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WAR ON DRUGS

A Prophetic Mission of Resisting Evil

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Dissenting Lamentation

"I do not agree with such killing. There are so many 'ninja' cops around in civilian clothes at the administrative office who kill cops for their involvement in shabu," a provincial administrator retorted in disgust. A taxi driver remarked in desperation, "It really is too much. People are being killed everyday. Just today I have seen 4–5 bodies lying on the streets. These are youngsters."[1] A middle class white collar professional lamented, "I voted for him but now I realized it was a mistake." Some theologians are asking, "Why is there no moral outcry in the Philippines over the extrajudicial killings (EJK)?" One former religious superior used a striking phrase regarding the EJK: "in this unhappy time."

Deplorable Local Scenario

These are laments coming from the grassroots over the killings in nationwide police buy-bust operations such as Oplan Tokhang,

[1]"Talagang sobra na ito. Araw-araw may taong pinapatay. Ngayong araw lang, may nakita akong 4–5 bangkay sa kalye. Mga bata pa sila" (from a conversation with a cab driver [Quezon City: September 28, 2016]).

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Oplan Galugad, etc. Many of the victims are allegedly killed in a shootout between the police and drug suspects when the latter are caught in the act of engaging in illegal activities, but most people believe or suspect that they are victims of EJK perpetrated by the police. The victims also include individuals assassinated by motorcycle-riding gunmen. Those abducted and killed by unidentified assailants are usually discovered away from the crime scene. Illegal drugs are often recovered from the victims, and their bodies bear labels tagging them as a "drug pusher," "drug user," or "drug addict." Their faces and bodies bear not only gunshot and stab wounds but also marks of torture; their arms or legs, or both, are also usually bound, and their bodies wrapped in tape.[2]

Most of the victims are from low-income families, like Francisco who was brutally gunned down on August 23, 2016 by unidentified assailants riding on a motorcycle in Barangay Rosario, Pasig City. According to his sister Marites, age 40 and who surrendered to the police, Francisco earned only a despicable fraction of the drug money, just enough to buy rice for his wife and three children—including a 4-month old baby.[3] Marites wished that her brother were arrested and shamed—like those top officials in the police, in politics, and in the judiciary who were named in public by President Duterte—instead of being assassinated.

Gun violence is relentless. In a video report produced by the BBC, Jonathan Head discloses that women are part of the hit team because they can get close to their targets without arousing suspicion as a man would. The BBC program, aired on September 27, 2016, shows a woman whose conscience got the better of her and who wanted out.

[2]There is more wisdom precisely in *not* calling it a "war." See Mags Z. Maglana, "Why we should not call it a drug war?" *Sunstar Philippines* (September 09, 2017), available at http://www.sunstar.com.ph/davao/opinion/2017/09/09/maglana-why-we-should-not-call-it-drug-war-563108.

[3]"Basta ang importante sa kanya, makabili siya ng bigas," Marites said.

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But her husband warned her that she would be killed.[4] Maria (not her real name) confesses to carrying out contract killings allegedly as part of Mr. Duterte's brutal campaign against illegal drugs. She claims to have killed five people, shooting them all in the head and bringing her victims to six after the first job she did two years ago. Maria's husband is also a contract killer for the police; together, they earn up to PhP 20,000 per hit, which is shared between three or four others whose roles Head does not describe in the report.

As of March 2017, nationwide killing had reached about 7,000 according to Human Rights Watch.[5] The 2012 National Household Survey estimated that there are 1.3 million drug users nationwide while 8,629 out of 42,065 (20%) of *barangays* are drug infested according to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.[6] "The *Philippine Daily Inquirer's* 'Kill List' of victims of extrajudicial killings in the anti-drug campaign shows the overwhelming majority are from poor neighborhoods and of modest means, suggesting the war on drugs is actually a war against the poor."[7] Little is disclosed to the public regarding how the war on drugs tackles the drug cartels—such as the Filipino-Chinese drug syndicates who engage in bulk smuggling and manufacturing with their

[4]"Philippines Drugs War: The Woman Who Kills Dealers for a Living," *BBC News* (August 26, 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37172002 (accessed Sept. 27, 2016), featuring the video "Inside Manila's Drug War: Female Assassin's Story." See also *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Sept. 2, 2016).

[5]"Philippines: Police Deceit in 'Drug War' Killings," Human Rights Watch blog (March 2, 2017), https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/02/philippines-police-deceit-drug-war-killings (accessed April 3, 2017).

[6]Dennis Carcamo, "PDEA: 92% of Metro Manila Barangays Drug-affected," *The Philippine Star / Philstar Global* (February 19, 2015), https://www.philstar.com/nation/2015/02/19/1425462/pdea-92-metro-manila-barangays-drug-affected (accessed Sept. 26, 2016).

[7]Mark R. Thompson, "Duterte's bloody democracy," *Nikkei Asian Review*, http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Viewpoints/Mark-R.-Thompson-Duterte-s-bloody-democracy (accessed Sept. 27, 2016).

