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# TWIN TOLERATIONS

## The Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan Experience

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There is a love-hate relationship between the Philippine State, embodied by its instrument, the government, and its largest religion in terms of membership, the Catholic Church[1], at least from the viewpoint of observers. Recent issues have proven this point, such as the jousts between Pro-RH and Anti-RH supporters which would ceremoniously be punctuated with the legislation of the RH law. The sequel of this saga could be seen in Bacolod, with its diocese displaying its Team Patay/Team Buhay tarpaulins in an attempt to foist the Catholic faithful to vote for Team Buhay (a list of senatorial candidates who opposed the passage of the RH law) and refrain from supporting Team Patay (a list of Senatorial candidates who supported the passage of the RH law). Constitutionalists called it a partisan jab, even a vendetta, against those who were instrumental in the passage of the said law, and by no less than the bishop—the embodiment of the magisterium in the Philippines, with the bishop extending his forearm where Caesar's domain begins. Then again, these instances in which the Catholic Church, under the leadership of

[1]In this essay, I shall use the term "Church" to refer not only to the ordained leaders (bishops, priests, deacons and sisters) of the Catholic Church but also to the involvement and interactions of lay partners and collaborators with the latter. It shall also be used to refer to the different Church-based or affiliated organizations.

its clergy, becomes embroiled in issues which are considered "secular" (and must therefore not be forayed into by religious organizations or institutions) spark debates and lively discussions, and an automatic revisit of the age-old democratic doctrine of Separation of Church and State. In the Philippines, the principle of the Separation of the Church and the State is enshrined in Article 2, Section 6 of the 1987 Constitution, otherwise known as "Declaration of Principles and State Policies." It states that "The Separation of the Church and State shall be inviolable." Despite the prominence of this provision, the numerous instances wherein the Philippine Catholic Church and the State, through its instrumentalities, have clashed with each other attest that this principle is not much upheld, or does not hold much water. Due largely to differences of opinions and positions on vital issues affecting the country, the cases previously mentioned could only be the tip of the iceberg. However, even if this is popularly the case, there are also plenty of instances wherein the Catholic Church—through its affiliated organizations—and the Philippine government often collaborate with each other to achieve a particular undertaking complementary to that of the latter, or implement and work for an undertaking where the government's competencies fall short. While there is a treasure trove of cases and instances wherein the Catholic Church has been instrumental in attaining undertakings geared towards greater and authentic democratization,[2] I shall focus my attention on a particular sphere and ingredient of democracy and

[2]The Catholic Church, at least the one identified with the Filipino clergy during the Propaganda and the Revolution and not to be mistaken with the Aglipayan Church, has historically been at the forefront of campaigning for wider spaces of liberty and social justice. It was also identifiably visible during the time of the Marcos Conjugal Dictatorship, calling for people to uphold justice and truth in the face of a Damocles sword in the form of the military. It was also visibly felt during the ouster of former President Joseph Estrada (although my personal participation in that movement as a very young Soc-Dem activist caused me remorse to this day, as it paved the way for a far more worse presidency. From here forward, I impose upon myself to exhaust all possible constitutional means before resorting to extra-constitutional means). The Church makes felt its support for campaigns seeking to represent and mainstream the plight of the marginalized, etc.

democratization: the Catholic Church's active involvement in one of this country's important democratic fabrics—elections. The general backdrop of Philippine society lays down the conditions by which the Catholic Church lends its precepts and principles as the kernel of the motivating causes or principles of most movements and collective actions whose interventions are not meant merely to address recurring electoral concerns but are evenly aimed towards social justice and the attainment of authentic democracy in a widely impoverished country. Even the uninitiated will not find this fact surprising as it is in electoral contests, especially with an electoral system that is in dire need of timely and apt reforms, where corrupt politicians and political dynasties capture and legitimize the power and authority that they wield.

Philippine elections have been an important "priority concern" of Philippine Catholic bishops as they collectively issued a total of eleven (11) pastoral statements regarding elections.[3] It clearly illustrates a void in morality extant in elections as partisan elements and organizations exercise strategies and tactics that blatantly undermine human dignity. This has also been buttressed by the existence of several Church-based and -affiliated organizations, such as the Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB) and others, that respond to the different gaps left unaddressed by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) due to various reasons. Most of the involvements and interventions of these Church-based and -affiliated organizations have been either to complement the work of different governmental duty-bearers with regard to elections[4] or to directly collaborate and coordinate with the COMELEC, in clearly

[3]Antonio F. Moreno, "Dancing with the Philippine Electoral System: The Rise and Fall of the Church's Electoral Engagement," *Landas* 24:1 (2010): 105–119.

