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EDITOR'S NOTE

WHILE the whole world is in pain watching the unprecedented outmigration from Syria and Iraq that has caused so much death—even of drowned children washed ashore—hereabouts, killings of indigenous Filipinos, locally referred to as "Lumad," has become rampant and unsolved. Who are behind these killings? President Benigno Aquino denied that the military is behind these murders. In a forum last Sept. 9, he reasoned that his government has "no campaign to kill anybody."

But wasn't this the same reasoning this bachelor president used at the massacre of Chinese tourists at the Quirino Grandstand in August 2010, when Malacañang boys were running the show? By the same stretch of imagination, it may be the same logic that Aquino used to justify the Zamboanga siege in September of 2013 when the president with his boys encamped "to watch" the war games with the MNLF that has since caused the city so much devastation in life and property. And, perhaps, the Mamasapano, too, where some are looking for an "alternative truth" as what really happened at the blood bath of about 44 Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police.

According to human rights groups, it appeared that the President was trying to exonerate whoever are behind the summary killings of the Lumads in Surigao del Sur. The CBCP president Archbishop Socrates Villegas calls this "disturbing." In a statement released Sept. 11, the Archbishop said, "We are disturbed profoundly by reports that national leaders have been quick to exonerate the militia group of wrong-doing. This alarming eagerness to deny culpability does not augur well for truth and justice. Such declarations inspire credence only after a reliable and trustworthy investigation by impartial and competent persons shall have taken place If made before any such investigation, they disturbingly suggest a refusal to hold accountable those to whom the Administration so eagerly extends its mantle of protection."

But while the national leadership seems to be somewhere else, local leaders and advocacy groups are very much aware who are harassing and killing the Lumads. In fact, on Jan. 30, 2015, a "Peace Dialogue" was held in Surigao del Sur attended by the PNP, AFP, the Provincial Government, the LGU of Lianga, Religious groups, and Lumad leaders. In that dialogue, the perpetrators were identified. They are members of the Magahat/Bagani, a paramilitary group headed by Datu Calpito Egua, Marcos Bocales, Marcial Belandres and Bobby Tejero. This gathering agreed to immediately dismantle and disarm this paramilitary group and file criminal charges. Of course, nothing happened after that except more harassment and more killings of the Lumads.

The priests of the Diocese of Tandag, as they stated in a pastoral statement issued on Sept. 8, believe that there are powerful hands that maneuver behind the paramilitary group Magahat/Bagani. Otherwise, these killings would have already ceased and court cases filed months ago. The priests say in their statement, "One can see and understand that only those community of Lumads who firmly stand to protect the forest and reject mining activities and anything that destroys nature were obviously the ones being hounded and intimidated supposedly by the aforementioned notorious group. Gathering all these, we can say that all this could be a work that has been extensively planned. Our indigenous people who, ever since, have been one with Nature, have lived in and survived out of their land of heritage, are now victims of those who are hungry and greedy for power and wealth."

Our cover story, "Refugees are our responsibility" is penned by Fr. Shay Cullen. Read on.

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Quote in the Act

"Please: do not abandon the victims of this crisis, even if the world's attention were to lessen."

Pope Francis, in a recent address to the participants of a meeting organized by the Pontifical Council Cor Unum on the Iraqi-Syrian humanitarian crisis where he exhorted Catholics to "strengthen the intra-ecclesial collaboration and the bonds of communion" in order to address the ongoing persecution of Christians in Iraq and Syria.

"We are disturbed profoundly by reports that national leaders have been quick to exonerate the militia group of wrongdoing."

Socrates Villegas, archbishop - president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in a recent statement "On the killing of voiceless Lumads," where he pointed out the "alarming eagerness" of government leadership to deny culpability of a paramilitary group suspected of killing of lumads in Surigao del Sur even before an objective investigation is conducted

"To stay neutral—not to take a stand—in the face of destruction of our natural resources, is not a Christian option."

Raul Enriquez, a Catholic priest who is one of the convenors of the Quezon Laban sa Coal; in a recent Church-led protest demanding the withdrawal of the local government's support for the 1,200 megawatt coal-powered plant expansion project in Atimonan and the existing coal plants in Mauban and Pagbilao in Quezon province

"We did not convert them. They voluntarily converted after they saw the providence of God in the livelihood programs and education we give them."

Eva Fidela Maamo, SPC, a nun who is the president of the Foundation of Our Lady of Peace Mission, Inc.; on the community of Christian Aetas in Zambalez who are recent beneficiaries of a government grant for the reforestation 100 hectares of protected land in Castillejos town

"We are too immersed in our material wealth that we become ignorant of the suffering of others."

Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Manila; in a recent message to catechists, students, and religious of the Diocese of Malolos on the occasion of the 10th founding anniversary of Pondo ng Pinoy in the diocese.

BRINGING CHRIST TO POLITICS

President Benigno S. Aquino III recently delivered his final State of the Nation Address. The count-down has begun to the next national elections in 2016. We thank God whose mighty hand is at work in our history for the gains we have made. We implore his pardon for our faults and failings. We call on his unending mercy for the tremendous work that must yet be done.

Do not forget the poor

While there are figures to prove that investments have risen and that economic fundamentals are strong, as pastors, we are deeply concerned with the inclusiveness of economic gain. Government and corporate figures remain items of cold statistics until they are translated into better lives by those now most disadvantaged.

End political dynasties

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. 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!

Peace for Mindanao and for all

We take heart from the earnestness with which our lawmakers address the problems of Muslim Mindanao, in fact, of all Mindanao — for we have always insisted that a peaceful and just settlement must be acceptable to all: Muslims and non-Muslims alike, for Mindanao is bountiful, rich and promising enough for all to share. The on-going 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.

People's Primary

As the political engine is revved for the presidential elections, we urge our lay persons to be actively engaged in the apostolate of evangelizing the political order. The CBCP was recently apprised of a lay initiative to screen candidates, to listen to them and to endorse 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!

Political Education

We encourage debate among the candidates, and we hope that our dioceses will organize public fora and debates that allow the public to familiarize themselves with the positions, platforms, plans, beliefs and convictions of our candidates. All of these meetings, however, must be permeated by a genuine sense of fairness, consecration to the truth and, above all, charity.

May we all heed the voice of the Good Shepherd who, without fail, leads us to verdant pastures to give us rest!

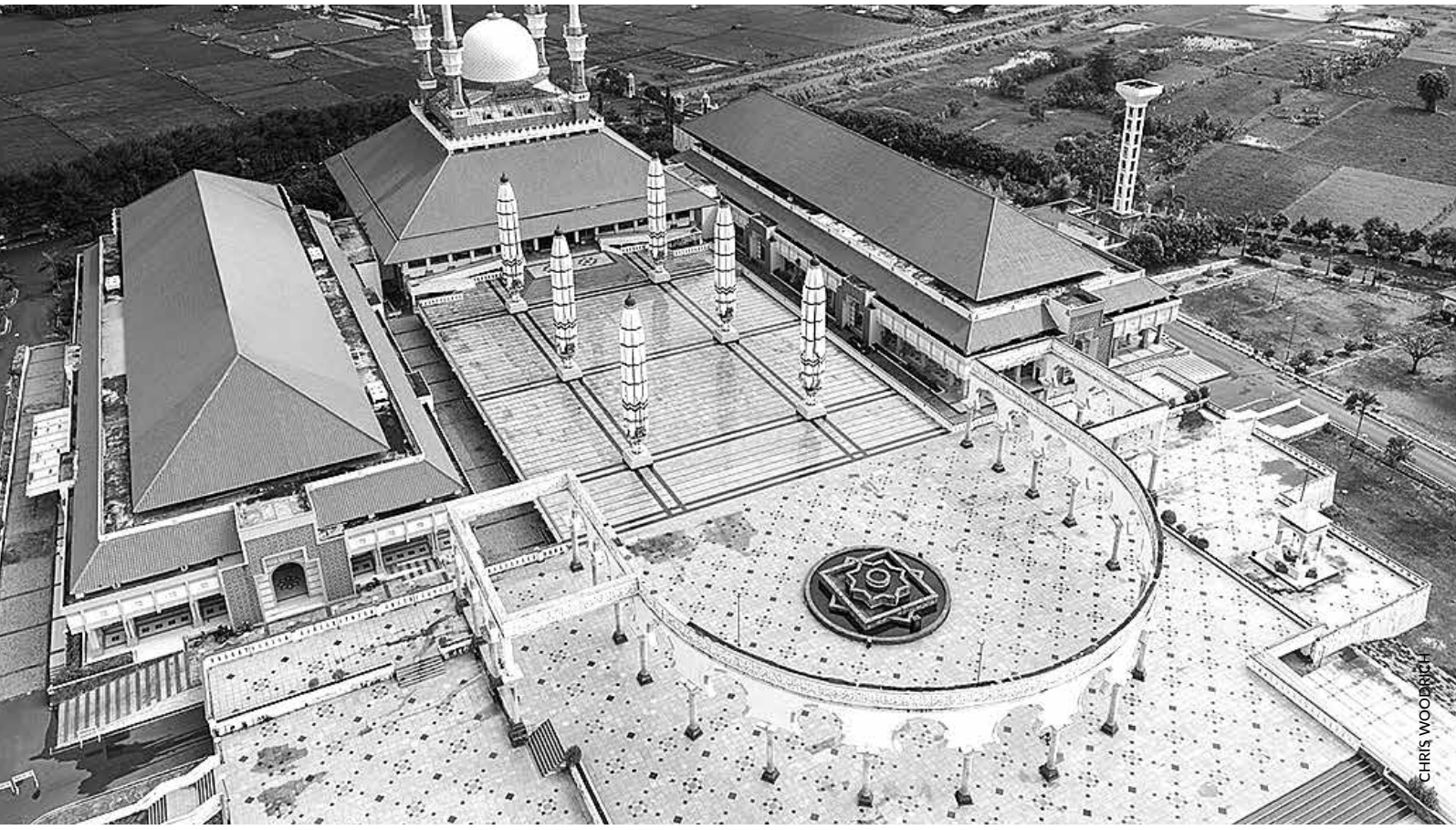
From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Intramuros, Manila, August 11, 2015, Memorial of Santa Clara de Assisi.

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

ROY LAGARDE

“ 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.

Religious Inclusiveness



By Joel Tabora, S.J.

Last August 25-29, as tempers in Manila flared because thousands of members of the Iglesia ni Cristo disrupted traffic on EDSA to protest alleged violations of the separation of Church and State, student and faculty sections of the Association of Southeast and East Asian Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASEACCU) met serenely in the Soegiyapranata Catholic University in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia to discuss the topic of religious inclusiveness. As we listened to religious leaders and scholars speak on the importance and the challenge of religious inclusiveness to 72 member universities from Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand, I was not aware of the demonstration that brought traffic to a halt in EDSA.

But the topic of the ASEACCU Annual Conference and the issue of the EDSA demonstrators were not unrelated. For separation of Church and State is ultimately about a state that is not under the control of religion and so permits religious inclusiveness. In the Philippines, because of the separation of Church and State, the state is not under the control of the Catholic Church. It is not under the control of the INC, nor even of Islam. That is why religious inclusiveness is possible in the Philippines. The state tolerates and protects the lawful functioning of various religious groups. Part of this toleration includes non-interference by the state in the affairs of religion. A perceived breach in this non-interference was what brought the INC demonstrators to EDSA.

It is providential that the INC problem could be solved by negotiation and did not lead to endless war, even though many continue to be curious what the agreements leading to the solution were.

Where the separation of Church and State is undone, and the authority of the religion is merged with the authority of the state, it is normally not the glory of God that is served, but the dark forces of religious passion, often violent, that in the name of God religiously and absolutely exclude from their sacred world and from the right to exist all humans and human achievements that are not part of their religious state. The ISIS, for example, the Islamic State, considers itself justified in the atrocities it brings on those who do not or cannot enter or oppose entering their sacred world; they behead, they maim, they murder, they massacre; they destroy any sign or symbol of civilization that is not does not fit into their religious paradigm. Similar behavior has befallen the Christian world when kings ruled by divine right and in the name of God spawned the Crusades and the Inquisition.

Against this backdrop, the ASEACCU conference considered religious inclusiveness: how it brings about humane

societies that include diverse religions. For this topic, Semarang, a center of religious inclusiveness, was an ideal location. Among its activities, the delegates visited the grotto of St. Mary in Kerep, Ambarawa, Indonesia's largest Marian pilgrimage site at which Christians and Muslims venerate Our Lady of the Assumption. They were also festively welcomed to Semarang's Grand Mosque in joyful exercise of religious inclusiveness.

