life-manual" of sorts by lay preacher and inspirational author Bo Sanchez that will teach you how to reach your dreams and make them all come true.

I love how Bo Sanchez introduces himself in this book, just one regular guy who has dreams of helping others and in this book, he offers concrete steps and solutions on how to achieve those. He offers 7 steps broken down into: Conceive, Receive, Achieve, Adjust, Supply, Solutions, Significance.

Not to early nor late

For the first step, Conceive, the book talks about how we should see our dreams with our minds first before our eyes. Having a dream is easy but accomplishing it could take time and determination. I love it when the author says, "When you start changing your life, there will be people who will not change with you." It just describes that we are all going to have our share of critics and encouragers whether our dreams please them or not. But it affirms us that no matter we often we fail at the start or whether we succeed at our first stage performance, God doesn't look at how better you are compared to others, but He looks at your heart and your dreams as if you're the only one who exists. He looks at you and He is obsessed with you. He never compares you to others.

The second major part on receiving focuses on how we have dreams, but we also need to have the courage and determination to pursue those dreams. "Don't be early, don't be too late," as the book says. Because there is the appointed time for your dream and you should be there to receive it willingly. God may not always help you fulfill your dream the you want Him to because your dreams may be bigger than your skills - like wanting to be an NBA player but having a height of 4'5". Sanchez says, maybe your skill is to be an NBA coach. At the same time, you should look at the skills and the talents that you were graced with, align it with your dreams and set it on fire.

Moving on the the third step, achieving, the author encourages the reader to know that miracles happen and that you are a miracle worker. This book will let you know that you can move from waiting for miracles to working your miracles.. You can ask for it, act and work for it, and achieve it.

Next, Sanchez talks about adjusting. He tells the by now already excited reader to know also that he is human and therefore, imperfect. In achieving our dreams, we can sometimes be lucky on our first try, but normally almost everyone fails at first. The key is to have a different strategy, try again and boom! There you go!

God never runs out of abundance

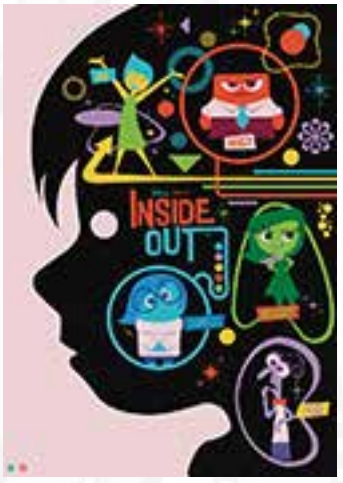
The third to the last step is all about supply. God never changes His mind and there is no shortage with Him when it comes to supplies. When it comes to financial and material things, there's never a lack or a "running out", but it all depends on us how we can get it to flow to us. This step challenges us to look at our dreams if it comes from our purpose or just from pride.

One of the last parts talks about solutions. We all have a part to play in achieving our dreams, finding the right strategy (and changing it from time to time), and choosing God's long-term solutions.

Lastly, this book talks about how success is important but how significance is way better. This step will help us achieve success but at the same time make an impact on other people, which means, our dreams and our work become a significant part in another's life.

This book lets the reader enter into his own reality: where he is now, what he can do with his life, and how he can use his God-given skills, even his weakness to achieve his purpose and find significance in this world. If you dream to be an NBA player but have a height of 4'5", this book will help you realize the way around to rediscovering your real dreams and where God is actually leading you.

Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation



Direction: Pete Docter, Ronnie del Carmen;
Cast: Amy Poehler, Phyllis Smith, Bill Hader, Lewis Black, Mindy Kaling, Richard Kind, Kaithlyn Dias, Diane Lane Kyle MacMaLachlan;
Story and Screenplay: Pete Docter, Ronnie del Carmen, Meg LeFaueve, Josh Cooley;
Production Company: Walt Disney Picture, Pixar Animation Studio;
Music: Michael Giacchino;
Producers: Jonas Rivera;
Genre: Animation;
Location: Minnesota, San Francisco
Distributor: Walt Disney Running Time: 102 minutes

Technical assessment: 4
Moral assessment: 4
CINEMA Rating: V13
MTRCB rating: PG

THE life of 11-year old Riley (Dias), is almost perfect until her father gets a new job in San Francisco and relocates the entire family. The once happy daughter slowly breaks down with this new episode in her life as she copes to let go of what she has been used to and learns to embrace the sudden changes. And we see all this emotional struggle inside her mind as five personified emotions—Joy (Poehler), Sadness (Smith), Anger (Black), Fear (Hader) and Disgust (Kaling—man the control center of her brains and help develop core memories which in turn fuel personality islands that make up Riley's character. Inside Riley's mind, Joy desperately attempts to keep the former happy and Sadness out of the way since she does not find her existence useful. During a struggle, Joy and Sadness are accidentally sucked out of the control center of her consciousness and into the deep recesses of Riley's subconscious mind. With Riley already emotionally unstable because of the events in her life and Joy's absence, Fear, Anger and Disgust try hard to regain control. Meanwhile Joy and Sadness, with Riley's long lost imaginary friend, Bingbong, discover each other's purpose in a person's life.

