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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE THIRD BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES (BEC) NATIONAL ASSEMBLY held recently in Manila was an opportunity to revisit an ongoing pastoral priority of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. This pastoral issue, which is seen as a new way of being Church, was formally adopted in 1991 at the celebration of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II). Its "ecclesial blueprint", however, was already budding at the aggiornamento of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

Admittedly, its concrete realization had been quite slow. Understandably, it had to be that sluggish because, just like the renewal brought about by Vatican II, it needed a radical changing of perspectives. In a Church that for ages had been used to a different ecclesiological model--which was more personal than communitarian, cultic than social--the introduction of a new ecclesiology was an uphill climb.

The impetus of the BEC had sideswept the eager beaver to precarious extremes. In some BEC communities, the "basic church" had become exclusive to the detriment and exclusion of the un-churched and the unregistered. It was a betrayal of the spirit of the renewal and a stiffling of the Holy Spirit that "blows where it wills." Not a few had been denied the sacraments or funeral services because they were not part of the hamlet.

After decades of navigating this new pastoral, which had been filled with tremendous challenges, especially at the parish level, the Church emerges fully armed with the lessons of time and theology. The coming of Pope Francis, who moves with inclusivity, mercy, and compassion, will certainly give fuller meaning to the BEC, to a better way of being Church.

This issue features the latest developments of the Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines. Rev. Fr. Amado Picardo, CSsR, the Executive Secretary of the Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities of the Catholic Bishops' Conference writes the cover story. At the outset he poses: What is happening to the BECs in the Philippines? What is their state of development? Read on.

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quote in the act

"We have to put mercy before judgment, and in any event God's judgment will always be in the light of his mercy."

Pope Francis, in his homily during the Holy Mass and opening of the Holy Door on the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy at St. Peter's Basilica on Dec. 8, 2015.

"Vulgarity is corruption. When we find vulgarity funny, we have really become beastly and barbaric as a people."

Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan and president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; in a recent statement on the many faces of corruption that includes vulgarity which is a distinct character of a presidential candidate that is a far cry from an exemplary leader.

"Let us build a society on the foundation of the merciful Jesus and let one of us be a stone of a construction of a just, truthful, and loving society of mercy."

Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, Archbishop of Manila and president of Cartitas Internationalis; in a homily at the local opening of the Extraordinary year of Mercy and the opening of the Jubilee Door at the Manila Cathedral.

"Most of the authoritarian and tyrant leaders in history eventually became plunderers. Why risk the future of this nation?"

Angel Ace Cortez, a Franciscan brother; speaking of a presidential aspirant who has a record of human rights violations and vigilantism, yet perceived to be the one to stop corruption which the incumbent administration could only aspire to.

"What is worse is that the poor and marginalized are the one who suffered from the threats of these climate-change induced actions of these big polluters."

Edwin Gariguez, a priest who heads Caritas Philippines; while attending the COP21 in Paris, France, has underlined the need to run after big polluters, naming 10 multinational corporations that have subsidiaries in the Philippines.

Msgr. Rolly Dela Cruz carefully holds the Most Blessed Sacrament in procession around San Fernando de Dilao Parish, Ermita, Manila on Sunday, the Solemnity of Christ the King. MARIA TAN

Eucharist and Environment: Celebrating Life and Earth in Laudato Si'

By Jaazeal Jakosalem, OAR

"The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise." (Pope Francis, Laudato Si', #235)

In Harmony of Life

Our creation story 'in essence' affirms the harmony of life, (LS, #70). We connect life and faith as we celebrate the sacraments, it is beyond the celebration of symbols, where the celebration becomes life itself.

Can we connect faith, people & planet? From a concrete faith experience, there is indeed a connection. The early ritual celebrations of our ancestors were done and communicated through indigenous nature-praising, ethnic cultural chanting, or in ways that connect community, environment and belief.

Celebrating our faith demands the maximization of images—water as the cleansing instrument in Baptism; bread and wine in the Eucharist; 'mercy' thru the forgiving representation of the priest in Confession; oil with multiple functions as healing for the sick and as expression of consecration. Making the natural images as sacramental signs, as vehicle in the celebration of faith – thus, enabling the 'natural' harmony of life. "The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things." (LS, 233). The call to restore creation, is a call to restore in all things – wounded by our anthropocentric view of the world.

The experience of celebrating the Eucharist in many cultural traditions, unfolds 'interconnectedness' of life. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity. (LS, #240). "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." (LS, 92) We admire celebrations of eucharistic experience adapted by some of our priests, giving 'ecological values' in the many symbols of the Mass, not alienating people but making them participate 'in the source and summit' of the liturgical experience. From here we speak of 'inculturation' popularized by our liturgists in the early 60's until its full inception in the 1990's. And it has still a lot of areas to be discovered on how it should be fully celebrated in a specific cultural situation.

Our own adaptation of the 'western' way of celebrating the Eucharist should not impede us to celebrate more meaningfully the liturgy. In the Philippine context, we still insist on wearing the 'formal' dress code in participating the mass; while there are areas around the globe where people celebrate the mass wearing their traditional cultural dress (with headress, even in full regalia weaved by their own hands and with a lot of cultural meanings). And they don't speak of and disagree on 'inculturation' – they lived by it. Such a local experience of eucharistic life, made us reflect that this can be a vehicle of preserving cultural life and not just influencing it by a foreign liturgical experience.

Creation as a sign of Grace

The beginning of life is a moment of grace. It flows from the life of God to the life of creation, life then is not exclusive of God—thus, life is given to us. "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely." (LS, #233)

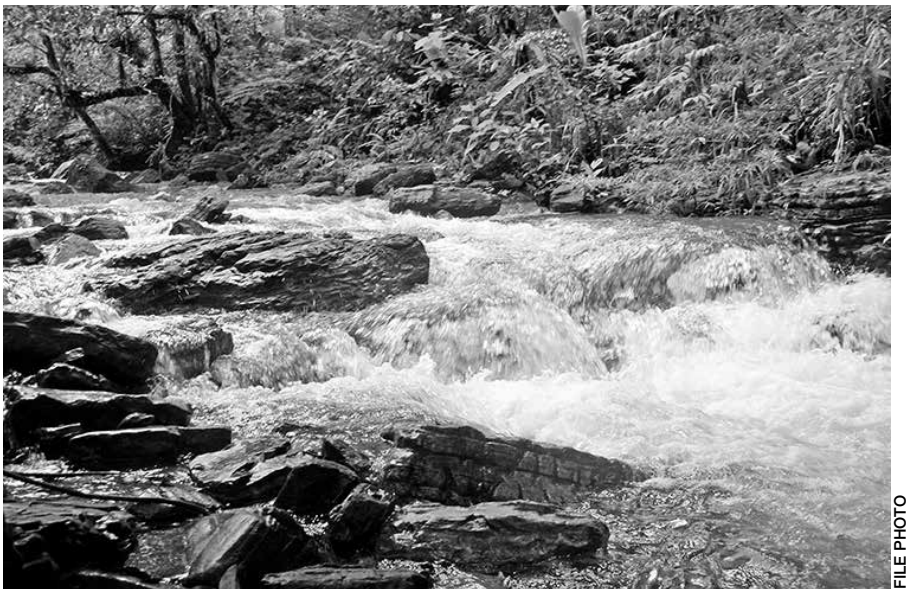
The Eucharist, is a sign of 'giving' prior to the crucifixion of Jesus. In fact, its celebration enables the apostles 'to understand' sacrifice, attaining the piece-meal lesson of the paschal mystery. It is a continuous unfolding of both the mystery and manifestation of grace. "One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross." (LS, #99). Our own experience of participating in the 'Eucharistic communion' enables us to celebrate the life of Jesus, of being offered and shared. The transforming effect then becomes our own transformation in the way we actualizes our faith – service to the church and for the people.

This flows from Eucharistic experi-

ence of life to a fruitful liturgical experience. The bread and wine are 'fruits of the earth'—it is not just a form of prayer but the matter itself, not artificial but the real bread and wine; their absence constitutes invalidity of the celebration of the sacrament. The 'process of creation' is evident in both the baking of the flour (bread) and the fermenting of the grapes (wine):" Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life. Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink." (From the 'Offertory' of the Mass). The real manifestation of grace is the reality of experience of Jesus' life present in the bread and wine. Not as a memorial but of a transforming reality of faith "in which nature is taken up by God." (LS, #235)

Pope Francis gave a very human image of Jesus, saying "Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship." Reflective of the enduring presence of a truly human identity of a saviour, in touch with life and of the simple 'humanity' of his people; the meaning then of the sacrament is simply touching base – this is what makes it a sign.

How can we bring the transforming presence of Jesus in the day-to-day struggle of our people? Laudato Si' speaks too of the reality of the ordinary struggles of our people – that their rights be respected and they be given dignity in this 'materialistic, capitalistic and technocratic' world which are putting the lives of our many Filipino brothers and sisters in the peripheries of oppression. The 'eucharistic experience' is a starting point of our reflection, the biblical readings of the liturgy creates an atmosphere of struggle, the life of Jesus as graced



FILE PHOTO

moments of sacrifice and the homily is the transformation from historical life of struggle to a faith-act reality of both social and ecological experience. "… all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation."

Shared Life of Jesus

In nature and in person he shared his life with us. "The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder." (LS, 97). The celebration of the sacrament is a meaningful actualization of the shared life of Jesus – living and present in our midst. "It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation."(LS, 236)

"In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life." (LS, 236) The sharing of his life, is an expression of his absolute presence; meaningfully understood as the fullness of his redeeming 'love.' This love then, is fully expressed in creation—"Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (Wis 11:24)." (LS, 77)

Jesus lived in the midst of poverty. "by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity" Poverty is a symbolic representation of destruction. Cry of the earth, cry of the poor; recent discussions on Laudato Si' centered on the impact of environmental degradation on the lives of people in poor communities. Our failure to connect the reality of the suffering humanity in the midst of environmental destruction is a failure of reflecting It certainly is a celebration how the brokenness of Creation, healed by Jesus' redeeming love in Creation.

Fully understood in the celebration of the Mass, Jesus—offered, shared and celebrated the fullness of his presence. "The Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation." (LS, 236)

The Year of Mercy and Philippine society

By Eutiquio B. Belizar, Jr., SThD

THANKS to the wonders of the Internet, we now have easy access to many things, among them, newspapers, and magazines. We don't have to subscribe to local and foreign papers to be able to read them.

With this exposure, I'm certain we are also forming many views and opinions, and we slowly discern the various underpinnings, political, ideological, religious, and otherwise, that the media outfits have.

I personally find it very interesting to compare opinions, styles, approaches, and see how they play out. There's a thrill always in observing the flashes of genius as different writers argue and often clash.

Also I want to fish, even if only tentatively, the different trends and biases the different papers can have. These considerations always shed some light on things to make them more understandable.