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clandestine laboratories and warehouses, the African drug syndicates that smuggle via couriers (usually women) in and out of the country, and the Mexican Sinaloa drug cartel that supplies raw materials or finished products to Filipino-Chinese distributors.[8]

Dissenting laments appear to be growing and forming rivulets that are converging into diverse oases. A movement against EJK will soon emerge from the people whose collective memory of the *People Power Revolution* is still vivid and fresh.

International Concern and Diplomatic Furor

The international community has expressed concern over the indiscriminate killing in the Philippines. President Duterte has allegedly called "on people to kill drug dealers" for "he values public safety over human rights."[9] This is clear from his State of the Nation Address: "Double your efforts. Triple them, if need be. We will not stop until the last drug lord, the last financier, and the last pusher have surrendered or [been] put behind bars—or below the ground, if they so wish."[10] Since President Duterte assumed office on July 30, 2016, his anti-drug campaign "has cost nearly 1,900 lives in the first seven

[8]Revised PowerPoint presentation of Fr. Manoling Francisco, S.J., originally delivered at Loyola School of Theology (Quezon City: Sept. 14, 2016).

[9]Cliff Venzon, "Duterte wants ASEAN war on drugs," *Nikkei Asian Review*, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Duterte-wants-ASEAN-war-on-drugs (accessed Sept. 27, 2016). See also Minoru Satake, "Duterte's tirade dampens alliance with US on South China Sea," *Nikkei Asian Review*, http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Duterte-s-tirade-dampens-alliance-with-US-on-South-China-Sea (accessed Sept. 27, 2016) and Tomomi Kikuchi, "Duterte pitches 'Mindanao corridor' to bolster ASEAN development," *Nikkei Asian Review*, http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Duterte-pitches-new-Midanao-corridor-to-bolster-ASEAN-development (accessed Sept. 27, 2016).

[10]Rodrigo Duterte, State of the Nation Address (July 25, 2016).

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weeks alone of his presidency," lives of those on suspicion of "either using or trafficking drugs."[11]

Due to this bloody democracy, "the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations, the foreign media, and Western governments have criticized the extrajudicial killings as a violation of basic human rights." Duterte in turn "accused the United Nations of meddling with domestic affairs" and "has threatened to take the Philippines out of the U.N. if it continues to criticize the killings."[12]

Before the ASEAN Summit in Laos from September 6–8, 2016, former U.S. President Barack Obama "had earlier indicated that he would voice concern over human rights issues surrounding Duterte's campaign against people linked to illegal drugs that has resulted in over 2,400 deaths." Duterte cautioned the U.S.: "You must be respectful. Do not just throw questions and statements," and he feistily remarked that Obama "must understand the problem first before we talk about human rights." Duterte then insulted Obama by calling him a "son of a whore" in Tagalog. President Obama subsequently canceled his meeting with Duterte through the diplomatic channels, after which President Duterte swiftly expressed regrets that his comments inadvertently "came across as a personal attack on the US President." In defiance, Duterte averred at the ASEAN Summit: "We shall not be cowed, we will press on" and urged ASEAN to "act together in concert" on such threats to ensure that the region can continue with its economic achievements.[13]

There are multiple concerns in the Philippines. Foremost is the moral question, "Does the end identified as 'public safety' through the war on drugs justify the extrajudicial means?" Should it be condoned even though Duterte claimed that "the nature of a number of deaths

[11]Duterte, State of the Nation Address. See also Kikuchi, "Duterte pitches 'Mindanao corridor' to bolster ASEAN development."

[12]See Kikuchi, "Duterte pitches 'Mindanao corridor' to bolster ASEAN development."

[13]Kikuchi, "Duterte pitches 'Mindanao corridor' to bolster ASEAN development."

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[implies] internecine, or organizational killings within the drug trade"[14] and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia stated that it is a legitimate means, amounting to self-defence, toward an end labelled as a war on drugs?

The second concern is that the use of the term "war" by the Duterte administration has justified the use of force with its ensuing collateral damage that sacrifices innocent non-combatants, their livestock, and their properties. The third question: is mere supply reduction of illegal drugs effective?[15] Supply reduction is all the more suspect given that the U.S. and drug-ridden countries in Latin America like Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Uruguay are also considering demand reduction as a more viable approach to drugs.[16] Last of all, should not the war be multi-pronged, more directed towards unemployment and underemployment, malnourishment, housing backlog, insufficient public schools and health centers, corruption, human trafficking, encroachment on the country's territorial waters, and local and global terrorism?

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[14]See *Manila Bulletin* (Aug. 19, 2016).

[15]"In 2017, for example, the US is proposing to spend more on demand reduction than supply reduction for the very first time since their drug war started.… Similarly, a number of governments in historically drug-ridden countries in Latin America—including Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Uruguay—are also rethinking their approach to drugs" (JC Punongbayan, "War on drugs? Other countries focus on demand, not supply," *Rappler* [Sept. 10, 2016], https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/145699-war-on-drugs-other-countries-focus-demand-not-supply [accessed Sept. 27, 2016]).