There is an undeniable genius in Pixar and Disney's attempt to visualize the abstract concepts of emotion, memory and personality. While there had been professional arguments discounting accuracy of the interpretation, Inside Out is foremostly a movie and not a psychological dissertation, so it has license to be more lax in its interpretation of scientific concepts. That being said, CINEMA can name four main reasons why it is a film that deserves its own niche in the "movies you should not miss" section: (1) The brilliant story and storytelling, as it clearly shows us Riley's struggle to face a new chapter in her life and brings us along Joy and Sadness' journey to discover their purpose. As a side trip, we see how the different emotions mature and shape a person. (2) The humor and drama are perfectly balanced, so that a child, a teenager and an adult will be treated to an emotional rollercoaster ride with Riley and the team. (3) The creative amalgamation of truth and fantasy, such that it is able to tread along the world of science with fun, creativity, and functionality as it translates abstract concepts like nightmares, imaginary friend, forgotten and long term memories into something tangible and relatable. (4) The audience leaves with a message that feels made just for him/her. Whether it is the humorous way five emotions have matured inside Daddy or Mommy's heads, or how nightmares are hidden in the recesses of our subconscious and resurrected as nightmares or how part of our childhood fantasy struggles to resurface as we grow up or how an adolescent boy panics at the sight of a girl, or how our external apathy is actually an internal chaos, the movie speaks directly to its audience. And speaks loud and clearly.

There are so many things that could be picked up with Inside Out but we will zero in on two very strong messages. First, a well rounded person has mature emotions that do not control each other but work together to create layers in the personality and respond to the situation in the best possible way. For a while, it seemed that Joy and all her energy and positivity are the only ones needed for Riley to overcome her issues, but it turned out Sadness is not just about feeling down and needy but showing vulnerability and crying for help so that love and support may be felt. But for an emotion to serve its real purpose, it has to mature and get over the initial automatic response to stimuli. We saw how Mom and Dad, with more mature emotions, do not have Joy commanding the control center. What is more important than staying positive all the time is learning how to harness that positive behavioural response of one's basic emotions: caution and preparation in fear, assertiveness and identity in anger, sensitivities of values and hygiene in disgust, resilience and perseverance in joy, and love and sympathy and empathy in sadness. Second, the movie shows that to move forward, we must learn to let go of part of ourselves. In the same way that Joy let go of her notion that Sadness does not help fix a situation, or how Riley let go of old memories to make room for new ones. And who can forget that heart- wrenching scene when Bingbong literally let go and allowed himself to fade away so that Joy can move on and save Riley. Love, although not personified as a character, spoke loudly every time someone chose to forget himself/herself for the sake of someone else. Overall, Inside Out is more than a fantastically crafted story—it shares with us a message of knowing and being true to one's core. Very young children might not fully appreciate its metaphors and symbols, but for older children and adolescents, with proper parental guidance, Inside Out makes a superb textbook for Self-Knowledge 101.

THAILAND. Catholics join in interreligious prayer service after bombing

Catholics in Bangkok gathered together with their fellow countrymen on Aug. 21 to pray for peace in the wake of the bombing at a Hindu shrine in the city which had killed 20 people and injured scores earlier in the week. The interreligious service held just outside the Erawan shrine included a Liturgy of the Word, and prayers for the bombing victims. More than 800 attended the service, where Pope Francis' message of solidarity was read, and distributed to the crowd, including a government delegation. "The Thai Catholic bishops and the faithful are deeply pained and express their deep solidarity in prayer with the victims in the targeted explosions at the Erawan shrine," Msgr. Andrew Vissanu Thanya Anan, deputy secretary general for the Thai bishops' conference, said. (CNA)

NEPAL. How a Jesuit school is helping quake survivors manage trauma

A Jesuit primary school located near Kathmandu is using increased counseling and student-parent orientation programs to help both children and parents to cope with the experience of the earthquake which struck Nepal earlier this year. Fr. Arul Selvam SJ, a teacher at St. Xavier's School in Godawari, explained that St. Xavier's School has increased its counseling, as well as student-parent orientation programs which help both the children and their parents to cope with their trauma, and help their overall growth. He noted the strong support St. Xavier's School has received from it's alumni, saying that many of them, most of whom are non-Catholic, "went out of their way, in their own little way, to help, without any prompting" during the earthquake relief. (CNA)

KOREA. Will the Church have a growing role in Korean reconciliation?