Almost automatically, several categories emerge in the mind as I instinctively try to sort out, classify, brand, and label the different positions. Among these categories are the conservative/liberal, right/left, open-minded/close-minded, serious/commercialized.

With all these developments, we need to pay more attention to what is fundamentally important to those involved in the media. What is clear is that everyone in the media, just like everybody else, should realize very sharply our need for continuing formation.

This need cannot be set aside, much less, alienated. This is the lifeblood of our profession, as it is in any other profession. Anyone who marginalizes the need for formation in his work is doomed to stagnate, if not fail miserably.

And formation should not just be some vague and generic term. It should strike us as something urgent, and with many concrete elements that need to be attended to.

For example, people in media should know how to attain greater independence and gain better objectivity, how to adapt to a fast-changing world driven by technologies that develop quite speedily these days, etc.

These are some concerns that need to be looked into if we in the media wish to really serve the people and contribute to the common good.

We have to be sensitive to subtle tricks, personal, social, and cultural, that can warp the integrity of our profession. These tricks are a constant threat. We cannot be naïve.

It would be good if we could have an inventory of biases and other conditionings that can affect our work. Some of them are unavoidable, but at least if we are aware of them, we can do something about them.

We have to be wary that unless we simply content ourselves with catering only to the ignorant and the impressionable, we need to improve our competence to satisfy the legitimate expectations of a more demanding and discerning audience.

But before we start thinking of what new style and techniques to learn to attain this goal, we have to remember one basic, indispensable requirement, one that needs continuing renewal and purification, given the condition of our life and work.

This requirement hopefully will give us a firm grounding, a sound sense of perspective, a clear focus, and sense of purpose. It's the understanding that our media work is not just our work but rather is part of the divine redemptive plan for all mankind. We have to attune our work to that context.

This is our usual problem. Many of us still have the primitive pagan notion that the business of communication is purely a human affair, so completely personal, private or autonomous that God has nothing to do with it.

Or at best, that it is just a social phenomenon, ruled purely by some social consensus, with God and His commandments playing no more than a cameo role.

Of course, with this attitude we become most vulnerable to all sorts of pressures and temptations that certainly distort the standard of justice and fair play, of freedom and truth, etc.

Unaware of the divine character and redemptive mission of our work, we can tend to go in circles, stuck in the mud of wranglings, self-righteousness, and useless speculations or worse, prone to the tailspin of frivolity, greed, and inanities.

This does not mean that media work should be some kind of sacred, rigid, and monolithic business. It can go mundane. It can and should respect the legitimate plurality of opinions proper of our autonomous earthly affairs.

But when there is this awareness of the divine character of our work, then the search for justice, freedom, and truth can be pursued, hindered less by our tendencies to be shallow in thinking, rash in judgment, rough in manners.

Even when there are conflicting views, there will always be charity in the discussions. Even when we are having fun, we don't forget God. This is our media challenge.

No to Taxes on Senior High School Voucher Income

By Joel Tabora, S.J.

ADMITTEDLY, the voucher system mitigates the adverse effects of the K-12 reform on some educational institutions. Private HEIs, adversely affected by non-enrollment due the the K-12 law, are able to offer SHS through the voucher system.

But the vouchers are not just about saving private HEIs from losses during a State-initiated reform period. They are about insure private sector participation in SHS provision which is on the whole good for the SHSs and good for their students.

Participation of the private sector in providing senior high school education to public school students in partnership with the provision of the DepEd instantiates the complementariness between public and private schools that is recognized by the Constitution as necessary for the State, first, to provide free basic education to all (par 2, sec 2, Art XIV), and second, to provide a complete, adequate and integrated system of education that is accessible to all Filipinos (par 1, sec 2, Art XIV). This accessibility is not merely a spatial concept; it is financial.

Senior High School is part of basic education. In general, the State should provide it free.

In providing this free senior high school, the State partners with the private sector, now through the voucher system. The value of the voucher is based on the replacement cost of public provision in a given locality. There is no quarrel with that. But the replacement cost of public provision is in many cases different from the actual cost of provision of private schools where the costs for acquiring and maintaining and developing competent faculty, staff and administrators, adequate libraries, usable laboratories, appropriate facilities are generally higher than the value of the voucher, especially as this value varies geographically which may not be the case in the private schools.

The participation of the private sector in this partnership, despite higher costs of delivery for most of the private sector, lessens public expenditure for the same provision which would otherwise be its Constitutional burden. The partnership benefits students choosing to go to private senior high schools from public junior high schools.

In this context, the State should not burden its private sector partners with taxes on voucher income. On the contrary, since the private schools offer senior high school for the equivalent of the cost of public school provision (i.e., the SHS vouchers) with value-added in private-quality instruction, character formation, facilities, etc., that students may freely choose without further burdening the State, the State should assist the schools, be they non-stock-non profit or for profit, in performing their educational functions under the partnership. Certainly, taxes on income coming from the vouchers should be abrogated, considering that there is no tax in the cost on public school provision, which is the basis of the voucher value, and considering that the vouchers support activity actually directly and solely used for senior high school education--which the State must provide for all free. This exemption from tax should be applicable to all private sector partners in providing senior high school, regardless of whether for profit or non-profit, and regardless of whether the schools requires a top up or not, since the public sector is freed through the participation of the private school of itself needing to provide that education.

The Constitution not only recognizes the complementariness of the public and private schools in the State's provision for the Philippines of a system of education, it also recognizes the crucial role the private sector plays in national development. "The State recognizes the indispensible role of the private sector, encourages private enterprise, and provides incentives to needed investments" (sec. 20, art II)

The terms of partnership between public and private schools in providing senior high school (and, certainly, other levels of Philippine education) should be better articulated not just from the viewpoint of private-school interests, nor just from the viewpoint of public-school interests but from the higher viewpoint of the "complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society" (par 1, sec 2, art XIV) that the Constitution mandates. In this articulation a healthy complementation between broad highly-regulated educational systems targeting maximized access might be appreciated vis-a-vis the creativity and innovativeness of educational institutions that are small, pliant, and creative. Also, through their complementation, the vulnerability of public schools to political interference might be checked by quality assurance freely exercised with the private sector; the increasing cost of public education might be checked by the cost of private provision, and vice versa.

Media today

By Roy Cimagala

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The Fallacy of Population Control

By Bernardo M. Villegas

AS commodities prices fall to historically low levels during the ongoing world economic crisis, the scaremongers who have been advocating population control are reliving the embarrassment of Paul Ehrlich, the original "population bomb" alarmist. As the prestigious Financial Times recently commented in an editorial last Sept. 1, 2015, falling prices show the world is not running out of resources. The FT reminded its readers about the celebrated wager between Paul Ehrlich and economist Julian Simon in 1980: "...the economist Julian Simon challenged doom mongering biologist Paul Ehrlich to a bet that the prices of any five metals would be lower in 10 years' time. He won, and made his point: over the long run, technological progress means commodity prices are likely to fall in real terms."

Julian Simon could have been thinking of the Philippines when he wrote a book titled "The Ultimate Resource," referring to human beings. If the Philippines is now the darling of investors from all over the world, the main reason is that our country is enjoying what is known as the demographic dividend which endows us with a growing, young, and English-speaking population. If we examine the engines of growth of the Philippines, which is considered one of the highest in the region, they are all people-related: remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers, earnings of BPO/KPO enterprises, and a boom in consumption capitalizing on a large domestic market. More people mean more supply of competitively cost manpower and at the same time, a large domestic market which makes the country basically immune from the ups and downs of the export market.

Pro-life rallyists protest against state-funded contraception and birth control legislation in Manila. FILE PHOTO

The FT editorial punches holes in a theory that became popular starting the early 2000s: that there are decades-long "super-cycles" in commodities prices which are expected to go up and up indefinitely into the future. Fear of these "super-cycles" motivated leaders in the Western world to strongly advice emerging markets to introduce birth control as a national policy. The Philippines was not spared this erroneous if not well intentioned advice as some U.S. officials put pressure on the present government to pass the Reproductive Health Law. Well, the truth is out: "With oil down about 57 per cent from its peak last June and copper and iron ore down about 50 and 70 per cent respectively from their peaks in early 2011, it has become clear that the "super-cycle" story was profoundly misleading...The past five years have dealt a fatal blow to the popularized version of the super cycle theory: that inexorably rising demand in emerging economies and constrained supplies of many commodities would inevitably put prices on a rising trend. With China apparently facing a future of slower growth than in the past two decades, and probably a shift away from resource-heavy investment spending towards consumption, the assumptions of strong long-term demand growth have been called into question."

Thirty five years later after the famous "population bomb" debate, Paul Ehrlich's pessimistic views appear even more unscientific. He was thoroughly wrong in assuming that rising prices were rooted in expectations of scarcity and that global population growth would have devastating consequences. Appearing ever more scientific is the sanguine view of Julian Simon that natural resources were for all practical purposes inexhaustible. He opined that, given freedom of private or individual economic initiative, market signals will always lead to increased supply and/or lower demand. I hope that those who will be elected in May 2016 will learn once and for all this lesson from both theory and history. For comments, my email address is bernardo.villegas@uap.asia.

APEC - the greed of nations

By Fr. Shay Cullen

Militant groups, led by Bayan, called on the government to reconsider its position on APEC and other existing free trade agreements which they claim failed to be felt by the ordinary Filipinos. Among other issues, they called on government to stop killing indigenous people from Southern Philippines. MELO ACUÑA

ANDREAS De la Cruz is a forty-year old fisherman from Masinloc, Zambales and he has a story of triumph and loss to tell and all of it is due to the obsession of powerful nations to control and dominate and occupy the lands and seas of other smaller nations.

A few months ago, Andreas set out to the rich fishing grounds of Scarborough shoal, about 60 kilometers from the beach where he lives in a small house with his wife and three children on the edge of the West Philippine Sea. His banca (boat), yellow and white with green outriggers made of bamboo poles tied together with nylon gut cut through the ocean swell with the noisy power of the motor.

The reef is well within the 200-mile Philippine exclusive economic zone of the Philippines. Andres said he and his father and grandfather and his ancestors fished off the reef even in primitive canoes with sails for generations. He has had a good, healthy life from fishing the reef and as prices and demand for good fish rose so did his earnings. He was able to send his children to a good school on his earnings. They rose out of the poverty and have more secure better lives. But that came to an end one tragic day over two years ago

When Andreas and his neighbor came to their customary fishing ground in the way of a big naval vessel ahead of them and were hailed over a loudspeaker to stop and turn around as they were they were illegally entering the waters of China.

Andreas was shocked, he said, it was like an invasion of the Philippines. The Chinese navy and captured the shoal which is like a submerged coral island. He evaded the naval cutter that tried to get close and swamp his little motorized banca. He swung around to pass it and headed toward the shoal with the ship coming after him. Then he made a fast tight turn and ran past it before it could make a slow wide turn and he was far away. The small "naval battle" was over with Andreas and his little Philippine flag the victor.

