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TINIG LOYOLA

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BREAKING THE WALLS BETWEEN CHURCH & STATE





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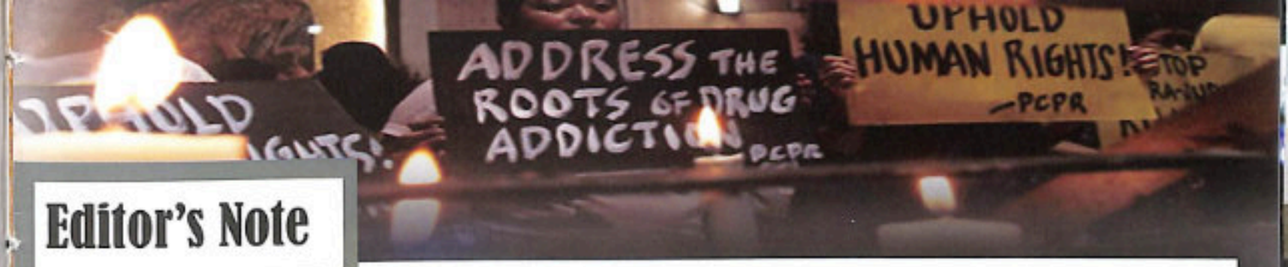
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Editor's Note

Many of us wonder what Article II, Section 6 of the 1987 constitution means when it states that "the separation of the Church and State shall be inviolable." Many believe that under this policy, the church should not interfere with the affairs of the state and vice-versa. On the other hand, many also believe that the separation of church and state involves limiting the exercise of religious beliefs only within church structures or within its private boundaries.

The preamble of the 1987 Constitution declares that "We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society, and establish a Government that shall embody our ideals and aspirations, promote the common good, conserve and develop our patrimony, and secure to ourselves and our posterity, the blessings of independence and democracy under the rule of law and a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace, do ordain and promulgate this Constitution." The words "welfare" and "common good" were clearly pointed out. Thus, all efforts and rules of society and government should be for the welfare of all, without exception. On the other hand, in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, it was written that all people are entitled to religious freedom. However, while it permits the separation of church and state, it does not support a separation of religion and politics. The Church believes that her proper role is to guide and inform the people of their rights. Moreover, it is the right and duty of the Church to advocate social order in which the human dignity and common good are fostered, and to protest when they are in any way threatened.

Romel Regalado Bagares, in his study *Re-Configuring Our Social Imaginary: A Rightful Place for "God-talk" in the Filipino Public Sphere*, explains that "the religion clauses in the Constitution are not meant to throw the baby out, along with the bathwater, so to speak... A repudiation of religion, they are in fact, some sort of recognition with regards to the important roles by which the religion plays in the democratic polity." Thus, there is no explicit or implicit statement from the constitution which disallows the Church to interfere in social issues concerning the welfare of the society.

In a world damaged by materialism and declining respect for human life, the Catholic Church asserts that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the innate dignity of the human person is the foundation of the principles of our social teaching. On the other hand, in a world full of injustices, the State, through the laws we abide, assures the security of everyone through its advocacy of a peaceful and humane society.

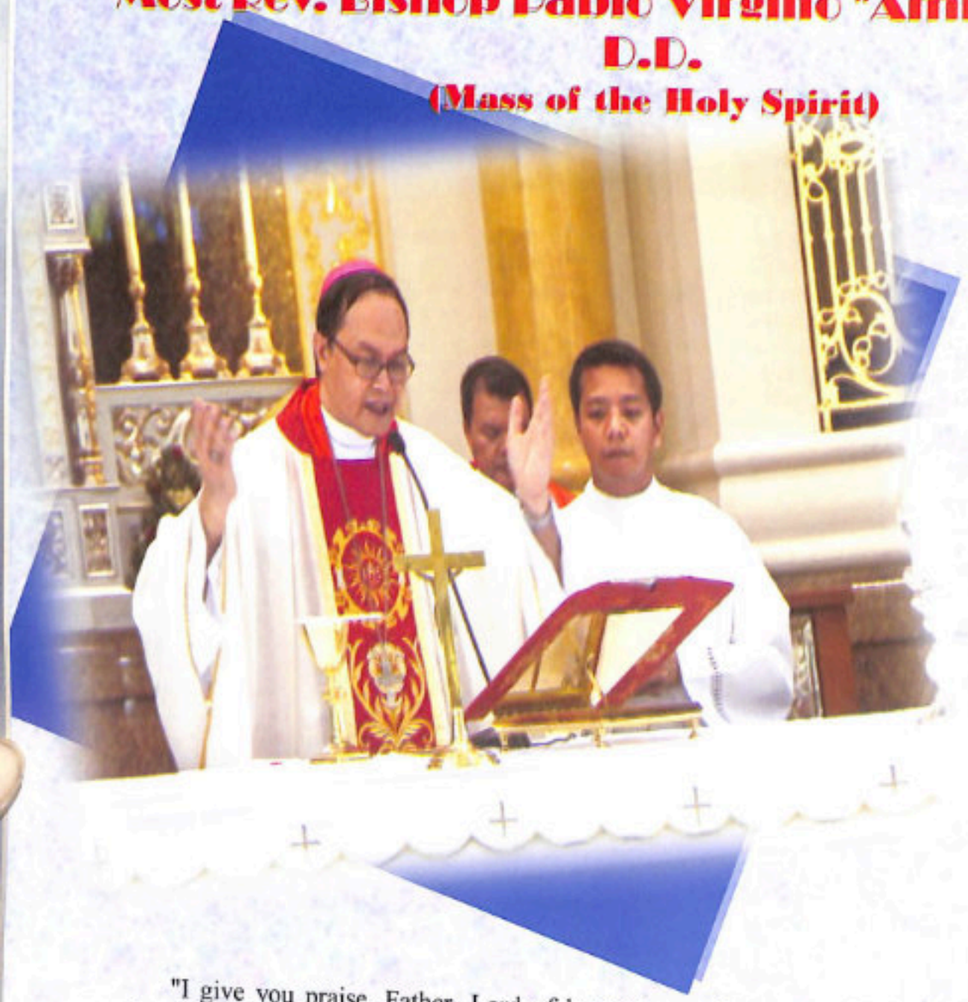
This issue of *Tinig Loyola* reechoes this the call of Christ to humanity—to protect the dignity of life, liberty, and justice—with special attention to the poor, the disenfranchised, and the wayward of our society and of the world.the Church and the State. When civil governance begins to systematically harm human persons, the faith communities cannot and should not turn a blind eye on such affairs just because it is not "Church business" but "State business." In the same way that civil governance must protect human persons from harm—including that which could come from the faith communities. The After all, the social teachings of the Catholic Church as well as the Philippine and the Constitution have clear provisions for the protection of the common good. provide a set of consistent and complementary principles, values and goals. They remind us that we all have essential responsibilities each time the society does not adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good. Regardless of whether one is "with Church" or "with State," as God-fearing people, all of us bear the responsibility of protecting especially the vulnerable in our society, As the Body of Christ, the Church is challenged to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to restore justice to the disenfranchised, and to make human systems work in order to improve the living of everyone, not just the wealthy but also and more importantly the impoverished. even to assess social institutions in terms of their impact on everyone. The Church, same as through with the State, promotes the well-being of the people. Both collaborate and work together because they share the same objective – the promotion of the public's common good. As Bagares would add, "to build a nation, in a certain sense, is to build first of all, a community; the project of nationhood or the narrative of nationhood must be one of inclusion – of a greater community where people from various ethnic backgrounds, faiths, and economic classes find common meaning".

As the present school year draws to a close, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to Fr. Jim Kroeger, MM, who was the the newsletter outoing moderator of Tinig Loyolafor the several years. Thank you Father for sharing with the readers of this magazine your knowledge and expertise throughout these years. I also extend my hHeartfelt gratitude to Fr. Peter Pojol, too, whom I always turn to for various concernsfor his support and encouragement. ; and to the present moderator, Fr. Arnel Aquino who provided the support, companionship, and encouragement in making this issue possible. May this issue of *Tinig Loyola* be a reminder to us to continue to all as we embrace and try to live out the teachings of Jesus Christ. To suffer with the people and for the people who are poor and suffering—is what Christian truth and justice are really all about. To suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves, is to become like Christ to his people, which includes suffering. In taking part in His mission, we are also taking a part in His pain. God bless our country. God help our country. God help us, Filipinos.

Revelation to the Childlike

Most Rev. Bishop Pablo Virgilio "Ambo" David, D.D.

(Mass of the Holy Spirit)



"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the clever and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike." (Luke 10:21)

I used to think of the Loyola School of Theology as an elite school for clever and learned theologians.

Our Gospel reading for this Mass makes me think otherwise. Perhaps if we truly wish to be properly disposed for God's revelation, for a genuine theological experience, we have to imagine LST instead as a "preschool for kids", a Loyola PreS-chool of Theology. A preschool whose main purpose is to make us properly mature from grownups to children, not the other way around. A preschool that will help us face the bigger school out there, to discover the world, not as a prison cell or as a big factory, but rather as a spacious playground; God's kingdom in our midst. I also propose to portray Jesus' role in this preschool, not as that of a teacher, but rather as that of a playmate. Perhaps the appropriate Jesus image would be the Santo Niño, the child Jesus dressed like the Little Prince. You might want to use as manual for this theological preschooling that famous little book, which is referred to as a "children's book for grownups". (I am more and more convinced that the French pilot Antoine de Saint Exupery, wrote that book with the Johannine portrait of Jesus in mind. I am also convinced that he had the Santo Niño as inspiration for his sketch of the playful Little Prince, and us humankind in his portrayal of the fox whom he had tamed.)