One of the keynote addresses came from the renowned Indonesian Muslim leader, Almad Syafi'I Ma'arif. Referring to the civil-military conflicts in the Arab world, he said, "Their uncivilized behavior to kill their own brothers is absolutely un-Islamic, but ironically they do it in the name of Islam." Expressing personal pain, he said, "as a Muslim I really feel ashamed to see how tragic and fragile the Muslim world now is." But hoping for a world where Muslims live with each other and other religions in peace, he said: "This earth planet is for all human beings without exception regardless of their background, believers or non-believers. ... In the Qur'an, there is a famous verse: 'there shall be no coercion in matters of faith. What the sunnat Allah requires is that human beings should live in peace, cooperation, brotherhood, and compete in good deeds.'"

All the other papers like that of Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin emphasized the role of Catholic higher education in nurturing a diverse community. Quoting Pope Francis, he said: "I believe in God—not a Catholic God. There is no Catholic God."

But the most applauded testimony came from came from Nor Jamal "Jan-Jan" Batugan, the student Muslim delegate of Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro. Despite the raised eyebrows of members of his Muslim community as to why he should be going to a Catholic conference in Indonesia, he went in the hope of becoming "a better version" of himself. He was not disappointed.

"What I learned here in Indonesia is that there is something greater than anything that binds us all together regardless of our religions, faiths, and beliefs. Our task is to find it, search for it: that which bridges all humanity at large—our faith in God, the One who created you and me.

I believe if only Muslims would be good Muslims or Catholics good Catholics then the world would be more peaceful and happier..."

"Back in the Philippines, my Catholic university has taught me many values that formed me into becoming a better servant of God. My university taught me to find God in all things, to seek His presence, and to recognize his existence in everything I do. My Catholic university has taught me to do everything in Magis—in excellence, to do more than what is expected. My university taught me to do perform all my duties and responsibilities, my dreams, my aspirations—all for the greater glory of God—ad majorem Dei gloriam."

Catholic higher education teaching Muslims to be better Muslims, teaching all to bring about a more religiously inclusive society not by watering down religion but by searching openly for its core? Jan Jan Batugan testifies it is happening. At its religious core, sameness need not be forced on all, especially not by the state. The ethic of one group need not be coerced on another. Diversity is a richness wrought by the Creator enriching even religion. God leads us to a better version of ourselves in living with the faiths of others.

Vatican City, June 29, 2015. Pope Francis interacts with Orthodox clergy at St Peter's Basilica. CNA

Priestly spirit of poverty

By Fr. Roy Cimagala

Vatican City - April 26, 2015. Nineteen men lie prostrate during their ordination as priests, presided by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica. CNA

It's nice to know that many dioceses in the country are adopting the so-called Standard Living Allowance (SLA) plan for their priests and, of course, their bishops. It's an effort to take care of the basic needs and sustenance of the clergy whatever their pastoral assignments and personal conditions may be. We indeed have to take care of them who are selfless in bringing Christ to the faithful.

The appropriate structures and systems of the plan are being put up. Some period of experimentation is now underway. The learning process has started with obvious cases of some kinks and snags being ironed out.

All these are good. But let's remember that the structures and systems, no matter how effective and efficient they are in theory, would come to nothing if they are not animated by the proper spirit of poverty that we, clerics, are supposed to live. As St. Paul puts it: "The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Cor 3,6)

We should then understand that this whole business of establishing the SLA is not just about money and sustenance and of how Church finances can be allocated with greater equity. It is, first and last, a matter of reinforcing the priestly spirit of poverty that is very crucial in the priest's identity, dignity and ministry.

We have to understand that without this proper priestly spirit of poverty, the priesthood is compromised or at least distorted, no matter how showy a priest struts his stuff. He will end up simply being a performer, a user, a bureaucrat, instead of the sacramental representation of Christ as head of the Church, a dispenser of the divine mysteries.

In the Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, issued in 1994, some description of this priestly spirit of poverty is made (n. 67). Priestly poverty is pictured as an image of the poverty of Christ that has a salvific scope. It is the way to make one totally available to the things of God, of Christ, and the needs of the people.

"A priest could hardly be a true servant and minister of his brothers if he were excessively worried with his comfort and well-being," it says. With respect to the created and earthly goods, the priest can use them but "with a sense of responsibility, moderation, upright intention and detachment, precisely because he has his treasure in heaven and knows that all should be used for building the Kingdom of God."

The directory encourages the priest to lead "a simple life and avoid anything which could have an air of vanity, voluntarily embracing poverty to follow Christ more closely. In all aspects (living quarters, means of transportation, vacations, etc.), the priest must eliminate any kind of affectation and luxury."

It's sad to note that many people have been turned off by the way some priests comport themselves in public. Rightly or wrongly, they have claimed that some priests have luxury cars, ostentatious manners and are always thinking of money to the extent that people brand them as "mukhang pera," converting their priesthood into some kind of business.

This does not mean that priests should look and smell like beggars. Far from it. They, in fact, should be elegant, decently attired and easily distinguishable as priests who can readily be approached by anyone. As much as possible, they should not be mistaken as 'habal-habal' or jeepney drivers or some misplaced celebrities, etc.

I suppose it would be good if regular lifestyle checks can be made by the proper church authority so that the appropriate suggestions, corrections, solutions, and remedies can be made promptly, avoiding scandals that can really be harmful to the life of the Church, not to mention the priests concerned themselves.

What can be helpful is when priests themselves have regular spiritual directions to which they should have recourse with all freedom. We should not forget that the greater the responsibility one has, the greater also is his need for guidance and discipline. The moment this principle is forgotten or taken for granted, the incidence of all kinds of anomalies would just be a matter of time.

The directory also says that a priest should be a friend of those most in need, reserving "his most refined pastoral charity for these, with a preferential option for all poverty, old and new, tragically present in our world, always remembering that the first misery from which man must be liberated is that of sin, the root of all evil."

All of these indications about priestly spirit of poverty have to be lived with naturalness and discretion, knowing how to pass unnoticed, without ever screaming to the world, "I am poor."

The dignity and vocation of homosexual persons

A Pastoral Response to the Acceptance of the Homosexual Lifestyle And the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

Paris, France - January 13, 2013: Protesters march in "La Manif Pour Tous," or the "Protest for All" in support of traditional marriage between a man and a woman in Paris on Jan. 13, 2013. CNA

The Nature of Marriage in the Divine Plan

The creation narratives at the beginning of Sacred Scripture reveal that God made human beings in His image and likeness. He created them male and female, equal in dignity but not identical nor interchangeable.

He made one explicitly for the other—"It is not good that the man should be alone" (RSV, Gen. 2:18)[1]—equal as persons, not alike but complementary. So that in relating to each other, as male and female, one would complete the other as two halves coming together to be whole.

This complementarity between man and woman, as St. Pope John Paul II has pointed out, is observed and affirmed at the biological, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels. But it is most manifest primarily in and through the union of two complementary bodies, male and female.

"The body, which through its own masculinity or femininity right from the beginning helps both (man and woman) to find themselves in communion of persons, becomes, in a particular way, the constituent element of their union, when they become husband and wife."[2]

Simply put, human beings, created by God as either male or female, are meant to complement each other in a union of the two intended from their creation. And human sexuality, characterized as distinctly masculine or feminine, is ordered by nature towards that union, of one specifically with the other.

Having created man and woman, Scripture continues, God instituted marriage as the form of life in which the complementarity of man and woman would be fulfilled and perfected. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

And as it is ordered or directed to the union of man and woman, human sexuality is also ordered towards the procreation and education of children. It is in and through the conjugal union that God has willed to give man and woman a share in His work of creation: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:2).

In the Creator's plan we see, therefore, that sexual complementarity and fruitfulness belong to the very nature of marriage. In other words, marriage by its very nature and intention is unitive and procreative.

Marriage is also the form of life best suited for the flourishing of children. As St. Thomas Aquinas explained, human children need, not only nourishment for their bodies, but also education for their souls. This they acquire best, according to St. Thomas, when they have both parents—father and mother, male and female—as their teachers and role models.[3]

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage."[4]

In sum, the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is the institution established by God for the foundation of the family: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."[5]

In other words, God created human beings as male and female, complementary and specifically for each other, and

ordered or directed towards union and procreation that are intended to be fulfilled and perfected in marriage.

The Nature of Homosexuality in the Created Order

Created either male or female, and by their masculine or feminine sexuality thus directed towards union with the other who complements them, men and women are naturally drawn and relate to each other in this order.

There are some men and women, however, often through no fault of their own, who find themselves sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex.[6]

A comprehensive explanation for same-sex attraction or homosexual tendencies and inclinations remains elusive to this day, but research undertaken within various branches of science and medicine at various levels indicate that male and female homosexuality, though different in character, have both biological and environmental causes.

Sexual attraction towards the same sex is not a sin. But it is, in the light of our understanding of marriage, objectively disordered—in the sense that it is not ordered towards the union of male and female in a relationship of natural complementarity.

Homosexual acts or practices that may arise from such attraction, although they may proceed from and be motivated by genuine affection between two persons of the same sex, are similarly not ordered to the union of the two persons and to the procreation of children.

Because they are not unitive and procreative—the distinct qualities of a complementary union of man and woman in marriage—homosexual acts or practices are "contrary to the natural law"[7]. Hence, they are, from the perspective of natural law, gravely disordered and considered "sins gravely contrary to chastity".[8]

The Catholic Church acknowledges that the number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies could be more than we think and that this inclination "constitutes for most of them, a trial."[9]

The Catholic Church looks at her children who have deep seated homosexual attraction with motherly compassion and paternal love, even as she reminds them that in cultures that have lost sight of the richness and diversity of friendships that enhance the human condition, those who struggle with homosexuality are called to witness to the life-giving nature of virtue-based friendships not ordered to sexual acts.

Those who find themselves sexually attracted to others of the same sex are called to develop chaste friendships with both men and women.

The Church certainly recognizes that like all growth in virtue, this challenge is a difficult one that will require a robust supernatural life that is radically open to the grace and mercy of God. Frequent recourse to the sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist is a necessary condition for growth in holiness.

The Social Reality of Homosexual Unions

Over the past few years, in an increasing number of countries, including traditionally Catholic countries, homosexual unions have been granted legal recognition equal to that of marriage.

In our understanding of God's creation of man and woman in complementarity and in His establishment of marriage, however, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and the family.[10] A homosexual union is not and can never be a marriage as properly understood and so-called.

In response to this emerging social reality and for the guidance of the faithful, therefore, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith instructs:

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. One must refrain from any kind of formal cooperation in the enactment or application of such gravely unjust laws and, as far as possible, from material cooperation on the level of their application. In this area, everyone can exercise the right to conscientious objection.[11]

Concretely, this means that Catholics cannot participate in any way or even attend religious or legal ceremonies that celebrate and legitimize homosexual unions. Understandably, this will be a particularly heavy cross for families that have been touched by homosexuality. The Church reaches out with compassion to these families whose loved ones have entered into such unions.

In countries where homosexual unions have not been legalized—a vast majority of countries worldwide, including the Philippines—Catholics are called to give witness to the whole moral truth about human sexuality, which is contradicted "both by approval of homosexual acts and the unjust discrimination against homosexual persons."[12]

CNA

Moreover, Catholics are called to resist all attempts to normalize homosexual behavior and homosexual unions in their culture.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also recommends the following actions that may be effective in societies that may begin to manifest an inclination to legalize homosexual unions:

- Unmasking the way in which such tolerance [of homosexual unions] might be exploited or used in the service of ideology;
- Stating clearly the immoral nature of these unions;
- Reminding the government of the need to contain the phenomenon within certain limits so as to safeguard public morality and, above all, to avoid exposing young people to erroneous ideas about sexuality and marriage that would deprive them of their necessary defenses and contribute to the spread of the phenomenon.[13]

Catholics are called to oppose all gravely unjust laws that contravene both divine law and natural law—including all laws that legalize homosexual unions—because these unjust laws pervert and undermine the common good.

They are at the same time called, perhaps even more so in societies that legally recognize homosexual unions, to be charitable to every single homosexual person they know.

In particular, families with members who struggle with homosexuality are

called to love them unconditionally, thereby outlasting all their other same-sex loves. This love, however, must be a love in truth that avoids praising, consenting to, or defending the so-called "homosexual lifestyle."

Finally, given their unique vocation, Catholic politicians are obliged to oppose the legal recognition of homosexual unions in a particularly vigorous way. When legislation in favor of this recognition is first proposed, the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. "To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral." [14]

And, in countries where legislation in favor of homosexual unions is already in force, the Catholic lawmaker must try to obtain at least the partial repeal of the unjust law when its total abrogation is not possible at the moment.[15]

Arguments Against the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

Marriage is a social institution that has been granted privileges and benefits by the state because it is an institution of the natural law that contributes to the common good in a way that no other relationship can, i.e., the procreation and education of children.

Marriage binds a man and a woman together for life so that the offspring of their union would have the experience and benefit of the complementary male and female presence in their total development.

Homosexual unions, on the other hand, do not have the basic biological and anthropological elements of marriage and family. They are not able to contribute in a proper way to the procreation and survival of the human race[16], and thus it would be an injustice to grant them legal recognition along with the same benefits and privileges accorded to marriage.