Darkness saved him and being a Filipino of courage with Juanito his helper, they lowered the nets near the submerged shoal. He did not get a chance to light the gas lamp to attract them yet he soon attracted a big catch. The other fishing boats had apparently turned back when confronted by the Chinese cutter and the ocean was his. In triumph, he arrived back with a full load to the amazement of the village. They were now marginalized, cut-off from their source of livelihood, and faced ruin and poverty. That's how the power of great nations crush their smaller weaker neighbors.

The once impoverished and weak Communist China was defeated by the capitalist juggernaut, and decided if China can't beat them, then let China join them. And so China did. It has to its credit and praise lifted hundreds of millions of starving Chinese from dire poverty in just thirty years or so. Today, it is a thriving capitalist, economic power ruled by a one-party Communist state. What a contradiction in terms and in reality.

Like the Western capitalist empires of the past and present that oppress and exploit the poorer nations in the world through multinational corporations povety and inequality grows, these multinationals work through organizations like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).They have been stealing the natural resources of poorer nations for a hundred years.

Amid stroke-inducing heat, hordes are stranded along Quirino Avenue, Parañaque City with many bound for the MIA Road. They are just some of the thousands of commuters who suffered from lack of public transportation occasioned by the APEC Summit, Nov. 19, 2015. RAYMOND A. SEBASTIÁN

China is now doing the same in the West Philippine Sea and beyond. It is developing into a superpower with global interests and hungry for raw materials to satisfy its insatiable desires for unlimited growth.

Andreas is just one of the millions that have been marginalized by capitalist greed, many more suffer the worse by Western liberal capitalism that China once condemned. China is not interested so much in the fish of the Southern Oceans but the oil and minerals below the ocean floor.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting of 21 heads of states was held recently in Manila. It drew thousands of protesters demanding true fairness and an end to the land-grabbing of the Philippines by China and the exclusion of the poor from the West- dominated world economy.

We have at last a prophetic, fearless Pope Francis, he is giving voice to the voiceless. In Bolivia last year, he made a powerful statement that ought to have been repeated at the APEC meeting.

He told the thousands of the poor that he stood with them in their demands for justice and social and economic inclusion.

"Let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change," the Pope Francis told the cheering crowds, referring to the unjust globalization of the economic system that "has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature". He went on to say:

"This system is by now intolerable: farm workers find it intolerable, laborers find it intolerable, communities find it intolerable, peoples find it intolerable. The earth itself--our sister, Mother Earth, as Saint Francis would say--also finds it intolerable," he said.

Million of hungry people are left out of a just and fair world and find it intolerable to live with such poverty, denied a life of dignity, purpose and justice. They grow up with hatred and anger and release it through violence and terrorism and barbarity.

It is only when there is an end to global injustice and greed, and when fairness and dignity and human rights are fully respected will there be peace and true prosperity.

Mindanao dioceses take hardline vs. coal mining

IN manifestation of ecclesial unity, the Dioceses of Dipologo, Ozamis, Pagadian, Iligan, and Marawi released on Nov. 11 a statement against coal mining and coal power plants, common concerns in the area.

"As Bishops of the Dioceses of Dipolog, Ozamis, Pagadian, Iligan, and Marawi (DOPIM), which comprise the civil provinces of Zamboanga del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Sur, Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, we completely oppose the operation of coal mining and coal power plants most especially within the aforementioned provinces. We do this not only because of our human responsibility, but as a call intrinsic to our Christian faith," reads part of the document signed by Dipolog Bishop Severo C. Caermare, DD; Iligan Bishop Elenito R. Galido, DD; Pagadian Bishop Emmanuel T. Cabajar, CSsR, DD; Bishop-Prelate of Marawi Edwin A. dela Peña, MSP, DD; Metropolitan Archbishop of Ozamiz Jesus A. Dosado, CM, DD.

The statement, which was also concurred by 166 delegates of the 40th DOPIM Bishops-Clergy Convention, describes the body's "serious concern on the operation of coal mining and coal power plant

Ground collapse caused by mining. CBCP NEWS

that triggers apprehension among our people and poses environment threat in the provinces where such facility is being established."

According to the document, coal mining and coal power plants are part of the "unchecked human activities" that are turning the earth into "an arid wasteland."

Referring to the recent natural disasters and super typhoons that have hit the country recently, the bishops said: "We are living witnesses of the destruction brought about by weather changes and the effects to health by carbon emissions. The calamities that claimed thousands of lives these past years and months are enough proof to awaken in us a commitment to safeguard creation and help mitigate their effects."

The statement mentioned the Holy Father as an influence for their stand, saying, "Pope Francis, seeing the urgency of action in dealing with environmental crisis, points out the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal to be progressively replaced without delay (Cf. Laudato Si, 165)."

The document was drafted during the 40th DOPIM Bihops-Clergy Convention at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, Del Carmen, Iligan City. ***(CBCP News)***

'Yolanda' women call for more livelihood aid

BASEY, Samar—Over 500 housewives, mothers, and sisters from "Yolanda"-hit communities in Western Samar who turned entrepreneurs have called the attention of government agencies to their need for more livelihood assistance.

"We hope to receive capital resources and machinery that we could use for our livelihood," they said collectively in Waray during the First Rural Summit held recently in Basey.

In a statement, they specifically asked for capital support, equipment, additional skills training, and help in linking their products to the market.

Social services

They further appealed for increased access to social services, particularly for health and nutrition.

The Samareñas, who came from 24 barangays in Basey, Marabut, and Sta. Rita towns, also grabbed the opportunity to stage a mini- trade fair featuring their products like organic vegetables and fruits, handicrafts, and native delicacies.

Meanwhile, representatives of the Provincial Agriculture Office (PAO), Department of Trade and Industry

A Yolanda survivor showcases some of the native delicacies in their province during a mini trade fair held in Basey, Samar. NASSA/ CARITAS PHILIPPINES

(DTI), and the Provincial Government of Samar conducted a commitment signing.

The delegates, moreover, had a unity parade from the St. Michael the Archangel Parish to the Basey Municipal Gym.

Housewives to entrepreneur

While before super typhoon "Yolanda," most of the women stayed at home caring for their children, after the disaster the Social Action Center (SAC) of the Diocese of Calbayog and NASSA/Caritas Philippines made sure they become micro-entrepreneurs, farmers, and mat weavers.

To date, about 406 women of them have received provisions like egg-laying implements, and capital assistance for mat-weaving and mat weavers' centers, salted egg production, and backyard farming.

SAC Yolanda Rehabilitation Program Director Fr. Cesar Aculan shared, "Yolanda may have destroyed the livelihood of the people of Samar, but it has restored as well the sense of self-worth of the women."

Besides providing livelihood aid, Calbayog's SAC carried out interventions on shelter, disaster risk reduction, ecosystem, and water, sanitation, and hygiene in the province. ***(Raymond A. Sebastián/ CBCP News)***

Church, Yolanda' survivors in Leyte sign Climate Change Declaration

IN solidarity with the on-going Climate Conference in Paris, the Archdiocese of Palo Relief and Rehabilitation Unit (Caritas Palo) together with at least 200 'Yolanda' survivors signed a Declaration supporting Climate Change and Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction in Palo, Leyte on Tuesday.

In a statement, Caritas Palo Director Fr. Al Cris Badana cited how important it is for members of the communities to be part of all processes addressing climate and disaster risks especially after the province experienced the wrath of Typhoon Yolanda last November 8, 2013.

He also mentioned how the impact of climate change cuts across all sectors regardless of gender, culture economic or political stature, with the poor suffering the greatest impact.

"Therefore, a plan of action to address climate and disaster risks must be undertaken using community-managed disaster risk reduction (CMDRR) as the strategy," Badana added.

Yolanda' survivors together with representatives from the Archdiocese of Palo Relief and Rehabilitation Unit (Caritas Palo) signed the Caritas Declaration on Climate Change in solidarity with the on-going Paris Climate Talks. NASSA/Caritas Philippines

Also present during the commitment signing are representatives from various church groups and government agencies such as the Provincial Government of Leyte, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Interior and Local Government, Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office and the

Office of the Civil Defense.

Aside from the declaration signing, the 'Yolanda' survivors from 15 communities in the towns of Palo, Santa Fe, Alangalang, Mayorga, Dulag and MacArthur each gave a presentation of how their communities are presently engaged in community-managed disaster risk reduction (CMDRR) measures and systems.

There was also a mini exhibit of the organic products produced by 'Yolanda' survivors to show its support for sustainable agriculture which is part of the climate change action.

After the devastation of Typhoon Yolanda, the Roman Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Palo through Caritas Palo and NASSA/Caritas Philippines helped Yolanda-affected communities in Leyte to craft their own resiliency and contingency plans, which were already adopted by their barangays. As of today, Caritas Palo has invested ₱150 million to build resilient communities.

The said communities also installed early warning systems and evacuation plans, which resulted in zero casualties and minimal damages during the onslaught of Typhoon Ruby, the strongest typhoon in 2014.

The Archdiocese of Palo Relief and Rehabilitation Unit (Caritas Palo) displayed the organic products produced 'Yolanda' survivors in Leyte, which is part of its climate change action. NASSA/CARITAS PHILIPPINES

It can be recalled that the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato Si, highlighted the adverse impacts of climate change on the poor and most vulnerable, and the scale of the climate crisis. ***(NASSA Features)***

Thousands to gather in prayer for peaceful resolution of PH–China sea row

Puerto Princesa Bishop Pedro Arigo. FILE PHOTO

MANILA, Nov. 24, 2015— Thousands of students across Palawan province will take part in a day of prayer on Dec. 2 for the peaceful resolution of disputes in the West Philippine Sea next week.

Organizers of the prayer gathering to held at the Puerto Princesa City's Sports Complex said it is vital to pray for peace as tensions around the strategic waterways mount.

"It's going to be a prayer of the rosary and the target is to gather 16,000 participants who are mostly students from different colleges and universities," Puerto Princesa Bishop Pedro Arigo told Radio Veritas.

He said the gathering also aims to raise awareness among the people about the issue and the current situation in the contested territories, which Beijing refers to as South China Sea.

"The purpose of this is for the people to get involved and to intensify our prayers so we should never lose hope," the prelate said.

In July this year, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a mandatory prayer for the faithful to recite for the peaceful resolution of the territorial row between China and the Philippines.

The CBCP also said the "oratio imperata" seeks to guide the country's leaders who brought the issue before an international forum for arbitration.