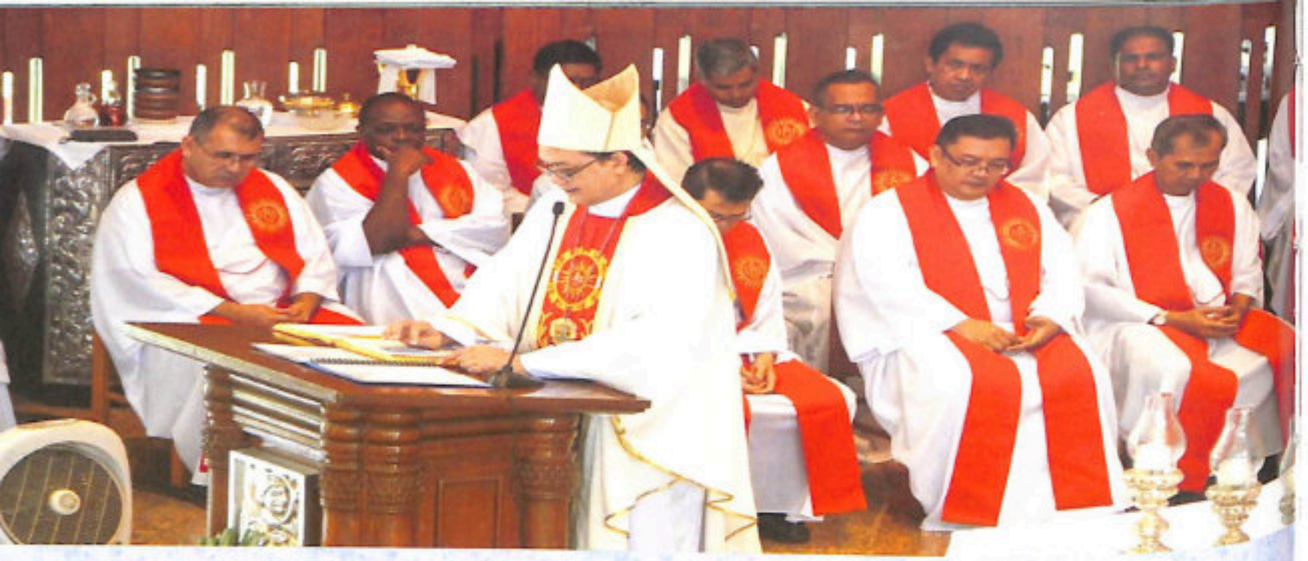
If you find this thought ludicrous, it might surprise you to know that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the revered father of postmodern thinking, once proposed something similar. In his book "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", Nietzsche laid out what he called a process of metamorphosis that the human spirit undergoes as an evolution in three stages. He calls the first phase the camel stage. That's what we are like at the start, he says; like beasts of burden bearing loads of tradition as we cross the desert. We obey because we do not know better; we take the word of grownups who tell us reality is what they say it is. Because we are in no position yet to question them, we take it all meekly and trustingly. Soon we outgrow the camel and turn into a lion, an angry and ferocious beast. We begin to question the world. We become critical of traditions and institutions. We're always on the lookout for lies and deceptions, ready at each time to tear them down. That's when we become rebellious and learn to say to our elders, "Just because you say so doesn't mean it's really so. Give me a good reason why I should take your word for it." (Whenever I listen to President Duterte, I keep hearing the word "angry". I wonder if we have a president who is in his lion stage. The type who has no qualms to question established institutions like the Church, the Pope and bishops, the United Nations, the constitution's provisions on human rights, etc. Perhaps we should say "good for him; he has at least outgrown his camel stage". That's why he doesn't mind hurting sensibilities by using the PI cusswords and the F-Word on just anyone or anybody. He needs to rub it in. He is eager to tear down hypocrites, like a lion. But isn't that also the case with old revolutionaries and activists who have not yet outgrown the angry lions in them. *Kaya siguro* at home *siya sa kanila.*)

Nietzsche says the third and final stage of our spiritual metamorphosis is that of the child. That's when we stop being angry and allow ourselves to be truly delighted by life as it unfolds. That's when we no longer take ourselves too seriously and learn to laugh at our blunders. That's when we can rejoice in the Spirit like Jesus in the Gospel. In the version of Matthew, the text gets a bit more elaborate. After thanking the Father for revealing himself not to the obedient camels or to clever and learned lions, but to the merest children, he invites his disciples to learn to be gentle and humble of heart, to seek, not the heavy yoke of the camel or the stressful anger of the lion, but rather a burden that is easy and light, one that can truly give rest to our weary and restless souls, one that can turn us into children and make us truly playful, one that is suffused with a profound sense of awe and wonder... What we call "*pagkamangha*" in Tagalog.

As we begin this academic year, I declare the playground called the Loyola Preschool of Theology open! I hope you, dear students and professors, are eager to explore the deepest mysteries of faith like little children having fun, like kids who are excited to dance in the rain, to gaze at the stars at night, and to play with insects. It's ok to be foolish; it is what the prophet Joel says is bound to happen when God pours out His Spirit on his children.

Para silang mga hibang. People would think we're just drunk, like they said about the apostles at Pentecost. "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream





dreams, your young men will see visions. **Even upon your male and female servants,** in those days, I will pour out my spirit." When that time of our final stage of metamorphosis comes, St Paul says, we should not be worried about being like little babies who do not know yet how to talk. He says "...for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings".

It's ok to babble like children or to speak in tongues. Isn't that what happens when you put children of various nationalities together who are unfamiliar with each other' anguages? They'll communicate and play.

Today, I ask you to think of your theological studies as a task of learning the grammar and vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. Be open to the Spirit who alone can teach us to understand God's will and to respond with love to the God who loved us first. He alone can enable us to listen even to those who don't agree with us. Like the Father whose house has many rooms, he will teach us to make space for everyone, even those who may have wronged us. Yes, including fools and troublemakers, addicts, neurotics and psychotics.

"Be open to the Spirit who alone can teach us to understand God's will and to respond with love to the God who loved us first. "

Bishop Pablo "Ambo" David is an alumnus of Loyola School of Theology and is the current Bishop of the Diocese of Caloocan.

To His Excellency, Rodrigo Roa Duterte

Robbie Paraan, SJ

Dear President Duterte,

You know I swear too. Not a lot of times, but much more than I should. I usually swear while playing basketball, after a botched play or whenever I miss an easy shot. I swear out of frustration—not really anger—and more often than not I curse myself. It's been a while since I last used cuss words directed towards another person. I've never needed to, and I've never wanted to either. I'm not proud of my swearing and it's definitely a practice I want to manage as I progress in my formation to the priesthood. A priest stands in the person of Christ and I don't think it's appropriate for a priest to swear, even if he would understandably be frustrated at times, as any other person like you would.

As president, I don't think you should swear. Or at least not as publicly and as often as you do. I'm sure you've heard all this said before: As president, you should act in a manner befitting the dignity of the office, you are a role model especially to the young, and whatever you say will be interpreted as official and representative of your policy, etc. I don't think these reasons have been sufficient for you though as you continue to swear and curse at will. Though I agree with these reasons, I personally find one most compelling: your swearing is symptomatic of your incapacity to listen.

Why is listening important? Let me take you first through my context. I am a Christian and I believe in a God who desires to communicate himself to humankind. In an age that values human effort and the power of the individual to shape his own destiny, I still believe all effort and striving would not even be possible if God had not taken the first move, desiring to reveal himself to all of us. He spoke to Abraham first, then to Moses, then to the prophets. Finally, and most definitively, he spoke through his Son—the Word that became flesh. My God is a god



There could be a better way of doing things, a more efficient means, with less fatalities or injuries, less confrontation and swearing and more progress, more people helped, more peace.

who wants to make himself known, to share himself to all, and this he speaks through language we all could understand.

My faith, more than an experience of seeing—I believe in an invisible God after all—is an encounter where I hear God speak. Christianity, like much of the Western culture you seem to despise, was built on the foundations of ancient Greek and ancient Israel. The Greeks were a visual people whose most important events were spectacles to be marvelled at or performances to be watched. Greek culture is a visually aesthetic culture, manifested in their art, sculptures, and architecture. Even up to now, the predominance of the 'visual' mindset is evident in the way we talk about knowledge. For us knowing is seeing. Knowing involves insight, perspective, illumination. When we understand something, what do we usually say? "Ah, I see."

From ancient Israel we inherit the great religion of Judaism. Christianity is indebted to the Jews for teaching us that there is something more than what is seen. For the Jews, to see Yahweh would mean death, and to represent God visually would be to commit idolatry. Throughout the Torah we learn of God who makes himself manifest in sounds, not sights. Yahweh speaks, he commands, he calls. Our response? To hear and listen, and to eventually obey. And it doesn't end there, because inasmuch as he wants us to listen to him, he wants to listen to us as well.

Though you identify yourself as Christian, I know better than to appeal to you based on your religious beliefs, as I acknowledge your struggle with the hierarchical institution of the Church. I am not trying to make you believe that listening is important solely on the argument that this is what our faith teaches. What I want to point out is that God himself listens to me and to everyone including you. When I pray, when I shout for joy, when I cry in anguish, even when I curse, I know God is listening to me. And you know what that makes me realize? How important I am to him!

And that's precisely why I want you to listen. No, let me rephrase that: I need you to listen. Because, in spite of it all, and despite what many other people still say, I still want you to succeed. You are still my president, and we the Filipinos need you to listen.

You need to listen, Mr. President because you might be wrong. I acknowledge why many people from Davao,



the city you led for decades, would go to the ends of the earth to defend you. You were a leader to them and you brought about great change to their community. And that's why I cannot blame you for wanting to enact the same policies that worked there on a national scale today. But hasn't it occurred to you, especially now as you near your first year in office, that some of the strategies that worked in Davao City may not be as effective for the entire nation? As mayor you must have exercised much power over the different agencies in the local government, but now, only if you'd listen, then you must see how the national police force, for example, cannot be micromanaged by you anymore. I believe on this and on many other fronts you are wrong, but that's my opinion which, in the greater scheme of things, may not matter as much. What matters is *your* opinion. And I hope yours is an opinion shaped by what is really happening on the ground. That is possible only if you are listening.

