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PROSTITUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

A Time for Change

James McTavish, F.M.V.D.

A Jesuit priest was asked to write the foreword of a book that deals with prostitution and human trafficking in the Philippines. He wrote the following:

> A foreigner came to our country. Then, as so many foreigners cheerfully do, he published his first deep impressions. The last sentence of his article was sad. He said: "The tragedy of the Philippines is this: in one of the world's loveliest countries, some of the world's most beautiful girls are being sold for money to some of the world's ugliest men."[1]

The priest, Fr. James Reuter, S.J., then made the point that when the trees are threatened people voice their indignation, when the fishing stocks are in danger then people protest, when land is sold unjustly then there is a surge of resentment but "when our beautiful girls are sold for money, the great rank and file of our people do not move."[2]

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[1]James B. Reuter, "Foreword," in Mary Soledad L. Perpiñan, *From Darkness to Light—Success Stories of Survivors of Incest, Rape and the Sex Trade* (TW-MAE-W, Quezon City: 2008).

[2]Reuter, "Foreword," xii.

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It is as if the reality of prostitution has been around for so long that nothing can be done. But the girls and children are worth much more than the fish, the trees and the land. Let us not presume that nothing can be done! At one time slavery was considered "normal" and inevitable even though it was unpleasant, yet it is now considered to be an injustice against human rights. Perhaps one day we will look back on prostitution in the same way.[3]

What is Prostitution?[4]

Some definitions and descriptions such as "entertainment," "sex work," "hostessing," "world's oldest profession" and "guest relations officer" are not helpful as they make prostitution invisible, legitimate, or trivial. Prostitution is actually the sale of persons, most often women and children, for profit and sexual gratification of another.[5] Prostitution is in fact a violation and exploitation of basic human rights and human dignity. It takes advantage of vulnerable populations particularly women, children, and the poor. Prostitution is not merely a single act where a person is bought for sex but is actually a system, and in it the so-called three "B's" are involved: the Business, the Buyer and the Bought—a) the business, wherein the stakeholders are the pimps and sex establishment owners, b) the buyer, who is a customer

[3]Melissa Farley, *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress* (Binghamton: Haworth Press, 2003), xix.

[4]I am grateful to Jonathon Nambu, Director of the Samaritana Transformation Ministries, for the information supplied in this paragraph (see www.samaritana.org).

[5]In the Philippine Anti-Prostitution Bill of 2009, it is defined as "any act, transaction, scheme or design involving the use of a person whether woman, man or child, for sexual gratification, exploitation or pleasure of another in exchange for cash, profit or other consideration, or any act that promotes or facilitates the accomplishment of the said act, transaction, scheme or design."

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with "buying power" and is typically a male, and c) the bought—the person (woman, man or child) whose body serves as the capital as well as the commodity.

More than ever before, prostitution has become institutionalized, organized, and globalized (i.e., through trafficking and the internet). If we look at the streets around us we see the explosion in budget hotels which are so clean but not so good, the all pervasive sight of girly bars and the numerous high class clubs and establishments that seem to cater for so many well-to-do clientele. Different forms of prostitution thus exist: street prostitution, bars, brothels, *akyat-barko*, "massage parlors," escort services, sex tourism, cybersex, local & international sex trafficking. Prostitution in the Philippines has become a de facto legal industry.

How Many are Involved in Prostitution?

Even back in the summer of 1982, Manila was depressingly tagged as the biggest brothel in Asia. There were 50,000 registered hospitality girls in the tourist entertainment industry in the early 70's, and in 1987 there were 300,000 bar girls, not to mention the unlicensed ones who were estimated to number about ¼ of the national figure then.[6] In 1998 it was estimated that there were at least 400,000 to 500,000 prostituted persons in the Philippines with 75,000 of these being children.[7] In

[6]See Tezza Parwel, "The Victimless Crime," *National Midweek* II, 27 (June 27, 1987): 1216. With gratitude to Jonathon Nambu for this data provided in his research paper "On Mirroring Jesus Christ to a Prostitute," Asian Theological Seminary, 1990–1991.