The archbishop said that the Oratio Imperata also seeks to guide the country's leaders, who are currently in The Hague and are tasked to deliver the arguments of the Philippines' arbitration case against China. ***(R. Lagarde / CBCPNews)***

Basic Ecclesial Communities today

By Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, SThD

WHAT is actually happening to the BECs in the Philippines? What is their state of development? This is an attempt to provide an answer based on the collated diocesan BEC profiles submitted in 2013 on the occasion of the National Gathering of Diocesan Directors and Coordinators in Cebu as well as my personal observation gathered during my visits to various dioceses all over the country and some case studies conducted by the office of the Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. On the first part I will present the findings of the initial survey. This will be followed by the trends and development and then identify some concerns as well as challenges.

There were 61 out 85 dioceses that submitted their diocesan BEC profile (71.7%): Luzon = 28 out of 47 dioceses, Visayas = 15 out of 17 dioceses, Mindanao = 18 out of 21. Visayas and Mindanao have higher percentage of dioceses that submitted their diocesan BEC profile than Luzon. This national profile is, therefore, partial and incomplete. It does not give a full picture of what is actually happening in our BECs. It does not provide a qualitative assessment of BECs. In spite of this we can deduce some trends and a general picture about the BECs in various parts of the country.

National BEC Profile

BEC As Diocesan Pastoral Priority

57 out of 61 respondent-dioceses consider BECs as pastoral thrust and priority (93.44%). This is a very high percentage in relation to the total number of respondents. What about those who did not respond? We cannot conclude that those who have not submitted their diocesan profile do not consider BECs as pastoral priority. But a 93 percent rating is could be to high. The findings of 2012 CBCP sponsored research on pastoral priorities of dioceses in the Philippines showed that 74 percent of dioceses in the Philippines consider BEC as high priority.

Mindanao has the highest percentage of parishes with BECs (99.45%), followed by Visayas (72.13%) and Luzon (60.98%). The national percentage is 72.79 %.

Loading infographic

The question is even if there are BECs in the parish, how established are they in most part of the parish? Meaning, is the parish already a network of BECs which can be found

Archbishop Socrates Villegas, CBCP president, on We at San Fernando de Dilao Parish in Paco. ROY LAGARDE

ednesday, Nov. 11, reminded delegates of the ongoing National Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) Assembly about their role as “catalysts of change”

in most of the barangays, puroks or sitios? Or are they only in some areas? The national total is quite small (33%) with Mindanao having the highest (41.56%). This means that while there are BECs already in 73 percent of the parishes, they have not really spread to most part of the parish.

The percentage of parishes with BECs that are fully alive is 36.17% nation wide – with Visayas having the highest percentage and Mindanao the lowest.

BECs among social classes

Rural poor: in 52 dioceses (85.2 %), Urban poor: in 35 dioceses (57.37 %) Middle class: in 36 dioceses (59.01 %), Upper class: in 12 dioceses (19.67 %)

Highest percentage: rural poor, high percentage: urban poor and middle-class Lowest percentage: upper class

Majority of the BECs are found among the lower classes (rural poor and urban poor). But there are also BECs in many middle-class communities and few among the upper class.

Shape/Form of BECs

Chapel-centered only: 40%,
Chapel-centered with Family Groupings/cells: 80%
Neighborhood FG/cells only: 46.6 %
BECs that are chapel-centered and at the same time having family groupings have the highest percentage.

BECs in parish/vicariate structures

BECs as part of parish structures: 100% Intermediate structures linking BECs
Barangay level =60 %
Zone/district level = 62.2 %
Parish level = 84.4 %
Vicariate level = 51.1 %
BECs represented in PPC = 95.5%

The dioceses in Visayas has the highest percentage of parish BEC assemblies and Mindanao the lowest.

Representatives of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) from 75 arch/dioceses in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao were in Metro Manila from Nov. 11 until Nov. 14, 2015 to mark 50 years since the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). ROY LAGARDE

The dioceses in Visayas has the highest percentage of parish BEC assemblies and Mindanao the lowest.

BEC Formation Programs/Activities Re: the Word & Evangelization

Basic Orientation Sem: 97.7 %
Bible/Gospel Sharing: 91.1 %
Occasional Seminars (evangelization, Basic-bible, leadership, etc): 86.6 %

BEC activities related to Worship/ Liturgy/Devotions

BEC Mass = 91.1%
Priest-less Liturgy of the Word = 77.7 %
Block-Rosary = 88.9%,
Novena = 82.2%
Prayer service for the dead = 77.7%

Parishes with BEC- based Social Action Programs

Luzon has the highest percentage of parishes with BEC-based social action programs

BEC- based Social Action Programs

Mutual aid = 51.1%
IGP/livelihood = 77.7%
Coop = 62.2%
Sustainable Agriculture = 55.6%
Good governance = 46.6%
Political Education = 64.4
Ecology = 66.6%
Peace building = 44.4%

Other BEC-based social action

program (less than 10%)
Microfinance
Health/nutrition program
Feeding
Medical mission
Disaster-relief

Modified Tithing System

Luzon = 11 out of 28 respondent dioceses (39.28%) mentioned

adopting modified tithing system for BECs
Visayas = 8 out of 15 (53.33 %)
Mindanao = 11 out of 18 (61.1 %)
Nationwide: 30 out 61 dioceses = 49.18% , Mindanao has the highest percentage

Summing-up: Type of BECs

Liturgical-Evangelical (BECs exclusively focused on the Word & Liturgy without social action): all = 9% most = 75% few = 1.8%
Holistic-Integral (BECs integrating liturgical-evangelizing -social action dimensions) all = 3.8% most = 26% few = 60%

Trends and Development

BEC as pastoral priority of most dioceses

In 1991, the PCP II adopted the formation of BECs as a pastoral priority for the Church in the Philippines. It also provided a vision of BECs. BECs can now be found in almost all dioceses in the Philippines (but not yet in all the parishes). The number of dioceses that have adopted the formation of BECs as a pastoral priority has increased through the years. There are many dioceses where BECs are becoming the basic pastoral unit of the parishes which is seen as a network of BECs.

The CBCP has been supportive in the promotion of BECs. The 2005 BEC National Assembly was the first CBCP-sponsored assembly. In 2008, another CBCP-BEC National Assembly was held. The proposal of the 2002 National Assembly for a CBCP national office had earlier been approved by the CBCP. The Episcopal Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities of the CBCP was finally set up in 2007. The setting up of this committee is an expression of the acceptance and support by the CBCP of the BECs as a pastoral priority.

Many dioceses are holding annual diocesan BEC assembly. There were several regional BEC gatherings or assemblies held (Northern Luzon, National Capital Region, Mindanao Region). A National Gathering of Diocesan BEC directors was held in 2011. Another one was held in Sept. 2013 . A National BEC assembly will be held in 2015. Out of 85 dioceses, 76 are sending delegates. The CBCP has declare 2017 as Year of Parish as communion of communities (BECs)

Diversity of forms and shapes of BECs

Various shapes and forms of BECs have emerged in the country. There are chapel-centered communities. These are communities with 30 to 200 families, mostly in the rural areas and also urban areas in Mindanao that made use of the barrio/barangay chapel structures and organizations. Most of the BEC gathering and activities are held in the chapel which is considered as the social space or center of the community.

There are also BECs which are chapel-centered but subdivided into neighborhood cells and family groupings (8-15 families per grouping).The BEC in the barangay or village is a network of neighborhood cells. The members of each cell gather in the homes during weekdays, while all the cells in a BEC gather in the chapel for their regular assembly and Eucharistic celebration (monthly or bi-monthly). There highest percentage of BECs have adopted this form.

There are neighborhood cells or family groupings without a chapel. These are found mostly in big cities. Most, if not all, of the activities are done in the homes of the members of the cells. The gathering of the wider community for assembly and the Eucharist is often done in public places – covered basketball court, side-streets, barangay hall or schoolhouses. There has been a tendency to regard the neighborhood cell consisting of 8-15 members as the BEC itself

rather than a BEC-cell which is part of a wider community.

Growth of BEC-Based Social Action Program

There is a growing number of BECs that have social action component. Various programs were introduced at the BEC level: sustainable agriculture, livelihood projects, peace advocacy, environmental protection, microfinance, community-based health program, skills training, good governance, etc. The National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) has been promoting the BEC-based Integral Evangelization Program. However, the majority of the BECs (around 74%) has still to integrate social action dimension in their activities.

The Growth of BECs in Urban Areas

There is a perception that BECs will only thrive in rural communities which are homogeneous by nature and where everyone knows one another. Many believe that it would be very difficult to form BECs in the cities, especially among the middle and upper-classes. Yet over the years, many BECs have emerged in the urban areas – in Davao, Surigao, Cebu, Ormoc, Metro-Manila, Lingayen, Dagupan, Aparri and other major cities. There are even BECs that have been formed in upper-class subdivisions and condominium. This requires new ways and approaches of building BECs and new forms and structures – different from the methods used in rural areas. Their stories have yet to be told and the best practices have to be culled and disseminated. In Sept 2012, delegates from 6 NCR dioceses plus Malolos and Antipolo came together for a conference : "BECs in the City"

Increasing number of volunteer BEC lay formators and animators

Many BEC parish formation teams have sprouted. These formation teams are composed mostly of part-time lay volunteers who are fully committed to assist in the formation of BECs. They need ongoing formation to deepen their commitment and develop their skills in evangelizing, organizing and mobilizing.

Modified Tithing and Spirituality of Stewardship

There are some dioceses that have adopted a modified tithing system. The Spirituality of Stewardship (SoS) is being promoted for parishes and BECs. The CBCP-BEC Committee teamed up with SPI in conducting a seminar to the bishops on SoS last January 2013.

Incorporation of BECs in Priestly/Religious Formation and Clergy Ongoing Formation

In many surveys, one of the blocks mentioned in the growth of BECs is the lack of support and initiative of the clergy. It was also recognized that BECs are vibrant where the clergy take an active role in its promotion.

In response to this concern, some seminaries and formation programs all over the Philippines have incorporated the BEC-thrust. The structures of some seminaries and houses of formation are patterned after the BEC-cells. They do not only talk about BECs but live it as a way of life among themselves.

Some dioceses are also integrating BEC formation for the newly-ordained deacons or priests. Some have also incorporated this in the ongoing formation program for the clergy. Seminars and retreats about Priestly Ministry and BECs have been given.

This is in line with the awareness that a new way of being Church requires a new way of being priest – a renewed clergy for a renewed Church. In 2013, the CBCP Commission on Seminaries organized a nationwide gathering of seminary rectors and staff. One of the topics: BEC and Seminary Formation

Areas of Concern

Lack of effective means for forming and sustaining BECs

The vision of BECs, as promoted by PCP II, is not fully understood and owned.

BECs are considered as simply activities (Bible-sharing) instead of a being regarded as a culture or a way of life

BEC is reduced to a handful of people/cell or Family Groupings composed of 6 – 10 people who gather for Gospel-sharing. There is a tendency to regard the BEC cell/neighborhood grouping as the BEC instead of being part of the local community. This is a misunderstanding of BEC. Consequently, it is difficult to determine how many BECs there are because the number of cells are counted rather than the actual BECs.

