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CATHOLIC POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP

Good or Bad for Democracy?

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My mission is to talk about the different categories of Catholic partisanship that emerged in the 2013 elections and whether these forms of partisanship are good for the party system—or for the Catholic Church in the Philippines. I will begin by telling four stories which illustrate three different forms of partisan political engagement on the part of the Church in the 2013 elections. By "Catholic Church" I mean not just the bishops, the clergy, and members of religious orders, but also lay groups and individuals who publicly carry Catholic values and a Catholic identity into their political interventions. I will then discuss how they may or may not be good for the Church and for democracy.

So here is the first story. Two months after the elections, I was a fly on the wall—or, if you like, a lowly laywoman, which is about the same thing—at the Fourth Congress of the National Clergy Discernment Group (NCDG). The NCDG is an assembly of Catholic priests with a strong orientation toward social justice. In the first workshop group I attended, the priests were asked to talk about sources of fulfillment in their ministry. Sitting beside me was a clergyman from the diocese of Bacolod.

The diocese of Bacolod was the one that hung on the façade of its cathedral a much-talked-about banner. The banner listed six senatorial

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candidates and two party list groups under the label Team Buhay, or Team Life, and seven senatorial candidates and four party list groups under the label Team Patay, or Team Death. The not very subtle suggestion was that Catholic voters should vote for Team Buhay, and not for Team Patay.

The diocese of Bacolod's binary of life and death, at least for the senatorial candidates, though not necessarily for the blacklisted party list groups, was built largely around the issue of support for, or opposition to, the Reproductive Health (RH) Law. Just for the benefit of those who have been on another planet for the last decade and a half: the RH Law contravenes Catholic reproductive ethics by, among other things, making it an obligation of the state to provide the full range of contraceptive methods short of abortion. There may have been one other life and death issue playing into the binary, which had to do with the four blacklisted party list groups. But you can ask me about that later.

In drawing up its list of "pro-life" senatoriables, the diocese of Bacolod seems to have overlooked some other life and death issues. Two of the candidates they endorsed were former adventurists of the Philippine military, who had sought to seize state power through violent means. One of these was suspected of having been behind the assassination of prominent political leaders of the aboveground left in the late 1980s. This history must have been known to Bacolod Bishop Vicente Navarra, who was a vocal defender of human rights in the late 1970s and 1980s. But perhaps he considered the candidates' opposition to the RH Law to have cleansed them of whatever previous offenses they may have committed against life outside the womb.

These two candidates won nationally, as did three others on the diocese's slate. Five out of six is not bad at all. It should be noted though that all five winners were already among the winning senatorial picks identified by the Social Weather Station survey as early as January 2013, *before* the banner was hung on the San Sebastian Cathedral. So it probably wasn't the diocese's endorsement that got them into the winner's circle. And in the actual territory of the diocese, the province

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of Negros Occidental, as well as in Bacolod City where the banner was hung, only three of the diocese's anti-RH candidates made it in.

Among the pro-RH candidates blacklisted by the diocese, four of the seven won in Negros Occidental—the same four who won nationally—and five won in the City of Bacolod itself, where presumably the Catholic campaign against them was most intense. The fifth pro-RH winner in Bacolod City, Ana Theresia N. Hontiveros, also known as Risa, placed seventeenth in the national elections. In Negros Occidental, which roughly constitutes the diocese of Bacolod, she placed three places higher, at fourteenth. In Bacolod City, she made it into twelfth. So if Bacolod City had been the nation, Risa Hontiveros would be a senator now.

This seems to suggest that the diocese of Bacolod may want to give some thought to what it isn't doing right. The Bacolod clergyman sitting next to me at the NCDG workshop had obviously given some thought to what the Catholic electorate in Bacolod wasn't doing right. Sadly, he lamented their ignorance, their incomplete and improper formation. But then his face brightened up with beatific relish as he recounted how particularly pleased the Bacolod clergy were that "Baraq" had lost the national elections.

Fr. Robert Rivera was also in that workshop group, although not as a fly on the wall. He glanced quickly at my face to see how I was taking the remark. Fr. Robert knew, as well as I did, that by "Baraq" our Bacolod clergyman didn't mean United States President Barack Obama, although he might also have been pleased if Obama had lost the 2012 elections in the United States. He meant Hontiveros, whose late husband's surname was Baraquel. I suspect that the monicker "Baraq" had a double significance: first, as a way of associating Hontiveros with President Obama, who is sometimes depicted by Catholic conservatives as a leader of an international conspiracy against life, and secondly, as a reminder that married women have no business using their premarital surnames, even when their husbands are already dead.