[7]See "The Philippines—Trafficking," www.catwinternational.org/factbook/philippines.php (accessed August 15, 2012). Prostituted persons are mainly adult women, but there are also male, transvestite and child prostitutes, both girls and boys. UNICEF cites the number of children involved in prostitution in the Philippines as being anywhere from 60,000 to 600,000 (www.unicef.org/philippines/support/sup_12.html (accessed August 15, 2012).

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her "Anti-Prostitution Act" (Senate Bill No. 2341), Senator Pia S. Cayetano cites the number of women being exploited in prostitution in the Philippines now ballooning to 800,000.[8]

What Drives a Person into Prostitution?

In one survey of those engaged in prostitution along Quezon Avenue in Quezon City, the main reasons given by the respondents for being involved were:[9]

1. Poverty
2. Under-employment or lack of employment opportunities
3. Physical or sexual abuse
4. Drug dependence and other vices
5. Lack of education
6. Peer influence

Other factors cited by NGOs involved in anti-prostitution work include a) coming from dysfunctional homes, b) deception by recruiters, c) pornography, d) tourism that capitalizes on Filipino women and e) a general apathy of the society and Church towards this reality.[10] It is important to be aware of these so-called "push-pull" factors. People

[8]See Senator Pia S. Cayetano, "Anti-Prostitution Act," Senate Bill No. 2341, www.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/100208564!.pdf, (accessed August 15, 2012).

[9]See "Prostitution along Quezon Avenue and Sagip Kababaihan—A Case Study," www.samaritana.org/sites/default/files/2011ORC/philippines-trafficking-prostitution/Prostitution_ Along_Quezon_Ave_and_Sagip_ Kababaihan.pdf (accessed August 15, 2012).

[10]Jonathon Nambu, Presentation to Exodus Novitiate formation group (Jan 9, 2012).

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who work in ministries seeking to rescue and rehabilitate prostituted women will tell you that they have never met a woman who wanted to be a prostitute; instead, they will recount countless stories of young women coming from poor backgrounds who often have a long history of prior physical and sexual abuse.[11] Many young women are deceived by recruiters to leave the province, where work opportunities may be few and far between, and come to the big city with the promise of decent work. Upon arriving there, the vulnerable person is often tricked or even coerced into working in the sex industry.

Short Shelf Life of Women Involved in Prostitution

In a study of prostitution along Quezon Avenue, 243 prostituted women (PW) were interviewed.[12] Of the 243 PW, 45% were aged between 18–22 years old, 30% between 23–27 years old and 11% between 28–32 years old. The relatively young age of the prostituted women reflects what is called "the short shelf life" of a woman forced into prostitution—the life is so inhuman and degrading that before long untold physical and psychological harm is incurred. As Melissa Farley clearly documents, prostitution is bad for the body and bad for the heart.[13] She states that "throughout history, regardless of its legal

[11]When a girl has been a victim of sexual abuse, which can often be in the form of incest, deep wounds are created in her psyche. This often leads to a reduced sense of self-worth and a low self-esteem. She becomes an easy prey to recruiters and may offer less resistance to a life in prostitution because her integrity has already been forcefully violated.

[12]This study also interviewed 46 pimps and 25 homosexual persons involved in prostitution.

[13]Melissa Farley, "'Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart': Prostitution Harms Women Even if Legalized or Decriminalized," *Violence Against Women* 10:10 (October 2004): 1087–1125.

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status, prostitution has had a devastating impact on women's health."[14] This can be seen in the many physical and psychological consequences of this destructive lifestyle. Some findings include:[15]

- Sexual violence and physical assault are the norm for women in all types of prostitution
- Health problems include exhaustion, frequent viral illness, STDs, vaginal infections, back aches, sleeplessness, depression, headaches, stomach aches, and eating disorders
- Post traumatic stress disorder is a consequence of prostitution as are mood disorders such as dissociation and depression
- Prostituted women are at a higher risk of being murdered

Rights of Persons Exploited in Prostitution[16]

The fundamental rights of persons exploited in prostitution should not be forgotten and need to be upheld. These include:

- The right to be treated as human beings
- The right to dignity and security
- The right against any form of discrimination
- The right to be protected by the law

[14]Farley, "Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart," 1097.

