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Tinig Loyola



LONGING TO BE SAVED

Understanding our Passion for Superheroes

Tinig Loyola

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A CALL TO GREATNESS

For a change, we wanted to have a "light" issue for this semester. Last year, we took on heavy stuff, concentrating on the country's social and political environment at that time. Still, we wanted a relevant issue. While scouting around for a theme, we observed that in the last three years, in terms of popular culture, there is a considerable amount of literature on superheroes inundating comics, television, and movies. This year alone we have witnessed the return of Superman. Although Hollywood has been churning out this kind of movie, what is significant is how local television has caught on to this fad, with the major networks either resurrecting local superheroes or creating new ones. GMA 7 continues with its successful Lord of the Rings-inspired Enkantadia, while its rival station has recently come up with a Harry Potter-like series in SuperInggo.

What, we asked, would be the reason for all this? In other words, why is this fad clicking with many in the populace, especially the youth and at this particular point in time, in the post 9-11 era, or closer to home, in the post-Cardinal Sin era? Is it mere escapism or is there something deeper than our fascination for visual effects? Does it reflect something about the culture of the people or something about their *sitz in lebem* or the hard realities of life? In his article, Xavier Alpasa, for instance, feels that this superhero fad mirrors the current desperate longing for good leaders in the political landscape. What seemed like a "light" issue hence turned out to be a cultural investigation. As our readers will find out in this issue, there is indeed "more than meets the eye" in our fascination with superheroes.

As students of theology, we welcomed the task. In class, we are always told to be immersed in the cultures of the people we serve. In the lead article, for example, Eric Santillan finds that our local superheroes differ from their foreign counterparts, with the gap explained by our distinct cultural mores and value systems. For his part, Richard Escoto shares how these media-created "superheroes from above" challenge our "superheroes from below"—our Christian heroes or more appropriately our Christian saints and martyrs—in our hallowed mission of evangelization.

And yet what seemed like a simple excursion into pop culture led us further to familiar ground—theology. For starters, Cris Fajardo, in his piece, reflects that there is already a close affinity between us, mortal beings, and the superheroes we admire—like the latter, we possess "superpowers" by virtue of the indwelling spirit within each one of us. With grace, we are capable of extraordinary virtue, extraordinary hope, faith and love, as exemplified by our saints and martyrs. Human as we are,



We are privileged to have been called to this mission. But as Peter Parker found, "with great power comes great responsibility."

there is a "super" in all of us. With God's grace, we are able to transcend our limitations and achieve the *magis*.

On that note, we hope, dear readers, that this issue will not only make us reflect, but also inspire us. As students of Loyola School of Theology, we are challenged to do the *magis* in our studies (especially as the finals are coming) as well as in our apostolates. As future leaders, pastors, prophets, and teachers of the Church we love, we are called to exemplify in our lives and ministries greater discipline and competence. We are privileged to have been called to this mission. But as Peter Parker found, "with great power comes great responsibility."

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PAINTING BY ALEX ROSS. FROM WONDER WOMAN: SPIRIT OF TRUTH © DC COMICS

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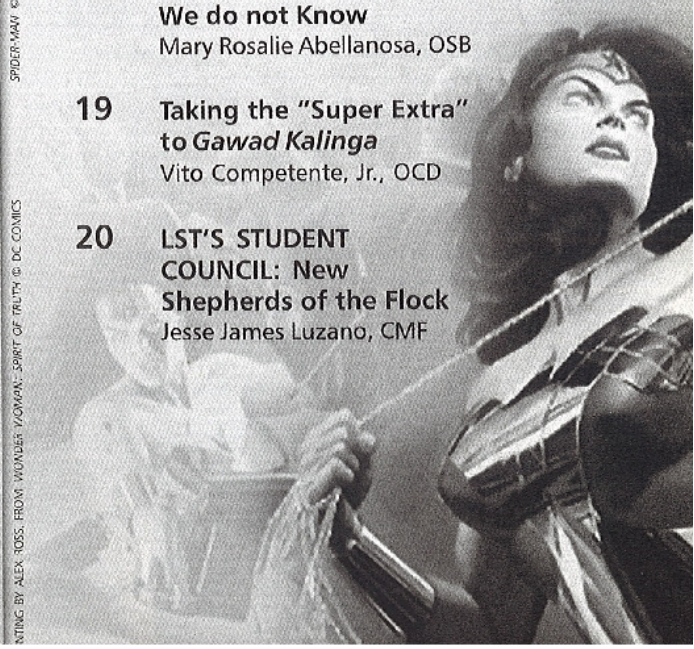
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What Our Superheroes Tell Us