[4]An example of this was when COMELEC, in partnership with other governmental agencies and organizations, took the cue to enfranchise what was seen to be seven (7) vulnerable sectors of this country's electoral processes, namely, 1) Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), 2) Detainees, 3) Internally Displaced People (IDPs), 4) Indigenous People (IPs), 5) First-Time Voters (FTVs), 6) the Elderly, and 7) Overseas Absentee Voters (OAVs). COMELEC, in partnership with other NGO-POs, a good fraction of which are Church organizations, implored for the assistance of the different governmental duty-

defined terms, on various platforms of engagement and venues of collaboration. Specifically, Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan—translated into English as "the Church in the Service of the Nation (SLB)—has been among those traditional Church-affiliated organizations that have ceaselessly worked for greater democratization in this country through its proactive electoral interventions, among others, since the restoration of formal democracy. Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB) is the socio-political arm of the Society of Jesus. It traces its history to the bleak and tumultuous final years of the Martial Law era.[5] At a time when the prevailing conditions of the country were very bleak, Jesuit priests and seminarians, together with other religious and lay individuals, saw that the continued hold on power of the severely repressive Marcos Conjugal Dictatorship,[6] aided by the military establishment, which was responsible for the deaths and disappearances of thousands of Filipinos, has been judged as unacceptable as it continued to rob and dehumanize the collective dignity of the Filipino people. On the other hand, a communist rebellion that was rapidly gaining momentum in the country-side using violent means to end the dictatorship had also been perceived as an equally unacceptable option. Thus, given the confluence of events and seemingly dead-end path that the Philippines was on during that period, the common sentiment to urgently address the existing conditions prevalent in the country, along with the then loosely-knitted group's eschewal of violent means in addressing the general effects of the Marcos Conjugal Dictatorship, led to the formation of what would come to be known as the "NAMFREL Marines"[7] which eventually evolved into a non-profit and non-stock organization

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bearers attending to the welfare and needs of the aforementioned sectors, such as the BJMP for detainees, etc.

[5]See "About: Who we are" at www.slb.ph.

[6]I am borrowing the term from Primitivo Mijares's creatively titled work on the Marcos dictatorship, "The Conjugal Dictatorship."

[7]In preparation for the 1986 snap elections, NAMFREL, the COMELEC citizens' arm, would deploy this group of religious and lay individuals in "hotspots" where election violations and election-related violence could break-out.

presently known as SLB.[8] For more than 25 years, SLB envisioned and worked for "a Filipino nation that celebrates love of country and genuine democracy." SLB invokes its deeply Christian ideals in working towards and attaining this end "in the spirit of faith that does justice with [the] preferential option for the poor." Among Civil Society Organizations, SLB is known for its political engagements, notably during elections. Since the enshrinement of the 1987 Constitution, SLB has been actively involved in undertakings seeking to fortify and strengthen this country's electoral processes. With elections being among the foremost institutions and key ingredients of democracy, SLB was keen to observe that the Filipino people's confidence and faith in the said institution must be restored[9] if democracy is to be rebuilt. With SLB's founding came its intertwined dynamic involvement in this country's electoral history. SLB's individual, intra-CSO/NGO, and inter-governmental collaborative experiences offer a glimpse into the collaborative relationships between the Church and the State while staying well within each one's respective loci of influence. In this essay, I will discuss the inevitable and all too frequent interface between the Church—through the experiences and interventions of SLB—and the State—through its instrumentality, the COMELEC and other governmental line-agencies. Given that the focus of this essay is the interaction between the government and the Church, I argue that this relationship is facilitated—and strengthened even—by the multi-various venues brought about by administrative needs and gaps that are extant to the COMELEC and other governmental line-agencies with regards to full and efficient general electoral exercise and implementation in the Philippines. I argue further that these instances of intervention are thus but opportunities for twin tolerations to exist in the Philippines.

[8]See www.slb.ph.

[9]This is due to the eroded integrity of the COMELEC as it has been co-opted by the Marcos dictatorship to legitimize its rule, save for the fact that this institution was destroyed by the Marcos regime when it was transformed into a token democratic institution.

## TWIN TOLERATIONS

I will utilize the concept of "Twin Toleration" as a framework in proceeding with my essay and in pointing out that, in the case of the Philippines, as in most other countries both Christian and non-Christian alike, separation of Church and State in democracies does not necessarily mean the actualization of the French secularist tradition more popularly known as *laicite,* or the total separation of—and clear demarcation between—the two institutions as totally independent of each other. In simple terms, Alfred Stepan points out in his *Twin Tolerations* that although there might exist a degree of freedom and independence between the two institutions, this does not necessarily have to mean a complete separation between the two. There must, however, be a clearly specified differentiation between each institution's sphere of influence, and respect thereof, allowing for venues of interaction, albeit limited, to exist. Stepan lays down the necessary conditions in order for "twin tolerations" to exist. He goes on to point out that in most democracies, certain institutional and political requirements are set as a minimum before a polity can be considered as such.[10] Dahl's seminal work, *Polyarchy*, articulates that before transition to a democracy is completed, "free and contested" elections must take place.[11] In the same work, Dahl argued that some requirements of a democracy are the existence of opportunities to formulate preferences, signify said preferences, and have these preferences factored-in in governance. He continues by explaining that the satisfaction of these conditions depend upon the fulfillment of eight necessary guarantees, namely: 1) freedom to form and join organizations, 2) freedom of expression, 3) the right of suffrage, 4) eligibility for public office, 5) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, 6) alternative sources of information, 7) free and fair elections, and 8) that governmental agencies responsible for policy-making must rely