It seemed ironic to me that this priest should single out Hontiveros' loss as a particular source of satisfaction, because his presence at this

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Congress suggested he was also a priest committed to social justice. And more than any of the anti-RH candidates endorsed by the diocese of Bacolod, Hontiveros has been an ally of the Church on social justice issues: agrarian reform, health care for the poor, opposition to large-scale mining, protests against human rights violations, the fight against corruption, support for the peace process. But none of that mattered anymore because she had also supported the RH Law.

Our Bacolod clergyman and the diocese of Bacolod's Team Buhay Team Patay campaign represent one type of Catholic partisan involvement in the 2013 election: the engagement of members of the clergy, including a bishop, in political partisanship around pretty much a single advocacy.

To be fair, another Bacolod priest who supported the banners on San Sebastian Cathedral took pains to claim, about a week after the campaign's launch, that it was actually a lay people's initiative which Bishop Navarra had merely supported. This seems to be an encouraging new development in the Catholic Church in the Philippines: the clergy and the bishops invoking the will of the laity to legitimate politically unpopular moves. "'The laity did it! And if the laity did it, it must be the Holy Spirit!" Of course, they use that argument only when the laity in question agree with their positions. Still, I suppose it is a form of lay empowerment that we of the laity should be happy to observe.

Nonetheless, it is clear even from the account of the laity-invoking priest that the decision to post the banners at San Sebastian Cathedral was ultimately Bishop Navarra's, so the Team Buhay Team Patay campaign undoubtedly counts as political partisanship by a bishop and some of his clergy.[1] And the laity-invoking priest's insistence that the campaign was lay-initiated probably wasn't just because he believed in lay empowerment and the *sensus fidei*. It was also because papal teaching, as well the teaching of the Catholic Bishops' Conference

[1]Nirva'ana Ella Delacruz, "Bacolod's 'Team Patay,' lay people's initiative," CBCP News (March 01, 2013), http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=14567 (accessed February 10, 2014).

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of the Philippines (CBCP), which Bishop Navarra obviously belongs to, explicitly discourages political partisanship among the clergy and especially the hierarchy.

You wouldn't know this from the GMA News report on the Team Buhay Team Patay campaign on February 22, 2013. The news report billed it as a national "voter education campaign" of "the Filipino Catholic hierarchy" that was being launched in Bacolod as its "first battleground." That angle sells news. But as it is written by the CBCP, in the *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, the document which sets the directions of the Catholic Church in the Philippines for the third millennium: "Bishops, priests and religious must refrain from partisan politics, avoiding especially the use of the pulpit for partisan purposes, so as to avoid division among the flock."[2]

And it is also written, by the CBCP again, in its 1997 "Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics": "The members of the hierarchy simply set guidelines to help the laity vote wisely. Under normal circumstances, they do not endorse any particular candidate or party but leave the laity to vote according to their enlightened and formed consciences."[3]

Perhaps Bishop Navarra thought that the passage of the RH Law counted as an abnormal circumstance, but it is significant that most of his fellow bishops did not publicly endorse the Team Buhay Team Patay campaign. Nor for that matter did all of Bishop Navarra's clergy. At least one priest of the diocese of Bacolod is reported to have publicly contested the campaign as "un-Christian" and a possible violation of

[2]"Decrees," in Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992), Art. 28, No. 2, p. 242. Look up Canons 287 No. 2 and No. 672 so one can invoke the universal Church.

[3]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics" (Sept. 16, 1997), http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/1990s/1997-philippine_politics.html (accessed February 10, 2014).

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canon law, and he is reported to have said that he was not the only priest of the diocese with this position.[4]

A second form of Catholic partisanship visible in the 2013 elections was that of lay movements unaffiliated with particular parties campaigning for individual candidates on the basis of specific Catholic advocacies. The White Vote Movement, an alliance of lay Catholic organizations with impressive Catholic credentials, was launched in April 2013 under the leadership of an organization of the laity mandated by the bishops, the Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas (LAIKO). The movement endorsed a full senatorial slate of twelve candidates from different parties. On its website, the movement declared itself to be supporting a range of Catholic advocacies for the elections beyond the RH Law: "Vote for the poor. Vote for the abused. Vote for family. Vote for life." But judging from its choice of candidates, its central issue was still pretty much whether candidates had opposed the RH Law. So one might consider the White Vote Movement as still largely a single-advocacy campaign, like the Team Buhay Team Patay campaign.