You need to listen, Mr. President, because you might have blind spots. Let me correct myself, you *do* have blind spots as any human being does. Even with a cabinet full of so-called experts on hand to advise you on any issue under the sun, you still cannot see all angles nor can you really be adept in all issues. What's more worrisome is that I do not see anyone in your cabinet nor in your close circle who has the courage to tell you about your blind spots; they are all either extremely afraid of you or, more likely, they just want to please you. There could be a better way of doing things, a more efficient means, with less fatalities or injuries, less confrontation and swearing and more progress, more people helped, more peace. You were voted not because you are all -knowing, but because you seemed willing to incorporate the perspective of the poor who have long been neglected in society.

Listen, and you will widen your view of things, your discernment will be more informed, and your decisions would necessarily be better. Listen to those in opposition even if they are not too intent to listen themselves. Listen to those who have been hurt and wounded forever by your words and actions. Listen to the Church; for all our iniquities, we still have something good to say. Listen to those close to you, but not only to what they are saying but to what they are struggling to say. And just a tip, people will speak and do so truthfully only if they know you will genuinely listen to them without responding with expletives once you are displeased with what they say.

I did not vote for you, Mr. President. I *settled* for someone else. I had considered voting for you, but your rape joke about the Australian missionary a month or so before the elections was the final straw for me. Until then I, like millions of other Filipinos, was drawn to your persona. For the first time in my adult, voting life, I felt a connection with someone who had at least a running chance at the presidency. You are charismatic and much of that is due to how genuinely caring and compassionate you seem to be. Not only do you speak for the poor, I believe you have a soft heart for the marginalized. I know you did not grow up poor, but at some point, you must have heard their pleas. From that point on they mattered to you.

"God listens, not only with his ears but with his heart."

Do we matter to you? 16 million people, and I'm sure countless others, believed that a year ago. I am not sure how many of those have given up on that belief. You must listen, Mr. President, if you want our contin-

listening—and yes, in your cursing—is that our voices do not matter. They do, and these are the voices that sent a message to the world in voting for you. The greatest 'sin' you can have as president is to let our voices fall on deaf ears.

You've always maintained that you never wanted the presidency. If that is true, then I assume you also don't want to be God. But let me end with how I started. The God I worship, and the God millions of Filipinos love and are devoted to—much greater in number than the 16 million who love and are devoted to you—listens. He does so not only with his ears but with his heart. That's why many of us have committed our entire lives, sacrificing much, to serve a God we could not even see. I have no intention to serve any human being in the same way. But if you genuinely want your administration to succeed, if you honestly desire our poor to be valued, if you really dream of a nation free of drugs, of crime, and of war, then you need our help. Please win us over by listening to us and making us feel that, to you, we are important.

Sincerely yours,

Sch. Robbie Paraan,SJ

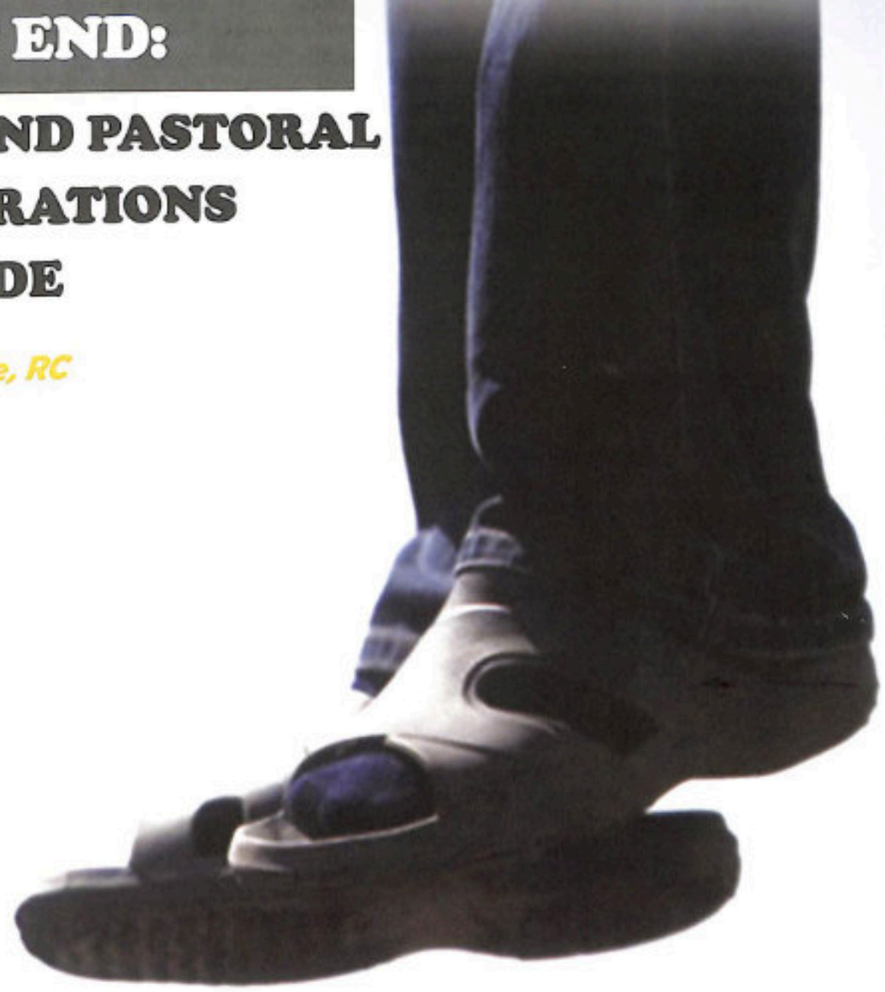
Robbie Paraan is a scholastic from.the Society of Jesus. He is in his first year of Theological Studies in Loyola School of Theology.



TRAGIC END:

MORAL AND PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS ON SUICIDE

Ma. Cecilia Tuble, RC



Around the world, a suicide occurs every 40 seconds. According to the World Health Organization, over 800,000 people kill themselves every year, and many more attempt suicide. As a result, many millions of people are affected or experience suicide bereavement every year. Clearly, the problem of suicide is a global concern, one that the church needs to address.

There is a vastly complex web of reasons, including socio-cultural, economic and religious factors, which come into the decision to die. However, recent studies have pointed to mental illness as a dominant factor. As psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison in his book, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding*, puts it: "no one illness or event causes suicide; and certainly no one knows all, or perhaps even most, of the motivations behind the killing of the self. But psychopathology is almost always there, and its deadliness is fierce."

Clinical Depression is the major cause of suicide in all age groups. 60 per cent of people – the vast majority - who kill themselves suffer from depression. Close to 15 per cent of those who are hospitalized for depression ultimately kill themselves. Thus, every person who is depressed is at risk, and there are no exceptions.

Heredity, severe mental illness, or an impulsive or violent temperament, are underlying conditions that predispose an individual to suicide. There are also some events or circumstances in life that interact in a particularly deadly way with those predisposing vulnerabilities, such as romantic failures or upheavals, financial or economic setbacks, legal problems, terminal or debilitating illnesses, shameful situations, and drug or alcohol abuse.

Mood disorders – depression and manic-depression (bipolar) – are particularly vulnerable to suicide. According to Francis Mark Mondimore, M.D. in his book, *Depression: The Mood Disease* the intensely sad and oppressive feelings of these illnesses can make life itself seem an overwhelmingly difficult burden and therefore an unwanted thing. To make matters worse, mood disorders tend to cripple a vital aspect of the healing process, and that is the anticipation of getting well. Ironically, it is often the period when persons are getting better from their depression that they are most vulnerable to suicide. This is because severely depressed persons lack the energy, and hence any action is too much of an effort. But when they are getting a bit better and have more energy, then they are more dangerously capable of suicide. This final, self-destructive act is often accompanied by a profound sense of helplessness that the unbearable suffering is beyond repair or control. According to Peter Whybrow, M.D. in his book, *A Mood Apart: The Thinker's Guide to Emotion and Its Disorders,* feelings of helplessness, loss of control, and alienation are the most powerful predictors of suicidal behavior.

Self-destructive thoughts and impulses are in themselves frightening, both for the patient and for those around him/her. Tremendous stigma and disgrace have been, for centuries, associated with suicide, and this sense of shame still makes people reluctant to discuss these thoughts when they occur to them. Likewise, there is the common misconception that "only crazy people kill themselves." For Mondimore, these ideas only complicate what is really, at heart, a clinical issue: suicidal ideation and behavior are a serious complication of a medical illness, one that necessitates immediate medical attention. Let us now take a closer look at the neuroscience of suicide.Depression destroys the capacity of the mind to function well in situations of great stress, pressure, uncertainty or repeated emotional or economic setbacks. Mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse or other psychiatric illnesses undermine the mind's flexibility and ability to adapt, and its defenses are put in jeopardy. Jamison writes: "Much as a compromised immune system is vulnerable to opportunistic infection, so too a diseased brain is made assailable by the eventualities of life. The quickness and flexibility of a well mind, a belief or hope that things will eventually sort themselves out – these are the resources lost to a person when the brain is ill." Depression, in fact, consists of a constellation characterized by the brain's inability to think fluently, reason clearly, or perceive the future with hope. Death is seen as the only alternative.

More recent studies of depression have taken advantage of the latest technology to delve deeper into the neuroscience of depression. In general, depression involves a problem with how the prefrontal cortex, the thinking part of the brain, does not communicate properly with the limbic system, or the feeling part of the brain. Thus, the thinking prefrontal cortex fails to regulate the feeling limbic system. This was further explained by Alex Korb, PhD in his book, *The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time* by saying that different regions in the brain depend on different neurotransmitters, and changes in these neurotransmitters can have profound effects on these regions.