[10]Alfred Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[11]Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

upon votes and other expressions of preferences.[12] However, Linz and Stepan argue that, although the latter does not contend the importance of these institutional requirements in the process of democratization or strengthening democracy, sole reliance upon the latter requisites will not suffice. Other conditions must be considered, such as the crafting of a constitution that takes into mind the welfare of minorities and enshrines guarantees respecting and protecting liberties and entitlements, an elected government that rules within the bounds set forth by a constitution/law, and the establishment of horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms within the said system.[13] If Dahl's and Linz-Stepan's criteria are to be combined, Stepan considers that for democracy to be consolidated, a dynamic, critical and robust civil society and the opportunity to create it must be in place. Pointing out that democracy is a system of conflict regulation that allows open competition over values and goals that citizens want to advance so long as a) disputes are settled amicably, b) rights are respected, and c) all groups are granted the right to the advancement of their interests both in political and civil society within the bounds of law, Stepan poses the following questions in a work co-authored with Juan Linz: "What does this imply about religion, politics, democracy and the twin tolerations? What are the necessary boundaries of freedom for elected governments from religious groups, and for religious individuals and groups from government?"[14] Stepan proceeds in arguing that:

> The key area of autonomy that must be established for democratic institutions is that the institution[s] that emanate from democratic procedures should be able, within the bounds of the constitution and human rights, to generate policies. Religious institutions should not have

[12]Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[13]Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[14]Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

> constitutionally privileged prerogatives which allow them authoritatively to mandate public policy to democratically elected governments.[15]

This being said, Stepan situates the respective locale each institution should occupy in a democratic political system. Stepan adds that, consistent with the core institutional definition of democracy, a key area of autonomy for religious freedom—from the state and even from other religions—is that individuals and communities must have complete freedom to worship privately. More as individuals and groups bound to society, religious practitioners must also be able to publicly *advance their values in civil society*,[16] and therefore sponsor organizations and movements in political society as long as public advancement of these beliefs does not encroach upon the liberties of others, violate democracy and the law, or use violence.[17] It therefore necessarily connotes that no group in civil society—including religious groups—can be prohibited from forming a political party. He continues to point out that constraints to said political party shall only be applicable if its actions violate democracy and that the determination as to whether or not it violates the latter should be decided not by parties but by the court.[18]

Stepan argues further that the broad framework of minimal freedom for the democratic state and the minimal religious freedoms of citizens can, from a purely theoretical perspective, produce an extraordinarily broad range of patterns of religion-state relations in political systems that would meet the minimal definition of democracy.[19]

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[15]Alfred Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[16]Italics mine.

[17]Alfred Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[18]Alfred Stepan, *The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the Twin Tolerations.*

[19]In the same work, Stepan specified 15 member states of the European Union which have met the core institutional requirements of a democracy and have

I argue that, similar to this position, the Philippines in essence practices and experiences a religio-political arrangement premised in the concept of Twin Tolerations. While it may be argued that, as of late, political parties whose core principles adhere to Catholic dogma exist and actively vie for political power via the country's electoral processes, which is in essence a manifestation of the principles under Twin Tolerations, I shall point out that, apart from direct participation of religious political parties such as the "Ang Kapatiran Party" in electoral contests, a broad range of patterns of religion-state relations, at least in the realm of elections, exists indeed in the Philippines. I shall, however, limit my focus on the active interaction of the State (through its instrumentalities) and the Church (through one of its affiliated socio-political organizations, Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan) in the electoral processes of this country, particularly its synergistic convergence in its campaign to actively enfranchise marginalized sectors and more so the improvement of this country's electoral processes, and that despite the limited freedoms each institution experiences, an array of venues and opportunities of interaction and cooperation have in fact been taken by corresponding state instrumentalities and Church organizations sharing common goals and advocacies to address the issues previously appertained to. While staying well within the bounds of their respective spheres of influence, conventional and unconventional patterns of complementary measures have been explored and exhausted by State and Church entities in achieving their common goals, in this case the enfranchisement of the seven vulnerable sectors of our electoral processes and the general reform of the country's electoral system.