The difference between this and the first form of partisanship, however, is that it is officially encouraged by the Catholic Church. In Catholic teaching, partisan politics is seen primarily as the function of the laity. Since at least the 2nd quarter of the 20th century, the Catholic bishops of the Philippines have urged lay Catholics to get involved in partisan politics, whether as supporters of candidates or as candidates themselves, in order to protect the Church's institutional interests, or to advance its ethical perspectives, or both. The CBCP's 1997 "Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics" declared that "[d]irect participation in the political order is the special responsibility of the laity in the Church … it is their specific task to renew the temporal order according to Gospel principles and values."[5] More recently,

[4]Carla Gomez, "Bacolod Rector: 'Team Patay' list 'unChristian'," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (March 16, 2013), http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/374783/bacolod-rector-team-patay-list-unchristian#ixzz2svcOIwhj (accessed February 10, 2014).

[5]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics."

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in 2009, the CBCP issued a statement calling for the lay faithful to engage in "principled partisan politics."[6] They reiterated that call in two pastoral statements on the 2010 elections.[7]

But although the CBCP officially encourages political partisanship among the laity in the service of Gospel values, it does *not* officially encourage the White Movement's insistence, confidently emblazoned on the "About us" page on its website, that "Catholic Faith calls for unity with the White Vote Movement."[8] The CBCP's 1997 exhortation, while declaring that Catholic participation in politics must work toward laws and policies consistent with the Gospel, also recognized that there might be a plurality of options consistent with the Gospel:

> Justice, peace and integral development can be pursued through many political ways. Hence there can be no one political party nor one political program that can exclusively claim the name Catholic. That is why there is normally no such thing as "the Catholic vote." Nor can particular Catholic groups present their candidates as the Church's candidates.[9]

It is also important to note that the documents which mention "principled partisan politics" nowhere mention opposition to contraception as the primary Catholic principle for such politics. Instead, the 1997 exhortation singled out laws that would protect and empower the poor. The 2009 statement did speak of the Church's commitment to defend the sanctity of human life, but it did not talk at all about life *in utero*. Instead, it focused on *ex utero* life issues, calling

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[6]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "A CBCP Pastoral Statement on Lay Participation in Politics and Peace" (July 12, 2009), http://cbcponline.net/v2/?p=570 (accessed February 10, 2014).

[7]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Statement on the Coming National and Local Elections: Transforming Election through a Solidarity of Consciences" (May 4, 2010), http://www.cbcponline.net/documents/2000s/html/2010-Statement%20on%20the%20Coming%20National%20and%20Local%20Elections.html (accessed February 10, 2014).

[8]See http://whitevote.org/# (accessed April 07, 2013).

[9]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics."

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for an end to human rights violations, redress for victims thereof, and a search for peaceful and negotiated resolutions to insurgency.

So, a couple weeks after the White Vote Movement was launched, also in April 2013, about thirty Catholic friends and acquaintances who supported these advocacies—pro-poor legislation, human rights, and a peaceful resolution to the nation's armed conflicts—dutifully obeyed the bishops' call for "principled partisan politics" by writing a letter called "Catholics for Risa Hontiveros." I was one of those Catholics.

Our letter did not defend Hontiveros' position on contraception, because if you are a Catholic trying to persuade fellow Catholics, you cannot argue against Church doctrine. And although Church doctrine on the "intrinsic evil" of contraception has not been awarded the status of infallibility, it is still Church doctrine—at least until someday a pope changes it, like maybe this pope. But we tried to make the point that Catholics could vote for Hontiveros in good conscience because her positions on other issues important to the Church were consistent with other Church teaching—especially Catholic social teaching. We talked about her advocacies for peace, agrarian reform, accessible health care, and other legislation addressing the needs of the poor. We posted the letter on our Facebook pages and emailed it to our contacts and invited them to sign on and forward the letter to their friends. Because we deliberately did not centralize the collection of signatures, we don't know how many did sign on. I doubt that it "trended" on Facebook. But the objective was not to gain numbers. It was to make a dent in the discourse, and to make an implicit statement that there could be no single Catholic position on Hontiveros, because the value for life involves more than just opposition to contraception.