Neither can this injustice be mitigated by allowing homosexual couples to either adopt children or use artificial reproductive technologies to engender them. Such actions would intentionally deprive these children of the experience of fatherhood or of motherhood that they would need to develop and flourish, not only as human persons, but as persons living in a gendered society where socialization involves the learning of gendered social norms.

This too would be a grave injustice, especially in light of the principle, "recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child, as the weaker and more vulnerable party, are to be the paramount consideration in every case."[17]

It would likewise be unjust if homosexual unions were granted privileges and benefits identical to those of marriages because this act would redefine marriage, making it "an institution devoid of essential reference to factors [that are necessarily] linked to heterosexuality; for example, procreation and raising children."[18]

Responding to Arguments for the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

In any debate that runs current to a proposal to legalize homosexual unions, four major arguments have been and will continue to be advanced.

The following enumeration and discussion is presented for the understanding and enlightenment of Catholics seeking appropriate responses to such arguments.

1. To deny homosexual unions the legal status of marriage is to unjustly discriminate against homosexual persons who simply wish to express their love and commitment to their same-sex partners as heterosexual spouses do.

The Catholic response: Distinguishing between persons or refusing social recognition or benefits to specific individuals or groups of individuals is immoral only when it is contrary to justice. Marriage is more than just the mutual affirmation one's love and commitment to a beloved. This is why the state regulates and licenses marriage in a way that it does not regulate other types of friendship, which to some degree, all involve the mutual affirmation of love and commitment between and among friends—because only marriage can naturally and directly contribute children and a stable environment for the raising of those children, to the common good.

Denying homosexual unions the social and legal status of marriage simply affirms that these unions, as well as other non-marital unions similar to them, are not equivalent to marriage because they cannot give society what marriages can give. This is not opposed to justice. On the contrary, justice demands it.[19]

2. Homosexual unions should be legally recognized because individuals, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, should have the right to do whatever they want to, if doing so does not hurt or impinge upon the freedom of others.

The Catholic response: As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains, it is one thing for individual persons to freely engage in their private activities, and another very different thing for them to demand that the state sanction these activities, especially when they would harm the common good.

This would be the case if homosexual unions were legally recognized.[20]

Rightly respecting individual autonomy does not mean that society has to do everything that an autonomous individual demands that it do.

3. Homosexual unions should be legally recognized because they are occasions for virtue, and as such, are good for society. There are many instances where same-sex couples have clearly grown in virtue, for example, the virtues of patience, forgiveness, and generosity, in and through their efforts to build a life together.

The Catholic response: It may be true that homosexual unions, in certain cases, may be occasions for the growth of imperfect natural virtue. However, this alone would not be a reason for granting them the legal status of marriage, because they still do not and cannot contribute to the common good in the same way that marriages do.

Moreover, the Catholic Church has the obligation to remind same-sex couples that natural virtue is insufficient for salvation and for the eternal beatitude to which everyone is called. Only the supernatural virtues are salvific.

4. Marriage as a social institution has evolved and changed numerous times over the course of human history to accommodate the needs of a particular society and culture. Thus, marriage should evolve once more to accommodate our contemporary notions of human sexuality that recognize the fluidity not only of gender identities but also of sexual orientations.

The Catholic response: The truth about marriage, i.e., that it is a social institution ordered towards the life-long union of a man and a woman and the procreation and education of their children, is attainable by human reason.

However, given fallen human nature, especially given the interior disarray of our carnal desires that obscures our intellect, it is a truth that is often hard to grasp, and only after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.

Washington D.C. - June 19, 2014: 2014 March for Marriage in Washington D.C. on June 19, 201. CNA

Not surprisingly, therefore, there has been and will continue to be throughout history, much confusion about the nature of marriage. Nonetheless, error is not a reason to abandon truth.

A Pastoral Response to the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

In societies that have legalized homosexual unions and in societies that are inclined to grant homosexual unions legal status, the Catholic Church is called, like her Lord did in his own time, to preach the good and saving news of marriage, by turning once again to God's plan "in the beginning," especially as it has been taught in the papal magisterium of Pope St. John Paul II in his Theology of the Body.

To the Catholic people and to other Christian believers, the Catholic Church is called to renew her efforts to catechize the faithful about the true nature of creation and marriage. This is especially urgent for our young people who may be led into error and doubt by those social movements that want to normalize homosexuality and to legalize homosexual unions.

For the Filipino people, we the Catholic bishops will be publishing a short catechism that specifically responds in simple language to the most common questions and objections raised by critics of the Church's teaching on marriage and homosexual unions. Notably, however, we also acknowledge that the confusion surrounding the true nature of marriage cannot be driven out of the culture without the penance, prayer, and fasting of God's holy people (cf. Mk. 9:29).

To families with members who struggle with homosexuality and who are tempted to ostracize their sons and daughters, the Catholic Church is called to preach mercy as her Lord did, without forgetting that the mercy of Jesus is always accompanied by his challenge to the woman caught in adultery that "from now on, do not sin again" (Jn. 8:11).

For the Filipino people, we the Catholic bishops consider addressing the familial shame that is experienced by Filipino families touched by homosexuality. It is a shame that needs to be redeemed in Christ through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God.

Finally, and most importantly, to homosexual individuals who are tempted either to pride or to despair, the Catholic Church is called to preach the power of grace through prayer and Holy Communion, and the mercy of Jesus Christ through the sacrament of penance.

It is Jesus Christ, and he alone, who can heal every broken human heart that yearns for unconditional love and authentic friendship. It is Jesus Christ, and he alone, who faithfully accompanies the homosexual person from grace unto glory.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, August 28, 2015

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

Endnotes:

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1605.
2 Pope John Paul II, "Marriage, One and Indissoluble in the First Chapters of Genesis," General Audience, November 21, 1979, Vatican City.
3 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa contra gentiles III-II.122.8.
4 Vatican II, Gaudium et spes, 48 §1. (cf. CCC, §1603)
5 Codex Iuris Canonici, can. 1055 § 1; cf. Gaudium et spes, 48 § 1.
6 In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2014 that 1.6% of the U.S. population identify themselves as gay, lesbian, and that 0.7% consider themselves bisexual. For details, see Ward et al., "Sexual Orientation and Health Among U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013," National Health Statistics Reports Number 77, July 15, 2014.
7 Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2357.
8 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, June 3, 2003," §4.
9 Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2358.
10 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, June 3, 2003," §4.
11 Ibid, §5.
12 B Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., §10.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., §7.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., §8.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.

Tagle blasts investment scams

MANILA, Sept. 3, 2015— The head of Manila's Catholic Church has denounced investment scams, describing it as blatant disregard for the dignity of the human person.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle denounced the scam which continues to dupe more people into losing their hard-earned money.

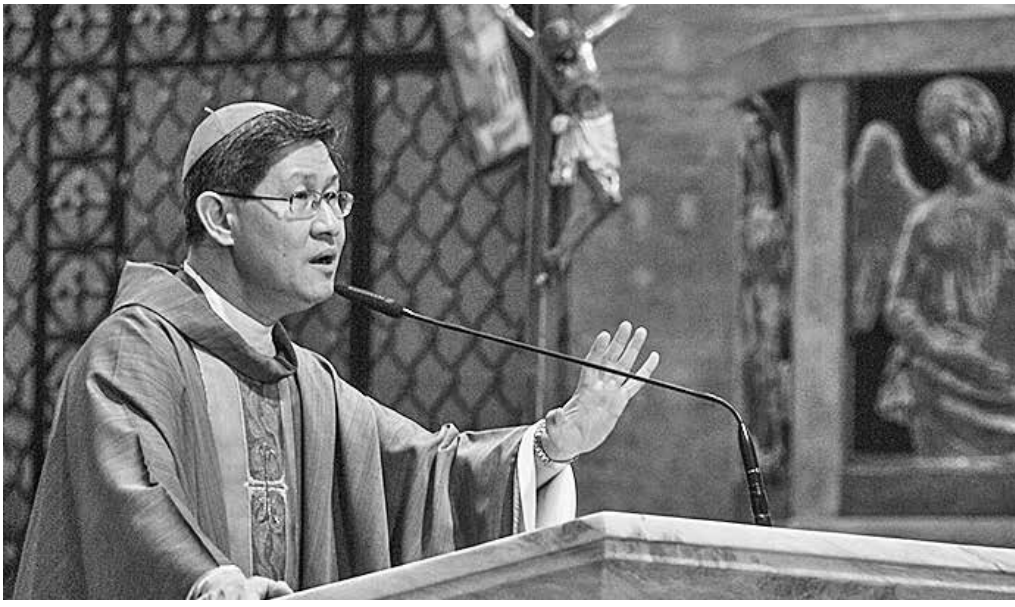
"It is sad but a lot of people gave all their savings but it amounted to nothing," said Tagle in Filipino over church-run Radio Veritas.

He then said investment scams are reminders that work should be an important expression of human dignity.

But today, he said, there is a risky tendency to use work to take advantage of other people.

Tagle expressed hope that people will stop making a living out of deceiving people.

He said the "networking scams" should serve as a reminder that dignity should always be at the heart of work, in its thousand forms.



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. ROY LAGARDE

According to the prelate, the incidents of scamming should serve as a reminder that work should remain noble and that earning money should not come at the cost of destroying other people's lives.

He added, people should not just think about making a living but also about how they can lighten others' burdens and not add to their fellow men's problems. ***(CBCP News)***

Climate justice is everybody's business—Franciscans

MANILA, Sept. 5, 2015– No group can claim exclusive right to advance climate justice, a Franciscan brother said after the advocacy was labeled a "socialist" agenda.

Refuting claims that it is largely just a progressive plot against capitalism, Franciscan Brother Angel Ace Cortez responded, "It's everybody's business."

He said climate justice advocacy is responsible involvement of any individual or group who cares for nature that faces mounting serious threats.

According to him, it is a call for commensurate reparation for the damages climate has sustained from humanity.

He also said climate justice can be served through reforestations, carbon emission cutdown, solid and non-solid wastes recycling, and other climate change mitigations.

Franciscan Brother Angel Ace Cortez. FRANCISCANS

"What we excessively take from nature today will haunt us in the future," said Cortez, who is the convenor of the newly formed Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement.

Cortez added that Typhoon Yolanda, which wreaked havoc in Central Visayas in November 2013, might be a manifestation of climate change.

It's not surprising that the Franciscans are involved today in the fight for climate, said Fr. Bernardine Leones, a senior Franciscan priest.

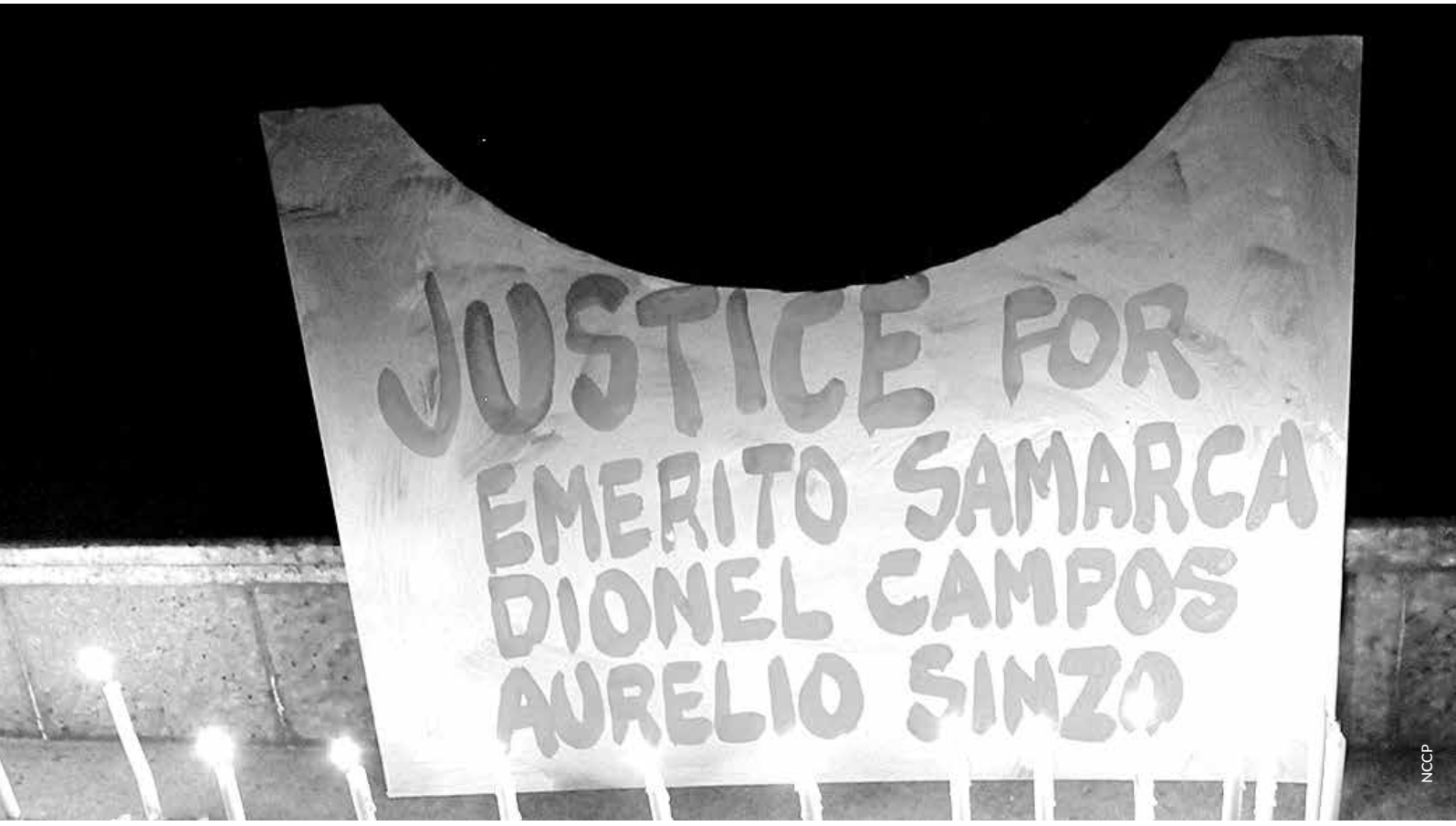
"St. Francis of Assisi is the Patron Saint of Ecology," Leones said.