## SITUATING TWIN TOLERATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines, after a prolonged harrowing experience in the throes of the Marcos-Military dictatorship, has seen a simultaneous

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socially and politically established the twin tolerations. Five of the fifteen standing member states of the European Union have established churches; Norway, which is not a member of the EU but is a democracy, has an established church.

escalation of uncertainty given the bleakness of the general social, economic and political climate, as well as the dangerous ebb in confidence of the Filipino citizenry in democratic edifices and institutions. It is however contradictory in the sense that at a time when the Filipino people's clamor for the restoration of authentic democracy was substantiated through a people power movement, disengagement and discontent was also looming among the majority of the Filipino people. The dislodged pre-martial-law landed elite were trying to re-insert themselves into the wobbly political order of the country which was predominantly being held by the new elite (thanks to cronyism and Marcos's hefty rewards to loyal lapdogs), or traditional politicians allied with Corazon C. Aquino's administration who belonged to political clans and were instrumental in Aquino's capture of power. The transfer of governmental authority had already been conducted during the snap election which sparked the chain of events that brought Marcos down. Although Dahl pointed out that "free and contested elections must take place" in order for democratic transition to ensue, the Marcos-sponsored snap election was far from being free. This was due to Marcos's uncontested monopoly on violence and intimidation. SLB and other like-minded organizations among the laity and other secular groups responded to the need of the situation by guarding the canvassing and transfer of ballots. This, together with the decline in popularity of Marcos's Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (New Society Movement) or KBL due to the numerous atrocities he and his military henchmen committed, the uncovering of the IMF of the Philippine Government's overestimated international reserves,[20] blatant corruption here and there, and his failing health, caused Marcos's eventual defeat, after which he then refused to concede. With this picture in mind, politicians who were strongly allied with Marcos were forced to consider abandoning Marcos to support Aquino if they were to survive in a post-Marcos setting where martial-law displaced elites would reclaim their "rightful" place. The existence of opportunities where each can "formulate preferences, signify these

[20]Richard J. Kessler, "Politics Philippine Style, Circa 1984," *Asian Survey* 24:12 (Dec. 1984): 1209–1228.

preferences and have these preferences factored-in in governance" was fulfilled as the 1987 Constitution was ratified. Though created to legitimate Aquino's accession to power and replace the Marcos-authored 1973 constitution, it also provided the other guarantees that Dahl, Stepan and Linz prescribes in order for twin tolerations to exist.[21] The creation of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) was the first order of affairs of the new regime, tasked with reclaiming ill-gotten wealth and putting to account public officials who were errant during Martial Law; it in effect functioned as an oversight and vertical-horizontal check over affairs of governmental agencies. The separation of powers of the three important branches of government was also restored, thereby restoring the check and balances mechanism invalidated by the Marcos regime.

It may be argued that the renewed prospect of restoring democratic governance, albeit sluggish and painstaking, has provided spaces and latitudes for civil societies, religious groups and partisan interests to negotiate their respective niches in what was then a fledgling Philippine democracy, as legal guarantees and entitlements capacitating such organizations to organize and do so were emplaced. The newly installed Aquino administration saw the abundance of citizens groups and civil society organizations, of which a good number were Church-based, involve themselves in undertakings that would futher strengthen people's participation in democratic institutions. SLB, being among the many organizations that are influenced by Christian values and Catholic Social Teaching (CST), advances these beliefs in the general democratic order and continuum of this country. It formed itself into a distinguishable organization by advancing advocacies that contribute to nation-building and democratization through its engaged citizenship framework of interventions infused with CST, the Ignatian Pedagogical

[21]These eight necessary guarantees are, namely, 1) freedom to form and join organizations, 2) freedom of expression, 3) the right of suffrage, 4) eligibility for public office, 5) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, 6) alternative sources of information, 7) free and fair elections, and 8) dependence of governmental agencies responsible for policy-making upon votes and other expressions of preferences.

Paradigm, and other general Christian values. SLB prides itself in advancing and promoting the interests and welfare of the marginalized, as its interventions are always in preference for improving the plight of the poor. It also supports the undertakings of other like-minded secular and religious organizations (such as AMRSP, CBCP-NASSA, CEAP, etc.) and constantly participates in religious-secular coalitions such as VFORCE[22] and the like, responding to various issues and concerns in Philippine political society. SLB advances these ideals in the Philippine political sphere through proactive, non-partisan and peaceful means, and always within the confines of legality and morality.

What then are these advocacies, interventions and activities that not only maintain SLB's recognition of the separation of Church and State according to conventional definition but at the same time actualize Linz-Stepan's concept of "Twin Tolerations?" Do these interventions contradict the legal boundaries provided by law? Do these interventions necessitate an interface with the State or should it be constrained within the limits or folds of Catholicism?