[16]Supply reduction only increases the market price of drugs. Several empirical studies have shown that it will not make a significant dent in the quantity of drugs demanded by the market. Estimates vary, but a 2006 study co-written by Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker found that, on average, for every increase in the price of drugs (say, 10%), drug purchases tend to decrease only by half that magnitude (in this case, 5%). See Lila Ramos Shahani, "Illegal Drugs: Is Tougher Enforcement the Best Solution?" *Philstar* (May 30, 2016).

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Jesuit Dissension

As Jesuit priests, our dissension is rooted in a call from an official communiqué of the Jesuit Provincial, Fr. Antonio F. Moreno, S.J., dated August 19, 2016, entitled "A Call for a Discerned Response to the 'War' on Drugs."[17] This call arises out of a painful awareness that "the drug problem in our country is deep and complex." This menace, the provincial averred, "has broken and ruined the lives of many people." The menace is systemic due to the "weak judicial system, the inadequate witness-protection program and corrupt bureaucratic practices [which] have undermined the rule of law." The provincial insightfully concluded that, as a result, "the key perpetrators of crime are often not brought to the bar of justice." The communiqué further deplored "the loss of lives without due process." The death count is mounting with each passing day. "The drive to eliminate drugs has wittingly or unwittingly created more widows and orphans whose lives, like the victims of drugs, are forced to endure deep trauma and pain." At the same time, the communiqué insightfully forewarned that "a dangerous culture of impunity and unaccountability is seeping into our social fabric whereby an irresponsible 'end justifies the means' mentality is disturbingly tolerated."[18]

This effort at theological reflection on the "war" on drugs is thus a joint response to the clarion call of the Jesuit Provincial of the Philippines.

> I therefore ask Jesuit communities, institutions and ministries to look closely at this matter and discuss it together with our mission partners so as to consider appropriate collective actions. *Some Jesuit institutions and ministries have already been studying and reflecting on the issue, and proposing lines of action in response to extra-judicial killings. I commend them for their initiative and concern.*… I ask our government leaders too to hear not only the

[17]Tony Moreno, "A Call for a Discerned Response to the 'War' on Drugs," Office of the Provincial, Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus (August 19, 2016).

[18]Moreno, "A Call for a Discerned Response to the 'War' on Drugs."

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> cries of drug victims and their families, but to restore the rule of law and heed the longings of those who have lost loved ones.[19]

This clarion call enjoins us Jesuits to "theologize" on this thorny menace in the interstitial space of suffering and struggle for an abundance of life in our nation.

A Theological Reflection Regarding the "War" on Drugs

The theological pronouncements of the local churches in the Philippines are part of the moral outcry. This is articulated in the first section below. The subsequent section will be a theological critique of the "war on drugs" in the light of Catholic social doctrine. The last section will be a reflection in faith on the nexus between conversion and social revolution in light of the conversion of Paul and the resultant Pauline movement that subverted the Greco-Roman world.

Local Institutional Outcry

The Christian Churches, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, the United Methodist Church, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) have registered their moral outcry.

Theologizing on this state-condoned drug-war, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle was quick to point out that all forms of killings should be denounced: "Many are worried about extrajudicial killings, it's only right. But I hope we should be worried too about abortion, why are few speaking out on it, that's also killing. Unfair labor practice is also killing the dignity of the worker." He also referred to other forms of "killing" like wasting food and forcing poor people to pick it up from

[19]Moreno, "A Call for a Discerned Response to the 'War' on Drugs" (italics added). The Loyola School of Theology is one such institution that held a theological hour on September 14, 2016. Fr. Manoling Francisco, S.J., took the lead in offering a PowerPoint presentation that culminated in a time for personal reflection, sharing, and collective prayer.

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the trash and feed it to their families. "That is also killing children who have nothing to eat," he remarked, and added that each and every life should be held sacred. "I know the killings are a big issue now. Guilty or not, life should be taken care of and respected. And if one is guilty, he should be given a chance to change."[20]

In the 113th plenary session of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines held on July 9, 2016, Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas, D.D., of Lingayan-Dagupan called on the CBCP

> to stand up against what is morally wrong and uphold the Church's teachings even if it means going to the "wilderness".… [T]he right is right and the wrong is wrong.… [W]e will not withdraw from the mission of the Lord. We will stand and defend every person's life and dignity.… We will shield the weak from harm, we will protect the confused from error.[21]

On August 25, 2016, he called for prayer to heal the "wounds and divisions" afflicting the country, and explained that "our first armor is prayer. So let us pray even more," making additional reference to a "prayer for [the] healing of the nation" which asks for unity, solution to crimes and corruption, and compassion for those who died "in the present purge." He interjected, saying that the "killings continue to rise. The divisions seem to widen even more. The indifference to the violations of the Commandments of God is spreading. We must not give up."[22]

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[20]Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle's interview on Radio Veritas Asia (August 28, 2016), quoted in Micaiah Bilger, "Catholic Archbishop: 'Why Are Only a Few Speaking against Abortion? It's Also a Form of Murder,'" *LifeNews.com* (August 31, 2016), http://www.lifenews.com/2016/08/31/catholic-archbishop-why-are-only-a-few-speaking-against-abortion-its-also-a-form-of-murder/ (accessed April 3, 2017).

[21]R. Lagarde, "CBCP head: 'We will resist the moral wrong,'" *CBCP News* (July 9, 2016), http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=80398 (accessed April 3, 2017).