Aside from genetics, other factors such as early childhood experiences, current life stress, and level of social support can influence the circuitry of the brain towards or away from depression. While our genes are not our destiny, they guide the development of our brain circuits. Our genes can give us brain circuitry that is more likely to get depressed. Furthermore, early childhood experiences also shape the tuning of the brain's circuits, including the stress one's mother experienced while pregnant. The brain is still actively developing until the twenties, and given that the prefrontal cortex is the longest region to mature makes it susceptible to stress for a long time. Thus, stressful life events throughout childhood and adolescence can alter the development of the brain's neural circuits and change the levels of its neurotransmitters.

THE MORAL PROBLEM OF SUICIDE

From a moral perspective, what is suicide? What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church teach?

First of all, God remains the sovereign Master of all life, and everyone is responsible for his or her life, which is a gift from God. We are stewards of this gift, and we are obliged to accept it gratefully. We need to preserve it for God's honor and the salvation of our souls, and thus, we cannot dispose of it in any way we want. (CCC 2280). Secondly, suicide is contrary to love: it contradicts the natural human inclination towards self-preservation, thus it is "gravely contrary to a just love of self." It is also contrary to love of neighbor, as it breaks the bonds of solidarity we have with family, nation and the human community. It is likewise contrary to love for God (CCC 2281), who is the ultimate source of all life. Thirdly, the Catechism notes that "if suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary cooperation in suicide is contrary to the moral law."(CCC 2282)

Traditional Catholic moral theology determines three conditions for mortal sin: sufficient reflection, full consent of the will and serious matter. In Richard M. Gula, SS's book entitled, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, he explained this by saying tahta "Sufficient reflection" and "full consent of the will" refer to the person, while "serious matter" refers to the action that is an expression of the person. All three must be taken together in order to ascertain the presence of mortal sin.

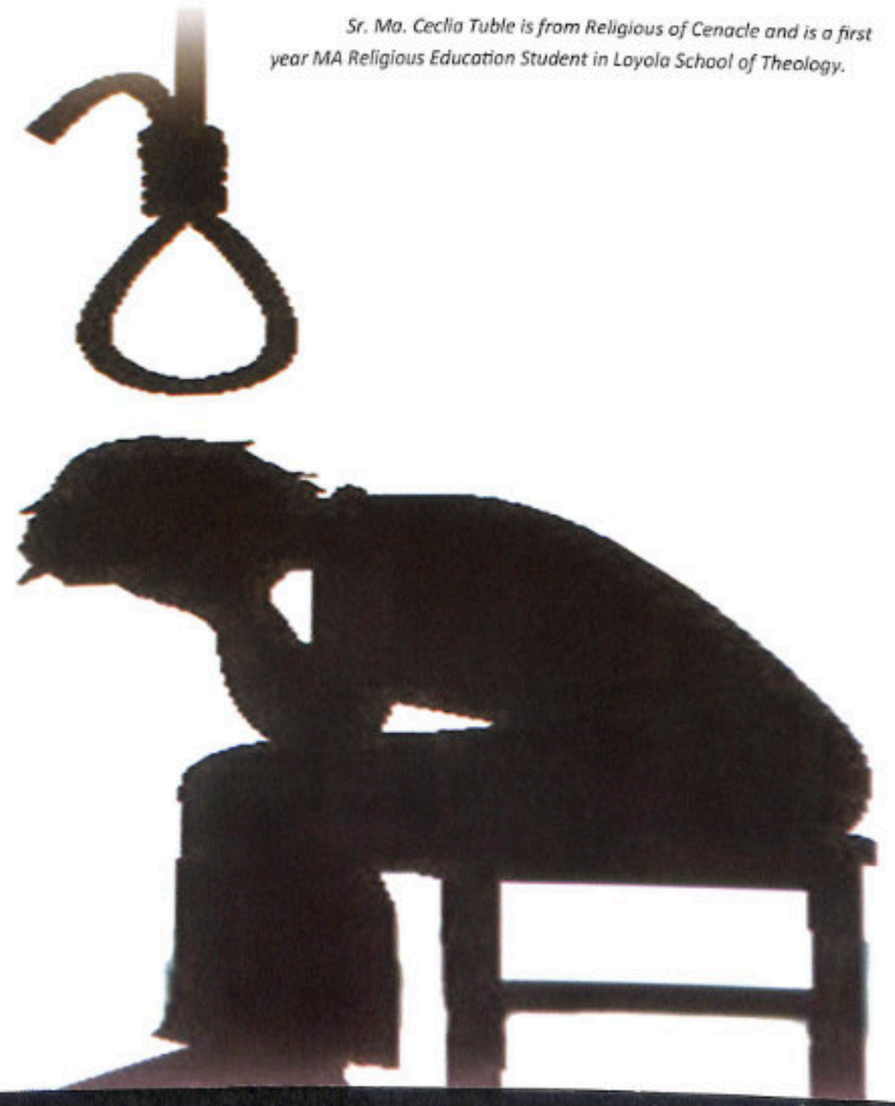
It is tempting to immediately label all suicides as "mortal sin" because the taking of one's life is a grave, irrevocable act. However, the gravity of a single act must be viewed "in the context of the general direction of the person's life and within the larger context of moral growth or decay." Thus, we cannot outright name as "mortal sin" actions in themselves apart from the person and without the context of that person's relationships and interactions.

Likewise, we must carefully consider "sufficient reflection" and "full consent of the will," both of which reflect the person's degree of self-possession and self-determination. We have already seen that depression lies at the heart of most suicides, and depression creates a mental and emotional state where both "sufficient reflection" and "full consent of the will" are greatly impaired, if not lacking. When the prefrontal cortex, the thinking brain, is supposed to regulate the limbic system or the emotional brain, but fails to do so and is itself mired in extremely negative and hopeless thought patterns, it is doubtful that the depressed person can exercise his or her knowledge and freedom sufficiently. Even the conscience, that moral voice committed to values and emanating from the depths of the person's being, is drowned out by the shouting of a hyperactive, overly harsh and punitive superego. In such anguished, confused and wretched state, we cannot say for certain that the person has enough freedom andenough reflection or evaluative knowledge to make a truly, morally mature choice. The Church has grown in taking into account the knowledge gleaned from psychology and neurobiology. The 1983 Code of Canon Law has removed suicide from its list of those to be denied church funerals. More importantly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "Grave psychological disturbances, anguish or grave fear of hardship, suffering or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide." (CCC 2282). Then it ends with a more hopeful and merciful note:

> We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives. (CCC 2283)

Thus, compassion, rooted in a firm belief in God's mercy, is the Church's ultimate response to suicide.

Sr. Ma. Cecila Tuble is from Religious of Cenacle and is a first year MA Religious Education Student in Loyola School of Theology.





LST@50

Homily of His Eminence Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle Closing Mass of the LHS-LST Jubilee Celebration

My Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good to be here. It is good to join our Loyola House of Studies and Loyola School of Theology communities in giving thanks to God for fifty years of faithful service to the Church not only in the Philippines but also in other parts of the world. This celebration of this culminating Eucharist is made more special by the presence of the bishop of Cubao who allowed us to come together and who allowed me to preside, Bishop Ontioco, who was also a student here, a graduate of Loyola school of Theology, and another alumnus, Bishop Mylo Hubert Vergara of the Diocese of Pasig. Of course we have our distinguished Jesuits, led by the Provincial Fr. Tony Moreno and our guests here, and most of all you the students and employees of LHS and LST. It is quite intimidating to preach before your former professors, some of them cannot hear anymore but some of them are still very sharp. But is good to be part of this culminating activity. We were here last year to open the Golden Jubilee and yes we are here again to close.

The readings for this Sunday's liturgy present to us a drama. It is very dramatic, the whole theme of the readings, and they spell out for us the very drama of salvation history and of our lives as Christians. Who are the characters of the drama? In the first reading from the book of Exodus, we have God, Israel – unfaithful to God, and Moses. God is angry because the people have forgotten him and his great deeds. In his just anger, God decided "I will consume, I will destroy this people." Then came Moses. Moses did something very simple. He reminded God that "they are your people." How could you destroy your own people? How could you destroy the people that you have liberated? Then something deeper than anger and justice surfaced. God remembered and He repented. No destruction happened.

In the second reading from the first letter of Paul to Timothy, we have Jesus Christ, Paul, and Timothy representing the Church. Jesus, he started a community, he fulfilled the prophets and the law, but people like Paul, in his zeal, which he later called unbelief, persecuted the followers of Christ. He persecuted the body of Christ. But then Jesus was merciful to him, so merciful that Paul, the worst of sinners according to his own estimation, now becomes an apostle, an apostle before Timothy and the Church, a witness to what the patience of God could do. Paul was not destroyed. In fact he is the vessel of God's word.

Then the gospel, all too familiar to us, the three parables of mercy. We have Jesus, and the tax collectors and sinners, and the third character, the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus eating and mingling with sinners, and this caused the Pharisees and scribes to murmur, to even question the sanctity of this teacher, Jesus. But through three parables Jesus presented the image of God, and this is the whole drama. In the three readings the question is "Who is God?" Do we really know God? Who is the God we claim we are following? And who are we? Who are we as sinners before the God that Jesus reveals? Let's go right to the three parables.