Mario Jose De Vega, a professor at the Universidad De Manila and outspoken advocate of Socialism said "climate justice advocacy is not a monopoly of socialists."

"Even anti-socialists support it, De Vega said.

"It has become everybody's concern. Even the corporations that emit the largest volume of carbon into the atmosphere cannot escape its negative impact," he said. ***(Oliver Samson/CBCPNews)***

Gov't told: Lumads, safer without military



NCCP

MANILA, Sept. 6, 2015—With the recent spate of killings in the region, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) has come to believe that the Lumad communities of Bukidnon and Surigao del Sur would be better off without the military there, and urges government authorities to end the ongoing militarization of Mindanao and prioritize the welfare of its indigenous people (IP) instead.

Safety first

"We call on government to ensure the safety of the Lumads through the pullout of the 1st Special Forces Battalion under the 4th Infantry Division in Pangantucan, Bukidnon and the 36th Infantry Battalion in Lianga, Surigao del Sur and through the dismantling AFP-organized and -supported paramilitary forces," says the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in a statement.

The largest coalition of non-Catholic Christian groups in the country goes on to demand justice for the Lumads killed allegedly by the government's anti-insurgency program Oplan Bayanihan which has been linked to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, trumped-up charges, tortures, massacres, and displacement of thousands of individuals.

Call for aid

"We call on authorities, our churches, and international partners in supporting the victims including displaced individuals and their families through basic necessities such as food, temporary shelter, medical, psychosocial, and spiritual care," NCCP says.

"We continue our cry the resumption of formal peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines in order to address the root causes of armed conflict in Mindanao and the rest of the country for a just and lasting peace," it adds.

Victims

On Sept. 1, 2015, Emerito "Tatay Emok" Samarca, executive director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Development, Inc. (ALCADEV), Dionel Campos, chairperson of MAPASU (Persevering Struggle for Future Manobo Generations), and his cousin Aurelio "Bello" Sinzo were killed by suspected members of a paramilitary group.

Meanwhile, its teachers and students were harassed, and hundred others displaced in Barangay Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur.

'Legitimate encounter'

In Barangay Mendis, Pangantucan, Bukidnon, five Lumads were killed in what the police and military assert was a "legitimate encounter" between state forces and the New People's Army.

According to NCCP, circumstantial evidences of the Lianga massacre point to the 36th Infantry Battalion Philippine Army and to the paramilitary group Magahat/Bagani Forces as culprits. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián /CBCP News)***

Stop excesses, save the environment—religious brother

MANILA, Sept. 2, 2015—The environment can be rehabilitated if people will stop wanting than what is enough, a Franciscan climate justice advocate brother said yesterday.

In order to safeguard and restore the environment, people should live not beyond "sapat spirituality", said Bro. Angel Ace Cortez, OFM, during the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

"It is saddening that our needs are far beyond what we [really] need," he said. "As a result, in the same manner nature takes things from us."

There is a pressing need to realize man's huge climate debt, Cortez noted.

"We are in the middle of experiencing a lot of climate change effects," he said. "That's why we need to call for climate justice now."

According to Cortez, "ecological conversion" of the people is needed to preserve and safeguard the environment and stabilize climate conditions.

Bro. Angel Ace Cortez, OFM. OFM

The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation should inspire every believer to "renew and reaffirm" his commitment to his "personal vocation as steward of creation," he said.

It is also a time to "praise and thank God for His wonderful masterpiece that he entrusted" man to care for, Cortez said.

According to the Franciscan, people should ask God's help to protect Mother Earth and His forgiveness for ecological sins. *(Oliver Samson / CBCP News)*

Migrants' deaths should force policy change: Church official

JAKARTA, Sept. 4, 2015 - The deaths of at least 14 Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysian waters should propel Indonesia to provide better care and opportunities for its citizens so that they won't seek work abroad, a Church official said.

"The state must offer job opportunities in places where migrant workers come from so that they will not have to find jobs in other countries," Father Paulus Christian Siswantoko, secretary of the Indonesian bishops' Commission for Justice, Peace and Pastoral for Migrant-Itinerant People, said Sept. 4.

Father Siswantoko made his remarks to ucanews.com a day after an overcrowded boat carrying undocumented Indonesian migrant workers sank off Malaysia's coast. At least 14 people were confirmed dead, with rescue workers searching for additional victims, according to a statement by the Indonesian embassy in Malaysia.

Father Siswantoko said he hopes the tragedy will provide momentum to change the way Indonesia processes the return of undocumented migrant workers from neighboring countries. It was ultimately the state's responsibility to care for its citizens, he said.

"If we talk about who takes the responsibility for the incident, it is the state, of course. The state is given a mandate to provide its people with employment," he told ucanews.com.

Indonesian migrants working in Malaysia are often forced to travel across dangerous waters separating the two countries in small, overcrowded boats. Because of their undocumented status, the workers seek informal transportation methods in order to avoid being fined by the Indonesian government or because formal travel is too expensive, said Anis Hidayah of the Jakarta-based Migrant Care, a nongovernmental organization that assists Indonesian migrant workers.

Hidayah called on the governments of both countries to re-evaluate protocols governing the return of undocumented migrant workers in order to avoid future tragedies.

Father Siswantoko said the Church lamented the fact that so many Indonesian citizens still seek jobs abroad illegally. "The question is why do they take an illegal procedure, is it because the legal procedure is too difficult and expensive for them?" he asked.

Nusron Wahid, who heads the Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, said the agency may struggle identifying all of the victims because of their undocumented status.

"This shows how important it is to work according to a proper procedure. If procedures aren't followed, (we) find it difficult in tracking them down and fulfilling their rights," he said.

"Principally, however, we will help and bring (them) to their families," he said. *(UCANews / Katharina R. Lestari)*

Syrian refugees in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon stand in line to receive aid. MELKITE GREEK ARCHEPARCHY OF FURZOL, ZAHLE AND THE BEKAA

The refugees are our responsibility

By Fr. Shay Cullen

THE large numbers of war refugees and poverty stricken migrants pouring into Europe is a matter of immediate concern and action. But it should be concern and action primarily for the displaced and suffering refugees and those fleeing sub-human conditions and political systems where human rights violations, religious persecution, and injustice are so cruel and common.

The secularized European Union has generally bypassed Christian values and replaced them with the pragmatic rules and regulations of an over-organized social welfare state.

But those EU legalistic processes and procedures cannot properly respond to humanitarian crises and to the human suffering of refugees and those fleeing violence and sub-human intolerable conditions of abuse and discrimination.

The secular political establishment of the EU is in turmoil and confusion. Without a special law agreed by all they are stymied and unable to respond. Besides several members will not agree to share the challenge because of racial, economic or political pressures in their countries. The have stated openly that they are against any plan to accept a quota of refugees.

Is the vaunted European Union really a union at all?, some are asking. Do most of the members really believe and adhere to the high principles of justice, fairness, respect for human rights, and economic equality for the poor and the oppressed of the world? Refugees and displaced migrants victims of oppression have rights of protection and help anywhere in the world. Freedom of movement is a key part of the EU and it can apply to refugees as everybody else.

Some states are in the EU for what they can get out of it for themselves. Their negative reactions and unwelcoming, closed doors is a disgrace and not worthy of a civilized people. Branding these people as "illegal" and justifying oppressing and abusing them ignores the war they are fleeing and the truth that humanitarian needs are more important than the rigid strict rules and regulations that block them from reaching a safe welcoming haven.

These unwelcoming nations of the EU are not good neighbors and don't care about the plight of the refugees and those fleeing human rights violations and extreme poverty. That's the effect of secularization and the loss of Christian beliefs in love of neighbor.

The politicians for the "no to refugees" policies and are refusing to accept them care more for their political careers than the humans suffering so much. They are morally constipated and devoid of compassion for human suffering. They hide behind heartless and unfeeling bureaucratic procedures that block the refugees from finding relief and a better life. The refugees and migrants fleeing oppression want to be free from extermination by terrorists, chlorine and gasoline-filled barrel bombs dropped on civilians by Assad of Syria. All these with hardly a protest or reaction of outrage from the West for such atrocities.

There are outstanding exceptions, such as Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, and Italy and most of all Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan and a few others who accept and help the refugees and even the migrants asylum seekers but they too are politically paralyzed. Germany has taken 40% of the travelers already and the UK only a miserable mean 4% and has a closed-door policy which David Cameron announced he would open the door a fraction to allow in a few more Syrian refugees.

The Christian response is that of compassion and the love of neighbor. The heart of Christianity is imbedded in the answer of Jesus of Nazareth when he was asked who is my neighbor.

His response is in his story about the victim of violence dying on the side of the road. A rich cleric and a member of the upper class social elite came by; they saw the victim and they quickly hurried away doing nothing, such was their apathy and indifference.

A social outcast from Samaria, a migrant in Israel who passed that way, saw the wounded man who was a total stranger to him. He had been robbed of all his possessions like a refugee or a migrant in distress. The traveler responded immediately with compassion and gave the dying man medical aid and brought him to an inn. He paid a large sum of

Vatican City - September, 7, 2013: Pope Francis led a prayer vigil for peace in Syria in St. Peter's Square on September 7, 2013. CNA

money for his recovery and offered to pay all future expenses on his return. He is known as the Good Samaritan and the example of the good neighbor who cared for the needy we are called upon to love even if they are not our relatives or clan.

There are remarkable dedicated people and non-government organizations assisting the refugees and the desperate migrants fleeing awful degrading and oppressive regimes and poverty. However, it is the government that has to respond and welcome and help them.

Some elite politicians and media label them all unwanted illegal migrants. This is an insult to suffering humanity where most of them are obviously Syrian refugees fleeing a bloody cruel war. The shocking picture of the body of a small boy being carried ashore after drowning in a tragic attempt to reach European soil has shaken the world through social media.

Over 2,000 desperate people have died trying to escape terrible conditions in Syria, Libya and other countries where; violence, human rights violations, injustice, cruelty, discrimination and indecent poverty makes life unbearable.

The large numbers of Refugees and migrants coming into Europe fleeing bombing atrocities of the Taliban and Isis and the tyrant Assad should be seen as a benefit not a burden. European nations have more people dying than being born and face labor shortages. The founding pilgrims of America were refugees fleeing religious persecution in Europe.

The North American indigenous people welcomed and helped them. They were not Christian but helped these unknown strangers and migrants that crossed an ocean seeking a life of freedom. The Irish fleeing famine migrated and populated America and built its railroads and cities and thousands died in the American Civil War fighting slavery. Europe was rebuilt by migrants and refugees of WWII.

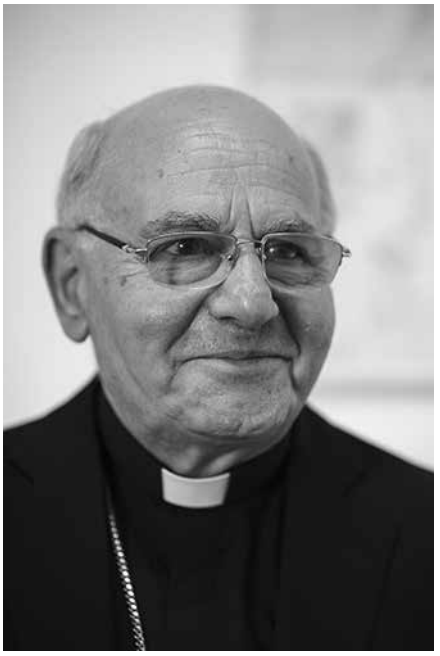
Europe can benefit from the skills, learning, and hardworking labor of migrants and refugees who are determined to work hard and succeed if given the chance and are not discriminated against or confined to camps and ghettos. They will be grateful all their lives for the welcome and the new life, reject extremist Islam. They have suffered from it already.