[15]Farley, "Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart," 1097.

[16]Supplied by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women—Asia Pacific group and slightly modified.

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- The right to be protected from abuse and exploitation
- The right to seek redress for violations of their rights and to have their complaints appropriately addressed
- The right to fair and human treatment
- The right to sensitive and appropriate legal, health and other social services
- The right to organize themselves as survivors and fight for their legitimate concerns

Addressing the Demand

One way to reduce the impact of prostitution would be to criminalize the demand side, thus making the buying or attempted buying of sex illegal. The one who should be prosecuted is the buying customer, or the pimp or establishment owner, not the women exploited in prostitution. If a brothel is raided, often the women involved are arrested and taken to prison. The male customers are not detained and are usually let off scot free. The sex institution and its owner are not penalized but instead are allowed to carry on business as usual. Reports of human rights abuses exist whereby arrested prostituted women are not treated fairly or are made to offer sexual favors to Law Enforcement Officers before being released from custody.[17]

Some NGO's are campaigning to criminalize the demand side, making the procurement of prostitution illegal similar to legislation in Sweden where the paying or offering to pay for sexual services is a criminal offence:

> In Sweden the spotlight now shines very clearly on all purchasers of commercial sex, and their role in supporting the sex "trade." This new approach has sparked a public debate that has caused communities

[17]"Prostitution along Quezon Avenue and Sagip Kababaihan—A Case Study."

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> to think afresh about whether the purchase of sex on their streets and in their neighbourhoods is acceptable. Since the new policy was introduced the numbers of women involved in street-based prostitution has significantly decreased. Although some may have moved to work indoors, the policy is claimed as a success based in no small part on the extensive level of support available to those women who wish to leave the streets.[18]

Janice Raymond, in a thought provoking analysis, gives ten reasons for *not* legalizing prostitution.[19] Some reasons for not making it legal are that legalization of prostitution is a gift to pimps, traffickers and the sex industry. Legalization also promotes sex trafficking, expands the sex industry and increases child prostitution.

Money is the Root of all Evil

Big money is involved and this is another reason why the prostitution industry thrives.[20] The prostitution business worldwide is linked to the market in human trafficking which ensures that the demand for various shapes and sizes of women's bodies is met. Trafficking is now estimated to be a $57 billion global industry. In addition, prostitution is not only linked to trafficking but also to internet pornography. According to a social worker involved in helping rehabilitate prostituted women, "internet pornography is the theory; prostitution is the practice."

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[18]See Home Office Report, United Kingdom Government, "Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution," Sec. 9.2–9.3.

[19]Janice G. Raymond, "Ten Reasons for *Not* Legalizing Prostitution and a Legal Response to the Demand for Prostitution," www.prostitutionresearch.com/laws/000022.html (accessed August 15, 2012).

[20]The flesh trade in Thailand has been estimated to generate between US$18–21.6 billion a year or over half of the entire 1995 budget of that country. See Coalition Against Trafficking in Women—Asia Pacific, "Sex: From Intimacy to 'Sexual Labor' or is it a Human Right to Prostitute?" http://action.web.ca/home/catw/readingroom.shtml?x=16287 (accessed August 15, 2012).

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This chilling remark opens our eyes to the devastating effects of internet pornography which is flooding our society.[21] When men view pornography their sexual desires are often fanned into a raging flame. What they have just viewed is very often outside the bounds of decency and their wives would in no way consent to the re-enactment of such immoral scenes which typically involve male domination or sexual violence towards the female. Seeing as his wife or girlfriend would never consent, the man feels he has a right to buy such perverted gratification through the use of a woman in prostitution.