The first parable of the lost sheep begins with Jesus questioning all of us. "What man among you having a hundred sheep will leave the ninety-nine in search of the lost one?" He is addressing it to us, to the Pharisees and scribes. Who among you



will leave the ninety-nine good sheep to look for the one that is lost? Who among you would do that? Probably no one, or maybe a few crazy ones. I tried it in a bible study group. I asked them, "who among you will leave the ninety nine?" No one will leave the ninety-nine. Then the next parable, what woman, or the women among you here, losing one coin will sweep the whole house to search for that one coin when you have nine other coins. Will any of the women here clean the whole house for that one coin? Maybe not many. Maybe my mother would. But really that is ridiculous. And then finding the lost sheep you call your neighbors to a feast. You find the lost coin you call your neighbors to celebrate. Now this one is overacting,OA. Sobra na ito, masyadong maarte. (This is too much, too overacting)

And now we go to the third parable, the lost son, whom by the way was also a lost brother. He asked for his inheritance, virtually telling his father "I wish you're dead, but since it is taking you time for you to die I cannot wait, please give me

"We may be lost, we may be wounded, but we are never absent in God's mind and heart."

my share of inheritance." How painful. But the father gave it and he squandered it. And he came to his senses and reversed a line: "I am no longer fit to be called your son, hire me as a servant. That is what I am right now, a servant." But then the father saw him, even from afar, and he broke all conventions, especially the protocol that governs wealthy families. The father left the house, ran to the child, to his lost son. Embraced him, literally fell on him. And before the son could even finish the reversed lines the father stopped him. The father would not want him to be reduced to a slave, to a servant, and restored him to the dignity of a son, with the clothing, with the sandals, with the ring. And again, overacting, you have a feast. That is why we sort of understand the reaction of the elder son, who did not, by the way, feel like a son. He described himself as a servant, "I labored for you."

Naku, kawawa namansya. Akala natin mabait na anak pero ang pakiramdam nya pala n ya, "alipin lang ako." (What a pity. We thought he was a good son but he actually felt like a slave.) And he refused to join the celebration.Again, who is God? Who is God? In the first reading he is a God that recoils, recoils in his anger because he remembers "they are my own." In the second reading, there is Jesus who trusts someone who persecuted him in his body and goes beyond it and even entrusts to his persecutor the mission to be his great apostle. And in the gospel, a God who shows us the way to respond to a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son, and even a lost the elder son who refused to join the feast. He got out of the house again and begged the child, the son to come home.

Who is God and who are we?

Salamat na lang sa Diyos na kung minsan di natin maunawaan, tayo ay buhay, tayo ay may pag-asa pa rin na maging anak. (Thanks be to God, whom we sometimes cannot understand. We are alive. We still have hope of becoming his children.) We may be lost, we may be wounded, but we are never absent in God's mind and heart. If we are totally absent, God will not look for us. God will not search for us. We may distance ourselves from God

but we will never disappear from God's heart. The gospel invites us the way Jesus invited the Pharisees, those who could not accept this God, Jesus tells them there is great rejoicing in heaven. Can you not rejoice here on earth when our God is rejoicing in heaven. The Pharisees and scribes, they are not rejoicing, they are sad that God through Jesus mingles with sinners. Who are we? On what side are we? Do we rejoice with heaven or do we rejoice in our anger, our sense of righteousness, in our sense of justice. Do we define ourselves in relation to God, the God who has his own ways and his own thoughts. The God who is mystery, of fidelity and mercy. But thanks to this God no one is forgotten. No one is totally lost. You are my own. You are my son. The only reason why God searches even for the people that the world considers useless because "it is mine, it is my own." That is our God and that is the drama of life. Will we rejoice with God? Will we be with God or would we choose to be with the God that we fabricate, very different from the God who saves. The God who gives hope. The God who embraces the wounded, the lost.

"The only reason why God searches even for the people that the world considers useless because ""it is mine, it is my own."""

I would like to think that is precisely the drama of Loyola House of Studies and Loyola School of Theology. For what is formation all about, what does formation consists in? Formation consists in entering that drama – God, you, the world, and the Church. What is theology? Theology is a drama where you grapple with the true God. So as you progress in your theological studies, the idols that you have fabricated, the idols that the world has passed on to us, the idols that even our professors create, will be revealed for what they truly are, they are not the true God. And then in our encounter with the true God we could witness before the world and the Church. After fifty years of dramatic existence, we hope that Loyola House of Studies and Loyola School of Theology will continue to participate in the unfolding drama. Sige magkaroon tayo ng Loyola House of Drama, Loyola School of Dramatics. Ito yung kailangan ng mundo, yung tunay na drama, na sa bandang huli you know the story, the true God will triumph. (Let us have a Loyola House of Drama, a Loyola



school of Dramatics. This is what the world needs. Real drama, that in the end we know the true story, God will triumph in the end.) The true God will not even talk about the sin of the lost son. The true God talks only about "he was lost and is found, he was dead and has come back to life." I wonder why the true God speaks this way. What God have we been following and preaching all along? What is the terminology that we use of our concocted, fabricated gods? We pray that the God of mercy will always be compassionate and faithful to Loyola House of Studies and Loyola School of Theology, so that like St. Paul, these two great institutions will continue to witness to the world of the patience, the love, the forgiveness of the true God. Let us now pause and open our hearts to the God being revealed to us by Jesus. Can we rejoice with God?

His Eminence, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle is an alumnus of Loyola School of Theology. He is the current archbishop of the Archdiocese of Manila.


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Theology in a Post-Truth Era

Sem. Eugene Parayaoan

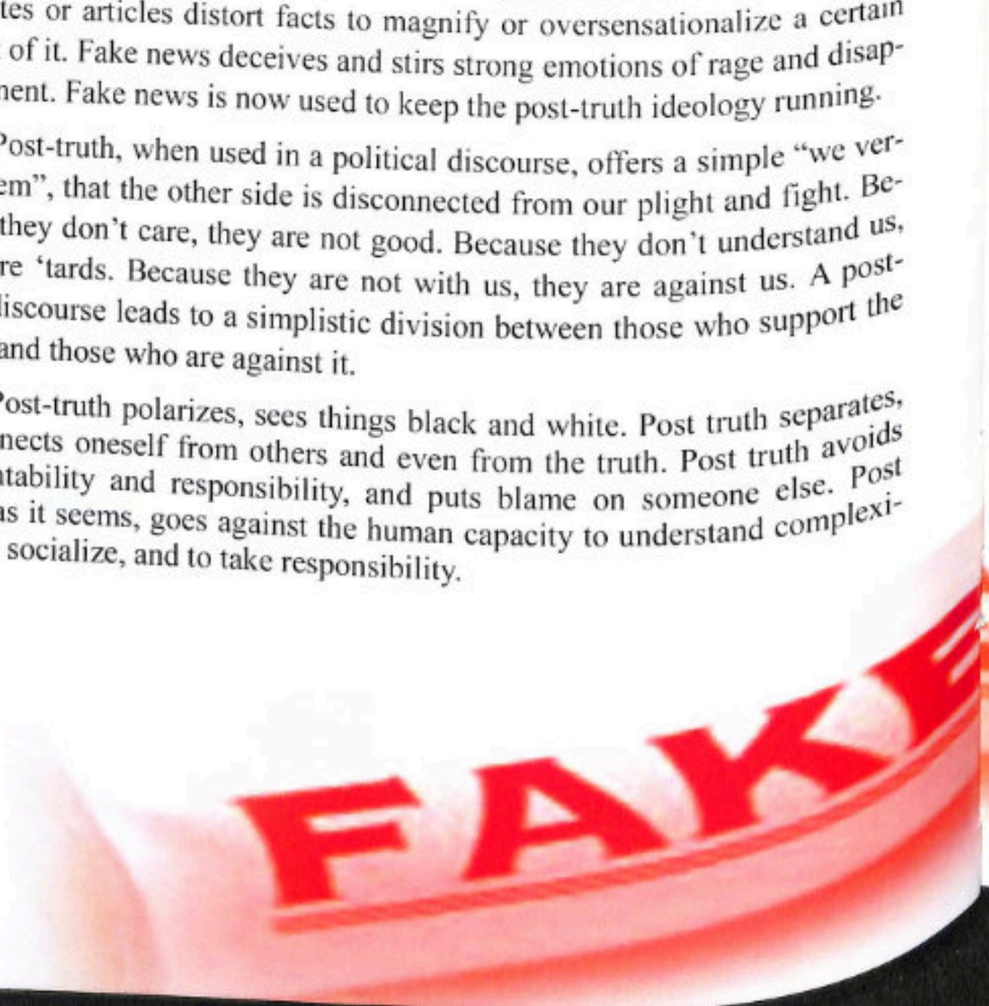
What is happening??

Oxford English Dictionary defines Post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Dr. Scott Rodin puts it as the phenomenon when a culture forms its values on what it feels to be true rather than what is in fact true. Instead of using reason and facts, people use emotions to determine what should be done. This extends to political discourse being driven mostly by emotions rather than actual policies or principles.

Within an emotionally driven discourse, fake news also became popular. Sites or articles distort facts to magnify or oversensationalize a certain aspect of it. Fake news deceives and stirs strong emotions of rage and disappointment. Fake news is now used to keep the post-truth ideology running.

Post-truth, when used in a political discourse, offers a simple "we versus them", that the other side is disconnected from our plight and fight. Because they don't care, they are not good. Because they don't understand us, they are 'tards. Because they are not with us, they are against us. A post-truth discourse leads to a simplistic division between those who support the cause and those who are against it.

Post-truth polarizes, sees things black and white. Post truth separates, disconnects oneself from others and even from the truth. Post truth avoids accountability and responsibility, and puts blame on someone else. Post truth, as it seems, goes against the human capacity to understand complexities, to socialize, and to take responsibility.