## SIMBAHANG LINGKOD NG BAYAN: AN EXERCISE OF TWIN TOLERATIONS

Since the restoration of democracy in the Philippines and until the contemporary era, SLB has carefully navigated its space in the political dimension of the country. More than a civil-society group, SLB is a religious organization that is composed of religious and lay individuals whose mission goals are: 1) raising the social consciousness of, but not necessarily limited to, the Catholic faithful, 2) furthering the values of Catholic Social Teaching, and 3) creating opportunities for volunteerism, collaboration, and collective action.[23]

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[22]Benjamin T. Tolosa, "Framing the Challenges of Political Empowerment and Engagement: Ideational Interventions for Democratization since 2005," in *Agenda for Hope: Ideas on Building a Nation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009).

[23]See www.slb.ph.

Commensurate to these, SLB seeks to fulfill its mission through 1) continuing education and formation in good governance, active citizenship, and Catholic Social Teaching for Church organizations, schools, community-based organizations, and the general public, 2) raising awareness of advocacy issues which are promotive of human rights affecting governance and marginalized sectors, and 3) partnering with other institutions engaged in initiatives that demand public accountability from government. As such, SLB continues to initiate electoral interventions among the general Filipino electorate nationwide. SLB has been crafting voters' education manuals, and continues to do so, for the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) which the latter also utilizes to distribute and conduct among different parishes nationwide. This collaboration started during the 1992 synchronized elections and continues up until today, as reflected by the crafting of the Pinoy Voters Academy Voters Education Manuals in the 2007 and 2010 elections and the Pinoy Big Voter (PBV) manual for the upcoming 2013 elections. More than fulfilling its mission, SLB has been contributive to the fortification of elections as one of the necessary democratic institutions in this country. A series of electoral involvements spanning from the 2007 until the upcoming 2013 elections illustrates SLB's contributions not only to the heightening of the Filipino electorate's consciousness but also to the strengthening of this country's electoral processes as among the vital democratic institutions which are the domains of the State and its instrumentalities. While staying within the limits set forth by the doctrine of separation of Church and State, SLB has in fact contributed to democratization instead of meddling or hampering its development, as what is commonly construed regarding Church-affiliated organizations or even the Catholic clergy's meddling with secular affairs. These interventions and engagements are either in partnership with other electoral organizations or are individually initiated by SLB. On several occasions, SLB explored and exhausted collaborative undertakings with governmental line-agencies such as the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), among others, in order to address

gaps in the full exercise of marginalized sectors[24] in this country's electoral processes. These engagements are as follows: 1) VFORCE, 2) TF2010, and 3) TF2013.

## VFORCE

VFORCE started as the Bantay Bayan Project and would later on become known as the VFORCE.[25] It served as a continuing framework for engagement which also coordinated and expanded action among stakeholders in the May 2007 elections. The statement of purpose of VFORCE[26] calls for the Filipino people to politically engage not only the electoral process, but also national politics and political actors in general, amidst widespread disengagement and apathy among Filipinos. It served as a venue for collaboration of civic-groups and religious organizations aiming to harness the potential of the youth, which comprised 40% of voters according to the COMELEC, as a key and instrumental factor in the outcome of the 2007 elections. It also laid down the framework in defense of the country's democratic institutions in short-term[27] and long-term engagements, centering on the deepening and leadership training of the youth as a source of future leaders. VFORCE also presented a menu of options that offered venues for volunteerism among the youth, and at the same time targeted to

[24]Pertains to the seven (7) sectors that are systematically disenfranchised due to varied factors and conditions, namely, 1) First-Time Voters/Youth, 2) Elderly, 3) Internally Displaced Persons, 4) Detainees, 5) Overseas Absentee Voters, 6) Persons with Disabilities, and 7) Indigenous People.

[25]Tolosa, "Framing the Challenges of Political Empowerment and Engagement: Ideational Interventions for Democratization since 2005."

[26]Tolosa, "Framing the Challenges of Political Empowerment and Engagement: Ideational Interventions for Democratization since 2005."

[27]This is due to the eroded confidence of the Filipino electorate in the COMELEC's integrity, given that then Chairman Abalos had been involved in the NBN-ZTE controversy while another commissioner was involved in a vote-rigging operation meant to secure the victory of GMA.

fill perennial gaps left unaddressed by the COMELEC, such as the security, sanctity and accuracy of the ballot from different types of machinations, and accessibility of relevant information necessary for making informed choices in the election. VFORCE presented these under two broad headings: political education and election monitoring.[28] SLB's contributions have been in the dispensation of political education and voters' education runs. SLB developed the Pinoy Voters Academy (PVA) voters education manual which was then massively reproduced by the PPCRV and circulated nationwide, addressing the lack of accessibility to necessary information regarding the electoral process in depressed and far-flung communities which could not be covered and reached by COMELEC's election-related information paraphernalia and information dissemination campaigns. Furthermore, SLB utilizes its vast networks and partners which are strategically located all over the country in order to intensify its information and voters education campaign. It seeks the assistance of Catholic Social Action Centers in different dioceses all over the country as CBCP-NASSA is among its established partners, and taps into the different Jesuit, Lasallian and other CEAP schools and organizations nationwide, thereby covering most regions in the country. It was also in 2007 that SLB started operating a call and text center facility in partnership with telecommunication providers PLDT and Globe Telecom, with the aim of providing toll-free information services regarding elections, including candidates' profiles and referrals of reports regarding cases of electoral violence and irregularities.