Hidden in Plain Sight

We have made prostitution "hidden in plain sight."[22] It is everywhere but we try to ignore it. The US Ambassador Harry Thomas drew attention to the problem when he commented that 40 percent of male tourists come to the Philippines for sex. Many senators were livid and asked him to produce evidence to support his claim.[23] The senators were obviously desperate to protect the good name and reputation of their country. It would be just and fitting if they had the same zeal to protect the good name and dignity of many women who are involved in the sex trade here in the Philippines. Moreover, neither should it be

[21]See Ann Marie Bruchalski and James McTavish, "Internet Pornography—The New Pandemic," *Boletin Eclesiastico de Filipinas* LXXXVII:887 (November–December 2011): 605–620. Also John J. Carroll, "Cesspools in the Living Room," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (August 29, 2011).

[22]This phrase comes from Judith Herman, a long term campaigner against prostitution.

[23]See Cathy Yamsuan and Maila Ager, "Say sorry or pack up, US envoy told over sex remark," *Philippine Daily Inquirer Online* (September 29, 2011).

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naively thought that only foreign males go to Filipina prostitutes. In fact, Filipino males are the main users of Filipinas in prostitution.[24]

Church Teaching Regarding Prostitution

Various Church documents address the issue of prostitution. In the Second Vatican Council, prostitution and the selling of women and children are seen as crimes against human life. "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as … prostitution, the selling of women and children … are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practise them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator."[25]

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in number 2355:

> Prostitution does injury to the dignity of the person who engages in it, reducing the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure. The one who pays sins gravely against himself: he violates the chastity to which his Baptism pledged him and defiles his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Prostitution is a social scourge. It usually involves women, but also men, children and adolescents (the latter two cases involve the added sin of scandal). While it is always gravely sinful to engage in prostitution, the imputability of the offense can be attenuated by destitution, blackmail or social pressure.[26]

The whole of the catechesis of Pope John Paul II's landmark study of the "Theology of the Body" gives us a renewed and redeemed vision of the meaning of the body and the true purpose of human

[24]Sol. F. Juvida, "Scourge of Child Prostitution," Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organisation (InterPress Service, October 12, 1997).

[25]*Gaudium et spes* 27.

[26]Catechism of the Catholic Church 2355.

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sexuality.[27] By referring to the words of Christ, the Pope delves into the deeper meaning of the state of man and woman in Genesis. The man of innocence who becomes the man of concupiscence is thus invited by Christ to become a redeemed man. Even when Christ tells us that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery (see Matthew 5:27–28), the Pope sees here not an accusation but a calling,[28] a calling to rediscover that gaze of Genesis when man looked at woman and proclaimed her as "flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones" (see Genesis 2:23). This new vision is only possible with new eyes and only in Christ can we put on this new redeemed man.

Pope Benedict XVI makes reference to the dignity and beauty of human sexuality in *Deus Caritas Est,* his first encyclical:

> Eros, reduced to pure "sex," has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will…. True, eros tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.[29]

Overall what is needed is indeed a new evangelization. In *Verbum Domini,* the recent post-synodal exhortation, we find that in "the face of widespread confusion in the sphere of affectivity, and the rise of ways of thinking which trivialize the human body and sexual differentiation, the word of God reaffirms the original goodness of the human being,

[27]See Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). Also of interest is Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2009) which gives a shorter and synthetic vision of the Pope's Theology of the Body.

[28]See Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them,* 45.

[29]Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 6.

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created as man and woman and called to a love which is faithful, reciprocal and fruitful."[30]

Conclusion—A Time for Change

In the book of Exodus, we hear the appeal of our Lord: "I have heard the cry of my people and I have come down to rescue them from their suffering" (see Exodus 3:7–8). Surely there is no cry louder than that of the women and children forced into prostitution. We know that Jesus himself had a compassionate heart for women whom society derided and despised: the Samaritan woman with her five husbands, the adulterous woman caught in the act and even "the sinful woman" whose reputation preceded her (see Luke 7:37ff). Jesus was not afraid of criticism because he did not come for the righteous but for those in need of salvation and redemption.