A third form of partisan political involvement on the part of the Church is the establishment of political parties inspired by Catholic teaching. The party list system has created an excellent space for the emergence of such parties, which need only two percent of the national vote to gain a seat in Congress. Two such parties are Ang Prolife and Buhay. They do not declare themselves to be officially Catholic, because the party list rules state that religious organizations cannot be party list groups. But their Catholic linkages are fairly obvious. Buhay, one of the

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two party list groups on the diocese of Bacolod's Team Buhay, has as a reliable mass base the Catholic Pentecostal movement El Shaddai. Ang Prolife was initiated by Pro-life Philippines, a movement for the defense of life, especially of the unborn. Pro-life is not officially Catholic but is dominated by Catholics and by a recognizably Catholic agenda focused on what liberal Catholics call "the pelvic issues": issues of sexual and reproductive ethics. Both parties declare the defense of life and the family to be their primary commitments, although Buhay seems to carry a wider range of issues, including environmental protection and welfare. Ang Prolife, a very new party, seems to be much more focused and militant on the pelvic issues than Buhay. Buhay was the top-grossing party list group in the 2013 elections, though probably less because of its platform and principles than because El Shaddai commands hundreds of thousands of votes.

But a far more interesting party is Ang Kapatiran Party (AKP), a national party, not a party list group, which has been fielding candidates since the 2007 elections for various positions ranging from president to municipal councillor. Many of its principles derive from Catholic social teaching. As Ka Nandy informed us yesterday, its theme song is a Catholic Mass hymn, *Pananagutan*. But AKP is in principle open to people of all faiths, at least, as long as they believe in God. It calls itself "the alliance for the common good" and declares itself to be founded on "universally accepted principles and tenets of social justice." So there is a clear attempt at universalizing its language. AKP also embraces what it calls a "consistent ethic of life"—one that embraces a much broader range of life issues than either Buhay or Ang Prolife.

AKP is an odd hybrid of militantly conservative Catholicism and militantly progressive positions on social justice—sometimes within the same person. Its 2010 presidential candidate and 2013 senatorial candidate, John Carlos de los Reyes, is an entrepreneur (of my favorite toy, Lego bricks) who got his early education from the Jesuits and the Christian Brothers, but is proud of having gone to "one of the most conservative Catholic universities in the world," the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. He taught at the Opus Dei's Center for Research and Communication under the guidance of an Opus Dei

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priest, Fr. Joseph de Torre, but was also a disciple of the late great Fr. Joe Dizon, a hero of the Catholic left in the Philippines. AKP's secretary-general and 2013 senatorial candidate, Rizalito David, worked for three years for the Opus Dei senator Francisco Tatad, but describes himself as a Christian socialist and espouses left-wing causes. He can be heard on Saturday mornings on Veritas 846, the Catholic radio station of Metro Manila, skillfully wielding the politics of indignation on such issues as agrarian reform and pork barrel. I think I may even have heard him last month slyly hinting at the possibility of an impending extraconstitutional transfer of power, maybe even this month, from the current administration, a la EDSA I or II. And then there are the Imbongs: Atty. Jo Aurea Imbong, who teaches at the Opus Dei's University of Asia and the Pacific and at times seems to be advocating a return to medieval Christendom, which might not be that good for democratic pluralism, and her son James, who filed the petition in the Supreme Court to declare the RH Law unconstitutional. I admire how AKP manages to hold together these very different strains. But in that sense the AKP is just like the Roman Catholic Church, except without the soft moderate center. Perhaps the absence of that moderate center makes it easier for left and right to affirm and reinforce each other's absolute moral convictions. That can make it difficult to enter into compromises which democracy requires with people of differing convictions. It will be interesting to watch how AKP will evolve, and whether it will hold together and become a successful party that knows how to play effectively with other political forces.

So we have three types of Catholic partisan involvement visible in the 2013 elections: partisan endorsement by bishops and clergy of specific candidates, partisan campaigns by lay people for specific candidates on the basis of Catholic values, and parties founded on Catholic principles. Are these good or bad for democracy, or for the Church herself?

The argument is often raised that partisan political engagement on the basis of religious convictions violates the constitutional separation of Church and state. In fact it doesn't. The separation of Church and state prohibits religious establishment, which is defined as the

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institutionalized favoring of one particular religion by the state at the expense of others. It does not prohibit the participation of religious adherents in campaigns for and against candidates, even when those religious adherents are priests or bishops. Religious adherents, and even priests and bishops, are, after all, citizens too. And there may be a greater case for saying that to disallow their use of religious values as a standard for choosing and campaigning for candidates is an unconstitutional violation of religious freedom.