## TASK FORCE 2010 (TF2010)

Continuing the synergistic and collaborative beginnings of VFORCE, Task Force 2010 (TF2010) recognized the socio-political reality that, despite the soundness of a rights-based approach of different voters' education campaigns, the impact, contrary to expectations, is not always even. Despite the right of suffrage being

[28]Tolosa, "Framing the Challenges of Political Empowerment and Engagement: Ideational Interventions for Democratization since 2005."

a universal guarantee, the previously mentioned seven (7) vulnerable sectors have been among those who are not able to exercise this right due to different issues and factors. Such has always been the case in the Filipino people's electoral history and experience, as Bro. Ernest Andal, S.J., observes: "elections are conducted not so much as to genuinely encourage people's full participation in order to hear their voice but simply to get the elite elected into power."[29] He continues to expound that "as long as there are enough people casting their votes to provide some semblance of legitimacy to the electoral exercise, full participation of all the vulnerable sectors [was] never thoroughly facilitated by government institutions." This is not only inimical to Philippine democracy but is also a clear manifestation of the incapacity and failure of the government to attend to the different needs of the said sectors. The same statement demonstrates how Christian precepts and values imbibed by SLB are enmeshed with its support and furtherance of available "secular" universal principles and entitlements, which are designed to protect and uphold the well-being of stakeholders concerned, in this case the vulnerable sectors and the general Filipino electorate as a whole. It also demonstrates the unceasing efforts of SLB to fortify and strengthen democratic institutions by universalizing the accessibility of such to the Filipino people, and by providing the venues for actualization and demanding the existence of mechanisms that will allow for said institutions' accessibility and use where there is none.

SLB would eventually collaborate with like-minded institutions, electoral watchdogs and governmental agencies to work towards the enfranchisement of the said sectors and in reforming existing electoral laws through legislation and administrative reforms; in effect, "reminding the State that there are segments in society that [need] to be truly valued and given equal treatment according to their human dignity." This consortium of 19 electoral stakeholders and watchdogs, with SLB serving as its official secretariat, was responsible for the attainment of a wide range of goals in several key result areas.

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[29]Ernald Andal, *Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan: An Example of Electoral Engagement of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines* (speech) (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2011).

In collaboration with the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Commission on Elections (COMELEC), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), and Department of Social Welfare and Development, Task Force 2010 was successful in 1) identifying the seven vulnerable sectors, as there was previously not a single database for this, 2) conducting regional sectoral consultations, 3) conducting a registration campaign for the identified vulnerable sectors, 4) designing election-related information materials and paraphernalia, 5) conducting Voters Education and Training of Trainers runs, and 6) institutionalizing key electoral reform agendas through legislation.

SLB, being the official secretariat of Task Force 2010, has taken the lead in closely collaborating with the Commission on Human Rights and the COMELEC in identifying the seven vulnerable sectors. A series of regional sectoral consultations (conducted in Baguio City, Davao City, Naga City, Samar, Zamboanga City, and Pampanga) were made, identifying the different factors impeding the full electoral participation of the relevant stakeholders and local duty-bearers in different regions. Local governmental duty-bearers and stakeholders gathered and consulted with local NGOs and CSOs to discuss the different factors capacitating and impeding their full electoral participation. These consultations documented sector, geographic, and culturally-specific issues of the different vulnerable groups, while also keenly mindful of the different over-arching and cross-cutting issues among the latter. SLB also deployed its scholastic and lay-members to gather and collate base-line data regarding the seven vulnerable sectors. Once collated, the outputs from said consultations and the gathered baseline data were then utilized by different Inter-Agency and NGO Technical Working Groups (TWGs) organized by the COMELEC in identifying, addressing by way of legislation, and implementing among respective and necessary duty-bearers reform agendas supplied by the sectors on the ground through the interventions of Task Force 2010. The tangible results of these interventions are the legislation of the following COMELEC Resolutions: No. 9485 (Polling Accessibility for PWDs), No. 9371 (Detainee Registration and Voting), and No. 9427 (Indigenous People Registration). It is also worth noting that the

outputs of the same consultations have been utilized by the DFA and the COMELEC in institutionalizing reforms for the enfranchisement of Overseas Absentee Voters, resulting in improvements in the accommodation and services accorded to OAVs by the DFA and COMELEC in the processes of registration and voting through the legislation of COMELEC Resolution No. 9269. As a direct impact of the recommendations of SLB and TF2010, 52,869 OAVs were registered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia alone.[30] Clearly, the nature of these undertakings has been non-partisan, and yet is considerably beyond the all too constraining conventional definition and notion of separation of Church and State. It is even beyond what Twin Toleration posits, as it was not only SLB's intention to further its beliefs in the public sphere within the limits imposed by law, for the involvement of SLB in the public sphere—which the doctrine of separation of Church and State so constrainedly defines—simultaneously strengthens the democratic institutional foundations under which such a doctrine is created. While proactive engagement and cooperation with various governmental agencies may be among the means by which SLB seeks to support and strengthen vital democratic institutions, it continues to do so critically.

Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan also saw the felt need to assist COMELEC in informing the general Filipino public regarding the AES or Automated Election System. With limited time and PCOS machines, SLB organized regional voter's education runs in partnership with local church and TF2010 networks, gathering the vulnerable sectors and the general electorate in order to maximize the availability of a single PCOS machine to a wider audience. In fact, SLB was able to gather members of the different vulnerable sectors and other electoral stakeholders in 31 places[31] all over the country as it rolled-

[30]Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan, *Ensuring the Right of Suffrage to Electoral Participation: Giving Access to Vulnerable Sectors in 2010*, Final Report (Quezon City: Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan, 2010).

[31]These places are as follows: Naga City, Pampanga, Tagum City Jail, Davao City Jail, Quezon City Jail, Mangyan Settlements in Occidental and Oriental Mindoro, Bukidnon, San Juan City Jail, Zamboanga City, Tunga (Leyte),

out and implemented its voter's education runs. In fact, all 16 regions of the country were covered and around 14,829 individuals were informed.[32] Recognizing that SLB cannot do this undertaking alone, Training of Trainers Runs (TOTs) were conducted in 11 out of the 16 regions of the country, training around 2,642 voter educators who in turn produced a multplier effect that was helpful for the campaign.[33] SLB has also effectively mounted a voter's registration campaign in its aim to intensify and broaden the participation of vulnerable sectors in the electoral process. In partnership with local community organizations such as Tunga Responsible Youth Organization (TRYO), 149 elderly and persons with disabilities in far-flung areas of Tunga, Leyte were registered.[34] It is estimated that SLB, in partnership with local organizations, was able to register 3,459 voters nationwide, and separately, around 1,740 individuals were able to register in their respective locations as they were assisted by SLB to set-up satellite registration centers in close coordination with each location's local COMELEC. Furthermore, SLB directly lodged complaints against errant COMELEC officials who refused to register members of the Agta Tribe who were being assisted by the Claretian Missionaries. The errant public officials' attentions were called and they were reprimanded for their conduct.

Its information dissemination campaign was calibrated to cater to the needs of ordinary and functionally illiterate individuals. Most materials were translated from the English language into local languages and dialects and were distributed for free. SLB and TF2010 also partnered with different radio stations, namely DZXL 558 (AM),

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Manila, Quezon City, Culion (Palawan), Nabua (Camarines Sur), Tabaco (Albay), Sorsogon City, Iloilo, Bacolod, General Santos, Cotabato, Batangas City, Taytay Rizal, Marikina City, De Lasalle University, Tagum (Ilocos Sur), Cagayan de Oro, etc.

[32]See note 31.

[33]See note 31.

[34]See note 31.

IFM 93.9 (FM), DZRH (AM), YES FM (FM), and Easy Rock (FM) to fully exhaust the broadcast media in covering as many voters as possible, asking them to vote responsibly in and proactively engage the 2010 elections. A total of 840 minutes of airtime was given by the said stations to SLB and TF2010. 62,500 (registration and how-to-vote using the PCOS machine) posters and 1,800 CDs (radio ads) were distributed. Around 86,000 voters education manuals, detailing the rights-based approach to voting and the proper use of the PCOS machine, were distributed to different partners and stakeholders all over the country.[35]

In the same vein, SLB has also re-established its Gabay Halalan Call and Text Center Facility in partnership with the same telecom providers, this time incorporating additional information regarding the AES and PCOS machine.

## TASK FORCE 2013

Task Force 2013 is a revival and continuation of the beginnings of Task Force 2010. It still aims to continue enfranchising the aforementioned vulnerable sectors. It retained most of its previous members and welcomed the collaborative efforts of other organizations, and continues to encourage citizen engagement by providing venues for collaboration and volunteerism. It also encourages the general Filipino electorate to consider actions and electoral engagements that will not only consider the outcome of the upcoming 2013 elections but that of the 2016 Presidential elections as well. It continues its voters education campaign, having crafted its latest Voters Education Manual entitled "Pinoy Big Voter" (PBV), which is also being used by the PPCRV. As of late, SLB has already conducted numerous Training of Trainers runs and Voters Education campaigns. SLB is also currently in discussion and coordination with other electoral stakeholders regarding the accuracy and transparency of the PCOS machines that have been and will be used (this coming election).

