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THE *DIAKONIA* OF AN *ECCLESIA* TO THE *RES PUBLICA*

Prospects of the Philippine Church in Transforming the Filipino Polity for the Common Good

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Five years after having led the Filipino people in the restoration of democracy, the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines asked "what kind of church must we be to meet the challenges of our society into the third millennium?"[1] Two decades hence the nation still suffers from a deeply rooted and widespread lack of a sense of the common good.[2] Certainly the church has continued to provide the "moral center" in the public arena but, in terms of official policy as reflected in its 1997 pastoral letter on Philippine politics, the favored socio-pastoral strategy revolves around the axis of the moral integrity of public officials and civil servants. Seduced by the powerful yet simplistic discourse of corruption,[3] church countermeasures include timely condemnations of public scandals – usually of the marital and/

[1]See *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines: Manila, 1992); hereafter cited as PCP II.

[2]See, for instance, Patrick Riordan, "Is there a Common Good," *Landas* 4 (1990): 70-89, and Manuel Quezon III, "The civic imperative," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (March 20, 2008): A11.

[3]See, for instance, Walden Bello, *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 2004).

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or financial kind – as well as exerting its influence in the appointments of persons to operate the bureaucratic offices, not to mention the power of the ballot or the judiciary to hold officials accountable.

Somehow lost in the church's discourse is an ethical vision honed by the deep convictions of the Christian faith and the sciences of political reason, namely the "common good." As the sum of all the conditions of social living by which members of a community or society are empowered to more fully and readily achieve total and integral human development (cf. MM 65, PT 58, GS 26, 74),[4] the common good requires a stable democratic polity that allows for participatory deliberation and envisioning of it as well as a truly democratic culture that nourishes both collective and institutional commitment for it. The lack of such democratic polity, we contend, explains the appalling lack of the sense of the common good in the Filipino political life.

To be an *ecclesia* at the service of the common good or, better yet, the *res publica,* appears to be the call of the times to which the Philippine church has yet to respond. This paper aims to sketch pathways to respond to the signs of the times.

1. The challenge to be a church of the poor by advocating with them their legislative agenda

A poverty institutionalizing political exclusion

Literature on political participation shows that intensity of political

[4]The abbreviations and paragraph numbers refer to the following social documents of the Church: *Mater et Magistra* (MM) and *Pacem in Terris* (PT) by Pope John XXIII, and *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) or the "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" by the Second Vatican Council. Other documents cited in this paper are *Rerum Novarum* (RN) by Leo XIII, *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA) by Pius XI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA) by Paul VI, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) and *Centesimus Annus* (CA) by John Paul II, and *Libertatis Conscientia* (LC) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

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participation is high among high-status groups in society and low among lower social groups.[5] At best, people in lower socio-economic groups participate specifically through the ballot while at worst they simply withdraw from the world of politics. While it is incorrect to attribute participation solely to socio-economic factors, still a situation of "daily misery inhibits many of the poor from carefully studying public issues and participating in public debates" and "makes it difficult for the individual to act as a free agent who can decide and act responsibly on public issues on the basis of the evidence."[6] It "tends to foster an understandable myopia which dismisses as irrelevant any fact that has no bearing on short-run survival,"[7] thus rendering the person susceptible to manipulation by those who can respond to his immediate need to survive.

The structural sin of political exclusion

At the heart of the church's ethical vision of the common good are two of the most fundamental aspirations of human beings, namely: equality and participation (cf. OA 22). A "greater sharing in responsibility and in decision-making is a basic demand of human nature, a concrete exercise of human freedom and a path to human development." It is true that more often than not the choices proposed for political decision are complex, its considerations numerous, and consequences full of risks. But "these obstacles," according to church teaching, "must not slow down the giving of wider participation in

[5]See, for instance, Pia Bennagen Raquedan, "If Things are So Bad, Why Aren't People Out in the Streets?" in *Understanding Poverty: The poor talk about what it means to be poor,* ed. Paulynn Sicam (Makati City: Institute for People Power and Development, 2007), 49-60, at 51-53.

[6]Fernando Zialcita, "Barriers and Bridges to a Democratic Culture," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture, Volume I,* ed. Maria Serena Diokno (Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1997), 39-68, at 43.

[7]Emmanuel de Dios, "Amid Great Political Difficulty, Some Economic Progress" in *Understanding Poverty,* 2-8, at 2.