In Austria, I met some of them. They were welcomed into small towns and villages. As I talked with those who understood English I learned that they were engineers, teachers, professors, and school leavers all desperate for a chance to be part of nation-building now that their homeland has been destroyed by war.

The principles and values of the EU are challenged as never before and if the Eastern countries can remember their own refugee past and poverty and lack of freedom under communism they will welcome these people seeking a new better life.

(The following is the full text of a talk delivered at the Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus in Philadelphia, USA, August 4, 2015. Most Rev. Jean-Clemen Jeanbart is the Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Aleppo in Syria)

Christians and the War in Syria



Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart of Aleppo, Syria. AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED

By Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart

IN my country, Syria, Christians are caught in the middle of a civil war and they are enduring the rage of an extremist jihad. And it is unjust for the West to ignore the persecutions these Christian communities are experiencing.

Syrian Christians are in grave danger: We may disappear soon. We hope that men and women of good will, in this Great Nation (USA), listen to our call and give their brothers and sisters in faith a helpful hand in relieving their miseries.

Let me give you an idea about what is happening in my part of the world:

For the past four years there has been much talk about the war in Syria. We have heard about the strategic consequences, the geopolitical influences in that region, and the violence afflicting the innocent population. Though I do not underestimate the political stakes of what is going on in my country, I must draw attention to the fate of Christians who are caught in this turbulence.

For the Church, what is most important is that peace be restored! And that, through peace, a non-confessional and pluralistic democracy is established, that guarantees all Syrians their God-given rights to live as full-fledged citizens in the country where they were born and where their ancestors are buried.

The realities in my country and in the region are complex and interwoven with many historical, social and religious nuances. Let me touch one of the core problems which torments our faithful and their pastors in Syria, where Christian leaders are endlessly appealing for reconciliation and peace, while radical Muslims are calling for jihad and exclusion, a kind of apartheid for all non-Muslims.

Our people are afraid to leave their houses, they avoid going out of their cities or villages, or do so only to move to other regions where they hope to find a safe refuge. In dangerous zones, like Aleppo and localities close to Turkey, what terrorizes the population more than the fighting and the bombing, are the kidnappings, the snipers, car bombs, the shelling and the looting... All this culminating in the manifestation of ISIS.

Christians are victims of a war of destruction led by certain foreign elements. They have promoted savage violence, injected a huge amount of money to buy weapons and hire tens of thousands of fighters, jihadists, fundamentalists, mostly foreigners and mercenaries recruited from many different countries.

I do not know whether or not Aleppo has yet been designated as a "disaster zone" by international powers. But what I do know is that Aleppo is truly a disaster zone: a human disaster zone, a material and economic disaster zone. The citizens of this great and beautiful city, with its seven thousand years of history, find themselves after four years of senseless war, in a desperate situation. The prosperity which Aleppo enjoyed and which placed her among the most important cities of this region is lost.

Innumerable attacks--most recently the bombing of the Christian quarter over Easter weekend--have destroyed its churches, its factories and its flourishing industry, its infrastructure and social and administrative institutions, its commercial area and its legendary souks, its ancient homes, schools and hospitals.

The result: Syria has lost one of its main sources of economic growth. Then there are the countless frustrations which the people of Aleppo have had to endure because of the siege, particularly shortages of food, water, power and other essential supplies. In a word, my flock has suffered and has been the innocent target of a war that is unjust and devastating.

Since the beginning of this senseless war, the Church has called for an end to armed conflict and has called for negotiations to achieve a political solution to this crisis: in the meantime, more than half the Christians have left the city. The Assembly of the Bishops in Syria has not ceased to call believers to pray, the fighters to lay down arms and the nations, to stop supporting the belligerents and to help reach a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Across the region, as the fight is taken up against ISIS, the U.S. and its allies must be aware that Christians and other minorities are often caught up in the fighting, facing calamities as they are displaced, without any provisions for shelter, food and medical assistance. The emergency needs of vulnerable populations must be seriously considered. Just recently, disaster struck the peaceful and quiet population of the city of Idleb in northern Syria, where Christians have been executed by ISIS, many people have been displaced and the parish priest Father Ibrahim Farah has been kidnapped. And then there was the April 19 release of a video showing ISIS slaughtering 22 Coptic Christians in Libya.

Iraqi army T-55 tanks used in military encounters with the ISIS. JEFFREY ALEXANDER

What horrors must ISIS commit before the world will take greater action to stop the murderers?

Christians must be able to count on the U.S. and its allies to stop this war by putting pressure on some regional countries, calling their government to change policy and suspend, once for all, helping terrorists in their way to Syria. And to ensure political stability, it is essential that Christian leaders, both lay and clergy, are given a voice and presence at the negotiating table. Christians bring forth a vision inspired by democratic and humanistic values as bridge builders between Shiites and Sunnis, and they can help the development of a political system that ensures the rights of all citizens.

Last but not least, Christians--like other people whose lives have been overturned by years of fighting--need practical, financial help to rebuild their lives, especially their professional lives. If Christians are not given the means to earn a living, there is no way they can remain in Syria or Iraq. The hierarchy's lamenting of mass emigration can do little good if the Churches do not give their flock concrete means to rebuild their lives. Christians in Syria need to feel secure and they want to know that they will not be left alone in the days and years to come.

By God's grace and with the help of organizations like yours, we have been able to respond, in a significant way, to a good part of the humanitarian needs of our people. But what we really need today, would be your love and concern toward our suffering Church that is trying to live and continue bearing witness in this holy land where Christian life began and where Paul was converted, baptized, ordained to priesthood and sent to convert the world! We need your continued help and your commitment aside of us, sponsoring our research and efforts in order to be able to look beyond the crisis at hand.

That is why I am calling for the creation of "Build to Stay," a Christian social initiative that needs to be supported by a "Solidarity Fund." This fund will allow workers--carpenters, plumbers, teachers, lawyers, craftsmen and others--to re-establish themselves professionally, to buy the equipment and supplies they need to get started again; to rebuild the city of Aleppo and their own lives.

If this initiative works in Aleppo, the model can be applied throughout Syria and beyond. When God grants us peace and stability, this program will gather many people and volunteers to build the future of our community. This initiative will transform Aleppo back into the vibrant commercial hub of Syria and the Middle East at large. The support of our Christian brothers in the West is extremely needed. Are they willing to hear our desperate appeal? We will be eternally grateful if they do!

However, something has to be done immediately, because if the war continues and if peace is not restored in the streets and in our hearts, all hope may be lost, for all Syrians, Christians and Muslims alike.

If the civil war in Syria is prolonged, violence and chaos will inevitably take hold in neighboring countries. You can imagine the cruel picture ahead with the tragic consequences to the Christian presence in Syria and in surrounding countries.

I am convinced that Christians' first task everywhere they are is to struggle for peace in our land and in our region. That is my task as a successor of the Apostles, to keep the Church alive in the land of its birth, a land made holy by the blood of countless martyrs, past and present.

It is my fervent prayer that my fellow bishops in the US and around the world--they, too, successors of the apostles as much as I am myself--join me in accepting this shared responsibility and making "the fate of the persecuted Christians in the Middle East" a real priority, and not treating it merely as one cause among many. That is because the suffering of my people is a wound to the entire Body of Christ.

We know the task is difficult but we Christians also know that He in whom we have put our trust is faithful and never abandons His own--He who came to stay with His own, will never leave them to fend for themselves.

Aylan's death and that of the Middle East

Refugee children in the Church of St. Josef in Ankawa, Erbil in Iraq. Credit: Aid to the Church in Need

By Bernardo Cervellera

LIKE others, we too mourn the death of the three-year-old boy who drowned with his five-year-old brother during an attempt to cross from Turkey into Greece, his body stranded on a beach in Bodrum, where other people normally play, swim and sunbathe.

We too, with a heavy heart and a lot of shame, watch the thousands of Syrians stranded in a Budapest station, a scene we have seen before, during World War 2, whose end we just celebrated, triumphantly, without any sense of guilt on both the winning and losing sides.

As PIME missionaries, we too have made available our house in Sotto il Monte (Italy), near Pope John XXIII's birthplace, to scores of refugees who have crossed the Mediterranean Sea. We too mourn the death of thousands who drowned during the risky voyage.

However, shedding tears for the dead, opening one's heart and home to refugees, putting pressure on the European Union to change its asylum rules may be all fine and dandy. They may appease our feelings, but they are neither enough to appease our conscience nor satisfy our intelligence.

Apparently, the little boy, Aylan, came from Kobane, a Syrian Kurdish town near the border with Turkey. For months, Islamic State forces besieged it to create a corridor between the territory they hold in Syria and Turkey from where they can bring in new recruits and smuggle out contraband oil.

Turkish soldiers pushed back refugees like Aylan's family when they tried to escape from Kobane. Turkey itself stopped Iraqi Peshmerga from helping fellow Kurds in defending the city.

What is the point then of weeping for Aylan if we failed to weep for Kobane and Turkey's collusion with the Islamic State group?

What is the point of weeping for the thousands of refugees holding out at a Budapest railway station, and not realize that most are Syrians and that they are in Europe because of the wars waged by the Islamic State group, international Jihadi militias, but also Western governments that sought first and foremost Bashar al Assad's fall?

What is the point of weeping for those who perish in the Mediterranean Sea, or slamming people smugglers, without acknowledging that the West contributed to the problem by undermining the disquieting balance maintained by Gaddafi?

Let us take in the refugees, let us change the rules of the Dublin Convention, but let us also deal with the root causes behind their tragedy. The causes are in the Middle East, a region that is adrift, partly because of Western action (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc.), extremist groups militarily supplied and financially sponsored by regional powers (Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, etc.), and great powers who, rather than build peace, prefer to confront each other via proxies (Syria, Iran, or Saudi Arabia).

It is high time for Mideast governments to stop funding the Islamic State group, for peace to be negotiated in Syria and Yemen, for the United Nations Security Council to do the job it was set up for, for the world to work for peace among the nations, and not for one's supremacy over others.

"Enough!" wrote some newspapers with regards to the pictures of the little boy, Aylan, lying on the beach. My sentiments, too, and the sooner, the better. Yet, what about the other tens of thousands of children who died in the past four years of war in Syria? What about those who died in Iraq?

If nothing is done to deal with the underlying causes that led to these deaths, expressing sorrow for refugees in Europe will simply come across as a way of evading one's responsibility in the world.

Meanwhile, as the Middle East powder keg keeps on ticking, there is a major risk that any explosion will not generate 200,000 refugees, but 100 million. And if the Middle East blows up, neither Europe, nor the world can be saved. *(AsiaNews)*

Pope asks all European parishes to take in a refugee family

POPE Francis has called on European parishes and religious communities to offer shelter to a migrant family.

The Pope's appeal came during the Sunday Angelus.

"May Every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family" Pope Francis appealed.

To the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, the Pope said the faithful are called to offer a concrete gesture of hope as indicated in the Gospel.

"Before the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing death in conflict and hunger and are on a journey of hope, the Gospel--he said--calls us to be close to the smallest and to those who have been abandoned".

Reminding the faithful of the upcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Pope said that offering shelter to the needy is a "concrete act of preparation" for the Holy Year.

And turning specifically to his European brother bishops, the Pope asked them to support his appeal and said that in the coming days two Vatican parishes will each be taking in a family of refugees.

Meanwhile, Francis' catechesis found inspiration in the miracle of the healing by Jesus of a deaf and mute man--symbol of non-believers.

"... His deafness--Pope Francis said--symbolizes his incapacity to listen and to understand not only the words of men, but also the Word of God".

Syrian refugees in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. MELKITE GREEK ARCHEPARCHY OF FURZOL, ZAHLE AND THE BEKAA.

Jesus healed the man and--the Pope said--"unblocked" his capacity to enter into communication with others and with God. This story--he explained--speaks of us because we too are often inaccessible and closed within ourselves.

And urging families, and couples, and communities and parishes not to be closed but to be open to the great family of the Church, the Pope said we must listen to God who speaks to us and communicate his Word to those who do not know it or who have forgotten it.

Pope Francis also prayed for a fruitful encounter of the bishops of Venezuela and Colombia who are currently meeting to talk about the critical situation between the two nations following the economic crisis triggered by Venezuelan closure of borders. *(Vatican Radio)*

Religious artist dedicates work to Syrian refugees

THE photo of drowned Syrian toddler en route to Europe has inspired a powerful emotional response from artists around the world including a Filipino religious brother.

Augustinian Recollect Jaazeal Jakosalem, better known as Brother Tagoy, has joined other artists by making his own drawing critical of international refugee policies.