As Church today, called to be a living continuation of our Lord's salvific mission, we have to be close to all those in suffering and in need. The opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* reinforce this appeal, calling the followers of Christ to be close to those who suffer, and to make their griefs and anxieties our own.[31] This is in harmony with the appeal of St. Paul to all the members of the body of Christ when he wrote to the Church of Corinth two thousand years ago—"if one part of the body suffers then all the parts suffer with it" (see 1 Corinthians 12:26).

We cannot be a Church that deals with these challenging issues at arm's length but rather need to be involved. A song called "Speak my Word" challenges us to not just sit around, keep silent and do nothing to help—"Look at you now, are you all right with what you see? This ain't what it's supposed to be…. Is it enough not to care just because you are not there? Is it enough to be far and safe? Is it enough to live

[30]*Verbum Domini* 26.

[31]*Gaudium et spes* 1.

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with ease and not give a damn to others needs? Is it enough to mind your own?" Prostitution "exists because significant numbers of men are given social, moral and legal permission to buy women on demand."[32] As Church we need to work to change cultural standards, to not simply accept the evil of prostitution but to denounce it, especially the demand side. As the CATW-AP branch notes, "ultimately gender relations must be restructured so that sexuality can once again be an experience of human intimacy and not a commodity to be bought or sold."[33]

How rarely is the topic of demand for prostitution broached. Have you ever heard a homily asking why we are so apathetic as a society in front of these realities? Have you heard a priest ever speaking out to denounce the sex establishments existing in his parish? We should not simply presume that nothing can be done. As Christians we are asked to fight the good fight, not to throw in the towel! As the popular expression runs, "evil happens when good people do nothing." More thought should also be given to considering why men in particular go to prostitutes. The famous English writer G.K. Chesterton said that the man who knocks on the door of a brothel is searching for God. It is not only to denounce the men who buy women but also perhaps to seek and pray for their conversion. In Jesus' recounting of the parable of the prodigal son who spent his inheritance on prostitutes, the father did not disown him but instead received him back with mercy.

What can be done concretely? I was once awestruck when I read that seminarians prayed their rosary once a week outside a sex establishment! Here are some concrete suggestions:

- To pray for those involved in prostitution, in particular for the conversion of men who buy women, and for a

[32]Janice G. Raymond, "Sex Trafficking is Not 'Sex Work'," *Conscience* XXVI:1 (Spring 2005).

[33]Coalition Against Trafficking in Women—Asia Pacific, "Sex: From Intimacy to "Sexual Labor" or is it a Human Right to Prostitute?"

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change of heart and mind for the pimps who sell them and for the sex establishment owners who encourage the industry.

- Organize a rosary and procession outside and alongside the sex establishments and girly bars in your neighbourhood or parish area.
- As a parish priest, to deal with the theme in catechesis or in a homily where adults are listening. It would not be prudent to address this theme in front of minors.
- If giving a retreat it could be a theme that is dealt with or made reference to.
- Create and sign a petition to close down nearby sex clubs.
- For theological schools to offer courses that study and analyze prostitution and trafficking.
- Work to cut down the influence of internet pornography.
- For more Religious Sisters to be concerned and involved in the plight of prostituted women.
- For a more vocal questioning of why many tourists are coming to the Philippines for sexual purposes.
- To denounce sex establishments and other places which have become a haven for prostitution.
- To support an NGO such as the Samaritana Transformation Ministries or the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

Perhaps what is needed most of all is a more focused and targeted Church ministry. Some sisters have made big efforts to combat the ills of prostitution but as Church we could do more. Certain groups

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are doing sterling work but a lone ranger mentality will provide only partial solutions. What is needed is for NGO's, government efforts, concerned lay groups and the Church to combine forces but this also needs coordination. We necessarily have pastoral offices or committees to deal with mining issues, deforestation, people with special needs and a whole gamut of Church and pastoral concerns but no specific ministry to deal with prostitution, yet this reality alone probably involves 800,000 women. Perhaps this is the single biggest pastoral concern that has no specific office or personnel directed to it. A suggestion could be for the Catholic Church to set up a national coordinator to harness or collaborate with the efforts of various personnel and NGO's working in this area.