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working out decisions, making choices and putting them into practice" (OA 47). But "when a man falls into extreme poverty, human freedom is crippled" and he/she "can scarcely arrive at the needed sense of responsibility" (GS 31). In a country where daily misery is not only widespread but also intergenerational,[8] the fundamental aspirations to equality and participation are unmet, even as the right of the poor "to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good of the citizens" (PT 26) does not have juridical guarantees. In the Philippines, the social sin of poverty has become "a pandemic that threatens the very essence of nationhood."[9]

What the church can do

If poverty breeds political exclusion, the *diakonia* the Filipino church can render to Philippine society is to become truly a church, not just for, but, more importantly, of the poor (cf. PCP II, 122-136). Simply alleviating poverty through income-raising projects cannot arrest the political exclusion. Neither can the simplistic but enticing discourse about the crusade against corruption. The church can instead advocate for laws – in a more united and purposive way – that aim to arrest the fundamental structure that breeds poverty and alter the cultural system that perpetuates patronage and dependence.

One such example is the church's current struggle to extend and complete the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) against the will of the landed class and their allies in the legislature. Although it is far from perfect, like previous agrarian laws, and way beyond the deadline,[10] the law can still make a big

[8]See, for instance, Ana Maria Tabunda, "Perceptions of the Poor: The Poverty Scorecard," in *Understanding Poverty,* 16-39, at 16-17.

[9]Howard Dee, "The Need for a Christian Response," in *Understanding Poverty,* 98-101, at 99.

[10]See, for instance, the studies by James Putzel, *A Captive Land: The Politics of Agrarian Reform in the Philippines* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992); Bello, *The Anti-Development State,* 33-90; and Rona Mercado, "Is the end near for

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difference in the aspirations to equality and participation of poor, landless farmers – the social class which, the Filipino bishops said, has "the single most urgent claim of the conscience of the nation."[11] The strong resistance by the landed class and some legislators, many of whom have historical and/or personal ties with the church, presents an extraordinary opportunity for the Philippine church leadership to honestly examine its traditional ties. Church policy says, "(the church) does not lodge her hope in privileges conferred by civil authority" and "stands ready to renounce the exercise of certain legitimately acquired rights if it becomes clear that their use raises doubt about the sincerity of her witness or that new conditions in life demand some other arrangement" (GS 76).

2. The challenge to help in institutionalizing participatory democracy

An elite and predatory democracy

A serious barrier to envisioning the common good in the Filipino polity is the endurance of a "powerful oligarchic class that enjoys an economic base outside the state," yet depends upon "access to political machinery" and state bureaucracy "as the major avenue for private accumulation."[12] They are preoccupied with "the need to gain or maintain favorable proximity to the political machinery. Even those oligarchs temporarily on the outs with the regime exert far more effort

CARP?" *Intersect* 21/4: 26-29.

[11] *Thirsting for Justice: A Pastoral Exhortation on Agrarian Reform* (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines: July 14, 1987). Landlessness is a global problem, says the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in "Towards a Better Distribution of Land: The Challenge of Agrarian Reform," *L'Osservatore Romano* 3 (January 21, 1998): 1-8.

[12] Paul Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), 12.

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in trying to get back into favor than in demanding profound structural change."[13] A related and equally strong constraint is the "considerable pressure" under which legislators are "to secure as large a share in the national budget as they can, and to deliver material improvements to their districts."[14] Although "the battles take place for the most part within institutional bounds," securing political leverage has become an end in itself, and legislation and legislative budget have become the means to that end.[15]

Elections as fanatical appropriation of power by the already powerful

This fanatical self-appropriation of power starts with the process of elections and in the structures of power that surround it. Conventional analysis has it that Philippine elections are always a triumph of 'personality politics,' in large measure due to the Filipino culture's penchant for, among other things, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), smooth interpersonal relations, and charismatic leaders. Without doubt personality is still a factor in Filipino politics, for by definition it is "about nothing more or less than individuals, rather than discernibly broader interests or ideologies." But its role takes effect only within the nexus of the money and machinery of the local bosses, for personality is the "mechanism by which individual politicians attempt to secure something of a hold on the flows of money, muscle, and machine manpower that are essential to electoral victory."[16]

[13]Ibid., 55.

[14]Rupert Hodder, "The Philippine Legislature and Social Relationships: Toward the Formalization of the Polity?" *Philippine Studies* 53/4: 563-598, at 570.

[15]Ibid., 584.

[16]John Sidel, "Take the Money and Run? 'Personality' Politics in the Post-Marcos Era," *Public Policy* II/3: 27-38, at 30.