According to him, the poster is his way of expressing solidarity with Syrians, who over the years, were forced to flee their war-torn homeland for the safety and better life they hope to find elsewhere.

The images of the toddler's lifeless body on a Turkish beach took the tragic plight of Syrian refugees to center stage, as many observers fear a further loss of life until Europe's' policies change.

The Cebu-based Recollect artist is known for his commitment to the poor and ecology and was a recipient of National Award of Ecology.

He was also behind the icon "Jesus of the Poor," which he made for the ongoing celebration of the Years of Consecrated of Life and of the Poor.

His other works include "Dakilang Likha (Jesus of Creation)" and "Inang Likha" (Mother of Creation). *(Raymond A. Sebastián/CBCP News)*

Understanding Pope Francis' gesture rightly

NEWS that Pope Francis will allow priests to absolve from the sin of abortion has recently gone viral, and, quite misleadingly, some news items even announce that the Pope has shown "more understanding" of abortion. To properly appreciate Pope Francis' gesture, some things have to be made clear.

Abortion remains a serious wrong. Because the Church holds that human life—willed by the Creator to be in his image and likeness—starts at the moment of conception, which almost all have rightly understood to refer to the moment of fertilization—then, terminating unborn life after fertilization occurs trespasses the sacred ground that human life is. God breathed into Adam the breath of life, teaching us all, in this age and ages to come, the sublime lesson that the spark of life is never ours to ignite or to extinguish but comes from that unquenchable Flame that the Eternal God is.

Because one who deliberately procures it for herself or performs it on another goes against so basic a conviction of the community that is the Church, such a person brings upon himself or herself that is technically called "excommunication", but what actually means that by his or her choice, a person separates himself or herself from the life of the Church and from the community of brothers and sisters who uphold the inviolability of life.

None of this has changed. The CBCP wishes to make this absolutely clear. Choosing to terminate innocent, unborn life is not among a woman's options because her right to privacy and to make decisions about herself do not extend to the life in her womb over which she enjoys no dominion at all. Dependent on her, yes, but entrusted to her stewardship, not handed over to her power! Abortion remains a grave and serious wrong. In the traditional language of older catechisms, it is a MORTAL SIN, a deadly sin. Not only does it bring death on another; it brings about the spiritual death of one who commits it with full knowledge of its malice and the consequences of this absolutely abhorrent act.

Rome, Italy - March 18, 2015. General audience with Pope Francis. CNA

Neither is the penalty attenuated for, as explained earlier, it is consequence that one brings upon himself or herself. This is the reason that it is a "latae sententiae" penalty: one that falls on the offender the moment the offense is committed.

Under the present discipline of the Church, abortion is a "reserved sin"—one that can be absolved only by the bishop as the head of the particular church. He absolves the sin, and lifts the penalty. The Holy Father, it seems, is inclined to allow all priests who are otherwise not impeded in the exercise of their ministry, to absolve the sin. This does not make the sin less grievous. What it does is make the mercy of God more tangible through the ministry of the Church. Because every priest will, under what appears to be the disposition of the Holy Father, be able to absolve from the sin, then forgiveness through the sacrament established by The Lord and his Church, the Sacrament of Penance, is more readily available, for a sin that remains ever so serious, an offense that indeed cries to heaven for justice.

Through this gesture, the Holy Father hopes that all of us sinners may more concretely experience the mercy of God. He will soon convoke the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. In a world rent by cruelty and afflicted by hatred and vengeance in so many forms, celebrating the Mercy of God should come like comforting rain upon our parched human lives.

The proper, Catholic response to the Holy Father's gesture is for all of us, sinners, to approach the mercy of God that constantly reaches out to us, that seeks out the lost. We will all seek the pardon and peace that come when, in full contrition of sin and a firm resolve to turn away from a life of Godlessness, we kneel and repeat the words hollowed by the tradition of penance in the Church: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned...."

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
President, CBCP
September 3, 2015

Joint statement on the Semirara coal mine tragedy

Issued by the Antique Diocesan Social Action Center and NASSA/ Caritas Philippines, 27 July 2015, San Jose de Buenavista, Antique

ROY LAGARDE

AT the dawn of 17 July 2015, the north wall of the Panian open pit of the coal mine in Semirara, Caluya, Antique collapsed. Nine miners died. Twenty-nine months ago on 13 February 2013, the same mine pit claimed ten lives.

St. Anthony's College, the Antique Diocesan Social Action Center, DYKA and Spirit FM condole with the families of the victims of this disaster. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom what pain grows in the hearts of those orphaned. We offer our prayers for those departed and the ones they left, hoping that it is God Himself that will comfort them in their great sorrow.

We strongly reiterate our call for the complete closure of the Semirara coal mines and for the prohibition of mining anywhere else in Antique. We make this call fully cognizant of the fact that many power plants in the Philippines are dependent on Semirara for its fuel and that the mining operator is likewise an employer of thousands. We are also fully cognizant of the fact that industrialization depends much on resources we excavate from the belly of the Earth.

There is an urgent crisis we have to avert – global warming. Global warming is a real environmental phenomenon that is melting our globe's polar ice caps, raising our sea levels, drastically changing our weather conditions, and reducing our freshwater resources. The Philippines is no. 8 among countries that are most affected by raising sea levels due to global warming. Within the next 50 – 100 years, 6,205,000 Filipinos will lose their habitable lands to water if global warming is not reduced. The Philippines is no. 1 among those adversely affected by drastic weather and climate changes. We have witnessed Frank and Yolanda very recently.

Global warming is largely caused by carbon dioxide and methane emissions. At one end, the use of fossil fuel (coal, oil, gas) and cement production increases the concentration of CO2 in the air. On the other end, rapid deforestation is diminishing the Earth's capacity to absorb carbon. While CO2 is the breathable air of plants, we have deforested the Earth faster than we could replenish it, making deforestation the second leading cause of global warming.

Of the fossil fuels, coal is the most dangerous insofar as global warming is concerned. In 2013 alone, Semirara mines, or Antique for that matter accounts for 7.5 of the 7.8 million metric tons of coal produced locally. Ironically, in 2008, the Department of Energy expanded the mine's coal operating contract by another 15 years up to 2027. In 2009 it expanded the coverage of the coal operating contract from the original 5,500 hectares in Semirara to 12,700 hectares including 3,000 in Caluya, and 4,200 on Sibay Island.

From 2009 to 2014 alone, coal mining in Semirara has destroyed over 83.92 hectares of 31-species mangrove areas and more than two kilometers to sea of coral reefs. It has introduced toxicity to the surrounding waters and destroyed a rich fishing ground shared by Antique, Romblon, Mindoro and Palawan. It demolished a thriving organic and sustainable aquaculture that benefits at least 30% of the adult population and brings in at least P400 million to the municipal economy.

Unong pit, a Semirara mining area abandoned after its resources were depleted is now underwater. The 400-hectare Panian Pit is walking towards this watery death as well. Even as Panian is being dug to Hades, a new pit is also being dug at Himalian, and is expected to destroy 620 hectares of ecosystem.

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. Such measures only serve to mask socio-environmental ills festering in communities where the common population has been emasculated by corruption, partisan politics, poverty, lack of education and lack of moral leadership.

A number of provinces hosting coal powered plants in the Philippines have stood firm in rejecting the use of coal to supply power to areas in the Philippines. They have realized that despite the claimed benefits of these plants, the disaster these plants create will be of far greater consequence to a greater number of persons and families. We stand in solidarity with these provinces and unite our voices with theirs as we call for the halt of closure of coal mines and coal powered plants in the country.

We demand that the government recognizes the direct contribution of coal mining and coal powered operations to global warming. It is the entire country that stands at a loss for every environmental disaster that hits it. Typhoon Yolanda alone, which killed at least 6,340 is a clear and strong testimony to the fact that the government can barely cope with the disasters brought about by global warming. Yolanda, is not going to be the last of these disasters.

The effects of global warming to the Philippines cannot be underestimated and taken for granted. Millions will be affected as the sea reclaims land, as salt water seeps into our freshwater resources, as drought and megastorms alternately batter the country, as food sources are drastically reduced, as earthquakes and land erosion change the topography of our country. It is a crime against humanity for the government not to take immediate measures to avert climate change.

The government has to immediately shift to less evil sources of power even as it finds better, more environmentally sound, socially just, and sustainable sources of energy. Models for water, air, and sun-derived power are present. The government only has to rid itself of personal vested interest to enable the country to shift to more environmentally sound sources of power. We make this call as we echo the State policy to "protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature," and the national motto, "maka-Diyos, maka-tao, maka-kalikasan."

Pope Francis has recently issued an encyclical, Laudato Si', where he underscored the moral duty of every person to care for the earth. Pope Francis cites that "climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day." The Pope is certainly right when he said that "its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. " Our country, together with neighboring Bangladesh and Vietnam must brace for disasters because we will continue to suffer the first symptoms of an impending global disaster if we fail to act against climate change.

This is the reason why the Semirara disaster could not be taken out of the context of a global plundering of the earth's resources. These coal plants are environmental crimes done in broad daylight. It is our province, Antique, through the Semirara coal mines that provide coal to power plants that in turn saturate the atmosphere with gases that raise global temperatures, destroying the environment for profit without regard for the future generations.

St. Anthony's College, The Antique Diocesan Social Action Center, DYKA and Spirit FM continue to stand hand in hand with the over 250 seaweed farmers, the Isalba ang Caluya, the Imba Fisheries and Seaweed Planters Association, and the Sabang-Poocan Fisher and Farmers Association who made their stand during the Caluya Declaration in 2012 for the end of all coal mining and to develop sustainable livelihood options. We stand by those who oppose the operations of mines anywhere in Antique.

We call on all Antiqueños to make a stand against coal mining and all forms of mining in Antique. Oppose legislative measures that will authorize otherwise. Withdraw support for politicians and leaders who will scheme to perpetuate mining operations in the province. Reject gifts or assistance funded by mining operators just as Jesus rejected the worldly temptations of Satan. We have a job much greater than ourselves, and that is to save our country and the future generation.

We will not be quiet about this even as we grieve for the families of those lost to mining and other man-induced disasters. We grieve because these disasters are already by themselves a reminder that we as a Christian community have been remiss in our duties. It is our obligation to act and advocate for the protection of our environment and to promote social justice. To quote Laudato Si, "For 'to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.'"

As always, we seek the help and wisdom of our Heavenly Father in these trying times.

REV. FR. EDIONE R. FEBRERO, JCL
President of St. Anthony's College
Director of the Antique Diocesan Social Action Center
Manager of DYKA and Spirit FM

FR. EDWIN GARIGUEZ
Executive Secretary
NASSA/Caritas Philippines

Separation of Church and State

ON the occasion of the recently concluded demonstration of members of the "IGLESIA NI CRISTO" (INC) for having felt much offended by the Department of Justice in taking into consideration the complaint of this or those members against this or those superiors at the national executive level of the INC, in addition to the call for "Religious Freedom," the more distinct cry made was "Separation of Church and State".

The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines rightfully and categorically provides: "The Separation of Church and State shall be inviolable." (Art. II, Declaration of Principles and State Policies, Section 6).

So is it that among other things, the Republic of the Philippines shall not have any official religion represented by any church in the country—be this the Catholic Church, the Church of Christ or any other church or sect in the Philippines. So it is that every ordinary Filipino as well as every public official is altogether free to profess his opted religion, free to practice his chosen faith, free to affiliate himself with any desired church or something the like. This, in more simple language, is the substantive meaning of "Religious Freedom" which is a necessary consequence of the said "Separation of Church and State" in the country.

Just for information for whatever purpose it may serve, the Catholic Church the world over has her own normative universal provision in consonant response to the above-cited Separation of Church and State. Canon Law stipulates: "Clerics are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power." (Canon 285, par. 3 CIC) Cleric refers to all Catholic deacons, priests and bishops all over the world. This definite and defined canonical provision is in the realm of the maxim "No one can serve two masters." So is it that in the event that any cleric would dare violate the above-cited Church Law, he is either officially suspended from exercising the clerical ministry as a whole or formally dismissed from the clerical state itself.

But then, the constitutionally provided separation of Church and State in no way means that any member of a given Church, Sect or Religion is free or exempted from observing the laws of the Land, from answering to any proven violation of any criminal, civil and/or administrative law duly enacted in the State through its government for observance in the country. So it is that the State is bound to observe and respect its separation from any and all given religious groupings. The same, however, is bound to impose its laws upon all its citizens—irrespective of any creed they subscribe to.

In other words, the Separation of Church and State in no way means that any individual member of any Church is beyond the reach of the arm of the law the moment the former violates the latter. This is not only the rule of law but also the demand of justice. To believe, to say, to claim otherwise is inanity.