A more cogent argument against Church political partisanship is that raised by José Casanova in his seminal work *Public Religions in the Modern World*.[10] Casanova holds that the political engagement of religion is not necessarily deleterious to democracy or to the legitimate autonomy of the political realm. He identifies three levels on which public religions may attempt to locate themselves. The first is the state. The second is political society, the realm of political parties, the electoral system, and the legislature. The third is the relatively undifferentiated realm of civil society. It is his contention that public religions are most compatible with modern differentiated pluralistic societies—and by implication with democracies—when they operate at the level of civil society.

This makes sense because the state and political society in a world of increasing religious plurality must operate as best they can to formulate policies and legislation that take into consideration the diversity of religious and secular beliefs in the societies in which they operate. Public religions located at the level of the state and political society may endanger this function: as for instance in the case of a number of countries with Islamist governments in the Middle East, or in the case of Turkey, where there has been much secular opposition to the ruling Justice and Development Party because of what is perceived as its agenda to desecularize and re-Islamize Turkish society.

Casanova also notes that since Vatican II, the Catholic Church worldwide has pulled back from both the state and political society in a

[10]José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

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self-limiting gesture, and has relocated itself, more or less firmly, in civil society. This is because, by accepting the principle of religious freedom for all faiths, as the Church did in *Dignitatis Humanae,* the Catholic Church has also accepted that no religion, not even Catholicism with its sacred monopoly on the truth, has the right to use the state to coerce others "to act in a manner contrary to [their] own beliefs."

But wait—isn't the CBCP's call for the faithful to engage in "principled partisan politics" a call to engage political society? And isn't that a channel by means of which Catholics may be able to coerce non-Catholics into following principles of Catholic morality to which they don't necessarily subscribe—for instance, the Catholic proscription of contraception?

It might be argued that if a critical mass of conservative Catholic candidates wins, they may begin systematically to introduce policy and legislation that favor Catholicism over others, or impose Catholic beliefs on others, thus curtailing the religious or irreligious freedom of those who do not subscribe to Catholicism. In my view, this is secularist bogey-making. If past history is any indicator, this is unlikely to happen in the Philippines any time soon. But if it should, then the liberal democratic system of checks and balances can kick in and allow the constitutionality of such legislation to be contested in the Supreme Court.

There is, however, a real danger to the Church herself when it is the hierarchy and the clergy who back specific candidates. If those candidates win and prove to be dishonest, corrupt, unjust, anti-poor, or repressive, the institution loses credibility. This is especially true of single-issue campaigns. With apologies to AKP, no candidate or party can perfectly represent all of the Church's moral teachings. There are bound to be a few to which they do not measure up. This is, I think, amply illustrated by the inclusion of known military putschists and a suspected human rights violator in the diocese of Bacolod's Team Buhay.

There is also the problem that candidates may be rejected by the institutional Church who on balance are supportive of a much wider range of Catholic issues than those whom she endorses. For instance, on the diocese of Bacolod's blacklist were Hontiveros and

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Teodoro Casiño, Jr., both of whom are stronger advocates of legislation consistent with the Church's "love of preference for the poor" than any of the diocese's supposedly prolife candidates. So by vigorously rejecting these two candidates, the diocese of Bacolod also rejected and possibly alienated two potential allies on issues that the Church has also identified as priorities.

Those are the strategic risks. A second category of risk to the institutional Church, however, is a much graver one because it is a moral risk. By cultivating relationships with political candidates or parties, the institutional Church compromises her own moral autonomy, and hence her capacity to oppose them if her own values are being violated.

What about lay engagement in campaigns for specific candidates or parties? Since lay Catholic groups do not speak with the same authority in the Church as the hierarchy, the danger to the institutional Church is much less. Also, given the diversity of views within the Church herself, it is almost impossible for any one lay partisan effort to maintain a monopoly over the discourse. For instance, the White Vote Movement has tried to portray itself as *the* Catholic vote. This is supremely irritating to Catholics who do not share the White Vote Movement's positions. And because there are, as the CBCP itself points out, many ways in which Catholic teaching can be applied to policy, such partisanship also generates counterdiscourse and countermobilization—for instance, Catholics for Risa Hontiveros, and Catholics for Reproductive Health. This forces the Church to confront her own internal diversity and plurality. Depending on whether you are a conservative Catholic or a pluralist one, that can be good or bad. I happen to think it is good because it forces the Church into greater ethical clarification, and also into greater internal democratization.