It is time for a renewal, a real Church presence to our prostituted brothers and sisters, a stronger denouncement of the customers frequenting prostitutes and a clearer and more vocal criticism of those running lascivious spas and sex establishments. I close with the appeal made by Fr. Reuter ringing powerfully in my ears—"Each of us has an obligation, in conscience, to reach out to our people, to those who are in need. The poor girl trapped in prostitution is [at] the bottom of the barrel—the one most desperately in need. Each of us can do something! If only we would try!"[34] If only we would try. It is time for change.

[34]Reuter, "Foreword," xiv.

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FACILITATING CONDITIONS OF CHURCH POWER

Seminar on the Church in Politics
April 18–19, 2011
Ateneo de Manila University

Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J.

It seems that for the purposes of this seminar a more practical and less theoretical approach to the subject of church power is more useful. I am sure though that you may recognize strains of some theory or other in what you are about to hear. "Church power" here specifically refers to the influence of the Catholic Church in the Philippines when it acts through its institutionally recognized entities, be it an individual like a bishop, an official group like the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) or an organized group of laity like the Couples for Christ (CFC).

Allow me then to offer the following hypothesis for discussion: The Catholic Church would have greater influence on Philippine society regarding a particular social issue when all or some of the following conditions obtain: 1) the issue is perceived, whether consciously or not, to be linked with the Christian grand narrative of liberation and its accompanying symbols and rituals, 2) when the Church's position on the issue does not conflict with other views and interests, 3) when the Church mobilizes its institutional resources for the said position, 4) when the Church acts with other organized groups of the same or similar persuasion and/or provides them with its resources, personnel and logistics.

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In the process of explaining this hypothesis, some constituent elements within it would be clarified. Among them are the differentiation between Christianity as church and as story, the nature and structure of church membership from theological and canonical perspectives, and the dynamics between institutional power and symbolic power.

Let us proceed to explain each of the conditions. The first is when the issue is perceived, whether consciously or not, to be linked with the Christian grand narrative of liberation and its accompanying symbols and rituals. In the 16th century, late medieval post-Reformation Spanish Catholicism came to the Philippines with Spanish colonization and brought not only the Roman Catholic Church but also the story and symbols of Christianity. Best exemplified by the *pasyon* tradition of chanting or dramatizing the life-story of Jesus Christ during Lent but also expressed in the many other texts and practices brought by Catholicism such as novenas and processions, these narrative and symbolic tropes have been woven into the social fabric of lowland Philippine life through the linguistic strategy of using and transforming the local languages for evangelization. This strategy translated Spanish Catholicism into a native Christian form defined by these narratives and symbols, and because of the inherent nature of narrative to be open-ended and of symbol to be polyvalent, their appropriation by its native readers could not be controlled by the Church. As discussed by Reynaldo Ileto, many 19th century movements for social change even subverted the nexus of colonial and church power on the basis of this tradition.

Thus when the Church takes a stand on a particular issue, and when this stand is perceived to be related to this grand narrative and accompanying symbols, then the Church's stand assumes greater power. For example, among other factors that facilitated it, EDSA I tapped into the narrative of liberation and the symbolic power of freedom. The long and profound Christian involvement in the anti-Marcos movement paved the way for the spontaneous irruption of Christian symbols in the form of statues or rosaries and the identification of the events as "the exodus of the Filipino people." A contrary example would

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be Church attempts to engage in partisan politics as in its campaign against the Senate election of the pro-family planning advocate Juan Flavier. Such attempts often fail because they are not perceived to be linked to fundamental narrative and symbolic tropes of Christianity, even if the Church formulates it in those terms.