[22]Socrates B. Villegas, "The Church in Wilderness," Message at the Opening of the 113th CBCP Plenary Assembly (Pope Pius XII Catholic

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Earlier on, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) issued a much more comprehensive statement:

> We express our full support for the government's serious crusade against the problem of illegal drugs in our country. We admire the leadership that the President has taken in this campaign and the determination of the people under him in working to rid our society of such menace. Nevertheless, we are alarmed at the continued extrajudicial killings, which seem to go unchecked, without trial or investigation. We are alarmed at the silence of the government, groups, and majority of the people in the face of these killings. *Ubi boni tacent malum prosperat*. Evil prospers where good men are silent. Is this lack of public outcry a tacit approval of what is happening? Is it fear that prevents people from speaking out? Whatever the reason, this problem, if it remains unchecked, leads to a culture of impunity. We demand that the concerned government agencies continue apprehending those involved in drug trafficking but avoiding extrajudicial killings, and pursue and apprehend vigilantes who carry out such illegal actions.
>
> As men and women of consecrated life, we commit ourselves to the following:
>
> 1. For our communities, parishes, apostolates and educational institutions to study, reflect on and act on these unabated killings.
> 2. To care for the violated, the orphaned and the widowed through counseling, sharing and integration with Gospel values.
> 3. To stand with people of other faiths and other beliefs in the inviolability and sacredness of life. In the Year of Mercy, let our humanity and compassion reach those who are the least and the powerless.
> 4. To recognize that the drug problem is a complex and deeply emotional issue that needs to be addressed holistically, with great understanding and compassion for both victim and perpetrator for we are all dehumanized by this culture of death.
> 5. To recognize and support the need for reforms in the criminal justice system and the need for rehabilitation for drug dependents. We need to weed out the corrupt in our security

Center, Manila: July 9, 2016), http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=80371 (accessed March 30, 2016).

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forces as well as in the prosecution service as well as the judiciary. The drug menace is an intricate web of corruption and patronage that feeds on the insatiable desire of people for profit.

6. To hold Masses and prayer vigils for peace and justice in the affected communities.

7. For the bells to toll at a designated hour in solidarity with the poor and in upholding the sacredness of life.

Noteworthy too is the statement of the Manila Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church that supports the establishment and development of a just and humane society where peace, justice, and love reign. The statement further extrapolated:

> We fully reject all careless, callous or discriminatory enforcement of the law … we further support measures designed to remove the social conditions that lead to crime, and we encourage continued positive interaction between law enforcement and members of the community at large.
>
> We denounce retributive justice and uphold restorative justice that seeks to hold the offender accountable to the victim and to the disrupted community. Through God's transforming power, restorative justice seeks to repair the damage, right the wrong and bring healing to all involved, including the victim, the offender, the families and the community. The Church is transformed when it responds to the claim of discipleship by becoming an agent of healing and systemic change.[23]

The CBCP subsequently released a pastoral statement entitled "For I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies—Oracle of the Lord God (Ezekiel 18:32)" on January 30, 2017, signed by Villegas, President of the CBCP.[24] Although the Catholic Church has taken a

[23]Marvyn N. Benaning, "Another Religious Group Supports Peace Talks," *Business Mirror* (August 23, 2016), https://businessmirror.com.ph/another-religious-group-supports-peace-talks/ (accessed March 27, 2017), quoting Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan of the Manila Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church.

[24]See Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "For I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies—oracle of the Lord God (Ezekiel 18:32)," *CBCP News* (January 30, 2017), http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=91162 (accessed March 27, 2017).

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beating due to the President's relentless maligning of not a few of the bishops, the opening paragraph demonstrated the Church's resilient mission of resistance:

> We, your bishops, are deeply concerned due to many deaths and killings in the campaign against prohibited drugs. This traffic in illegal drugs needs to be stopped and overcome. But the solution does not lie in the killing of suspected drug users and pushers. We are concerned not only for those who have been killed. The situation of the families of those killed is also cause for concern. Their lives have only become worse. An additional cause of concern is the reign of terror in many places of the poor. Many are killed not because of drugs. Those who kill them are not brought to account. An even greater cause of concern is the indifference of many to this kind of wrong. It is considered as normal, and, even worse, something that (according to them) needs to be done.

The CBCP spoke of the need for change that is guided by truth and justice. The truths enunciated by the CBCP are unequivocal:

1. The life of every person comes from God. It is he who gives it, and it is he alone who can take it back. Not even the government has a right to kill life because it is only God's steward and not the owner of life.

2. The opportunity to change is never lost in every person. This is because God is merciful, as our Holy Father Pope Francis repeatedly teaches. We just finished celebrating the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and the World Apostolic Congress on Mercy. These events deepened our awareness that the Lord Jesus Christ offered his own life for sinners, to redeem them and give them a new future.

3. To destroy one's own life and the life of another is a grave sin and does evil to society. The use of drugs is a sign that a person no longer values his own life, and endangers the lives of others. We must all work together to solve the drug problem and work for the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

4. Every person has a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Society has ways and processes to catch, prove guilty and punish perpetrators of crimes. This process must be followed, especially by agents of the law.