With an increasing number of faithful, the Catholic Church in South Korea may foster a climate of reconciliation and peace, as the nation has reportedly made a deal with North Korea to avoid military escalation after days of fire exchanged between the nations. South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported Aug. 24 that North Korea had agreed to express regret over the injury of two South Korean soldiers by a landmine earlier in the month, and that South Korea agreed to stop propaganda broadcasts via loudspeakers located on the border between the countries. The Catholic Church has grown significantly in South Korea since the Korean War ended in 1953, and its presence maybe be important in nurturing a culture of reconciliation, as was one of the main goals of Pope Francis' visit to South Korea one year ago. (CNA)

MYANMAR. What the Church is doing to help flood victims in Myanmar

More than 100 people have been killed and thousands more displaced by monsoon flooding in Myanmar, one of the poorest nations in Asia. With government relief efforts faltering, the Catholic Church is stepping in to offer help. Fr. Leo Mang, head of social communications of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, that the Catholic Church is working through local emergency units as well as "Caritas," the bishops' social arm, to reach out to victims and offer aid. In the last month, torrential rains have created landslides and floods in Myanmar, also known as Burma. The current situation in the country varies by region. In the Diocese of Hakha, landslides resulting from heavy rain have washed away many houses and other buildings. Some chapels remain submerged. (CNA)

TURKEY. Syriac bishop to be beatified

On Aug. 8, Pope Francis approved a decree recognizing the martyrdom of Flavien-Michel Malké, a Syriac Catholic bishop who was killed in 1915 amid the Ottoman Empire's genocide against its Christian minorities. The decision was made during an Aug. 8 meeting between Pope Francis and Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Bishop Malké will be beatified Aug. 29 – the 100th anniversary of his martyrdom – during a liturgy celebrated by Ignatius Youssef III Younan, the Syriac Patriarch of Antioch, at the convent of Our Lady of Deliverance in Lebanon. It is expected that thousands of Syrians and Iraqis displaced by the Islamic State will attend the beatification. (CNA)

CHINA. China consecrates first new bishop in three years

In mainland China's first episcopal consecration since 2012, a priest was consecrated a bishop in the cathedral of Anyang. His appointment was agreed upon by both the Vatican and the Chinese government. Fr. Joseph Zhang Yinlin, 44, was consecrated coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of Weihui (Anyang) on Aug. 4 by Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin of Weihui, who is 90. According to UCANews, assisting bishops were Joseph Shen Bin of Haimen, Joseph Yang Yongqiang of Zhoucun, and Wang Renlei of Xuzhou. Each of the bishops present are recognized by the Vatican. The ordination Mass was concelebrated by 75 priests and attended by an estimated 1,400 people. A source who attended the Mass told UCANews that the cathedral was under heavy security, with hundreds of police and firemen guarding it. (CNA)

INDIA. Catholics mourn Abdul Kalam, the much-loved 'people's president'

Catholics in India have joined their confreres in paying tribute to and praying for APJ Abdul Kalam, who served as the nation's president from 2002 to 2007 and was beloved by Indians across religious and cultural divides. Kalam died July 27 of cardiac arrest, collapsing while addressing university students in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya state in India's northeast. Bishop Henry D'Souza of Bellary recounted his having met Kalam on several occasions, and added that "he had a great appeal to children and youth--he aimed to 'ignite young minds'. He fired their imagination." D'Souza also noted that Kalam completed his college education at a Catholic college, and often mentioned of the influence of Father T. N. Sequeira on his life. (CNA)

PHILIPPINES. Lawmaker admits helping priest's suspected killers

A Philippine legislator has admitted to providing lawyers for the alleged killers of Father Fausto Tentorio, an Italian missionary who was killed outside his parish house in October 2011. Rep. Nancy Catamco said the family of the suspects, who live in her district, sought her help after the two men were accused in the murder of Tentorio in Arakan town in North Cotabato province. Catamco said that she helped the suspects, Jimmy and Robert Ato, obtain counsel, asking a local law firm to represent them pro bono. Italian Fr. Peter Geremia who, along with Tentorio, is a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, told an Aug. 13 House Human Rights Committee hearing that the Ato brothers are being protected by Catamco. She, however, noted that providing a lawyer "is not a crime." She also denied that the suspected killers are working for her. (UCAN)

VIETNAM. Nation moves closer to passing restrictive religion bill

Vietnam is moving closer to passing a restrictive law on religion, Christian groups have warned. The country's most powerful political organ, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, discussed the bill Aug. 14 with few signs major amendments would be made before passing next year, said the religious freedom advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Critics of the draft warn it would require all group religious activity to be registered with authorities or face being outlawed, a system similar to China. The draft law—if passed—would be considered "a step backward", said Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the Vatican's nonresident representative to Vietnam. (UCAN)

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CBCP Monitor

VOLUME 19
NUMBER 13

June 2 - July 5, 2015

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Junk 'normalization' of gay unions – CBCP president

BEIJING: the teaching that same-sex unions cannot be called marriage in the strict sense of the word, a Filipino prelate has underscored the duty of each Catholic to resist attempts to make homosexual acts "ethically normal" by standing up for true human sexuality.

"In those situations where homosexual unions have been legally recognized or have been given the legal status and rights belonging to marriage, clear and emphatic opposition is a duty," says Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas in a recent statement.

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