Majority of those who are actively involved in BECs are women – very few men and youth.

The poorest of the poor (especially in urban areas) are not involved in BECs

Many BECs remain prayer/bible-sharing groups lacking in social concern.

Many BEC social action programs are not sustainable or lacking in effectiveness and do not lead to social transformation or poverty alleviation.

There are still many priests who lack initiative and support in forming BECs

There are BECs on maintenance mode and are slowly stagnating.

Many BEC formation program lack systematic and sustainable evangelizing component.

There are some dioceses and parishes that rely on sanctions policy to coerce people to participate in BEC activities (certification). Those who are not active members are not allowed to have their children baptized, married in church, no funeral Mass.

Challenges for BECs and Promoters

To continue the process of promoting and forming BECs where they are not yet fully established

To revitalize BECs that are already

BEC leaders undergo formation and training. CBCP NEWS

fully established, but are now on a maintenance and stagnation mode.

Engage in new evangelization – integral part of the process of forming or revitalizing BECs. Emphasis should be on personal encounter with Christ leading to personal conversion and discipleship in community.

Develop special evangelization programs for family, men and youth without neglecting women.

Promote BEC to clergy – acceptance as integral part of priestly ministry

Adequate training and formation of lay pastoral workers (full-time and volunteers) and BEC leaders

Develop wider sense of community and not just focus on small cells/ neighborhood groups (kapitbahayan, kasilinganan).

Go beyond the liturgical-evangelical type and develop as holistic-integral BECs that include the social action component that is relevant and effective.

For those who have adopted it, get rid of sanctions policy. Beware of a bureaucratic, institutional and authoritarian model of BECs. Promote a more compassionate and inclusive model that would encourage and inspire those who are not active to become more involved in their BECs.

Promote the BEC culture – a way of life rather than just a program or activity.

BECs are a not yet-yet-already reality. They have already emerged in most dioceses and parishes, but the realization of the vision of a Renewed Church in Vatican II and PCP II in the BECs remain and ongoing journey. (CBCPNews)

(Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, SThD is the executive secretary of the Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines)

Jubilee of blessings, mission of renewal

CBCP Pastoral Exhortation for the Jubilee of Mercy And the Year of the Family and the Eucharist. Let us kneel before the Lord who made us. (Psalm 95:6)

THE Year 2016 will be a year of many blessings for us in the Philippines. It will also be a year of mission for the Kingdom.

From December 8, 2015 until November 20, 2016, the Church all over the world will observe an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy as decreed by Pope Francis in the papal bull Misericordiae Vultus. We stand in faithful communion with the Holy Father as he prays that "the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort.

In the Philippines, we shall open today November 29, 2015, the First Sunday of Advent, the Year of the Eucharist and the Family, as part of our nine year preparation for the Jubilee of 2021, the five hundredth anniversary of the first Mass and first baptism in the Philippines. We also eagerly await the celebration of the Fifty First International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu come January 2016.

2016 will also celebrate the twenty fifth year of the convocation of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, the greatest ecclesial event in the Philippines in the twentieth century.

In this forthcoming year of renewal dedicated to mercy, the Eucharist and the family, under the light of PCP II, how shall we as a people respond?

As your brothers and pastors in the faith, our answer is "If we want renewal, let us learn how to kneel again." Our generation seems to have lost the religious gesture of kneeling; we have become more a clapping generation. We seem to have compromised the virtue of humility with a culture of self-security and independence. Our throw away consumerist culture can hardly imagine kneeling down before one another, like the Lord who washed the feet of His beloved ones. If we are to restore a contemplative view of creation as Pope Francis invites us, we must learn to kneel again by the feet of the Lord and be caught in awe at the wonder of His tenderness and mercy.

If we want renewal, let us learn to kneel again in body, in heart and attitude.

Begging for mercy, we kneel in repentance. Adoring the Eucharist, we kneel down and worship. With humble service, we kneel in the family and wash one another's feet. If we dream of renewal, let us kneel again in repentance, in adoration and in service.

For Mercy Let Us Kneel

We cannot celebrate mercy without repentance.

Then Stephen fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"; and when he said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:60)

Merciful like the Father, we are called upon to pray on behalf of humanity for the forgiveness of sins. We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. (MV #2).

Celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy, we are also invited to kneel down in humility and repentance especially in the sacrament of reconciliation where we kneel down to confess our sins and receive pardon. Kneeling is a very important gesture in our Christian culture that we must regain and safeguard. Origen said kneeling is necessary if we want to admit our sins before God and seek His mercy. Kneeling symbolizes someone who has fallen but trusts in the loving mercy of God. When our bodies fail to move with the prayer dispositions of the heart; when we lose the importance of kneeling and bowing, our prayer can become dry and even boring. Praying with the body by kneeling or bowing or raising our hands can ignite the dying embers of our spiritual lives.

John Cassian (360-435) taught "The bending of the knee is a token of penitence and sorrow of a penitent heart". Furthermore, St. Ambrose of Milan (Hexaemeron, VI, ix) said "The knee has been made flexible so that by means of it, more than any other limb, our offences against the Lord may be mitigated and God's displeasure may be appeased, grace called forth."

Kneeling down is not just an act to seek mercy for our sins, it is also a gesture of compassion for our fellow wounded sinners. We are invited to kneel down to bind the wounds of those who are bleeding and hurting. Indeed, mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. (MV, #9). Kneeling disposes us to receive and share mercy. Kneeling

December 8, 2015. The banner for the Jubilee Year of Mercy in St. Peter's Square on December 8, 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. CNA

humbly reminds us that we have fallen and in our fallen yet forgiven condition, we must show mercy to one another.

We must kneel down in contrition before God for our sins against Mother Nature. We kneel down in sorrow for the scars on nature, the destruction of complex living systems sacrificed on the altar of economic progress.

We kneel down before the poor we have ignored; they whom the Lord assured will inherit the Kingdom. We kneel down in sorrow for our abuses against the weak and the vulnerable. We kneel to seek mercy from those we have marginalized and misjudged, suspected and gossiped about. We need to kneel down and seek pardon for our misplaced prudence and cowardice to stand for the Lord and die with Him.

If we want renewal, we must learn the humility of kneeling from the heart and with the knees.

It is easier to remember that we are sinners when we kneel. It is easier to share the same mercy kneeling down, not from a higher moral level but from our shared sinful condition. Miserando atque eligendo.

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. (MV, #10) We share this mercy not as dispensers of grace from our judge's thrones but from the common ground of our sinful condition.

In Adoration Let Us Kneel

In January 2016, our feet and our knees lead us to Cebu for the Fifty First International Eucharistic Congress echoing the words of Saint Paul to the Colossians "Christ in you, our hope of glory" (1:27).

If we dream of renewal, let us rediscover the power of kneeling again in silent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament the Lamb of God.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev 5:13-14).

Then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in his book "The Spirit of the Liturgy" that Hebrews regarded the knee as a symbol of strength. To bend the knee is therefore, to bend our strength before the living God, an acknowledgment of the fact that all that we are we receive from God."(p.191)

Kneeling is part of our Christian culture. We cannot abandon or set aside the culture of kneeling in favor of the culture that says as freemen we must face God on our feet. Bending the knee before the tabernacle in genuflection, kneeling down at the celebration of the Eucharist, kneeling down to adore the exposed Blessed Sacrament—these are little but sublime acts of adoration that we must preserve and protect.

Kneeling at the consecratory words over the bread and wine is not only an act of humility but a bowing welcome to meet the Lord who Himself has stooped down to reach out to us. Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself… becoming obedient to death, death on the cross. (Phil 2: 6)

If you want renewal, kneel again. We kneel to atone for the countless profane actions against the Eucharist. As we bow down and adore the Eucharist, we also beg for mercy for the sacrilege and desecration the Sacred Species are repeatedly subjected to in many communities. We seek pardon for liturgical experiments and abuses; the narcissism among ordained ministers seeking popularity rather than piety; for taking the Mass for granted; for the irreverent attire and the cold interior disposition when we attend Mass.

Returning to Cardinal Ratzinger, "there is a story that comes from the sayings of the Desert Fathers, according to which the devil was compelled by God to a certain Abba Apollo. He looked black and ugly, with frighteningly thin limbs, bit most strikingly, he had no knee. The inability to kneel is seen as the very essence of the diabolical" (The Spirit of the Liturgy, 193)

All the families of the nations shall bow down before him.

For dominion is the Lord's and he rules the nations.

To him alone shall bow down all who sleep in the earth;

Before him shall bend all who go down into the dust. (Ps 22:28)

If we want renewal in spirituality, we must recover the Christian culture of kneeling.

For Love and for Service Let Us Kneel

In this Year of the Family and the Eucharist, we are invited to kneel

down to bring renewal to the family. We kneel to serve like the Lord. We envision every Filipino Catholic family to be missionary disciples of the Eucharist.

Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet. (John 13:4)

Let us kneel again at home for family prayer and for feet washing. Where love and service prevail instead of pride and grudge keeping; where the humility of pardon and being pardoned prevails over revenge and bitter resentments; where siblings wash one another's feet and parents do the same; where the culture of family kneeling is present, the dream of renewal in family life will not be far from sight.

The family that prays together stays together. The family that kneels together will be refreshed and renewed together. The family that kneels together will remain young and fresh and new. Kneeling empowers families to stand up against the storms of life. Kneeling is strength.

As it is with the family, so it is with the Church and her pastors. The Church is not ours. The Church is Christ's. We who are only stewards, not master builders, must return to the spiritual value of kneeling for prayer and stooping for feet washing. The mandate the Lord gave on Holy Thursday to "Do as I have done" is a daily obligation we must fulfill with humility, with joy, with faith, with love.

Kneeling for Renewal

In the Jubilee Year of Mercy, this Year of the Family and the Eucharist, let us return to the spiritual value and beauty of kneeling. Tertullian even went so far as saying "No prayer should be made without kneeling". (De Oratione, 23)

How can we be renewed without prayer? How can we pray without kneeling for repentance? How can we receive mercy if we are proud and self-secure?

How can we worship without kneeling down when the Apostle himself says "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

How can we show that we are His disciples without kneeling down to wash one another's feet as He has mandated? By love we will be known as His disciples.

In this Year of Mercy let us kneel again. If we want renewal, let the heart and body kneel. Let the mind and the legs bend before the Lord. Let the soul and the knees bow together in worship and humility.

May Mary Mother of Mercy teach us her humility and lead us by the hand to adore her Son and serve like Him. Amen.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, November 29, 2015, First Sunday of Advent

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

Final Statement of the 6th Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs

Asian celebration of the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Redemptorist Center, Pattaya, Thailand, November 16-20, 2015

1. It is by God's grace and providence that we 87 participants in the Sixth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA VI), from 17 different countries, have come to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Nostra aetate in our Asian context and in our time. We are grateful for the funding we received from Missio Aachen that helped make this gathering possible.