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5. Any action that harms another (seriously) is a grave sin. To push drugs is a grave sin as is killing (except in self-defense). We cannot correct a wrong by doing another wrong. A good purpose is not a justification for using evil means. It is good to remove the drug problem, but to kill in order to achieve this is also wrong.

6. The deep root of the drug problem and criminality is the poverty of the majority, the destruction of the family and corruption in society. The step we have to take is to overcome poverty, especially through the giving of permanent work and sufficient wages to workers. Let us strengthen and carry forward the unity and love of the family members. Let us not allow any law that destroys the unity of families. We must also give priority to reforming rogue policemen and corrupt judges. The excessively slow adjudication of court cases is one big reason for the spread of criminality. Often it is the poor who suffer from this system. We also call upon elected politicians to serve the common good of the people and not their own interests.

7. To consent and to keep silent in front of evil is to be an accomplice to it. If we neglect the drug addicts and pushers we have become part of the drug problem. If we consent [to] or allow the killing of suspected drug addicts, we shall also be responsible for their deaths.

It is most heartening to note that the CBCP unequivocally affirms its resilient mission of resistance:

> We in the Church will continue to speak against evil even as we acknowledge and repent of our own shortcomings. We will do this even if it will bring persecution upon us because we are all brothers and sisters responsible for each other. We will help drug addicts so that they may be healed and start a new life. We will stand in solidarity and care for those left behind by those who have been killed and for the victims of drug addicts. Let us renew our efforts to strengthen families.
>
> Those of us who are leaders in the Church should strive to push forward or continue programs that will uplift the poor, like livelihood, education and health programs. Above all we will live up to—we all will live up to—becoming a Church of the Poor.

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> Let us not allow fear to reign and keep us silent. Let us put into practice not only our native inner strength but the strength that comes from our Christian faith. Our Lord Jesus promised us: "You will have affliction in this world, but take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).[25]

Critique in the Light of Catholic Social Doctrine

In light of the surreptitious climate of fear, the statist violence meted out in the name of a "war on drugs" has to be denounced for what it is. Catholic social doctrine denounces such a militaristic mindset in no uncertain terms. "War is a scourge" and "a war of aggression is intrinsically immoral"[26] for reasons that this "war" has failed to satisfy all four criteria: "(a) the damage … must be lasting, grave, and certain; (b) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; (c) there must be serious prospects of success; (d) the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated."[27] A case in point is related to the second criterion, that demand reduction has not been considered or implemented thus far.

In this climate of fear and impunity, the security of the most vulnerable and the centrality of the human person need to be all the more re-emphasized. Every civilian or citizen has the right to political security, a right to be promoted by the political authority or the government of the day. In no. 384, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC) alerts us that the "human person is the foundation and purpose of political life" and that the "political community originates in the nature of persons, whose conscience 'reveals to them and enjoins them to obey'" the precept that EJK is detrimental to the

[25]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "For I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies—oracle of the Lord God (Ezekiel 18:32)."

[26]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), nos. 497 and 500. Hereafter referred to as *CSDC*.

[27]These are the traditional elements of the so-called doctrine of "just war" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2309).

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common good of the political community.[28] Drug-related killings without due process of law is an inhumane state of lawlessness that has to be condemned because the Church "sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. This image finds, and must always find anew, an ever deeper and fuller unfolding of itself in the mystery of Christ, the Perfect Image of God, the One who reveals God to man and man to himself."[29]

> Those killed in the war on drugs are the poor who are not
>
> a shapeless multitude, an inert mass to be manipulated and exploited, but a group of persons, each of whom—"at [her/his] proper place and in [her/his] own way"—is able to form [her/his] own opinion on public matters and has the freedom to express [her/his] own political sentiments and to bring them to bear positively on the common good.

In addition, those "who belong to a political community, although *organically* united among themselves as a people, maintain an irrepressible *autonomy* at the level of personal existence and of the goals to be pursued." The goal to be pursued is fullness of life in God.[30]

By and large, the institutional moral outcry (see section above on "Local Institutional Outcry") is a verdict on the EJK as unjust. A political order is deemed to be just only when such state-condoned policy flows from just laws or policies that "correspond to the dignity of the human person and to what is required by right reason and therefore is derived from the eternal law."[31] Otherwise, "a law that is contrary to reason … is called an unjust law" and "it ceases to be law and becomes instead an act of violence." Aggressive pursuance of EJK that totally disregards the growing moral outcry has to be forewarned that public authority "must always be exercised within the

[28] *CSDC*, no. 384.

[29] *CSDC*, no. 105.

[30] *CSDC*, no. 385 (italics in original).

[31] *CSDC*, no. 398.