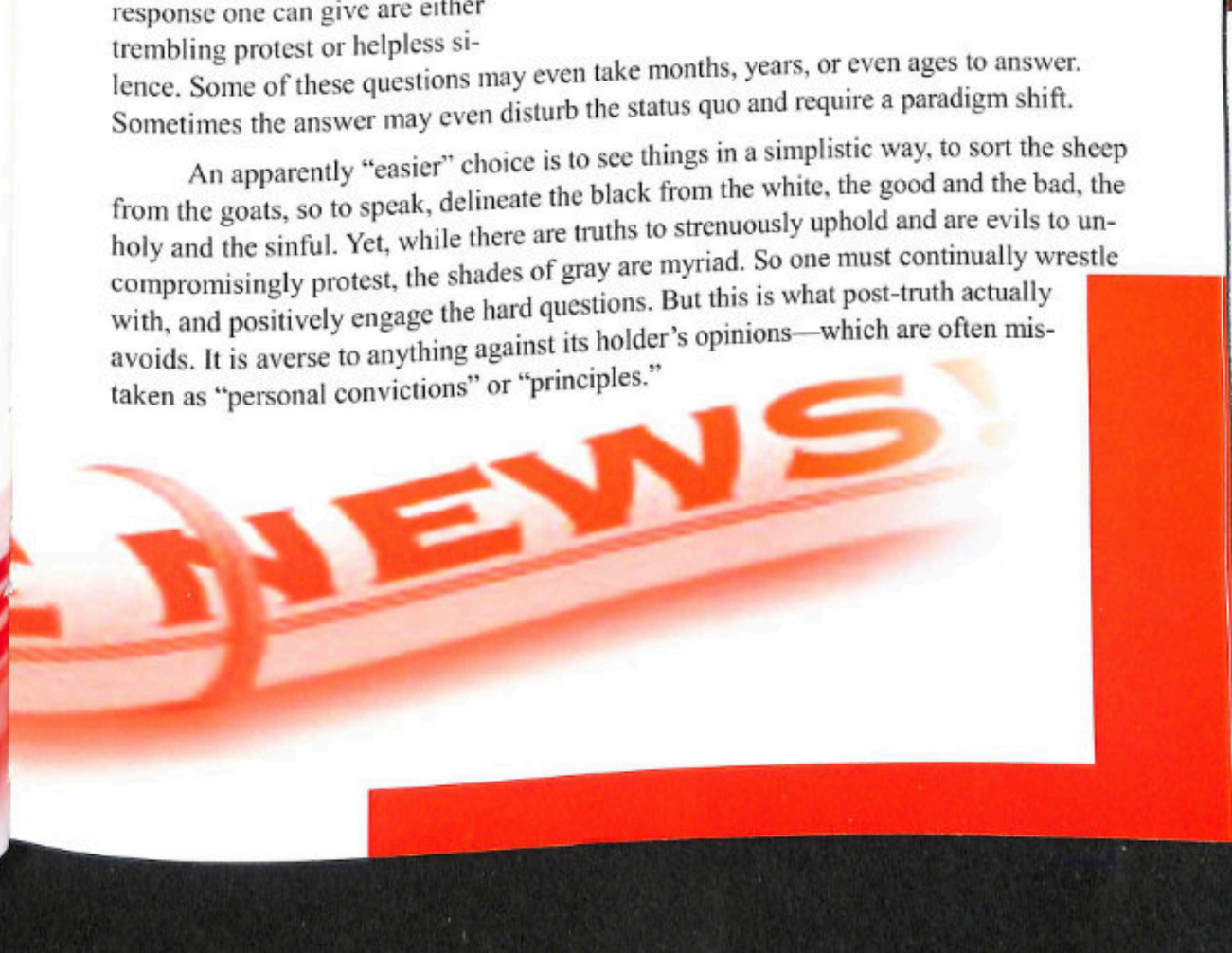
A second look

However, to put all the blame on those who subscribe to a post-truth ideology and label them as "'tards" (a contraction of "retards") as well would make no real difference. It would not change the way they think. It may even provoke even more anger. Rather than looking negatively at them, maybe looking at how they see things may shed light on their desires and intentions.

Understanding complexities in life is a daunting task. It requires wrestling with the absurd realities happening all around.

Understanding complexities in life is a daunting task. It requires wrestling with the absurd realities happening all around. Some of these questions are unnerving, like the question on suffering or if drug addicts are "human" or not, and the only response one can give are either trembling protest or helpless silence. Some of these questions may even take months, years, or even ages to answer. Sometimes the answer may even disturb the status quo and require a paradigm shift.

An apparently "easier" choice is to see things in a simplistic way, to sort the sheep from the goats, so to speak, delineate the black from the white, the good and the bad, the holy and the sinful. Yet, while there are truths to strenuously uphold and are evils to uncompromisingly protest, the shades of gray are myriad. So one must continually wrestle with, and positively engage the hard questions. But this is what post-truth actually avoids. It is averse to anything against its holder's opinions—which are often mistaken as "personal convictions" or "principles."



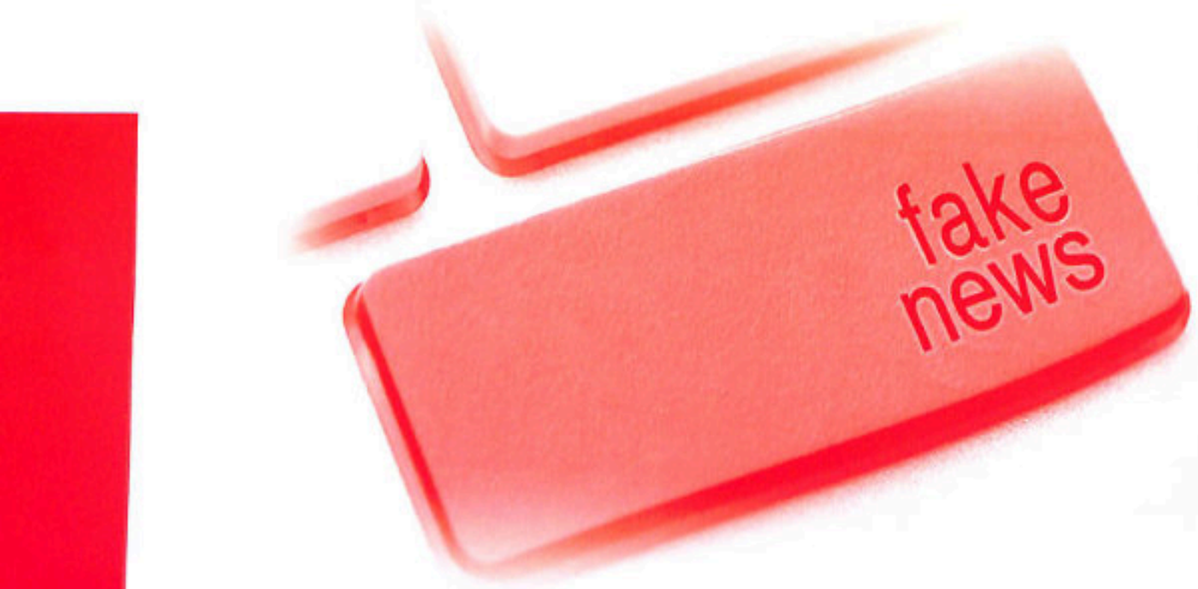
But behind the reductionist and the divisive outlook in life, those who subscribe to a post-truth ideology are actually not very different from the rest. While extreme emotionality could be a hindrance to genuine discourse, aren't these same strong emo-

What Theology can Offer ?

At this point, can theology solve the dangers and the hungers beneath a post truth ideology? The short answer would be no. The long answer is that it can't give an immediate and direct solution because theology can only show a certain part of the Truth. Bishop Anthony Fisher, OP said that the truth is a like a light. When faced directly, the truth blinds and hurts. However, this same truth also allows us to see things clearly and distinguish right from wrong. Thus, to address this post-truth ideology, there is a need to return to and know the Truth, and good theology reflects a good side of the Truth especially because the Truth is not simply an abstract reality—but the very person of Christ. Truth is not just proof-texting.

With this, what can theology offer to contribute to the return to the Truth? It can point us back to the basic truth of humanity's basic unity. Theology can remind everyone that all people are created by God and that gives us the same standing. Theology can spur us to be more accountable to one another and responsible for each other's lives. Theology can constantly make us protest any and every kind of killing, violence, bigotry, deception. Theology can offer refresh our memories of the relevant truths that remain crucial—and practically so—especially because Truth is Christ.

But since





Christ is as much the Way & the Life as he is the Truth, people who do theology must live out the Truth and walk it. It is extremely important that witnesses live out the truths that good theology (beyond proof-texting) teaches today. These witnesses, in their daily lives, are called to carry their learnings and live them out in the world. Theology, in a post-truth world, can also offer witnesses who journey toward the truth.

To end, truth should not just comfort, it must also confront even the difficult realities. Truth engages people and invites them to engage with other people. Truth pushes for dialogue and a continuous search. Truth, in a post-truth era, calls us to walk with those who subscribe to a post-truth ideology, enter their point of view, and along the way, slowly lead them back to the Truth.

Theology can remind everyone that all people are created by God and that gives us the same standing.

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CHURCH : POST EDSA

Sem. Paul Richard Dy

On November 9, 2016, the Supreme Court of the Philippines handed down a ruling that paved the way for the body of the late president Ferdinand Marcos to be buried at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* - a resting place to "perpetuate the memory of all the presidents of the Philippines, national heroes, and patriots for the inspiration and emulation of this generation and of generations still unborn." The move has surprisingly generated a considerable amount of support from the public, and has once again brought division to the Filipino nation and even within the Filipino Catholic Church. Many have expressed support for the burial in favor of national reconciliation and healing. But can the nation really move on with a hero's burial for the former dictator? The martial law era is a period that will forever be distinguished in Philippine history by the loss of civil liberties, increased human rights abuses by the military, the rise of graft and corruption, and economic mismanagement. The authoritarianism never really deviated from the patron-client relationship that has always plagued Philippine politics. Rather than restructure the system to benefit the poor and the marginalized, the Marcos regime pursued a top-down economic development agenda that made very little consultation with the affected communities and served instead new privilege groups, thus making it prone to abuse and conflict. And the Catholic Church in the Philippines played a prophetic role in reinstating the ideals of

The Moral and Social Implications of a Hero's Burial for Marcos

Thirty years after the Marcos dictatorship was overthrown by the EDSA revolution, the legacy of martial law continues to divide the nation. A nationwide survey ran by Social Weather Station between February 24 to 27, 2016 found that 50 percent of Filipinos believes that Marcos "deserves to be buried with official honors." Back in June 1986, a similar survey conducted by Ateneo-Social Weather Stations also revealed that 69 percent of Filipinos found Marcos a "brave president", and that only 14 percent wanted him to be punished for his crimes. Appalled at the Filipino people's ability to seemingly forget the atrocities of



the Marcos regime and immediately offer reconciliation to those who perpetuated crime, Fr. John Carroll, S.J. wrote in his piece *"A Nation in Denial"* that the Christian virtue of forgiveness should only be applied "to those who acknowledge their offenses and ask pardon, not to those who arrogantly deny that they have done any wrong." Moreover, punishment does not necessarily connote vengeance. When seen within the context of a community, punishment for a crime is the community's way of "reaffirming one of its values when this value has been seriously violated." This set of common values "gives unity and coherence" to a community – a "common conscience" according to Emile Durkheim. When the community recognizes that its common conscience has been violated, the community has to rise up in protest to punish the violators. Common conscience is thus considered weak when it is willing to forget the massive crimes against the nation, for a reaffirmation of the value that was violated is a reassurance that "this will never happen again." What is therefore required is a social system that consistently rewards those who behave according to the society's values, and discourages those who attempt to harm those values.