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'Partial divorce'

IT is truly sad to know and be aware of the fact that there are a good number of incumbent public officials at the national level of government who are bent on fooling around with, if not doing their best to effectively destroy the nature and finalities of marriage as stipulated by Natural Law and affirmed by ethical principles. This phenomenon has particular relevance to the still—already too long—ruling administration together with its well-rewarded allies in the Legislative Department. It must be admitted that they are not simply sly but also ingenious in their common venture to destroy the fundamental assumptions as well as the essential finalities of such a sacred and serious institution as the marriage covenant which is definitely and categorically very much more than a mere contract in line with the business norm of "No exchange. No return." Instead of "OK to Change and Return."

Time and again it has been said and still being mentioned that among the well-designed and accordingly desired legislations of this allegedly "Daang Matuid" government, the following take precedence: POPULATION CONTROL, DIVORCE, and SAME SEX MARRIAGE—the last two of which are delayed because of the unexpected BBL. It is rather strange and quite interesting to take note of the well-standing fact that the over-all Chief-in-Command is single to this date and time. So it is that likewise time and again it is asked why the deep and lasting interest and preoccupation about the said three legislative fixations?

They already have succeeded in undermining the significance and implications of Responsible Parenthood by the so-called "Reproductive Health Law" which is precisely against human reproduction, not to mention the abortive accompanying features thereof. One thing worth noting is that those against human reproduction are already reproduced by their parents.

As of now, Congress in fact already have the draft of the "Same Sex Marriage"—the ultimate camouflaged formal heading thereof is still not yet known and might be even imprudent to already disclose it. There is not the least maliciousness much less evil intention vs. the LGBT in countering such a legislation with manifest sexual implications—a legislation which is a big futility vs. basic truth and ground reality.

And here now comes the enigmatic opted legislation curiously called "Partial Divorce"—or something the like. A divorce that is but "Partial" and wherefore "Total" it is not? Does that mean that there would be such a thing as "Partial Marriage" as well—partial husband and wife, partial marital life, partial parental relationship? Amusing!

The truth of the matter is that the proposed legislation essentially means the following: When a marriage is between a foreigner and a Filipino citizen, in the event that the former files for and obtains a divorce, then the latter is legally held capable of re-marrying too. How many divorces one may file and obtain, how many remarriages one may enter into—this is not yet stipulated as of now. (Cf. Family Code of the Philippines, Art. 26, pars. 1 and 2) Interesting!

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BLADIMER USI

Ecology

"God... the Designer and Maker of the earth...not creating it to be a waste, but designing it to be lived in." (Isaiah 45:15-25)

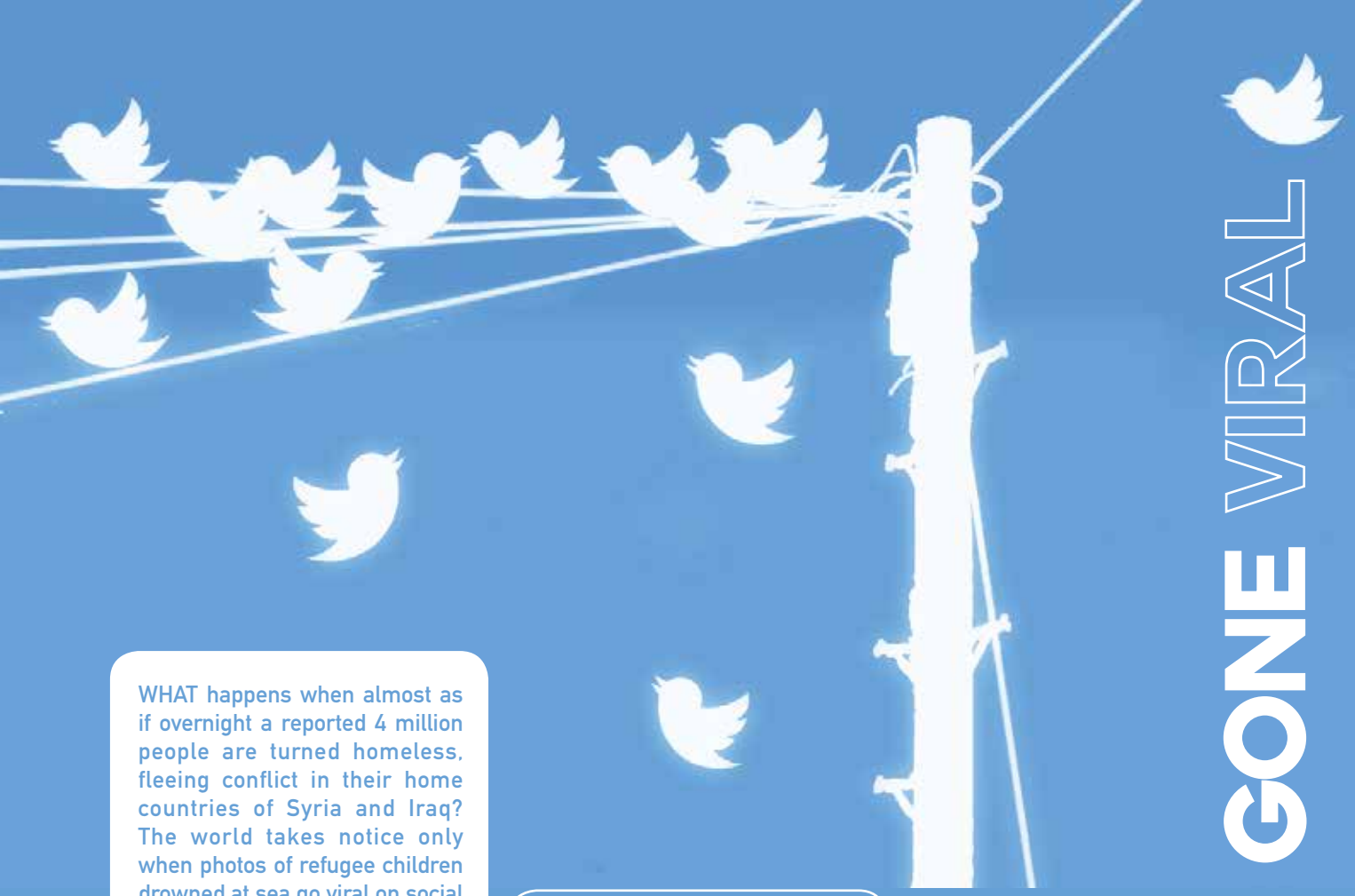
THE above-quoted Biblical passage from the Old Testament written by the prophet Isaiah who lived in the year 740 before Christ already brings to fore the idea that ecology was already then a markedly signal concern even back then. The main reminder-contents of the citation are plain yet profound in significance and implications. First, earth has nobody else as maker and designer than God Himself. Second, earth must thus be cared for, preserved not wasted, even but considering its maker. Third, earth was specifically designed and made by God for man whom He also created, to live in with all his fellow human beings.

So it is that no less than some two thousand seven hundred and fifty five years ago, ecology was already a marked preoccupation as expressed by no less than Isaiah, a distinct prophet. Yes, there were other men of God who saw, understood and wrote about truths in the supernal order--in the realm of the spiritual and in the sphere of the divine. Yet, ecology--which is basically about the on-the-ground relationship between living beings and their environment and vice-versa, was already a well-perceived concern, a fundamental reality, a marked preoccupation.

And these are precisely the days and times that man seems to be bent pn profiting from the earth while destroying its well-being, appears to be covetous of the wealth therein contained while indifferent to its integrity. Ecology--what is that? Environment--who cares? Climate change--so what? It is such greed and nonchalance, such covetousness and indifference that in effect occasioned the recent issuance of nothing less than a Papal Encyclical on the "Care of Our Common Home". "Papal" because it is no less than Pope Francis himself who issued it. "Encyclical" because it is addressed to the world as a whole--considering that its content and spirit are worldwide not only in relevance but also in scope. Among many of its teachings and reminders, the following come to fore:

- Many things have to change course, but it is the human beings themselves who need to change first in their value system in conjunction not only with their present but especially so in anticipation of their future.
- The ecological system they are living in is already bad and it is becoming worse unless they change their value system, particularly in relation to Mother Earth whose fruits and benefits are for all, not only for a chosen few.
- The way people look at the wealth of the earth gives the pitiful impression that they have long since subscribed to the pitiful, shameful, and truly egoistic principle of everyone for himself, let others take care of themselves.

What is more sad and saddening is that the three aforesaid observations are not but relevant to atheists but also to many so-called "Christians".



GONE VIRAL

WHAT happens when almost as if overnight a reported 4 million people are turned homeless, fleeing conflict in their home countries of Syria and Iraq? The world takes notice only when photos of refugee children drowned at sea go viral on social media. Here are some of the things being said online about the current crisis:

Good morning.
FYI, here is a Bloomberg View column revisiting the economics of the refugee tragedy in Europe, including Brussels proposal for mandatory quotas. #refugees #crisis #europemigration #EU
~ Mohamed A. El-Erian

#Refugees are welcome in #Germany. Hundreds of people arriving in cities across Germany are greeted by cheers, singing and applause by groups of locals. .....Good lessons for the leaders of Islamic countries ~ Basir Ahang

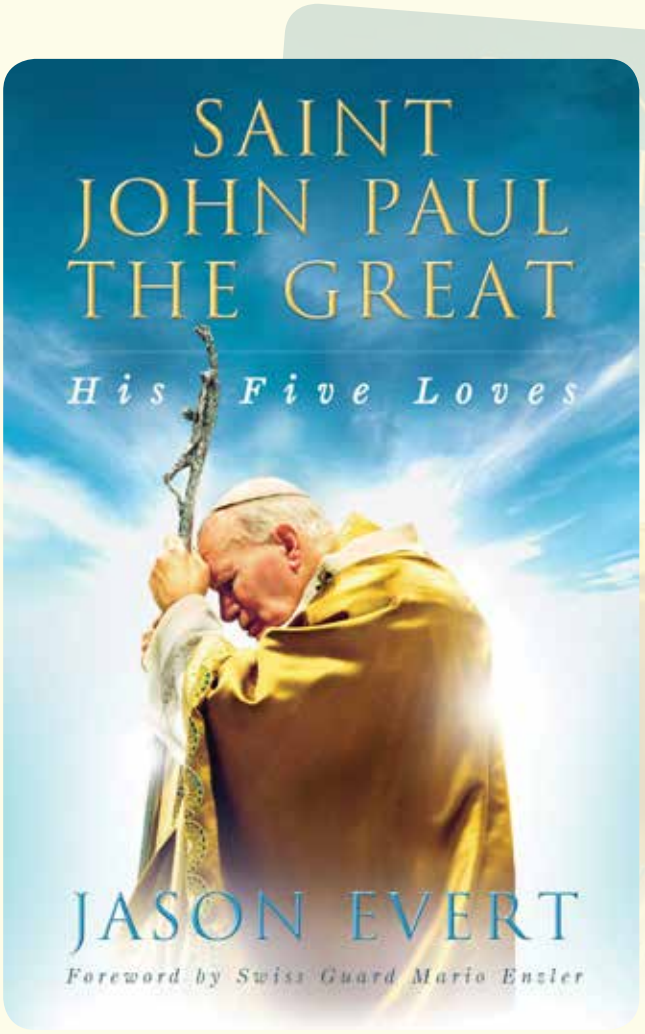
Frustrated refugees break police line in Hungary #refugees #migrants ~ Rebecca Costa

There is always hope. #hospitality #refugees #Hungary ~ Cheryl Anne Buluran Dayrit

I gave notice of motion calling on #European Govts 2 work together re #refugees 2 ensure no further loss of life ~ Shaoquett Moselmane MLC

The asylum seekers were coping with conflicting messages from Europe, ranging from warm welcomes in some places to a series of new constraints on their ability to get where they want to go. #follow me on my travels #onassignment @nytimes with #Refugees ~ Sergey Ponomarev

While here in Europe today I saw the Syrian refugees traveling by train from Austria to Germany. Some have been traveling for two weeks. The above pic is the police line with a herd of them waiting for a train or entry into Germany. Though they are welcomed here in Europe officials did their best to keep track of them and have them wait to enter or move about the countries. There are Red Cross stations set up at train stations for them to rest. Syria's civil war has displaced up to 11 million people. #SyrianRefugees #refugees #europe #syrians #syria #sad #empathy ~ Beth Hagendorf



SAINT JOHN PAUL THE GREAT HIS FIVE LOVES

By Nirva'ana Ella Delacruz

HOW does one begin to encapsulate the heart of a spiritual juggernaut of a man like St. John Paul II in a book?

Obviously the inspirational Catholic speaker and author Jason Evert has succeeded—and how. During his life, St. John Paul II was a prodigious author even when he was still known as Karol Wojtyla; and men have attempted to introduce, expound, and mentally masticate on his thinking, milestones in his papacy, and theological ideas, specifically what American social and political activist George Weigel called a "theological time bomb, one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries", his Theology of the Body.