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limits of morality."[32] As such, any failure on the part of the political authority to uphold the common good forfeits "its proper purpose and so delegitimizes itself."[33] In the face of further delegitimization of political authority, the Church's social doctrine posits that citizens reserve the prerogative "in replacing them when they do not fulfill their functions satisfactorily."[34]

The prayer for the nation will continue so that the elected are given the opportunity "to share fully in the destiny of the people and to seek solutions to social problems." The elected are challenged to "put power into practice as service"[35] that restores the "respect for the rule of law," promotes "a legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea, emergency response and disaster management, protection for migrant workers, [security for all trafficked persons], peace and reconciliation efforts," and the combating of terrorism.[36]

Pathway from Personal Conversion to Social Revolution

In a political climate when the conversion of perpetrators and their truth-telling were systematically discounted, what does the episode of Paul's conversion and his missionary movement inform us about the nexus between personal conversion and the emerging social revolution? First, let us consider the personal conversion of Paul and then the social revolution generated by the Pauline missionary movement that subverted the Greco-Roman world.

Action of God's Spirit of Truth. Any conversion of the perpetrators of violence has to be attributed to God's grace. God's Spirit (John 14:26)

[32]*CSDC*, no. 394.

[33]*CSDC*, no. 398.

[34]*CSDC*, no. 395.

[35]*CSDC*, no. 410.

[36]Venzon, "Duterte wants ASEAN war on drugs."

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of Truth awakens a blunt conscience that is numbed by the relentless homi-/genocide of fellow humans portrayed as the enemies of the Temple-State.

Saul perpetrated violence by making threats (compare Acts 4:17, 29), arresting the believers of the Way (Acts 9:2; 22:4; 26:10) and condoning their executions (Acts 8:1; 26:10).[37] His mission in Damascus was mandated from the top, licensed with the authority of the chief priests[38] of the Temple State "to arrest all who call on [the Lord's] name" (Acts 9:14). As he was travelling and approaching Damascus (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:12), God countervailed Saul's zeal to execute what he thought was a divine mandate to persecute the Church.

"Paul never refers to his own experience as a 'conversion' and in his letters, there is no clear mention of a trip to Damascus and no narrative detailing what took place, as there is in Acts."[39] But his encounter with Christ alluded to in Gal. 1:13–17 and Phil. 3:4–7 was so radical that Paul experienced "a change of commitment, values and identity that was sudden and unexpected."[40] In fact, "all he was, all that he had achieved, all that of which he was justly proud and in which he could rightly boast, he now counted as 'refuse'.… Whatever happened to Paul radically reversed the scale of his values and made his vision of all things utterly new."[41] Luke, in his second account (Acts 22:3–11), offers a contrastive portrayal of God's irresistible power vis-à-vis Paul's helplessness, an experience that the OT prophets attest to, with

[37]See also Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*: *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 368.

[38]Annas and Caiaphas, according to Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 329.

[39]Marcel Uwineza, "The Conversion of St. Paul," *Thinking Faith* (January 25, 2011), http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20110125_1.htm (accessed March 20, 2017).

[40]Uwineza, "The Conversion of St. Paul."

[41]See Stanley B. Marrow, *Paul: His Letters and His Theology: An Introduction to Paul's Epistles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 35–36.

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Jeremiah's life as exemplifying "God's action upon him as enticement (Jer. 20:7)." Luke's third account (Acts 26:12–18) extrapolates the encounter as Paul's prophetic call for the Gentile mission, "to open the eyes that are blind … I will turn the darkness before them into light (Acts 26:18 & Is. 42:6–7, 16)."[42]

Like Saul, Edgar Matobato and Arthur Lascañas claimed that they were former members of the death squad in Davao who were mandated from the "top." But God who "*is present in the intimacy*" of their "*being … mind, conscience and heart*" encountered them with his Truth and Light, exposing the lies and darkness in their hearts. This inner light of God led to their conversion—an experience deemed ordinary yet profound and overwhelming.[43] In Lascañas's case, Archbishop Villegas remarked, "He asked for mercy, confessing his sins. He knew his soul was clean and he was ready to die or get killed. He didn't care. He was touched by mercy. He was not Superman but he received Super Love. He sobbed. He rose up ready to soar the skies."[44] Both Matobato and Lascañas experienced a radical reversal of their scale of values. The conversion overwhelmed them to the extent that Lascañas unequivocably avowed, "This is to follow what God wants. This is also because of my fear of God. This is also because of love for our country and because of my own conscience. Because of this, my loyalty to Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte will now end."[45] They decided to "tell it all" to close confidantes from the Church in closed-door sessions. The conversion

[42]Uwineza, "The Conversion of St. Paul."

[43]See John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), par. 53. Cf. also Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* III, 6, 11: CCL 27, 33.

[44]Paterno Esmaquel II, "Archbishop Villegas backs Matobato, Lascañas," *Rappler* (March 23, 2017), https://www.rappler.com/nation/165050-archbishop-villegas-edgar-matobato-arthur-lascanas-lent (accessed April 24, 2017), citing the meditation of Archbishop Villegas for the season of Lent 2017 entitled "Edgar and Art and God's Mercy."

[45]Bea Cupin, "SPOC3 Arthur Lascañas: 'Blind obedience' ends now," *Rappler* (February 21, 2017), http://www.rappler.com/nation/162057-arthur-lascanas-profile-davao-duterte (accessed April 24, 2017).

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was so overwhelming that they were willing to go public at great risk to their lives and the safety of their respective families.[46] Truth-telling in public hearings is a prophetic mission intended to lift the darkness that shrouds this nation and to open the eyes that are blind to the hideous murder/genocide.