When the community recognizes that its common conscience has been violated, the community has to rise up in protest to punish the violators.



to build a society worthy of the human person, the social values of "truth, freedom, justice, and love" are to be upheld."

And the work of establishing a social system that would reverse the traditional relationship between power and values in Philippine society needs a symbol that signifies and communicates to us that power should be and can be in the service of values. Fr. Carroll goes on to assert that traditionally, it is the Church, as a structure of organizations that extends down to the local levels, who acts as the custodian of important symbols and values. With its wide-ranging network, the Church can carry the message of symbols and values to every town and barrio in the country. And the Second Vatican Council reminds us that to build a society worthy of the human person, the social values of "truth, freedom, justice, and love" are to be upheld. Of particular importance in our present-day re-evaluation of the Marcos legacy is the value of justice.

Justice in the Hebrew Scriptures: What constitutes a just community?

However, the approach that was traditionally used by the Church to understand justice had been primarily philosophical. Hence the concept of justice has acquired a very secular nature so much so that many Christians seem to have forgotten that justice has deep roots in the earliest Jewish and Christian traditions. Elsbernd and Bieringer in *"When Love is Not Enough"* expound that as a ratification of a covenant, the Law defined behavior that characterizes a right relationship between God and the people of Israel. However, the relationship extended beyond "just individuals" to cover justice as a quality of life among peoples within a community. As such, justice as a value did not just ask "What must I do to be just?" but also posed the question "What does a just community look like?" The just community therefore structured itself around patterns of right relationships that faithfully adhered to the demands of the covenant relationship, and requires that justice be an important component of a restructured social order.



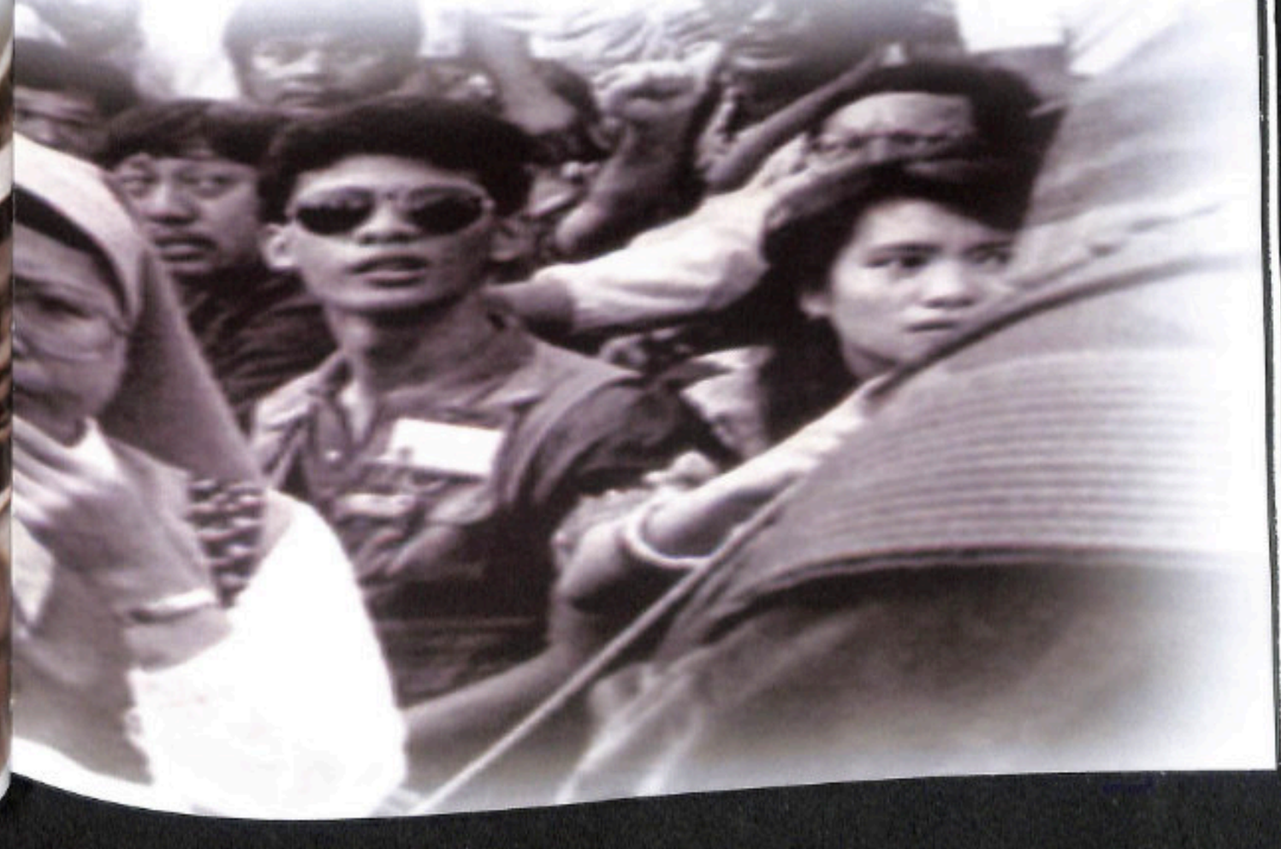
Justice that Restores and Heals: How should different people live together justly?

With the development of theological frameworks that increase stress on the relational aspect of justice, an old practice of justice in traditional cultures was rediscovered – a restorative justice that seeks to restore the losses suffered by the victims, that holds the offenders accountable for the harm they have caused, and one that aims to build peace within the communities. The *Episcopal Commission on Prison Pastoral Care* of the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines* emphasizes that restorative justice: (1) recognizes that offenders harm victims, communities, and even the offenders themselves; (2) insists that those involved and affected by the crime should participate in discussing the effects of the crime and the steps needed to make things right; (3) offers healing and forgiveness to everyone involved. Without condoning or excusing the offender, forgiveness releases the victim from the power that the offense and the offender have over them, and allows the victim to move on into becoming a survivor.

A Way Forward for the Church

Burying Ferdinand Marcos in the hallowed grounds of the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* underscored several facts that run counter to the nature of justice and genuine reconciliation: (1) the martial law era is replete with massive violations of civil rights and wide-scale graft and corruption (2) there have been no sincere efforts thus far from the Marcos family to restore the harm inflicted on Philippine society, most especially to the victims of human rights abuses. In fact, the Filipino bishops, in the 1983 pastoral letter *Reconciliation Today,* have declared that "reconciliation can take place only in truth, sincerity, freedom, justice, and by means of dialogue with the Gospel force of love that can transform both man and society."

But what is even more alarming is the consistency of certain realities that the February 2016 SWS surveys have revealed: (1) that 70 percent from Class ABC believed that Marcos was worthy of being buried in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*; 50 percent from Class D; 44 percent from Class E; (2) that 55 percent of those who were already born during martial law favored the burial; (3) that similar surveys conducted



imply that there is something more besides the Filipino's vague recollection of the crimes of martial law. But Fr. John Carroll once again offers his analysis that at the heart of the matter is the continued struggle for justice in the equitable access to resources and the political participation of everyone; and that power must be in the service of values in the struggle for justice. For justice to be realized, Fr. Carroll insists that the values of "justice, compassion, solidarity, and the concern for the common good" need to be reasserted and institutionalized not through "moral appeals" alone but by ensuring that: (1) the disadvantaged groups are organized at the grassroots to assert their rightful claim to "equality and participation", and that people can form their values, articulate their needs, and apply pressure as needed in defense of their interests through these organizations; (2) the disadvantaged groups are supported by other members of the society who are able to "exert moral leadership" or "influence public opinion."

Noting that the 1986 EDSA revolution was more of a religious moment rather than a movement that enforced structural change, Aloysius Cartagenas in *"Where have all the BECs Gone? Prospects of the Roman Catholic Church for the Democratization of the Filipino Polity and Culture"* raises a relevant question: How can the Church engage the people in a grassroots movement to "form their values, articulate their needs, and apply pressure as needed in defense of their interests"? In 1991, six years after democracy was restored in the Philippines, the Filipino Catholic Church convened the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines to discern its ecclesial identity and mission. By doing so, the Church acknowledged that the EDSA Revolution was "essentially a movement without yet an ideology", and that the Philippine society was still in need of a "coherent vision for nation-building." The Church thus adopted as her official pastoral strategy the Basic Christian Communities (BCC) program that was already in place in Mindanao during the martial law period, from thereon called Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). These BECs are small communities of Christian families who consciously strive to integrate their faith into their daily lives as a new way of being a small Church. Morally responsible and socially engaged BECs may give rise to the emergence of grassroots servant-leaders who, spurred by the desire to serve the common good, may help create the enabling environment for the meaningful participation of the people in the pursuit of justice.