We notice a proliferation of superhero stories in TV and the movies nowadays. This past month, we saw what has been touted as the last of the *X-Men Trilogy* and the very successful return of a Cristopher Reeve-less *Superman*. Trailers of the new *Spiderman* movie are already being shown in theaters. On the local front, we had the *Darna* series on GMA 7 several months ago along with *Panday* on ABS CBN. Before *Darna*, GMA had *Mulawin*—which was about a mythical race of bird-human creatures. Currently, *Captain Barbell* (with the popular Richard Gutierrez in the title role) is lording it over the figurative skies of the boobtube.

Is it merely coincidence that all these superhero stories are coming out at this point in our nation's (and the world's) history? Or is the proliferation of these stories and these characters media's own way of "editorializing" the events that are happening around us? Is it our way of reminding ourselves that we are not alone, because we have heroes among us?

Several theories have been presented about this. The most obvious is that the popularity of the superhero genre in media signifies a clamor for heroes to emulate. There seems to be a lack of real-life heroes to imitate nowadays, and so we resort to mythical media-created superheroes in order to make alive the values of heroism, sacrifice and selflessness.

It was said for example that *Voltes V*—the Japanese animation about a robot controlled by five humans—was shown and became popular at around the time of two major historical events in our country. During the Marcos era, *Voltes V* became popular and the then President Ferdinand Marcos had the political perception to ban it. *Voltes V* became popular once again around the Erap years and his impeachment trial. Media observers say that *Voltes V* is really a story about cooperation (five humans work hand in hand to control *Voltes V*), selflessness and love for country and somehow these values were projected to its viewers. Thus, it was President Marcos' perception that it is a dangerous animated story—dangerous specially with the government's tenuous hold on its citizenry.

Literary Critic Sol Reyes would say that our superhero stories have facilitated "the mass acceptance of grim realities. They served as the cathartic venue for the people who were bereft of economic or political power." If this is true, it does not just effect the *acceptance* of realities. It even has the power to lead to unconscious introspection that leads to eventual action.

This might be even more real with our Filipino superheroes. While influenced and even "copied" from the American comic books (the characters have fair skin and high-bridged noses and were based on American heroes—Darna on *Wonder Woman* and



***Pinoy Komiks* Facts and Figures**

- The very first Pinoy *komiks* superheroes appeared in 1946, right at the birth of the Philippine comics industry. This was the year of Independence from the US and subsequent to the three years of Japanese Occupancy.
- *Halakhak Komiks* and *Pilipino Komiks* were the first two comics-magazines in the Philippines. Although *Halakhak Komiks* did not contain any serious superhero story, it had, on the other hand, a Pinoy funny superhero called *Siopawman*, created by a young cartoonist named *Larry Alcala*.
- The first true Pinoy komiks superhero was *Ipo-ipo*, a character created by Lib Abrena and Oscar del Rosario. Ipo-Ipo gets his superpowers from the whirlwind. He acquires the speed of the wind and bullets fired into him just pass through his body. Fresh from the horrors of the Japanese invasion, Abrena and Del Rosario pitted Ipo-ipo against the ruthless Japanese soldiers who refused to surrender, even after the unconditional capitulation of Japan in 1945.
- In July 1947, Mars Ravelo created *Varga* in *Bulaklak* Magazine. Varga was actually the first Darna, and she also had an alter-ego named *Narda*. When Ravelo left *Bulaklak* and was hired in Ace Publications, he re-created Varga and renamed her Darna.
- In 1950, Darna appeared in *Pilipino Komiks*, re-created by Mars Ravelo and superbly illustrated by Nestor Redondo. The first story of Darna tells of her battles against the evil Valentina.
- More than any other superhero, Darna opened the floodgates of superheroes in Philippine comics. Aside from being the first komiks superhero to capture the attention of Pinoy komiks readers, Darna also laid claim as the first superhero to appear in the movies, with Rosa del Rosario in the lead role.

Source: http://pilipinokomiks.blogspot.com/2006/06/first-pinoy-komiks-superheroes.html

By Eric Santillan, SJ

About Who We Are

Captain Barbell on *Captain Marvel* for example), the stories of these characters were definitely Filipino.