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Elections as the poor man's ritual of gambling for momentary power

Nevertheless, Filipinos in general do not feel alienated from this kind of electoral system. In fact, the lower social groups do not view elections as necessarily elitist,[17] perhaps because, "in the absence of sustained interest in authentic political issues as defined by party platforms, elections are major community activities," which give them "the sense of momentary power to decide local or national outcomes."[18] Elections, like a cockfight, momentarily suspend hierarchy and dominance, even as the long-standing inequality in political power is reaffirmed. Rather than a "leveling mechanism", Aguilar contends, the ritual of sharing the "tokens of the bounty" after winning in an electoral contest is merely "a recirculation of luck and the re-inscription of all within the world of gambling" in preparation for the next elections. No wonder, despite the deception and trickery that almost always accompany games of chance, the whole electoral process is regarded as legitimate and an obligation.

Weakly institutionalized political parties and family political dynasties

The "highly non-programmatic, weakly institutionalized nature of Philippine political parties"[19] exacerbates the situation. Political parties "are visible and active only during election season" and "their primary concern is to get and keep power rather than to advance great

[17]For details of the survey results, see Anna Marie Karaos, "Perceptions and Practices of Democracy and Citizenship among Urban Middle Class Families," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture, Vol. 1,* 113-32, esp. 124-27.

[18]Luisa Canieso-Doronila, "An Overview of Filipino Perspectives on Democracy and Citizenship," in Ibid., 69-111, at 82.

[19]Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism*, 250; also see Paul Hutchcroft, "The Politics of Economic Liberalization," Public Policy I/1: 121-133, at 132.

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principles."[20] Membership in a political party or faction as a form of democratic practice, according to a survey, is not even common.[21] There is also the omnipresence of family-based political dynasties and the omnipotence of their narrow interests. These dynasties, according to Hodder, are "determined to keep the office within the family or, when circumstances require, to hand it temporarily to a close ally over whom they have a strong influence. They desire power, both for its own sake and because they fear that they and their family might suffer all kinds of retribution were their office to fall into the hands of their opponents."[22] In effect, the line that differentiates public office and private legacy is blurred and rendered meaningless.

However, this "anarchy of families,"[23] as McCoy rightly calls it, has long endured, thanks to the multitude of "professional vote-getters" or wards financed by political bosses through the spoils of office. Recruited from large families and clans known to deliver the votes, and possessing power and authority in villages, wards are the ones who "think up, implement and monitor the execution of campaign strategies, especially when it comes to generating and engaging in illegal activities" such as "tampering of election results, coercing opponents

[20]Ladylyn Lim-Mangada, "Grooming the Wards: Dynamics between a Political Party and Community Groups," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: Civil Society Making Civil Society, Volume 3,* ed. Miriam Coronel Ferrer (Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1997), 259-270, at 259.

[21]Karaos, "Perceptions and Practices of Democracy and Citizenship," 127. Of the total respondents only 48% said they were members of a political party, and "middle class individuals are twice more likely than those from the lower class to be engaged in partisan political activities."

[22]Hodder, "The Philippine Legislature and Social Relationships," 577 and 586-587; also see Belinda Aquino, "Filipino Elections and 'Illiberal' Democracy," *Public Policy* II/3: 1-26, at 16-19.

[23]For such an apt description see the comprehensive analysis of this long-standing political pattern in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines,* ed. Alfred McCoy (Madison: University of Wisconsin, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

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and their supporters, etc."[24] They also "run errands for the boss and eventually integrate into his family," even as they act as his "eyes and ears," ever ready to sacrifice their life and, at times, even their families. Wards are not only "responsible for the success of mediocre, incompetent and '*trapo*' (traditional politician) candidates," their power also explains the inability of a majority of Filipino voters to express their dissatisfaction of public officials and hold them accountable by voting them out of office.[25]

The sin of a structural usurpation of power

Integral to the pursuit of the common good is the continuing struggle for the control and exercise of power. It is "served to a greater or lesser degree by the continuing interplay of the selfish and altruistic interests of political actors as they seek state power and influence the content of public policy." The national common good triumphs over the selfish individual or group interests "to the extent that a particular nation is continually able to attain social, economic, political, and cultural development which enhances the quality of life of its citizens." [26]

The church recognizes that, given the inherent dynamism and diversity of human societies, it is impossible to set once and for all the most suitable manner of governance (cf. PT 67). In fact, it may vary "according to the character of a people and their historical development" (GS 74). There are, however, constants that are "in keeping with the innate demands of human nature" (PT 68), most crucial of which is what the church values as "the democratic system," for in it "each power (is) balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it in proper bounds" (CA 44). Guided by a "charter of fundamental human rights", it upholds the supremacy of the rule of law and "guarantees to the governed the possibility

[24]Mangada, "Grooming the Wards," 261-262.

[25]Ibid., 259.