What about parties based on Catholic values? Don't they narrow the space for non-Catholics? Again, because of the plurality of Catholicism, this will not happen without contestation from within the Church herself. Also, rather than narrow the space for non-Catholics, it may actually broaden the Church's own perspectives. One of the things that can happen when Catholics have to compete in a democratic political arena is that they are forced to universalize their language and

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their arguments so that they can win over people who do not share their religious convictions. This is already happening to AKP. This translation of religious values into more universal values is one of the important prerequisites that Casanova, as well as Jürgen Habermas, stipulate as a requirement for the constructive participation of religions in the public sphere. In other words, participation in the public sphere requires religious people to learn ethical multilingualism. They have to be able to translate their religious ethics into language that people of other faiths, or no faith, will understand.

But the translation of religious values into values that can be shared with others can also have a transformative effect on those who are doing the translating by forcing them to enter the perspectives and the logic of those who do not belong to their own religion. This is one of the potentially democratizing consequences of partisan political engagement on the part of the laity. And since politics is the art of compromise, it also means they may have to learn how to make room for the needs and convictions of others without necessarily sacrificing their own core beliefs.

Finally, let's look at the state of Philippine political society. Casanova's prescription for religious self-limitation to civil society works best for societies that already have a well-functioning state and political society. But in the Philippines, we have a very weak state, and we don't have a system of parties based on ideas or principles, or for channeling interests other than those of the political class. And judging from the quality of the people who are elected into our government and our legislature, we can safely assume that the majority of Filipino voters do not make their electoral decisions based on issues.

So from that perspective, voting for someone on the basis of advocacies grounded in religious conviction is actually a step up from voting for someone because of patronage, or bribery, or their box office popularity, or their boxing credentials, or sheer name recognition. And a party based on Catholic principles is a step up from parties formed around personalities, or representing the interests only of the professional politicians and their allies. In that sense, AKP makes a significant contribution to our political maturation as a nation by

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demonstrating the possibility of a party based on values and principles. That doesn't necessarily mean I'll vote for them in every election, but I recognize the effort as a challenge to the status quo.

That is one way in which principled partisan engagement on the part of the laity of the Catholic Church can help to strengthen the political system. But besides that, the Church can make two other important contributions. One is to bring into the public sphere the commitments of Catholic social and political teaching: to human dignity, to respect for human life in all its forms, to defense of the right to association, to a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to participation, to solidarity with humanity, to stewardship, to equality, to the common good, to freedom of conscience. Most of these principles are included in AKP's commitments, and they are not just Catholic, they are universal—which is the true meaning anyway of the word "Catholic." The second contribution that the Church can make is to bring into the political realm the Church's particular charism: the compassion of Christ.

But I still agree with Casanova that the primary place for the Catholic Church in general—and the Catholic Church in the Philippines in particular—is not in political partisanship, however principled. Rather, it is in the strengthening of civil society—especially in collaboration with those invisibilized and marginalized by domestic and global political and economic processes.

This was brought home to me last July by a young Jesuit scholastic who was a discussant at a panel sponsored by the Philippine Association for the Sociology of Religion. He is a member of Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB), which means "Church Serving the People." SLB is an organization of mostly young seminarians and laity engaged in nonpartisan social justice advocacy.

We were asked to talk about whether there had been a widespread religious vote in the 2013 elections. When his turn came, this young Jesuit announced, with the passionate, rabble-rousing conviction that young Jesuits are known for, that all our talk about the existence or non-existence of a Catholic vote, or whom and whom not to vote for, or whether there was a genuine vote at all, was a distraction from the

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real mission in which the Church should be engaged: solidarity on the ground with the poor and marginalized. He spoke of how SLB has been accompanying the farmers and indigenous peoples who are in danger of displacement by APECO, a corporation which seeks to convert the rich farmlands and waters of Casiguran into a freeport zone to serve the needs of capital.

SLB is not the only Catholic organization that accompanies the poor and the marginalized in their local struggles. All across the country are basic ecclesial communities, diocesan social action centers, and other Catholic organizations that help to organize or support community struggles against big mining or logging firms. In some cases, these efforts are backed by the local bishops: to name just a couple, the diocese of Marbel supports community resistance to the Tampakan Copper-Gold project in South Cotabato, and the diocese of Borongan supports community resistance to mining on Manicani and Homonhon islands.

This is the work of building civil society, and it is important and necessary work. Without a strong civil society, political society cannot function. And without such solidarity with the poor, the Church's engagement in principled partisan politics is empty. Only through such solidarity can the Church nurture the compassion of Christ that is her special charism, the compassion that should be her primary contribution to the political arena, the compassion grounded in solidarity with suffering, which is the most effective prophylactic and antidote to the potential tyranny of a Catholic politics based on absolute, uncompromising, exclusionary morality.

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