For one, the superheroes always spoke in Filipino. Emil Flores, an editor of graphic novels and a creative writer, would point out that it's the *melodrama* more than the superhero character itself that has proven to be the genre in comics. Even the superheroes were Filipino not just in nationality but also in terms of origin. Darna, Captain Barbell, and Panday all belong to the working class and receive their powers from magical objects handed down to them because of their humility and purity of heart.

Compare this fact to American comic-book heroes. They either inherently possess their skills and powers (Superman, Wonder Woman, Storm, Cyclops or even Batman who trains himself to peak human perfection), or get their powers through scientific means (the Flash, Daredevil, Wolverine, Spider-Man and the Hulk). These superheroes and their origins demonstrate valued American qualities such as individualism and pragmatism.

Writer Emil Flores adds, "The Filipino heroes, on the other hand, tend to display fatalism and religiosity. Indeed, even the psuedo-scientific origins of characters such as Lastikman (a meteor hits a rubber tree which gives a simple boy powers) are attributed to God."

Our heroes merit their powers by being humble and good. And because they're good people, they never use their powers for selfish gain or for evil. The power is both their reward and their burden. There is a point in the story where they feel the power too heavy to bear, and a crisis happens when the superhero asks himself/herself whether to continue or not. The crisis point usually comes because the hero's powers endanger his/her immediate family (another very Filipino aspect of the story—if something happens to the family, everything collapses). The power itself becomes a burden; before perspective is reached, the power is finally *accepted* as the hero's responsibility and the hero rises again. Even before Peter Parker had his crisis in the second Spiderman movie, our heroes like Darna and Captain Barbell already had their own superhero crisis. Note here the play of responsibility in the hero's decision-making. Power *is* responsibility for the Filipino. And responsibility is usually seen as sacrifice—something heavy, a cross to bear. The sacrifice is highlighted more than the reward, not just because superheroes are supposed to be sacrificial, but because it mirrors many aspects of our personality and our culture as a people—long-drawn sacrifice, silent suffering, and perseverance among many other traits.

Our superheroes live in present-day Philippines. If the story is situated in another place—Etheria or Encantadia, for example or the land of *Majika*—very familiar elements of our society come out in allegorical form. The narrative is usually about government (or some other kind of authority's) impotence, elite domination, and the eventual rise of the people from poverty.



JUSTICE LEAGUE AND SUPERMAN FROM MYTHOLOGY: THE COMICBOOK ART OF ALEX ROSS © DC COMICS

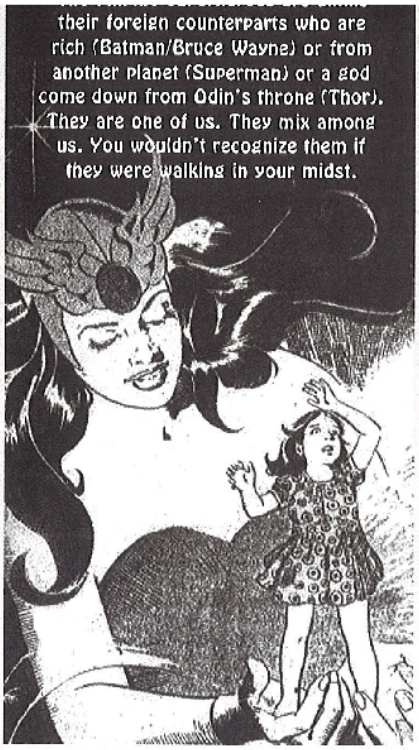


ILLUSTRATION BY NESTOR REDONDO. DARNA © MARS RAVELO

In the end, our superhero stories tell us that there is hope amidst the problems we encounter in our society. Even if the odds are stacked against us, there is a way out. On the one hand, the stories mirror to us our propensity for *deus ex machina* solutions. We probably pray about our problems more than find practical and real solutions to them (*"ipapasa-Diyos na lang"*). On the other hand, the praying does matter and *is* a way out of problems because it strengthens our resolve and gives us hope.

This is the power of superheroes in our culture. In a culture needing heroes to emulate, Darna and Panday and Captain Barbell tell us that heroism can come in unlikely places—in the slums, among the poor, among the downtrodden. The Filipino superheroes are not OTHER, just like their foreign counterparts who are rich (Batman/Bruce Wayne) or from another planet (Superman) or a god come down from Odin's throne (Thor). They are one of us. They mix among us. You wouldn't recognize them if they were walking in your midst. And because they are one of us, it is possible to be like them as well.

In the end, that is the most important challenge of our superheroes. It is not that we are not alone because our superheroes are with us. But that, really, heroism *is* possible. Superheroes are not alone. They have us with them.