[26]Jose Abueva, "Tracking the Nation," *Public Policy* II/2: 83-104, 83-84.

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of electing and holding accountable those who govern them and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate" (CA 46; also PT 52).

The moral scandal in Philippine polity is that where the separation of powers is supposed to set the pattern of relations between the government and the governed in mutual check and balance, each of the three instrumentalities of governance - the legislative, executive and judicial – has been, in varying degrees and for a long time, captured by a predatory oligarchy propping up a patrimonial state and family political dynasties perpetuating power through the ritual of elections. Filipino politics has yet to succeed in systematically curtailing "the formation of narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the state for individual interests or for ideological ends" (CA 46) so that the climate necessary for and conducive to the deliberation of the common good is ensured (cf. RN 26; PT 70).

What the church can do

The church cannot arrest the trajectory of political exclusion of the poor majority of the country if it continues to make elections the main axis of its public interventions. The alternative is to institutionalize an advocacy – from the level of the diocese down to the grassroots – for laws meant to institutionalize people-power. Worthy of the church's pastoral advocacy and vigilance are the Local Government Code of 1991 and the Party List Representation Law of 1995. In the former, "governance is in the hands of local government units who are required to institute systems of transparency and participation, so that the citizenry can effectively take part in governance and delivery of basic services." In the latter, the marginalized, or "those who are often left out of the direct discourse of national legislation," are guaranteed 20 percent of seats in Congress.[27]

[27] Agustin Martin Rodriguez, "The Limits of Legislating Democracy: A Sketch for a Study on the Possibility of Legislating Discourse," *Philippine Studies* 50 (2002): 93-112, at 94 and 103.

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Integral to this advocacy is monitoring, inasmuch as in the transition of devolving power from the elite to the grassroots, resistance is a normal reflex. The Party-List Law, for instance, did not go as far as "to ensure that only groups genuinely representing the marginalized are accredited for participation in the party-list elections."[28] Even among sectors genuinely represented, a profile of their party-list representatives shows that only "a few, if any, are organic members of their sectors."[29] Vigilant monitoring is also a must because decentralization, or the transfer of authority from national to local governments, could be a double-edged sword. In the hands of corrupt and inefficient local officials, it will be ineffective. Where, for instance, the passage of local laws requires the participation of civil society organizations, "some local executives set up dummy non-governmental organizations so that the people who will fill the seats" of local consultative bodies are people of their own mind or kind.[30] Be that as it may, "in the hands of progressive local officials" decentralization creates "new avenues for political space and institutional reforms can be made."[31]

[28]Ibid., 106. For details of the law, see Patricia Ann Paez, "State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making: Focus on the Legislative," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making, Volume 2,* eds. Marlon Wui and Glenda Lopez (Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1997), 33-70, at 38-39.

[29]Rodriguez, "The Limits of Legislating Democracy," 110. For their struggles to represent the marginalized, see Jeremiah Opiniano, "Party List Groups: Struggling to represent the marginalized," *Intersect* 18/6: 20-24.

[30]Rodriguez, "The Limits of Legislating Democracy," 102.

[31]Tom Villarin, "Decentralizing Government," *Intersect* 18/3: 4-6, at 6. Another possibility, strongly opposed by the local political elite, is the Local Sectoral Representation System which reserves three seats of the local legislating bodies for representatives of marginalized sectors such as the workers, women and another sector to be determined by the local legislative itself. The representatives are "to be elected by the people" and "will have the rights and powers of the other local legislators." See Rodriguez, "The Limits of Legislating Democracy," 101.

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By helping to institutionalize grassroots democracy, the church helps prepare the ground for the birth of genuine political parties of the poor or parties based on politics that genuinely represent their agenda. They can provide a countervailing force to the predatory and patrimonial features of an elite-controlled Filipino polity and serve as an alternative to personality-based or family political dynasties.

3. The challenge to nurture a democratic polity in and through its Base Ecclesial Communities

Hierarchized patterns of relations

Filipino society is still divided into "roles with high versus low status attached to them" and "those in roles of low status are expected to defer to the opinions of those above them."[32] "It is not customary for decisions to be deliberated upon in a collective manner where family members who are not directly involved in a problem also participate," says Karaos. "Discussions of public issues do take place at home but not very frequently" and whenever it occurs, the focus is on scams, crimes and other issues with sensational if not moralistic flavor rather than policy issues.[33] In most Filipino schools, whether private or public, the democratic ethos is, to a serious extent, also wanting.[34] No wonder a "favorite metaphor for the Philippine nation-state and its local units is the family."[35] All Filipinos are brothers and sisters, and the executive, from the national to the local level, is the father. Though Filipino culture has some democratic content, given the dominance

[32]Zialcita, "Bridges and Barriers to a Democratic Culture," 44; also see 59-61.