But I have never really heard of anyone who dared approach the heart of the subject: what were the things that this great saint loved? What kind of wondrous imagining made him believe it would be possible to gather the young people of the world to the Church's bosom every two years with the creation of the World Youth Days? What kept him up working, reading, and writing, by many accounts, up until 1 a.m., even when he was also said to bang his hand on the side of a chair when it shook uncontrollably because of Parkinson's? What drove him to become the most travelled, the most publicly seen pope in the history of the Church? He made 104 foreign trips, more than all previous popes combined, not even counting his visits to parishes and churches in Italy as head of Bishop of Rome. What figure would fit the man better? He logged more than 1,167,000 kilometers, and was rendered a slave to Christ's own words: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

I started out to read this book out of holy curiosity, because friends have recounted clasping the book with tears in their eyes, moved by the stories and personal anecdotes shared in this sumptuous gem of a book. Little details you'd want to know by heart so you could tell them to your friends. Here was a man who lived on the world's stage in the name of Christ, and he was larger than life. What was funny was instead of tears, I find myself chuckling out loud alone in my bedroom at 2 a.m. or covering my mouth during LRT rides in delighted surprise. By golly, this man was so human he had turned divine—so it seemed—right before the eyes of the world, or did he ascend the chair of Peter fully formed like an angel among men—unassailable as he was holy, impregnable as he was relentless? Far from it. The man who loved sweets so much—he would draw little circles on his napkin during dinner time until his nuns in attendance would grant him a cookie—had far from a charmed life.

As we find out in the book, the early life of Karol would be scarred by tragedy after heartbreak and back again; the death of family members and loved ones, the horrors of war, brushes with death could only surely forge a man who would set the world on fire. Nevertheless, looking at his life in retrospect, it would be an understatement to say the Lord knew what He was doing.

Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation

DIRECTOR: Jerrold Tarog
LEAD CAST: John Arcilla, Mon Confiado, Mylene Dizon, Epi Quizon, Paulo Avelino, Bing Pimentel, Arron Villaflor
SCREENWRITER: E.A. Rocha, Henry Hunt Francia, Jerrold Tarog
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Pong Ignacio
PRODUCER: E.A. Rocha
EDITOR: Jerrold Tarog
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Jerrold Tarog
GENRE: Biopic, historical action
DISTRIBUTOR: Quantum Films
LOCATION: Philippines

Technical assessment: 4
Moral assessment: 3
CINEMA rating: V14

BAGAMA'T nasa Pilipinas na ang mga Amerikano noon, hindi pa rin malimi ng bagitong gobyerno ng Pilipinas ang tunay na motibo ng mga Kano. Si Heneral Antonio Luna (John Arcilla), ang namumuno ng puwersa militar ng Pilipinas at tagapayo ng Pangulong Emilio Aguinaldo (Mon Confiado), ay walang tiwala sa mga Amerikano. Sa ganang kanya, dapat unahan ang mga Amerikano, tirahin na ang mga ito bago pa lumawak at humigpit ang kapit nito sa bansa—ngunit hindi sasang-ayon sa kanyang pananaw ang ilang miyembro ng kabinete, lalo na yaong mga interesadong makipagnegosyo sa mga Amerikano. Mangyayari ang nakikinita ni Heneral Luna—digmaan sa pagitan ng mga Philipino at mga puting dayuhan. Maninindigan si Luna sa gitna ng gulo at sa kabila ng pagiging pasaway ng ilang tauhan sa militar.

Kahanga-hanga ang pagpili ng mga nagsiganap sa Heneral Luna, hindi lamang dahil sa matalino at taos-pusong pagganap ng mga ito kungdi pati na rin sa kanilang mga anyo. Sapagka't kamukhang-kamukha ng mga pangunahing aktor ang mga tauhang kanilang ginagampanan, lumalabas na buhay at makatotohanan ang pelikula. (Ano kaya ang naging resulta kung ang napiling Luna ay si Richard Gomez, Aguinaldo ay si John Lloyd Cruz, at Mabini ay si Alden Richard? Baka naman naging masayang zarzuela ito.) Salamat sa direksiyon ni Jerrold Tarog, kapani-paniwala din ang mga eksena ng paglalabanan; nakadagdag din sa pagka-makatotohanan ng Heneral Luna ang pagkakaroon ng tila mga tunay na "kano." Wala nang pupunahing pagkukulang ang CINEMA sa ibang technical aspects ng Heneral Luna, bawa't aspeto ay may kanya-kanyang ambag sa maayos na kabuuan ng pelikula.

Kadalasan, kapag ang isang pelikula ay tungkol sa kasaysayan—sa ibang bansa man o dito sa Pilipinas—sinisikap nitong maging mapitagan. Ang mga "bida" ay ipinakikita bilang mga bayani—magigiting, halos hindi mo makikitaan ng mga kahinaan ng karaniwang tao. At ang mga pangyayaring isinasalarawan ay pawang mahahalaga sa buhay ng bida at sa pagsulong ng kasaysayan. Kahit na nga maaaring magbigay-inspirasyon ang kanilang kuwento, minsan ay nakapangliliit din naman ito, lalu na't kung iisipin natin ang tila lampas-tao nang tapang, giting, at kadakilaan ng bayani. Dito naiiba ang Heneral Luna. Ang Antonio Luna ni Arcilla at Tarog ay pinaghalong kagitingan at kabaliwan, kaya taong-tao. Sa digmaan, walang takot; bilang anak ng Inang Bayan, iaalay ang buhay; kasama ng mga kawal, nambubulyaw, nambabatok, nagmumura, humahalakhak; sa piling ng sinisintang babae, naglalaho ang bangis. (Hindi mapigilan ng CINEMA ang magtaka: uso na ba ang "P..... i...." noong panahong iyon? Hindi ba't sa wikang Kastila pa ang pagmumura, tulad ng "Hijo de p...."? Naitatanong lang po).

Sa kabila ng mumunting daplis ng pelikula, nagtagumpay ang maningning na pagdidirihe ni Tarog na isalarawan ang dalawang mukha ng kasaysayan: katawa-tawang komedya at walang kapararakang trahedya. Maraming ipinupunlang katanungan ang Heneral Luna sa isip ng manunood: Sino bang talaga ang nagpapatay kay Heneral Luna? Gaano katapat ang pelikula sa katotohanan sa likod ng mga pangyayari sa kasaysayan? Bakit nasabi ni Heneral Luna na ang ating pinakamasahol na kaaway ay hindi ang mga banyaga kungdi ang ating sarili? Di kaya ang hamon ni Heneral Luna sa mga namumuno noon—"Bayan o sarili?" "Negosyo o kalayaan?"—ay hamon din ng Heneral Luna sa mga namumuno ngayon sa Pilipinas?

Bagama't itinuturing nating isang "demokrasya" ang Pilipinas sa ngayon, hindi maikakaila na tayo ay isang nahahating bayan. Ang isang bayan na walang pagkakaisa sa puso, diwa, mithiin, at gawa ay madaling magugupo ng mga dayuhang nagnanasa sa kanyang likas na yaman at nagsasamantala sa kanyang kahangalan. Iminumulat ng Heneral Luna ang mga mata ng makabagong Pilipino upang matutuhan natin ang mga aral ng kasaysayan. Saan patutungo ang Inang Bayan kung ang tanging katanungan ng mga kabataan sa ngayon tungkol sa Heneral Luna ay "Bakit palaging nakaupo si Mabini?"

PHILIPPINES. Filipino 'Laudato Si' now available

Since its release in June, Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si," a document first translated to eight languages, continues to spark discussion. Now, it has been translated into Filipino. Published by Claretian Communications, the letter on the care of creation has been translated by Filipino from Spanish by Leo R. Ocampo. The Tagalog version of the landmark document was released during the recent Manila International Book Fair. Catholic bishops earlier called on Filipinos, Christians, and non-Christians alike, to study and reflect on the various points of the encyclical. ***(CBCPNews)***

LEBANON. Refugees at risk because UN aid agencies are broke

The response of the international community to the needs of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and other countries remains weak and "does not meet the needs," said UN chief's Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon Philippe Lazzarini in an interview with Lebanon's Arabic-language daily An Nahar on Sept. 30.The UN official said that the World Food Program has recently warned that it would suspend its operations starting November not just in Lebanon and Jordan but in Syria too if it does not receive new funding. Mr Lazzarini added that the meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon in New York is aimed at sending a message that Lebanon remains a "priority on the agenda of the international community." He lamented however that several international grants have been frozen because of the government's failure to approve them. ***(Asianews)***

JERUSALEM. Catholic schools reopen, their value recognized

"We are pleased with today Christian schools are open and officially began the school year. In theory we lost 28 days, actually with the holidays and the Jewish, Christian and Muslim holidays, there were only 15 and we have plenty of time to catch up for lost time". With these words Mgr. Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo, Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem, comments to AsiaNews on the signing of the agreement between representatives of the Christian Schools and the Israeli Ministry of Education. The agreement was "reached between the 10 on Saturday night and midnight Sunday" resolving the standoff and ending the protest of Catholics in the Holy Land. School is now open for the tens of thousands of young people and teachers. "With a little 'patience and staying true to our line - adds the prelate - we got what we needed to start." ***(Asianews)***

SAUDI ARABIA. Over 700 pilgrims die in Hajj stampede

At least 717 people have been killed and about a thousand wounded in the horrific stampede near the holy city of Makkah during hajj on Sept. 24. Saudi officials have been constantly updating the figure. It is not clear why the incident occurred, but Saudi officials suggest that a surge in the number of pilgrims heading towards the Jamarat Bridge might be the cause. According to the authorities, this is the deadliest incident to occur during the Hajj in 25 years. Saudi Health Minister Khaled al-Falih said the crush occurred because pilgrims moved "without respecting the timetables" established by authorities. ***(Asianews)***

BANGLADESH. IS militants claim murder of Italian volunteer

Islamic State (IS) militants have claimed responsibility for the murder on Sept. 28 of Caesar Tavella, a 50 year-old Italian volunteer working in Bangladesh with a Dutch NGO. The man was killed by three armed men after work, while jogging in Gulshan, the diplomatic area of the capital, near the Egyptian embassy. The assailants fired three shots, one of which wounded him in the hand and the other two to the abdomen. Although IS extremists have claimed the crime because the man was a "crusader", the police suspect that the responsibility could be attributed to other groups. ***(Asianews)***

INDIA. Hindu group seeks pope's apology for clergy sex abuse

A prominent Hindu group in India has asked Pope Francis to apologize to Indians who have suffered sexual abuse at the hands of Christian missionaries in the country. The joint general secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or world Hindu council, Surendra Jain, said Christian missionaries have sexually abused children in India and Pope Francis should apologize to the victims, reported the mass circulation Hindi daily Navbharat Times. Jain was responding to the news of the pope's Sept. 27 meeting in Philadelphia with survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Jain said that Christian missionaries have been involved in such acts around the globe and the pope is offering an apology because there is pressure on him from the U.S. and other western nations. ***(UCAN)***

SRI LANKA. Activists, Catholics outraged by child murders

Catholics in Sri Lanka are adding their voices to demands that authorities crack down on sexual violence against women and children. Recent high-profile cases of child abductions have outraged activists in the island nation. On Sept. 18, activists from the group Mothers and Daughters of Lanka demonstrated in the capital, Colombo, to demand that authorities implement laws to stop sexual violence against women and girls. One of the pressing problems, said Nalini Ratnaraja, an activist who attended the rally, is that justice is slow for perpetrators of gender violence. Courts are also quick to grant bail to suspected perpetrators, she said. ***(UCAN)***

INDONESIA. Universities urged to play role in eradicating corruption

State-run and private universities in Indonesia can help eradicate corruption through the formation of students during their college years, said a philosophy professor from the Atma Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta"An effort to eradicate corruption needs two elements namely action and reflection. If [we] are just active, [our] reflection is empty. But in many universities, there is only reflection and no action is taken," Aloysius Agus Nugroho said at a forum held Sept. 29 at the university. Universities can produce people with anti-corruption spirit, he said, noting that the community values learned by young people can help control the spread of corruption on a national level."This is what we need to look at. It is not easy though," he said. He suggested that universities should include the effort to eradicate corruption in all subjects. ***(UCAN)***

VIETNAM. Abandoned church on Vietnam beach attracts tourists

Many tourists to Vietnam find appealing the ruins of a church on a beach in Nam Dinh Province, around 120 kilometers from Hanoi. The beach is located in Hai Ly Commune in Hai Hau District. In the past, the location of the beach was home to many small and large churches. As time went by, seawater encroached on the beach and damaged these churches. This one church, which survived the encroachment, has been abandoned since 1996.The ruined church on the beach is now a popular destination for wedding photo ops. It has the best view during dawn and dusk. Tourists enjoy watching not only the church but also fishing activities of local people here. Vietnam is home to many iconic churches, which are very popular among tourists for its architecture and history. ***(UCAN)***

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