Mediated Action of God's Spirit of Truth. The conversion of Paul is occasioned by the mediated action of God's Spirit of Truth through the agency of Ananias (Acts 9:1–20; 26:9–21; Gal. 1:11–24; Matt. 10:16–22; Ps. 67). God made possible the mediation in a dual and simultaneous vision in which God called Ananias and Saul. God summoned Ananias (Acts 9:10–11) to go and attend to Saul while Saul had a vision of Ananias "coming in and laying hands on him to give him back his sight" (Acts 9:12). After the healing, Paul's prophetic mission involved an extended period of suffering as he responded to the call "to bring my name before the Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel" and "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:16, 18). Saul destroyed the Church by "going from house to house; he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3).

In the case of Oplan Tokhang, God's mediation is made possible through a double agency of the Church and the perpetrators-turned-truth-tellers. The truth-tellers seek out the Church because she mediates the agency of God's merciful embrace. In the safe haven, the naked and ugly truth is laid bare. In his Lenten message, Archbishop Villegas remarked,

> In the safe house, he did not only get safety. He met the Divine Mercy. He knew he was loved but he was not sure if his sins could still be forgiven. He was assured by the priest of God, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." Edgar had found himself, his real self. Edgar rose [up] to repair his harm. He could not bring the dead back to life but he wanted to stop more murders. He told the truth.[47]

[46]Cupin, "SPOC3 Arthur Lascañas: 'Blind obedience' ends now."

[47]See Esmaquel II, "Archbishop Villegas backs Matobato, Lascañas."

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Truth-telling has radically dented the "walls of lies-upon-lies" perpetuated by the "brick upon brick of dark-truths." These "dark-truths" have been unshackled and surfaced, thus exposing the "buried truths" of those minced and muted.

The resulting radical reorientation and inner transformation of the truth-tellers may be unverifiable in a judicial hearing. But the conversion experience is undeniable and the community of faith readily recognizes and admits it as "credible evidence." For this reason, Archbishop Villegas, in his Lenten message on Good Friday, publicly attested that "Edgar and Art are true stories of conversion. They want to pay for the murders they got paid for."[48] The confessions witnessed, transcribed, and attested to by the Church should be regarded as admissible evidences in the Senate hearings.

Manifesting Justice and Mercy. The Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of justice and mercy. Personal conversion calls for restorative justice which demands "some compensation to victims for what they have lost."[49] It involves decisions such as audacious truth-telling in public that carries "great symbolic and ritual import, because they not only address the past but also say something about the kind of future a society wants." In other words, truth-telling must effect structural justice that "entails the building of a just society as humanly as possible where the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, political structures of good governance, agencies for human rights and modes of economic development are legally in place and constitutionally guaranteed."[50]

Mercy enjoins that truth-telling brings about restorative and structural justice as means to end the senselessness of violence. Furthermore, justice calls for the trusting "abandonment of oneself to

[48]Esmaquel II, "Archbishop Villegas backs Matobato, Lascañas."

[49]Robert Schreiter, "Entering the Healing Circle: The Practice of Reconciliation," in Stephen Bevans, Eleanor Doidge, & Robert Schreiter, eds., *The Healing Circle: Essays in Cross-Cultural Mission* (Chicago: CCGM, 2000), 183.

[50]Schreiter, "Entering the Healing Circle: The Practice of Reconciliation," 183.

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God's will" rather than blind servitude to the crassitude of the gun.[51] In this abandonment, the repentant sinners find themselves welcomed and forgiven in the bosom of a merciful God who abounds in love for all sinners. This mercy is well expressed by the prophet Hosea, "I desire love and not sacrifice" (6:6), and the evangelist Matthew, "'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt. 9:13). In other words, justice demands that "anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price." This should be an expression of "the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God … [who] does not deny justice" but "rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice."[52]

Mercy dictates the bold denunciation of wrongdoing the way Pope Francis did with corruption, calling it "a grave sin, an evil, a sinful hardening of the heart that replaces God with the illusion that money is a form of power"; it is certainly "a work of darkness, fed by suspicion and intrigue." Furthermore, corruption "threatens the very foundations of personal and social life," and "its tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor." The Church thus needs to exercise a prophetic mission of resistance which requires "prudence, vigilance, loyalty, [and] transparency, together with the courage to denounce" any corrupt practices that gravely affect the poor since they are most "deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings, and even their very lives."[53]

A social revolution of resilience: irresistible and uncontainable. The agency that facilitates the baring of "dark-truths," albeit invisible, is a felt agency of God's irresistible enticement, attested to by the prophets and Paul himself. In the lives of Matobato and Lascañas, this divine

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[51]Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (April 11, 2015), no. 20. Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

[52]*Misericordiae Vultus* 21.

[53]*Misericordiae Vultus* 19.

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irresistible enticement is uncontainable and inadvertently spills over into truth-telling that becomes a rivulet which erodes and dents an invincible wall of secrecy.