[33]Karaos, "Perceptions and Practices of Democracy and Citizenship," 123.

[34]For a discussion on the "mixed record" of the Philippine educational system as agent of political socialization, see David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), 44-46.

[35]Ibid., 46.

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of the hierarchized mindset, such allusions to family and fraternity are not egalitarian at all. Instead they promote perpetual subservience to those vested with power and authority, it is often wielded as an effective excuse for stifling dissent, and it publicly stigmatizes questioning by a social inferior.

Preference for patron-client relations and the lure of populism

Equally a threat is the Filipino's general weakness toward structural changes that can empower the poor. A nationwide survey reveals Filipinos do not see welfare policies as obligations performed by the state, Abad explains, "but as a set of rights and duties expected between patron and client."[36] This is not to say that Filipinos cannot be strong advocates of welfare measures for in fact they are, except that, according to Abad, they "will stop short at giving overwhelming support for leveling schemes." For them the legitimacy of "a harmonious asymmetry of ranks" is preferable to "equality of positions," in which case welfare policies that enhance rather than sever the symbiotic union of patron and client are likely to gain stronger support.

An alarming reproduction of the poor people's preference for patronage is populism.[37] As a "mode of mobilization" and a "form

[36]See Ricardo Abad, "Attitudes towards Welfare and Inequality," *Philippine Studies* 45 (October-December 1997): 447-76, at 469-73. Abad's conclusions are based on data gathered from a 1992 nationwide survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) and were compared with selected countries that participated in the 1987 and 1992 international surveys on social inequality initiated by the International Survey Programme (ISSP), a consortium of twenty-five nations of which the Philippines is a member.

[37]This is exemplified by the People Power III of May 2001 which "saw the mobilization of urban poor by politicians opposed to the Arroyo regime and the incarceration of former president Estrada." See Aya Fabros (ed.), et al., *Social Movements in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2006), 31-35. Other examples may include Joseph Estrada's election to the presidency in 1998 and the campaign with which movie actor Fernando Poe, Jr. ran for the 2004 presidential elections. In contrast, People Power I (1986), which ousted

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of political representation" by social movements, populist politics have mobilized poorer groups into enduring labor unions or political parties. But populism Filipino-style, according to Karaos, is "unguided by ideological commitments" or an "independently critical frame of analysis on which to anchor their actions." It cultivates the poor people's victimization, targets "political institutions and the political elite" as the enemy, and cultivates "the dependence of subaltern groups on politicians who represent the poor's only access to the political system." Without a durable bond with "institutionalized channels of access to representation in the power structures of society," the poor people's struggle to empower themselves stands in danger of being constantly subverted by the self-interest of patronage.

Extreme familism

Studies also show that "the problem of developing national unity is accounted for, in part, by the inability to transcend family and self-interest in favor of the local and national community."[38] Where state welfare institutions are largely ineffective and perceived to be unreliable, Filipinos "tend to rely more on extensive family networks than on public institutions for meeting their welfare needs." Filipinos would frame their relations with public civil servants as "extensions of their family with whom they have personal ties, rather than as public officials performing their official roles." This, according to Doronila, adds "to the instability and weakness of political institutions that are supposed to be governed by bureaucratic and universalistic norms," thus rendering them less necessary. Where there is the proclivity to exact "compliance and loyalty over and above the common welfare,"[39] a

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Marcos and installed Aquino, and People Power II (2001), which removed Estrada to be replaced by Arroyo, were mainly middle class-led movements for political reform.

[38]Doronila, "An Overview of Filipino Perspectives," 83.

[39]Karaos, "Perceptions and Practices of Democracy and Citizenship," 114.

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"concern for the broader community's interests is notably weak," while the concepts such as "the nation" or "Filipino people" as owners of the *res publica* "are too abstract a concept for many."[40]

Culture of impunity

Last but not least, Filipinos in general seem to be willing to forget massive crimes against the nation. Unlike other countries that prosecuted the perpetrators of their authoritarian regimes, there was "little desire to punish the Marcos family," even as the family's accomplices and cronies have been elected into public office or able to get back to their business interests.[41] This was not, however, the first and will prove to be not the last such case. By a series of accommodations the newborn Republic of 1946 failed to prosecute most of those accused of collaboration with the Japanese occupying forces during the Second World War.[42] Propped up by the military to power in 1986, Aquino did not punish the military officers who staged a series of bloody coup d'etat during the democratic transition.[43] The culture of impunity continues in the current government's inability or,

[40]Zialcita, "Barriers and Bridges to a Democratic Culture," 47.