2. In this grace-filled gathering, we have worked together as the Church in Asia retracing our steps along the path of dialogue; praying, reflecting and sharing our experiences and thoughts on the questions of what we have done so far and what we need to do further for interreligious dialogue in Asia.

3. We recognize that Nostra Aetate is still inspiring and challenging us to realize the vision of the Church as the people of God in dialogue in our time, facing the interdependent reality of the complex and diverse influences of globalized socio-economic-cultural-political structures, we reaffirm the strong need of the "triple dialogue" with the poor, cultures and religions, in a journey towards the Kingdom of justice, peace and ecological harmony.

4. Through our experience of dialogue and action for the last five decades, we have learned that interreligious dialogue is not only to be a specific pastoral strategy of the Church, but rather an Asian vision of the Church. It is a Church that proclaims the values of the Kingdom without fear, in dialogical collaboration (partnership) with the people of other religions.

5. Struggling against any kind of fundamentalism, terrorism and proselytism, the Church in Asia is called to work together with others as co-pilgrims. In protecting the poor and the environment through our interreligious network, we are not doing social work together, but building a mystical union of God's Kingdom as inter-dependent beings (in the harmony of our relation-

ship with one another and with all creation).

6. The Church in Asia confirms that we cannot engage with others in a real dialogue without having a clear identity of who we are and constantly growing in our own faith. In the pluralistic contexts of Asia, the Church, as a "little flock," is called to learn a kenotic (self-emptying) spirit of love and service from Jesus Christ. It is through our humble and open-minded approach that real trust and mutual understanding with others can be established. We are aware of the importance of grassroots interreligious dialogue, which usually starts from inter-personal friendship and grows to communal action for justice and peace.

7. The Church in Asia takes seriously the challenges of today for all religions: various conflicts and violence, massive poverty and global inequality, the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants, pollution and environmental crisis, corruption and moral degradation, human trafficking and the breakdown of social cohesion, terrorism and all forms of fundamentalism.

8. One of the most urgent challenges in Asia is to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, while acknowledging and respecting what is "true and holy in other religions" (Nostra Aetate, No. 2). As a community of disciples, we give witness to Jesus through our personal and communal lifestyle of love in three interconnected ways: silence, presence, and story-telling. In an existential silence, we empty ourselves and listen deeply to the voices of the other without judging, with a loving heart. In the depth of our silence, we are aware of Jesus' presence among us, which is inspiring our journey of interreligious dialogue and action for transforming the world. It is by telling our own story of transformation through Jesus, as individual persons and as communities that the globalized culture of indifference and greedy consumerism is to be transformed into the gospel-culture of solidarity and sharing.

PHOTO FROM INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FACEBOOK PAGE

9. In our common journey with others, we Christians in Asia recognize the importance of basic human communities at the grassroots level, where the dialogue of life and action is going on, especially together with the indigenous people. It is through these basic human communities that the Church in Asia learns the holistic world view and the sacred cosmic spirituality which awake us to take care of "our common home." We are called to go beyond our comfort zone and to develop a new narrative of dialogue, coming from our common experience, with the hope of rediscovering the harmonious relationship between humanity, cosmos and God for the future generation.

10. We commit ourselves more passionately to interreligious dialogue in Asia in different ways for example:

- To develop local interreligious dialogue and action in the grassroots communities.
- To organize formation programs for interreligious dialogue within the Catholic community
- (e.g. Seminaries, religious houses of formation and for the laity).
- To promote intra-dialogue between Christian churches and within Catholic institutions.
- To support dialogue activities and forums. (e.g. UN Interfaith Harmony Week).
- To advocate interreligious dialogue and action in the public sphere and cyberspace.
- To provide adequate preparation and pastoral care to the interreligious family.

11. After these days of reflection and sharing of our experiences of and insights on interreligious dialogue in the light of Nostra Aetate, guided by the Holy Spirit, we have come to realize again the importance of openness towards the people of other religions and the indispensable role of witness to the Kingdom of God ever growing in the heart of Asian people. Through our sincere commitment to dialogue, "Jesus Christ will be better known, recognized and loved." (PCID, Dialogue in Truth and Charity, No. 39).

The present administration (a liability)

THIS is not meant to say that the present Administration has done absolutely nothing good for the past 5-6 years. It is simply intended to state that to this date, it has done very much less than what it continues to claim and proclaim. Neither is this intended to say that the same administration has not even tried to do something beneficial for the country and its people. This is but to affirm what is already of common knowledge long since – such as its marked administrative liability, manifest governing incompetence so that the supposedly leader is the one being led, simply saying what he is told, merely reading what is written down for him.

It is but noting the ground reality that it has done much harm to the Philippines that the Filipinos today and the next generation yet to come will have to bear and suffer for – such as in terms of the institutionalization of graft and corrupt practices in many government agencies, the progressive increase of the national foreign debt vis-à-vis the interminable collection of taxes of many kinds bearing different titles, the conversion of certain public utilities into business ventures through the infamous PPP, the proliferation of criminal elements, plus a practically omnipresent drug trade – not to mention the vanishing middle class in the socio-economic structure of Philippine society productive of the on-going increase of very poor and miserable people openly camping in the sidewalks such that the government finds it necessary to hide them from the sight of high-ranking foreign visitors.

That is why more and more thinking people are likewise more and more alienated - appalled, angry, disgusted – with the still present Administration as readily seen, read and heard through the tri-media. So it is that through the last survey done by a known entity on the occasion of the forthcoming 2016 elections at the presidential level – the result of which may not be exact but still remains basically true – the following came to fore:

An apparently no-nonsense local public official obtained the highest rating for the Presidency. Reason: He is known for his no-nonsense stand against criminality, drug syndicates, and shenanigans in government.

A neophyte in government was the second choice, considering that the same appears simple and sincere, honest and credible – all questions about the latter's constitutional qualifications notwithstanding.

The candidate of the out-going supreme government official came out as one of the last in acceptance – not really because of his person and professional qualifications but simply because of the governing fiasco of his sponsor.

Needless to say, many things in many ways may change among many people in the course of time such that there could also be eventual changes in their perception, appreciation, and options of whom to vote for in the forthcoming election. But it is rather difficult to hope that the present administration would be an asset instead of a liability for whoever it endorses for the highest Office in the land.

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Political representation

WITH or without APEC--before and after APEC--life goes on in the country where the people are once again challenged to undergo a political exercise called the "2016 Election". While some people appear to take the event seriously, others however look at it with disdain or take it as a big joke. There are those who ask: Whom will people elect among the disabled if not in fact those ineligible for election? How will people elect among those who are all basically alike in heavenly claims and starry promises if not also suspect in their competence and honesty? What is election for when so many thereof were already held before and the people are now even worst than before as well? But time and again, there is clamor made in favor of participating in the election basically for their political representation in a democratic system of government.

In essence, political representation means that public officials elected by the people for the tenure and exercise of public authority should always remember that they are given the authority and the leadership more specifically in order to serve the people in general and particularly in responding to the former's needs and yearnings in the here and now. In other words, woe to the people if their supposed representatives look out and work but for their own personal interests and family benefits--instead of looking after the public welfare and promoting the common good of the people.

Among the liabilities of the democratic system – and so with royalty and dictatorship--incompetence and dishonesty, graft and corrupt practices, not to mention insensibility and shamelessness, are the most serious ethical bankruptcy and moral degradation whose usual victims are the people themselves. Such liabilities constitute a compromise of the proper and expected function of the political community which is synonymous to a marked disservice to and gross betrayal of the governed. In their naked realities, graft, and corruption are both the plain stealing of public funds given by the general public for public welfare. Graft and corrupt practices in the government can be readily considered a big curse or a downright malediction of the governed which in fact pay their governors with their unending taxes and who, in turn, as a matter of fact, also steal from the already poor and suffering governed.

It is neither hard to understand nor difficult to accept the truth that the political community exercising public administration from the local to the national levels, may not be oriented and dedicated to the service of the people in general. Thus it is repeatedly said and emphasized that, "The State is the steward of the people's resources" which is it administers in view of the people's common good. This is why "impersonal functionalism," "overgrown bureaucracy," "unjust personal interests" are some of the big, real, and operative enemies of the citizens of the State. No wonder then that with such negative perception of the political community in this country, there are those who earnestly and even adamantly propose the boycotting of the forthcoming election. This is neither surprising nor really unacceptable. The truth however remains that political participation is a fundamental feature of a democratic society.

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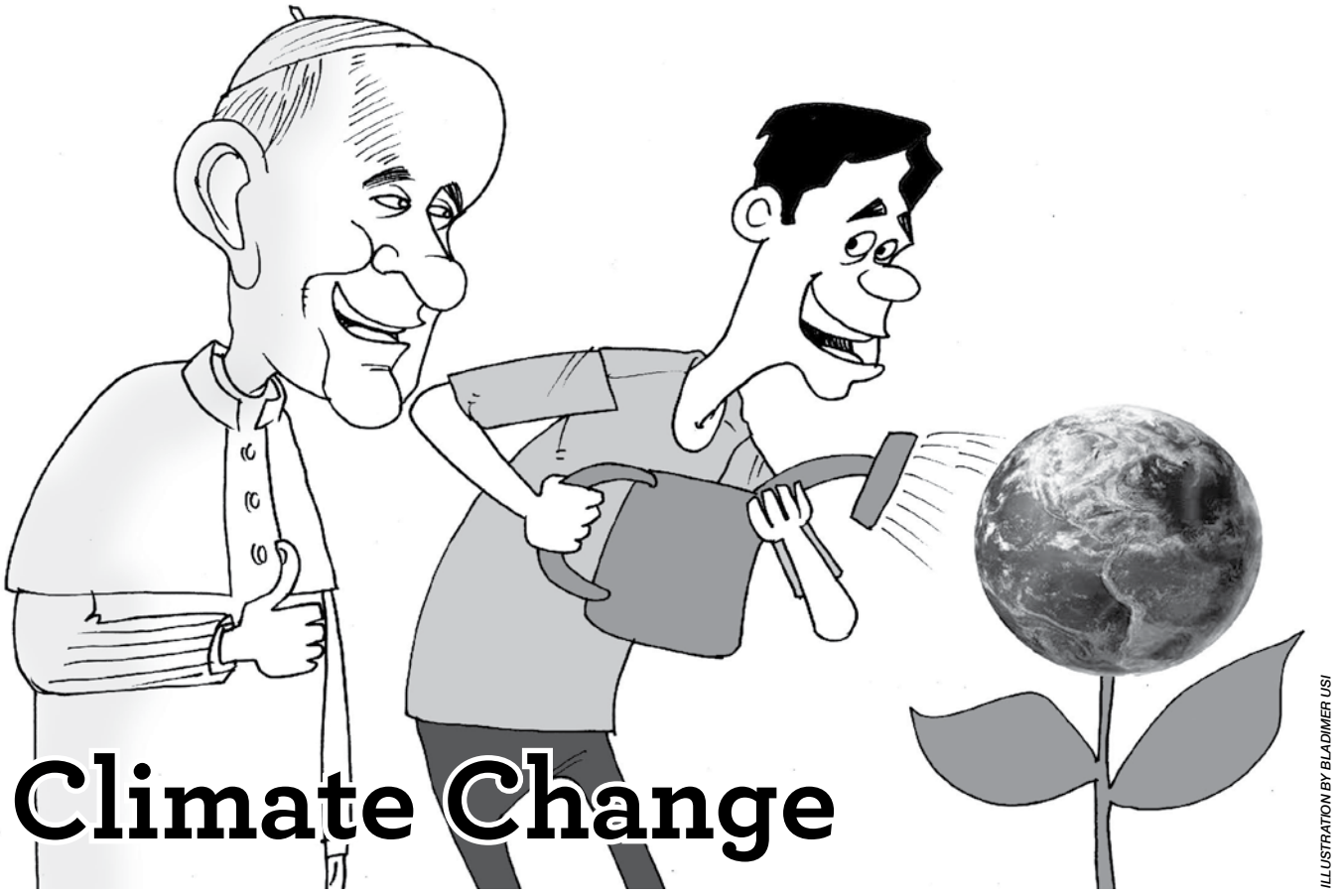