[35]See note 31.

It is also poised to set-up the Gabay Halalan Call and Text Center in mid-April. SLB continuously seeks to exhaust creative venues in order to entice the youth and members of the vulnerable sectors. SLB also actively utilizes its weekly Sunday CGE radio program at Radio Veritas 846 to mount its massive information dissemination campaign regarding the upcoming elections, as well as its Engaged Citizenship Campaign. SLB continues to proactively collaborate and work with the COMELEC and other governmental agencies.

## CONCLUSION

At the onset, the doctrine of separation of Church and State, while meant to assign each entity its respective space, has become a clear basis in guaranteeing that one entity will not meddle with the other. But as it is inevitable that these two entities will interact, either directly or indirectly, with each other, the doctrine must be re-examined, but not in the sense that it shall be abrogated or amended to accommodate and clarify grey areas, or iron out points of misunderstanding and vague interpretations, but whether or not the debate should encircle, highlight and dwell on the different points where contention will naturally occur between the two. It is also particular to note that SLB was able to contribute to democratization and nation-building by exploring grey areas that are venues for collaboration between the Church and the State. Given that these two entities vastly differ in nature, it is not unexpected that one might not behave according to the expectations of the other, as both have varied competencies. It is a given, and to me a necessary, pre-requisite of a democracy, for it enables dialogue, discussions, and clashes of opinion which transforms lumps of coal into gold, distilling points of dissent and contention into carefully negotiated common agreement and understanding. It enables informed actions and choices especially since democracy was not designed for purposes of efficiency but inclusion and majority rule. It lessens group-think but not to the extent where it undermines the value of collectivity and common consciousness, for it is, after all, these social attributes that allow for socially acceptable structures to exist. Moreover, given that each shares a common set of constituents, there will always be,

at a certain point, an implicit competition of interest between these two entities; such is normal. Each is a form of check for the other; each is a counter-balance for the other. Even so, given that each is a recognized source of authority for the same set of constituents, these two entities are co-equal in their worth in terms of opinion, stands, and assertion of its acknowledged authority, as they are confined within their own spheres of influence. Each has universalizing effects upon a set of people, and each has a divisive or isolative capacity, and this is where each could remind the other of its flaws or ineptitude. By doing this and accepting the checks, if not the corrective criticism, of the other, they validate each other as co-equal entities acknowledged and recognized in their own spheres of influence. But given that each entity (at least in the experience of this country) is a conscientious actor, it is therefore a validation of each one's respective authority that even with their competing interests, articulated in the forms of laws, rules, tenets, principles, or any structure which patterns the social decorum or behavior of people who might not necessarily subscribe to the authority of the other, each one is prudent enough to set limitations to the exercise and actualization of precepts and principles that mutually encourage subservience of its common constituents to each other.[36] Twin Tolerations explains just that. Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB), being a Church-affiliated organization, has been a specific example of this dynamic relationship. SLB was capacitated to advance or further its religious beliefs by the enabling conditions set forth by the State which are necessary for a democracy. While operating well within its sphere of influence and competence, SLB negotiates its space in the political community by furthering its deeply held principles and beliefs that are complementary with the enshrinement of the rule of law and fortification of democratic institutions. It does not wish to

[36]Examples of these are the Church's social teachings, specifically: "Members (of the Church) are encouraged to take full responsibility as citizens of a given nation"; "An authority is needed to put order in the political community"; "Political authority must be exercised within the limits of the moral order"; etc. Along with this, the bill of rights as enumerated in the 1987 Constitution specifies legal guarantees that assure freedoms to exercise and profess religious beliefs and inclinations.

supplant nor replace the omnifarious nature of the State; it merely seeks to remind and fill-in the gaps left unaddressed by the State in matters where the well-being of the marginalized is neglected and overlooked. In essence, the consequent interventions and engagements that SLB prods upon itself to address such issues and problems are but approximations of the latter's preferential option for the poor and the marginalized, and an extension of its deeply held religious values and beliefs. There could be variations as to how SLB wishes to accomplish these, one of which is its proactive and engaging manner in institutionalizing electoral reforms which target the marginalized and the poor. This in essence is a welcome collaborative effort which not only validates and buttresses the acceptability of the democratic regime SLB wishes to support, but also seeks to strengthen and enshrine it further. The point of collaboration between each entity is, in effect, a form of mutual validation and acceptability for each other which translates to voluntary subservience and obedience among its common constituents. Lastly, Twin Tolerations and the separation of Church and State do not make an exclusive arrangement between the Philippine government and the Catholic religion; these apply to all religions, regardless of number in membership. All religions hosted by an authentic democracy must be accorded opportunities for interaction and elbow room for advancement and representation if Twin Toleration must really exist as a justification for the healthy confluence of the Church and the State.

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