[41]John Carroll, "The Philippines: Forgiving or Forgetting?" *Public Policy* III/2: 83-92, at 90. Carroll mentions the countries of South Africa, Brazil, Guatemala, and Chile. For instance, two of Marcos's top henchmen, General Fidel Ramos became president of the Philippines, while Juan Ponce Enrile is until now a senator. See Ibid., 83-85, 87-88.

[42]Ibid., 85-87, 89 and John Carroll, "Entomb Them Alive," *Intersect* 18/6: 4-8, at 5-6 citing the study by Frank Golay, *Face of Empire: The United States-Philippines Relations, 1898-1946* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997).

[43]See Mark Thomson, *The Anti-Marcos Struggle: Personalistic Rule and Democratic Transition in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day, 1996), 168-170; and Aurora Javate de Dios, "Intervention and Militarism" in Aurora Javate de Dios (ed.), et al., *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People's Power* (Manila: Conspectus, 1988), 269-324, esp. 289-314.

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better yet, unwillingness to solve extrajudicial killings of, mostly, civil society leaders, human rights advocates, land reform advocates, and labor union leaders.[44]

The vices of an undemocratic culture

These are deeply rooted cultural traits that create not only dysfunctions in the bureaucracy but, more importantly, distortions in the trajectory of democratization of the Filipino polity. In a hierarchical socialization "the desire to assume a larger role in organizing the life of the political community (GS 73; also OA 24), as well as the habit of "contributing to the common good according to (one's) own abilities and the needs of others" (GS 30) are not at all nurtured. There is a lack of "a lively awareness of the value of the rights of all and each person" (SRS 33). Even where personal or group interests are brought "into harmony with the needs of the community," this is done not "in accord with the norms of justice and within the limits of their competence" (PT 53).

The proclivity for patron-client relations and the lure of populism devoid of a critical frame of analysis do not in truth appreciate and validate "the growing awareness of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their efforts to support one another" and the public manifestations of "their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of public authorities" (SRS 39). They are rather part of the continuum of elite machination of "continued exploitation, and actual contempt" as well as of the absence of "deeper feeling of respect and service to others" and the refusal "to renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others" (OA 23).

[44]See Jay Carizo, "Human Rights, Human Wrongs and the Fallacies of the Palace" in http://ipd.org.ph/main/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=95&pop=1&page... (accessed on July 14, 2008). The report was done by Philip Alston who is the UN's Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The Philippine government's Commission on Human Rights placed the number at 403 from 2001 to 31 May 2007 while the human rights alliance reported 863 deaths.

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The hegemony of family in Filipino culture has contributed to the "growing inability to situate particular interest within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good" (CA 47). This is not to say that the Filipinos are self-centered, it's rather that the moral universe of their loyalty does not readily expand to the national community and their sense of solidarity is difficult to apply to fellow citizens when mediated by policies, structures and institutions. Finally, the culture of impunity is a collective refusal to bring "social reality into line with the objective requirements of justice" (cf. PT 154-155) The historical legacy passed on is that, between traitors and patriots, perpetrators and victims, there is no difference, or that it is not worth the effort to sort them out. The inability or unwillingness of Philippine society to call powerful and prominent people to account for their wrongdoings shows the weakness of the 'common conscience' or that "common set of values that give unity and coherence"[45] to a community or nation. This failure has led many to "reduce a community's values to a matter of personal preference" or mere "recommendations."

What the church can do

No wonder the Philippine church, according to a judicious study, "has had only limited success as an agent of social change."[46] The reason may not be the lack of institutional resources or moral ascendancy, for the church has both in abundance. What could, perhaps account for it is the Church's inability or, better yet, unwillingness to witness, in its own institutional life and organizational structures, to the moral values, ethical standards and democratic virtues it demands from political life, processes and agents. A church that nurtures and practices a democratic polity holds tremendous potential for its own

[45]Carroll, "The Philippines: Forgiving or Forgetting?" 90, appropriating the theory of Emile Durkheim.

[46]Patricia Licuanan, "Basic Christian Communities as a Force for Social Change," in Gabino Mendoza (ed.), et al., *Church of the People: The Basic Christian Community Experience in the Philippines* (Manila: Bishops-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development, 1988), 28-34, at 28.