Climate Change

ILLUSTRATION BY BLADIMER USI

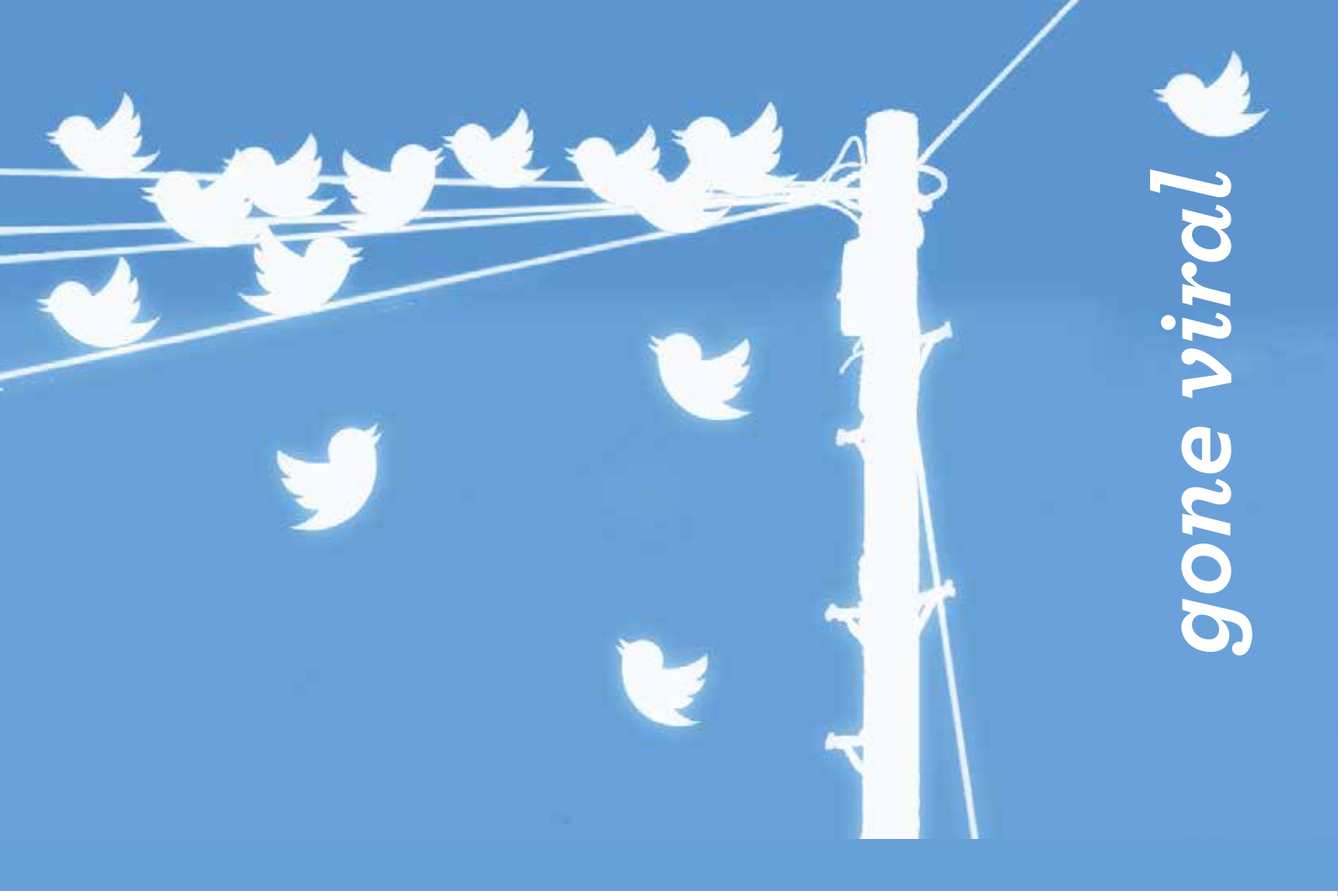
NO less than Pope Francis, the Sovereign of the Universal Catholic Church spread all over the globe with membership from all known continents, races, and colors, made the deliberate option to formally and categorically address the phenomenon of climate change – the eventual and ultimate victim of which is humanity as a whole. Among other definitely serious and deadly consequences of climate change are the following: The progressive warming of the global climate. The gradual destruction of the world environment. The slow but sure wastage of earthly resources, the eventual loss of human lives well-included—when nature itself revolts against its destructors. It is definitely not a profound truth that a bomb-maker can be the victim thereof when it precisely explodes on him.

The Church is certainly much concerned with the truths in the supernatural sphere. But this does not mean that the same Institution is indifferent to the realities in the natural order. Yes, the Church is continuously teaching the fundamental Commandment of Love of God. But the same Ecclesial Institution is also much concerned with the basic Commandment of Love of Neighbor. In other words, the Church is committed to affirm the glory of God and at the same time, also mandated to safeguard the good of man. And when the Church through the Pope himself speaks about the mortal dangers brought by climate change to humanity, this is but her obligation. So it is that the perpendicular love of God plus the horizontal love of man brings about no less than the reality of the Cross of Christ.

The earth is the "Common Home" of humanity as a whole. It is God's creation for man to live on even but temporally until he is called to his eternal abode. The truth of the matter is that God Himself saw to it that the earth was ready – the air and the waters, the sun and the moon, the land and the trees, the greenery and the animals – before He brought man to life and live thereon. What a pity if through his abuse and other misdeeds, he is in fact slowly but surely destroying his "Common Home" with all others brought about precisely by climate change.

The vicious exploitation, degradation and destruction of nature usually on account of avarice and greed, the consequent phenomenon of pollution on account of a throw-away social culture, the consequent loss of biodiversity—all these and more challenge the integrity of nature, all these and more demean the environs and necessarily make man the ultimate victim. No. Man is not meant much less able to challenge nature because by so doing, he is the sure loser and victim. He is instead obliged to take care of nature so that nature takes care of him.

Would that the just concluded international encounter of no less than leaders from countries the world over, one way or another sooner than later decidedly take remedial steps to counter climate change.



gone viral

STARGAZERS, you must have been extra good this year! The night sky will be a present you won't have to unwrap; just look up to see a full moon on #Christmas Day. The moon will be at its fullest on Christmas Day at 6:11 a.m. EST.

And how special is this lunar event? Not only is it the last full moon of 2015 but we haven't had a #FullMoon on Christmas since 1977, and it won't happen again until 2034. ~ Jonelle Veritas

I MAY be an atheist, but that won't stop me from loving the best (lyrical) Christmas song. Christians and non-believers alike should mind the words: Truly He taught us to love one another. His law is love and his message is peace. Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother. And in His name all oppression shall cease.Think about the way you treat others this holiday. If you're Christian, follow the red letter of Jesus in the New Testament. If you're not, show the world that it doesn't take God to be a wonderful human being. #christmas ~ David File

WE take our daily routines for granted, such as bathing, brushing our teeth, eating, drinking clean water, sleeping in clean sheets, warmth, electricity, tv and the list goes on and on...There are many people who are deprived from ALL of the above... Either life has been rough on them, or they were abandoned by their own family members, old age or #sickness....and the list goes on and on... We are here to shed the light on some of those #forgotten members in our society. We want to make them remembered each day...we want to restore their #faith in #humanity and make them feel humans again. They are hurt, disrespected, humiliated and in too much #pain both physically and psychologically... We have asked them what they wish for this #Christmas as a gift and they couldn't reply.Non replied directly because they were never asked that or even given the chance to think... Probably it has been a very long time since they felt loved, wanted or accepted...Please help us to complete our mission, with your helping hand we can always care for them. And give them their basic needs Under each photo there's a small list of things, if anyone wishes to help please call us on 0367940. We have all ages from 1 till 80 years old. #MakeADifference ~ Roula Chreim

PLAIN, simple, tangible analogies on grace (enabling power of the Atonement) Read, listen to, or watch this talk on Grace; whatever it takes for you to know, understand and feel what the Savior has done for you and ultimately, how you can use His Atonement to change your life and perspective of it. This world would be so different if everyone understood just how powerful the Savior's sacrifice was/ is and how we all can tap into that power to change, improve our lives, and find everlasting happiness and joy! I'm only beginning to understand the Atonement, but I like what I now so far and know it's real. And it works. #sharegoodness #Christmas #Asaviorisborn ~ Jessica Jye-Syin Lew

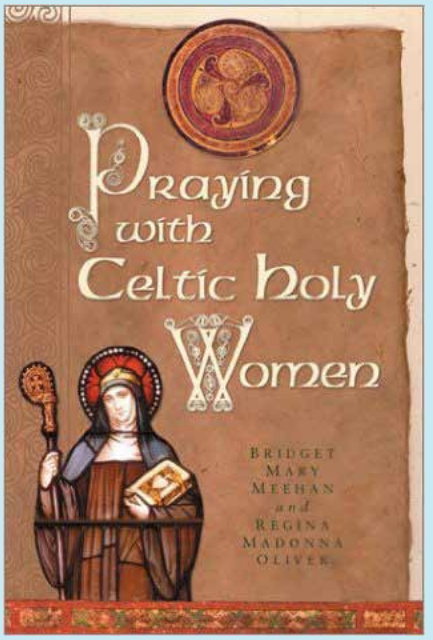
WENT to grocery store tonight. #Christmas music played. I thought to myself, enjoy it before it's banned. #Islamophobia. ~ @RusPrekrasna

LISTENING to #Christmas music and drinking hot chocolate...I love working from home. @JoshuaJHager

GIVE #veterans the gift of healing this #Christmas #WtL2016. ~ @KofC

Praying with Celtic Holy Women

By Bridget Mary Meehan and Regina Madonna Oliver



The Celtic tradition of inspiring, holy women can still be felt today. Through this intimate book by Bridget Mary Meehan and Regina Madonna Oliver, I personally felt transported to the green, rolling hills of Scotland and sniffed the moist air of Ireland where the tradition of asking for the intercession of women saints and martyrs from as far back as the 7th century; of "doing the rounds" around a holy site while praying Our Fathers and Hail Marys; and going to healing wells associated with saints continues to edify countless pilgrims today with a palable Christian presence.