The second condition is when the Church's position on the issue does not conflict with other views and interests. The Catholic Church in the Philippines exists in a pluralistic society governed by constitutional democracy. Thus it interacts with other social actors with views and interests different from, if not contradictory to, its own. When its position on a particular issue runs counter to or is subverted by different views and interests from these other actors, then it is unlikely that its views would hold sway. One historic example from the 1950s would be the Church's opposition to the Rizal Bill, one that mandates the inclusion of Rizal's novels in the school curriculum. Here it ran aground against nationalist sentiments and the constitutional provision of the non-establishment of a particular religion.

A more recent and interesting instance relates to the issue of the death penalty. It was forbidden under the post-martial law 1987 Constitution, but was reinstated for those convicted of heinous crimes under President Fidel Ramos. The first execution took place during the following term of Joseph Estrada who later issued a moratorium in honor of the 2000 Jubilee Year. The death penalty was re-abolished in 2006 under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. The Catholic Church and other civil society advocates were responsible for this. However, then as well as now, surveys reveal that most Filipinos support the death penalty and that the Church has failed to persuade its own Catholic constituents. It appears that many Filipino Catholics operate out of a more primal view of retribution.

The third condition is when the Church mobilizes its institutional resources. Though the Catholic Church's theological self-understanding is that of a communion of persons equal in dignity by virtue of baptism, its doctrinal, organizational and juridical structures are clearly hierarchical. Official pronouncements regarding doctrine have varying degrees of power depending on their nature and source, with

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an infallible definition by an ecumenical council being the highest. Though consultations take place especially since the Second Vatican Council, decisions related to governance are made by clerics or bodies composed exclusively of clerics. The fundamental flow of governance proceeds from Pope to bishop to parish priest; not even the national bishops' conference like the CBCP has a juridical status.

This tension between equality on the theological level and hierarchy on practically all other aspects produces an unusual dynamic in the Catholic Church. On the one hand, it is highly centralized with clear lines of authority. On the other hand, uniformity in thought, word and deed is difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, in the case of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, one must take into account that it numbers around 80% of the total population and therefore its ethos and behavior are typical of majority religions. At the same time, only around 30% of its members have some form of regular contact with it, primarily through Sunday Mass.

These factors defining the nature and characteristics of the Catholic Church in the Philippines come into play when it mobilizes its institutional resources for a particular issue. One such instance is the impact of the Catholic Church on the electoral process through the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV). Formed in 1991, PPCRV has contributed to the relative quality and order in national and local elections because of the general support of Church leadership, both diocesan and religious. Moreover, because of its base in the parish, it is readily integrated into the organizational structure of the Church.

The fourth condition is when the Church acts with other organized groups of the same or similar persuasion and/or provides them with its resources, personnel and logistics. Since social power is greater when it involves more people and resources, the Church would more likely have greater impact when it acts with other organized groups on some shared agenda. These alliances on particular issues is either total, that is, when there is complete agreement between the Church and another group, or strategic, that is, when the agreement covers

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only certain substantive or operational matters such as the sharing of resources or personnel.

The Church's support of the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), a non-governmental organization, during the 1986 elections proved crucial in defending the sanctity of the ballot and eventually unseating President Marcos. The Church did not only provide financial support but also key personnel. The "NAMFREL Marines" were nuns from different congregations who guarded and accompanied ballot boxes to safety, often past midnight and with some peril to their lives. This support diminished when the Church formed PPCRV and occasional battles over turf took place.

Another example of the Church working within an alliance is the movement against the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) during the Marcos regime. This involvement occurred at various levels. Religious groups like the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines actively campaigned against the BNPP. Other church groups like Share and Care Apostolate for Poor Settlers (SCAPS) were organizing the local communities in Nagbalayong, Morong, Bataan. These multi-pronged church efforts cooperated with broad international and national alliances made of diverse sectors including scientists, educators and activists. Such breadth and depth of opposition forced President Marcos to call an independent commission under the much-respected Senator Lorenzo Tañada and eventually to mothball the BNPP based on its findings.

These different conditions facilitate the exercise of church power in Philippine society. They certainly interact with each other and have differing degrees of significance according to the social issue at hand and the surrounding social context. Weighing them in relation to each other can help us calibrate the extent of the Church's power regarding a particular issue.

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