This irresistible power occasioned Paul to generate a social revolution through a resilient and emergent movement that succeeded that of Jesus. The early movement, Doran averred, was imbued with "a sense of marginality, of alienation" for the Christians were "a *vocal* minority."[54] The Pauline movement accorded equal standing and the possibility of patronage to both women and men—free, freed, or slaves, a praxis that subverted the patriarchal Greco-Roman authorities and the Roman religion.[55] Furthermore, egalitarian associations "stood in conflict with the Greco-Roman society just as the Jesus movement did with respect to that of Palestine."[56]

Will truth-telling, engendered by personal conversion, generate a social revolution? If the conversion of Paul is any indicator, conversion must accomplish God's greater purpose for it to be a prophetic light, truth, and voice to the nations. As Gamaliel notes, "if their purpose or endeavor is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:39, 40). If history is any lesson to go by for the future of this nation, this much is guaranteed. In the bygone era of the Marcos dictatorship, truth-telling—assisted by the mediatory agency of civil society, the Church, other faiths, NGOs, POs, and CBOs—has led to the EDSA Revolution and the burgeoning of grassroots democracy or the peoples' movements. Truth empowers people and brings about the collapse of the dictatorship and the downfall of corrupt Presidents.

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[54]Robert Doran, *Birth of a Worldview: Early Christianity in Its Jewish and Pagan Context* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 10.

[55]See Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *A Feminist Theological Construction of Christian Origins: In Memory of Her* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 182–187.

[56]Fiorenza, *A Feminist Theological Construction of Christian Origins: In Memory of Her*, 181–183.

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Prophetic Mission

The war on drugs and EJK will continue unabated unless the Church, led by the CBCP, builds her network with other faiths and organizations in civil society to exercise a concerted and nationwide prophetic mission. This prophetic mission is the very medium that conveys the power of God's Spirit of Truth.

The power of God's Spirit of Truth enjoins the Church to provide "a safe social space where the perpetrator can uncover past deeds and explore how they are to be understood."[57] Schreiter averred that

> those safe spaces are also essential for the victim [in] looking at the past. The fear of recounting past trauma is, for victims, a fear that the trauma will reoccur. Having a safe space to explore that trauma is essential for the healing of the victim. The perpetrator needs a safe space as well.[58]

At the same time, the Church needs to mediate God's mercy to the repentant sinner by celebrating forgiveness. This calls for a ritual that involves acknowledgement of guilt, sorrow for sin, and a commitment not to do wrong again. There must be resolve to "'undo' in some measure the wrongdoing of the past, to show public repentance, and [to] begin to convince the offended community of the right intentions of the erstwhile wrongdoer in order to repair the bonds of sundered trust."[59] Physical separation of the offender in safe houses for a given period of time, away from the community, may be necessary to refine and deepen his conversion experience.

Finally, the Church and all religious leaders need to acknowledge the divine power at work in personal conversion that serves as the religious basis of truth-telling. They need to use their religious authority and

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[57]Robert Schreiter, "The Challenge of Healing Perpetrators," paper delivered at "Theology, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: An Intercontinental Conversation" (Adamson University, Manila: December 13, 2014).

[58]Schreiter, "The Challenge of Healing Perpetrators."

[59]Schreiter, "The Challenge of Healing Perpetrators," 13.

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institutions to support the truth-tellers. Ecclesial, religious, and civil society leaders have been the seedbed of the EDSA revolution. Such revolution is only possible if civil society and citizenry rise up against unjust and unethical governance that thrives in systematic denial of the dignity and security of those most vulnerable to statist violence.

Conclusion

The moral outcry of the Church, civil society, and the international community is an indictment of the tyranny of EJK in this "war" on drugs. At the same time, it issues a clarion call for the government to consider the "demand reduction" strategy for dealing with illegal drugs as a more viable option than the current militaristic "supply reduction" strategy that is violence prone and proven to be ineffective in the U.S. and Latin America. The denunciation of EJK is also complemented by a nationwide prayer-petition for a more wholistic approach to the drug menace while upholding the rule of law, national sovereignty, security and dignity for the marginalized, and a clean and green government and country.

In addition, the Church perceives this EJK menace as a sign of the time which beckons the Church to be truly prophetic by offering a safe haven for the truth-tellers. The ecclesial and Jesuit effort at theologizing on the war on drugs takes account of the citizenry's moral outcry in the light of the pastoral teachings of the Church and Catholic social doctrines. This theological reflection further provides the pathway from pastoral actions to prophetic mission, and from radical conversion to integral liberation. At the same time, this Jesuit response is part of the collaborative mission of the Church to be placed, like Ananias, in the liberating pathways of the many truth-tellers like Matobato and Lascañas.[60]

[60]See Christine O. Avendaño & Nikko Dizon, "On 58th birthday, De Lima willing to bargain with Duterte over EJKs," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (August 27, 2017), http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/925979/leila-de-lima-58th-birthday-ejks-war-on-drugs-rodrigo-duterte (accessed September 10, 2017).

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May God's Spirit of Truth, at work in truth-telling, engender in us a resilient spirit of hope, justice, peace, mercy, and solace. At the same time, may God's Spirit of Life increase the democratic space where there is dignity, security, and sustainable livelihood for the poor and the earth community.

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