Starting off with the most well-known of them, St. Brigit of Kildare, abbess and foundress, the book goes through an entire panoply of women of faith who have helped shape the Christian faith for centuries from St. Dwynwen, patroness of lovers and relationships for the ancients Celts and their modern descendants, to St. Ita of Killeedy, "foster mother of the saints of Ireland."

The book is part travelogue, part history lesson, weaving remnants of hagiography and church tradition with what existing documents, markers, local history as told by oldtimers, and shrines have to offer to piece together lives of these Celtic women who were transformed by the Gospel. Many of these saints continue to have a strong devotion among locals with some even drawing pilgrims from as far as India; some, sadly, have all but been forgotten. The holy women and their stories are striking testimonials to what faith can do in ancient societies where injustice and sexual violence would rear their ugly heads – much like ours today. I would like to cite the story of St. Dymphna of Achill Island, whose father Damon was a pagan king who became a widower when St. Dymphna was a young woman. As what is also known from her story, her father in desperation for a wife and because of serious depression would end up wanting to marry his own daughter. The young saint would flee to the Slieve Beagh Mountains where she found a well on the side of the mountain at Caldavnet, which would become a pilgrimage site throughout the centuries.

Her father would eventually catch up with her and he ends up beheading her companion, Genebern, and his own daughter, St. Dymphna. They were buried in Geel by some locals in a cave. When their bodies were later on exhumed, it was said that the remains were found in coffins made of white stone not found in the area, leading stories to circulate that they were buried by angels.

Today, St. Dymphna continues to be an intercessor for victims of sexual abuse, incest as well as those suffering from mental illness.

Another extraordinary woman – and undoubtedly the most exalted of them all – is also in the book: Mary of Nazareth. While the Blessed Mother's appeal is transcultural and her maternity universal, the book focuses on a delightful passage on the apparitions of Our Lady in Knock, Ireland in the 19th century, precisely during a time of great economic depression in the country. Seemingly, so immense was the Irish despair that Blessed Virgin didn't appear alone but with apparently with St. Joseph and St. John.

The book quotes one of the visionaries, Dominick Byrne, as recounting:"The Blessed Virgin was in the middle...Her face was turned to us. Her eyes were lifted up, in the manner of praying....St. Joseph was on her right hand side, and turned towards her. His hands were joined together and he was stooping. His hair and beard looked gray. On the left side was St. John. He was dressed in a long robe and had on a miter."

Published by Liguori Publications, the book is a welcome introduction to the mysticism and unique spiritual genius of the Celtic female saints and their legacy.

THE GOOD DINOSAUR

DIRECTOR
Peter Sohn

CAST
Raymond Ochoa, Jeffrey Wright, Frances Dormand, Jack Bright, Sam Elliot, Anna Paquin, A.J. Buckley;

STORY
Peter Sohn, Erick Benson, Meg LeFauve, etc;

SCREENPLAY:
Meg LeFauve;

EDITOR:
Stephen Schaffer;

MUSIC:
Mychael Danna, Jeff Danna,

PRODUCER:
Denise Ream;

DISTRIBUTOR:
Walt Disney Studios;

GENRE:
Animation;

LOCATION:
Pre-historic Times

RUNNING TIME:
100 minutes

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT:
3.5

MORAL ASSESSMENT:
4

CINEMA RATING:
VA (Viewers of All Ages)

Millions of years in an alternate timeline when the asteroid which should have caused mass extinction of creatures on our planet missed Earth, civilization is ruled by these behemoths. Young Arlo (Raymond Ochoa) is the youngest and weakest child in a family of Apatosaurus (a.k.a. Brontosaurus) farmers. His siblings have no problem adjusting to their responsibilities, thus, easily earning them their marks on the family silo. But Arlo just can't get over his fears and constantly fails to do his chores successfully. In order to help Arlo, his dad Poppa Henry (Jeffrey Wright) assigns him to kill the pest eating up their corn stored for the winter. Arlo manages to ensnare the pest and is surprised to find that he is a wild caveboy—Spot (Bright) but could not bring himself to harm him. He lets him escape much to the displeasure of his dad. They run after the child but is caught in the middle of a thunderstorm which eventually leads to Henry's death. Arlo blames Spot for his dad's death and chases him until the two are washed by the raging waters of the river. What follows are predictable but charming adventures of Arlo trying to fend for himself alone and Spot gaining his trust and friendship. At one point, Spot's life is placed in danger and Arlo realizes that he needs to forget his fears to save someone he deeply cares about.

The good dinosaur is visually fantastic as expected from the production companies of Pixar and Disney. Not only is the animation breathtaking, images are also genuine and natural. Pixar has upped their game again and delivered a fantasy film that feels closer to reality. The story is interesting and tender as we journey with Arlo in discovering his inner strength and deepening his friendship with Spot. For a change, the human Spot is the one amusing as he acts like a little puppy craving for attention. However, its pacing is a tad too slow for any age. Arlo's voice actor does not help in making his character or the scenes livelier. The treatment lacks humor and is wanting of lighter moments to balance Arlo's personality. Spot is amusing and occasionally keeps the audience from drifting away. Some scenes drag and honestly, the movie could have been told half the time shorter.

The message is effectively timely. Not only does it talk about friendship between different cultures or races or about self-discovery but more importantly the movie also shows how love leads us to forget ourselves and to commit to the common good. Arlo overcame his fear and insecurity not out of pride or desire to earn his mark, not out of the need to survive and protect himself, but out of love for a friend. And this same love led him to overcome his need to hold on to Spot and allow him to find a family with other human beings. These times, when hatred, self-centeredness, and individualism cause war, violence and division, it is good to be reminded that the journey to discover one's self is not about accomplishment or glory but about discovering the value of sacrifice, family and service.

■ THAILAND. Catholics join in interreligious prayer service after bombing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ TURKEY. Syriac bishop to be beatified

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

■ CHINA. China consecrates first new bishop in three years

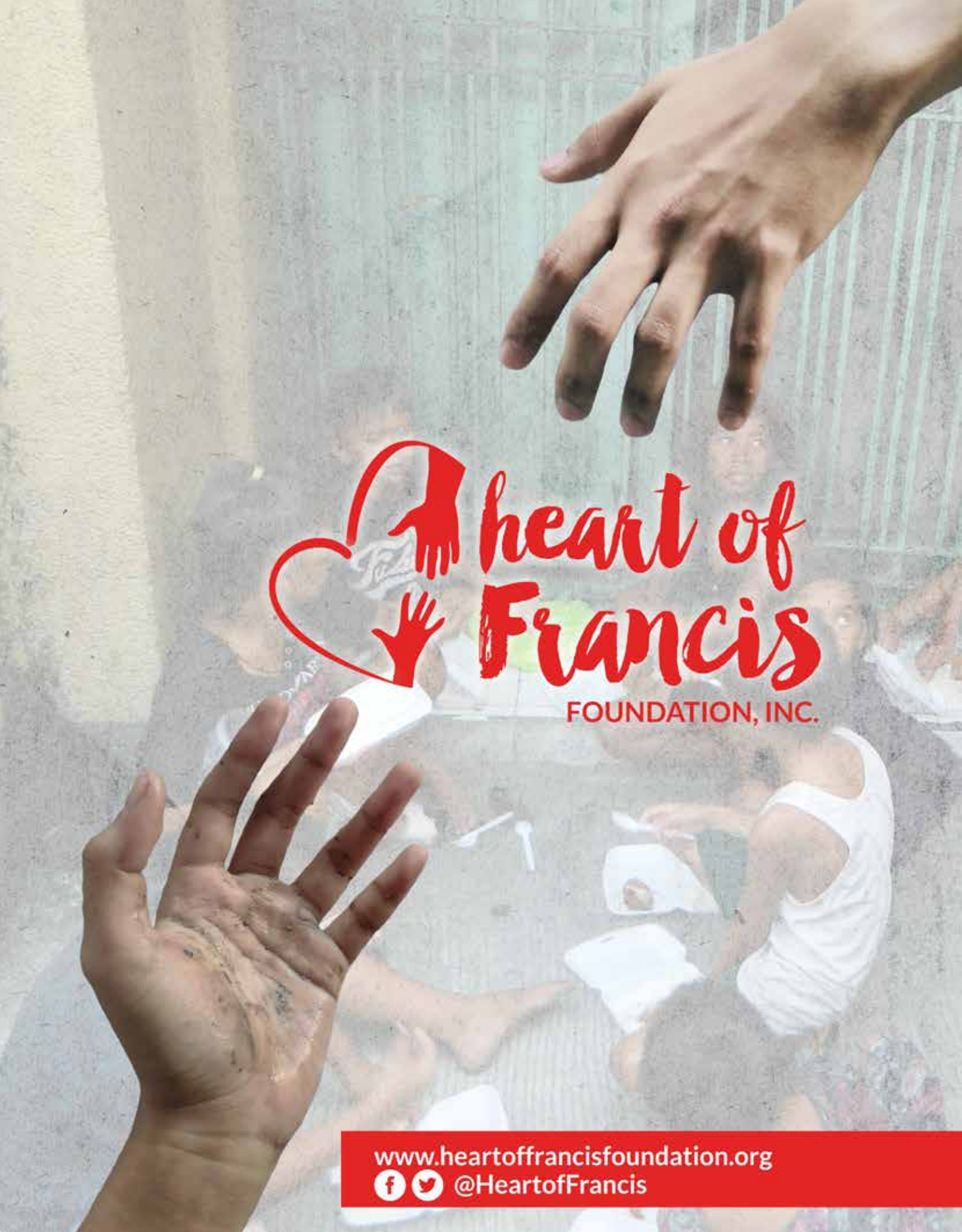
In mainland China's first episcopal consecration since 2012, a priest was consecrated a bishop in the cathedral of Anyang. His appointment was agreed upon by both the Vatican and the Chinese government. Fr. Joseph Zhang Yinlin, 44, was consecrated coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of Weihui (Anyang) on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

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

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

■ PHILIPPINES. Lawmaker admits helping priest's suspected killers

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