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ecclesial life and the renewal of society. Because "polity affects not only how churches govern their own affairs and how they relate to each other as ecclesial institutions, but the stances they take in relationship to the world and its institutions."[47]

In this vein there is a general need to evaluate whether or not the Philippine church still cultivates the democratic culture of "communion, participation, and mission" (PCP II 137-140) and, in particular, to examine to what extent its base ecclesial communities (BEC) are still holistic and prophetic.[48] BECs hold a tremendous potential for the integration of Christian faith and daily life, prayerful discernment and incisive analysis, prudent decision and innovative action for the common good. The BEC ethos of participation can tilt the balance of ecclesial power toward the laity, even as it can mitigate, if not neutralize, the too hierarchized patterns of relations. Sharing of power with the poor in society in ecclesial processes could alter the penchant to depend on patrons. Reliance on communal resource and the BEC's social orientation could expand the narrow confines of extreme familism and kinship. Where members possess greater self-confidence and sense of efficacy, they become more responsible to hold accountable the integrity and competence of church and state leaders alike. The BEC's bias for democratic processes could be an antidote to the Filipino society's deeply rooted undemocratic features.

[47]Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., *Patterns of Polity: Varieties of Church Governance* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 156.

[48]For the history of the BEC as vision and structure of the Philippine church, see John Carroll and Francisco Claver, "The Pastoral Priorities of the Philippine Bishops: A Report on a Survey," *Philippine Studies* 34 (1986): 21-40; Mendoza (ed.), et al., *Church of the People*; *Building Basic Ecclesial Communities: Case Studies from the Philippine Experience,* eds. Antonio Ledesma and Amado Picardal (Manila: NASSA-Caritas Philippines, 2000); and Karl Gaspar, *To be Poor and Obscure: The Spiritual Sojourn of a Mindanawon* (Quezon City: Center for Spirituality, 2004), 152-163.

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4. The challenge to embed in civil society and collaborate with new partners

The last set of culturally embedded barriers to the growth and maturation of a democratic polity refers to citizenship. Filipinos in general have yet to overcome certain habits so that the "processes by which (they) negotiate the nature and extent of their rights as individuals and their obligations to the community"[49] will be fruitful for all.

The uncivil habits of reluctant citizens

Filipinos in general conceive of citizenship almost solely in terms of electoral exercise. Even the church and the powerful business community consider elections as the most decisive instance of belonging to a political community.[50] But "a political system should be judged not by its ability to hold elections but to serve democratic ends," says Aquino, and elections are not a sure test of democratic values.[51] "It is possible…to have free and democratic elections but the governments produced by such elections may be corrupt, inefficient, incompetent, or incapable of functioning for the public good."[52] If the good citizen is nothing more than one who exercises the right to vote and helps ensure clean and honest elections, the formal and official mechanisms of legislation and policy-making as well as the enforcement

[49]Maria Serena Diokno, "Becoming a Filipino Citizen: Perspectives on Democracy and Citizenship," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture, Vol.* 1, 17-38, at 19-20.

[50]Eva-Lotta Hedman, "Whose Business Is It Anyway? Free and Fair Elections in the Philippines," *Public Policy* II/3: 145-170, at 145.

[51]Aquino, "Filipino Elections and 'Illiberal' Democracy," 5.

[52]Ibid., 4. For an account of business interests in recent Philippine politics, see Hodder, "The Philippine Legislature and Social Relationships," 578-579.

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and implementation thereof will remain the most under-utilized areas of civil society intervention[53]

Filipinos have the proclivity to influence policy and legislation through the "parliament of the streets". Banking on a "resistance paradigm," public protest action and rhetoric dramatize the agenda, but achieve little in terms of enlightened shaping of public opinion in an atmosphere of participative, truthful and free deliberation as the issue becomes an easy prey to sensationalism and oversimplification. As long as civil society "depend[s] mainly on indirect channels of information and indirect methods of intervention," Paez contends, "they will continue to play a relatively weak role in shaping the legislative agenda."[54]

Most Filipinos have a basic lack of understanding of legislative processes and dynamics. They are less concerned as to how a bill becomes a law, who are the players involved, when the right timing is, which views need to be adjudicated and for what reasons, and, above all, in what way they can optimize the official avenues available for effective intervention. There is also "the unwillingness of some civil society actors to accept that legislation (and policy-making) is the politics of consensus."[55] Consensus and compromise are worked out very rarely on the basis of the readiness to give up if not refine one's position in view of better arguments or more reliable evidence.

There are those who no longer vote, protest or advocate a legislative agenda because they have lost confidence in political institutions to be made responsive to govern for the collective good. With a long

[53]See Alex Brillantes, "State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making: Focus on the Executive," and Paez, "State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making: Focus on the Legislative," in Marlon Wui and Glenda Lopez (eds.), *Philippine Democracy Agenda: State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making, Vol. 2,* 21-32 and 33-70, respectively.

[54]Paez, "State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making," 55.