The constant cry for social upheavals underscore the sad reality that the promise of justice after the EDSA Revolution was not lived out by many of our people – particularly poor communities. Arising out of such disillusionment is the concept of justice as a participation, one that emphasizes a "community-oriented" approach to justice which reinforces the role of structures and procedures. Adopting a central point in Elsbernd

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The work of the Church as a custodian of symbols and values in society has to be more effective and relevant to continue its prophetic tradition of remaining a witness to the most powerful symbol and value – the person of Christ. The late Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., one of the foremost church leaders who untiringly worked for a Christian conscientization during Martial Law, never forgot that the struggle of appropriating and living justice was to proclaim the narrative of Christ as the ultimate justice – the gracious intervention of God in the flesh for the establishment of justice. Three generations after the 1986 EDSA Revolution, the Church's work for justice is once again beset with frustrations and setbacks. Hopefully, the Church does not forget that the commitment to uphold the justice and peace of Christ also requires that people and communities are trained, educated, and formed into becoming agents of justice in their own private and public spheres; and that enough spaces are created for them to live out the justice and peace of Christ themselves. Like Christ, the BECs as a new way of being a priestly, prophetic, and kingly Church are propelled by the Christic values of justice, peace, and love. These small Christian communities participate in building the Kingdom of God as authentic human communities that incarnate a prophetic community wherein the giftedness of everyone is embraced, and everyone's right to participate is honored and realized.

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Discernment in Asian Contexts

The LST International Theological Forum 2017

Archie Magarao, Sch.P

March 16-17, 2017, Loyola School of Theology (LST) conducted a two-day International Theological Forum (ITF) at the Leong Building of the Ateneo de Manila University with the theme: "Frontiers, Dialogue and Discernment in Asian Contexts." It highlighted renowned theologians and experts namely Ms. Margot Torres, Dr. Filomeno Aguilar, Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, and Peter Phan. The ITF encouraged the LST community to explore various aspects of doing theology and evangelization.

Communications: Information Technology and Social Media was the first session's theme delivered by Ms. Margot Torres, SVP of McDonald's Philippines and Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor-in-chief of La Civilta Cattolica (Rome). On the one hand, Dr. Filomeno Aguilar of Ateneo de Manila University and Peter Phan of Georgetown University gave the second session on Asian Demography and Contemporary Challenges to Asian Churches.



Highlighting the good, the bad, and the ugly of social media and information technology was Ms. Torres' central thrust in her one-hour presentation. She noted that several persona exist in social media namely the influencer, listener, activist, humble bragger, the troll, etc. Each of these could occur in every social media user. Although social media made communication easier and the sharing of news and information accessible, it however reduced people's personal interaction. Similarly, she argued that social media affected negatively family closeness. It also created people who rant ceaselessly. The significant loss of productivity had added up to this negative effects of the social media. The worst effect of the social media according to Ms. Torres is the skewing of self-image by blurring the line between the true and imaginary. Furthermore, spreading fake news, privacy issues, peer pressure and cyber bullying, and fraud are accompanying ugly faces of the social media.

Fr. Spadaro, SJ, on the other hand, unlike the first speaker accentuated on the positive effects of the social media. He asserted that the internet is the new answer to ancient questions and desires. He believed that the internet is a rich human environment made by a network of people. The relevant question, on this regard, is what is the anthropological and theological meaning of the internet and what is its role in God's plan of salvation. He further advanced that the internet is an experience. As space of experience, it is an integral part of human life. It is therefore not just a tool but also an extension of the daily living space that requires responsibility.



Humans had perpetually tried to understand the world through technology, Fr. Spadaro stressed. The Christian task, in this regard, is to find the meaning and value of technology in God's plan of salvation. Finding connection therefore between technology and spirituality is an important Christian duty. Certainly, the social media is a potent means for evangelization.

Nowadays, noted Fr. Spadaro, raising the right question is more vital than giving the answer. The Gospel, he proposed, more than being the book of answers should be presented as book of questions. Identifying the essential question is indispensable on this regard. Moreover, one should not give answers to unasked questions.

The internet today has eclipsed traditional broadcasting. It as well changed content sharing among people. This posed a challenge in the communication of the faith. Thus, there is a need for renewed evangelization of the faith vis-à-vis the shift of mentality towards communication. In this context, the faith must be shared than broadcasted, stated Fr. Spadaro.

Sharing of contents nowadays created networks of relationships. Hence, society and culture are understandable not only through content but also through relationships. After all, it is about people and relationships that contents are shared. Christian witnessing is central in this respect. By sharing contents in social media, one becomes a witness of what one shared. Content, he added, should generate relationships if it wanted to be meaningful.

Multiplication of connection in social media should lead to deeper communion. Connection is not enough to make the internet a place of full human sharing. Therefore, the Catholic's duty on the internet is to make it mature from a place of connection to a place of communion. Only human communion has the ability to recognize the otherness of the *other*. It further gives avenue for diversity, dialogue, and genuine discovery of the *neighbor*---a neighbor who is both virtual and physical.

Dr. Filomeno Aguilar opened the afternoon session with his topic on demography, democracy, and modernity. Population change had occurred across Asia, he observed. Strikingly, Asia's population is expected to stop growing by 2050 as evident in China and Thailand. The data revealed that from 1950-2050 the trend of large families and short lifespan would end up with small families and long lifespan. Life expectancy is also rising in Asia. Simultaneously, there is a fertility rate decline across the Asian continent. Factors like preventive health and medical treatment, socioeconomic development, mass education, formal sector employment, effective family planning, and postponement of marriage cause such waning. Furthermore, the rise on individual autonomy and self-actualization had aggravated the situation. As a result, marriage is now highly individualized as institutional constraints disappear and social norms shift in value orientation. Moreover, aging population, increased urbanization, internal migration, age of individual mobility, and

international labor migration in South East Asia are other notable aspects of this trend.

Demographic change in religion across Asia also exists, added Dr. Aguilar. Islam would soon be the dominant religion according to the data since fertility rate still ran high among Muslim areas. Increasing religious discrimination against minority religions in Muslim and Buddhist majority countries in Asia is a consequent result of this trend. This is worrisome as Muslim and Buddhist majority countries show less tolerance towards other religions than Christian dominant countries.

Dr. Aguilar's democratic consolidation data further showed that majority of Asian countries are substantially unfree. Interestingly, Southeast Asians believe that they live in democracy despite Freedom House Rating result saying otherwise. It therefore raised the question as to how democracy is understood in SE Asia. Similarly, Asians believe that good economy is more important than democratic living. Democratic legitimacy, therefore, depends on whether effective governance delivers stability and decent living standards. People understood democracy in this connection as freedom from fear and want and having freedom and dignified living. Nonetheless, there is a growing inequality across Asia and income is one significant factor. Adding to this is the worsening of poverty.

Suicide, on the other hand, had narrowed gender gap in Asia as more men increasingly took their lives. Depression and psychiatric disorders, acute life stress such as job loss and gambling, financial problems, high rate of pesticide ingestion of young rural women in China, and women suicide due to dowry dispute in India were some risk factors, cited Dr. Aguilar. He finally noted that young Asians are growing in a very different environment such that they desire to be heard and express their feelings.

Renowned theologian, Peter Phan, delivered the final topic of LST's International Theological Forum. His lecture titled, "Go to Strange Places, Cross Borders, Build Bridges: Contemporary Challenges to the Asian Catholic Church." He began by quoting Matthew's great commission account found in chapter 28:18-20. Jesus' commissioning posed three questions, according to Phan. First, as the Church was tasked to "go" to the "nations," which are today the "nations" in Asia to which Asian churches must go? Second, in going to these "nations" the Church would encounter borders of every kind, which borders and what should Asian churches do with them? Third, as the Church was commanded to make disciples, what does it mean today to "make disciples?



Phan stressed that the Church is a movement. It is not just an institution since its mission is to "go." The Church, in this vein, must bore a "going-forth" ecclesiology with the virtue of mercy. It should not be forgotten, contended Phan, that the faith propagated through the "gossiping of the Gospel" by ordinary people. Despite this, there were still difficult areas for the Church



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Asian nations were already rich in cultures and civilizations prior to the arrival of the western missionaries. They had already possessed deep religiosity before Christianity arrived. Hence, Asian cultures also have something to contribute to the communication of the faith.

Phan distinguished three functions of non-geographical borders, first, it is an individual and communal identity marker, second, it fences out people different from oneself, and third, it is a frontier for the expansion of one's knowledge and relationship circle. Globalization and mass media made borders multiple and porous these days. In response to these challenges, the Church in its *catholicity* should open up borders as *frontiers*. Therefore, Asian Churches must be agents of presence, kenosis, reconciliation, and holistic integration. There is no other model to follow on this regard but Jesus who is the border-crosser par excellence, first, in the Incarnation, second, in his ministry, and third, in his death and resurrection.

Christian mission should be bridge-building, stressed Phan. In this relation, he provided three models viz. *missio ad gentes* (Mission to the Gentiles), *missio inter gentes* (Mission among the Gentiles), *missio cum gentibus* (Mission with the Gentiles). In *missio ad gentes*, the Church mush be a giver and receiver all together. In *missio cum gentibus*, the Church must do mission *among* and in the midst of Christians, non-Christians, and those who have no religious belief. In *missio cum gentibus*, the Church must collaborate with people of other faiths and of no faith to promote world justice, peace, and integrity of creation. Lastly, in all of the Church's missions Jesus promised to stay with us down to the very end of time. This promise is the sustenance of the Church and its hope in crossing borders and building bridges in strange lands.

The LST International Theological Forum compelled its audience to be courageous in doing theology and mission. It rejuvenated LST's theological understanding and missionary spirit. Along with its second day session, LST community was given the chance to share and exchange insights on the four talks of the previous session. The activity deepened the participants' theological understanding on the relationship between technology and faith and sociology and ecclesiology. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is alive, guiding the Church as Jesus promised, and LST's ITF is one avenue of its urging presence.



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