[55]Ibid., 56.

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history of political betrayal, many Filipinos "have a defeatist attitude that nothing worthwhile will ever come out of being involved in legislative advocacy,"[56] given the fact that the legislative and executive institutions are run mostly by elites with vested interests to protect and promote.

A narrow sense of moral obligation to the polity

What we have is a narrow sense of obligation to the polity and too limited understanding of the necessary civil habits and virtues. Citizenship is the political expression of the fact that "the social nature of the human person is not completely fulfilled by the state" (CA 13). For this reason, every member of the political community has to navigate within the "the web of autonomous associations independent of the state, bringing citizens together in pursuit of their common interests."[57] It is therefore very crucial that the diversity of interests among social groups, which are more often than not conflicting, is adjudicated "in the spirit of sincere concord" (MM 65) necessitating the positive and constructive role certain political habits (cf. GS 43).

Going to the polls to vote or to the streets to protest are certainly not enough, unless each one has the habit to pursue "honest discussion of differences founded on a desire for justice" or, if opportune and necessary, the openness for "reasonable compromise" (CA 14; cf. LC 77). The Filipino's general lack of capacity for respectful dialogue as means to adjudicate legitimate plurality cannot lead to forms of collaboration which may be possible "for the attainment of economic, social, cultural and political ends which are honorable and useful" (PT 160). All this speak of a narrow sense of moral obligation to the polity.

[56]Ibid., 57.

[57]Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "Civil Society: An Operational Definition," in *Philippine Democracy Agenda: Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture, Vol. 1,* 5-15, at 9.

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What the church can do

In this light, the Philippine church needs a new socio-pastoral location from where it can learn how to overcome these shortcomings. Besides the moral content of its interventions in the public sphere, a church's social location is also crucial in the effectiveness of its pastoral mission. The Philippine church has to overcome its fixation on being the secular state's equivalent in the sacred realm. Church leaders have to stop passing themselves off as administrators of spiritual goods, being the religious counterparts of elected public officials in charge of public material services. By locating itself as the counterpart of the state, the church can easily function as a power-broker or a patron – an institution that can depose or install even the highest office of the land or influence in the appointment or removal of public officials. The evidence we presented implies that as long as the church allows itself to be trapped in this socio-pastoral location, it will only enlarge the heritage of uncivil habits and apolitical virtues instead of fill the gaps created by the deficits of the structures, institutions, and culture of the Filipino polity.

The as yet unexplored and promising alternative for the Philippine church is to shift its socio-pastoral location and collaborate with new partners. It is our contention that if the church embeds itself in civil society[58] its prospects as a credible and effective social force for the common good will gain new life. For, according to studies, where a local church (e.g. arch/diocese) collaborates with people's organizations (POs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and/or social movements (SMs) "the avenue of participation" widens and "a climate

[58]The term is contested and its scope is varied. By "people's organizations" we mean the formation of sectoral groups that refer either to class (e.g., labor, peasants), non-class (e.g., women, indigenous peoples, youth), or issues (e.g., human rights, environment). "Social movements" may mean organized political action or social mobilization of poorer or disenfranchised sectors of society, while "non-governmental organizations" refer to organized non-state groups that provide support to the previous entities. For these distinctions, see Fabros, (ed.), et al., *Social Movements in the Philippines*, 15.

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favorable to the democratization of state and society" is created.[59] The interaction may also offer the church, like every human institution and social organization, a historic opportunity to be enriched by these groups in the exercise of its pastoral mission in the Filipino polity.

Conclusion

Going back to the terms of the question, the challenges we have sketched would all point to the answer hinted at by the Philippine bishops not too long ago when they envisioned a "society-leavening church."[60] The vision seems to hold the key, that is, if we are correct in arguing that the collective deliberation and envisioning of the common good does not merely require an electoral exercise nor a democratically elected government, but rather "a complex and multi-linear political, social, and cultural transformative process," which involves the synergy and "the active participation of citizens in decision-making in all aspects of life, and in actualizing these decisions as well."[61] Only such an ecclesiological vision can offer prospects to the Filipino *ecclesia* to be able to exercise its *diakonia* to the *res publica* with new vigor, new methods, and new collaborators. There is no better time for the Philippine church to be true to one's own vision than now.

[59]See, for instance, Antonio Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines: Narratives of Engaged Citizenship* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006). Also see John Carroll, "Society: Civil and Uncivil," *Intersect* 17/8: 4-6 and "Democracy from Below," *Intersect* 19/3: 12-18.

[60]CBCP, *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics* (Manila: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines), 28.

[61]Ferrer, "Civil Society: An Operational Definition," 5-6.

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