What is it that attracts us to Superheroes? What are the qualities that we identify in Superheroes? This entire issue of *Timig Loyola* attempts to answer these questions from a variety of perspectives; this article tries to glean some insights from a survey distributed to LST students during the first week of August, 2006.

THE SURVEY ITSELF. A brief overview provides the context of the survey; it asked for responses to the following questions:

- Who is your favorite superhero? What one quality does the superhero possess that you admire?
- Who is a hero in history that you respect (this must be a real person)? What one quality does this person have that makes you respect him/her?
- Who is the person you most admire in your life (someone you know)? What one quality does that person possess that you admire?

The survey design was open-ended to allow respondents to answer as they saw fit. The survey also had two demographic questions: "Which best describes you? Seminarian, Priest, Nun/Sister, Lay" and "What year are you in? 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, Other."

Surveys were distributed in one course at each year-level of the STB program with the hope that enough of the non-STB students would be present to ensure an adequate representation across the LST student community.

Looking at the demographic data, 60 respondents (88%) reported as Seminarians, and 3 each (4.5% each) reported as Nun/Sister and Lay. A response to this question was missing on 2 (3%) surveys. This data is inconsistent with the student composition of LST, where (of 406 total students), 234 (57.5%) are seminarian/male religious, 51 (12.5%) are female religious, and 121 (30%) are Lay. Thus, the responses are more accurately interpreted as reflective of the seminarians and male religious at LST, rather than of the entire student body.

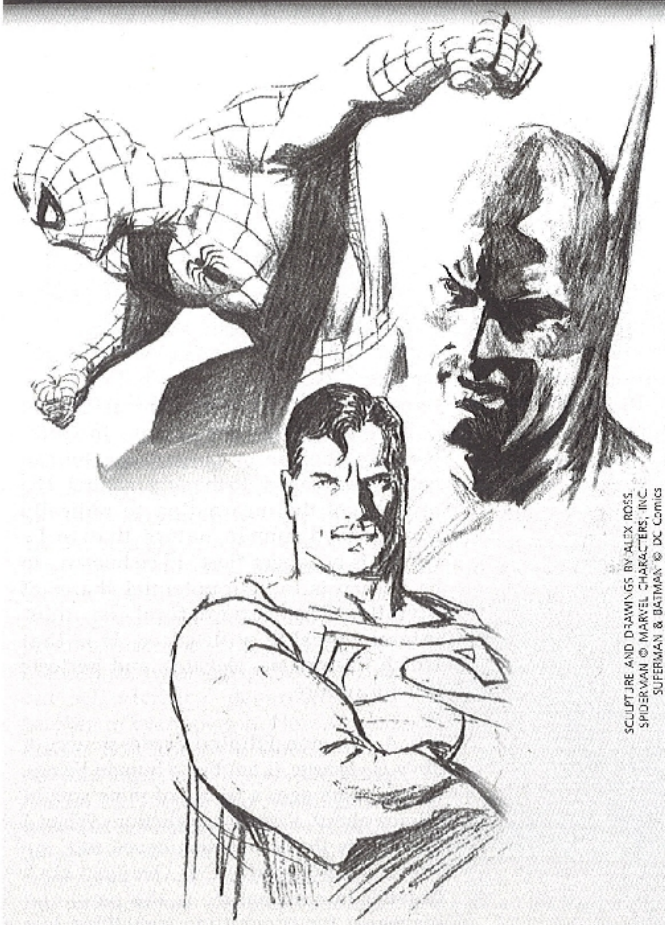
Moving to class years, the 4th year, because they were not in their STB core classes at the time of the survey, had 0 respondents to the survey. 1st year were 27 (40%) of the respondents, 2nd year were 20 (30%), 3rd year were 15 (22%), and 4 (6%) respondents selected "Other." Again, there were 2 surveys that did not respond to this question.

One final shortcoming of the survey, as pointed out on two of the forms, was that the questions request a "superhero" or "hero" for two of the questions, potentially biasing respondents against selecting "superheroines" or "heroines." However, respondents offered both heroes and heroines on the survey, so it is not clear whether this had any effect on responses.

The analysis of the data was completed by entering the information into SPSS and Microsoft Excel, and then counting the number of times individual heroes/heroines were listed. After identifying each top respondent, a list of qualities were reviewed for similarities; those being mentioned several (2 or more times) were listed.

By Michael Liberatore

LST'S SUPERHEROES



SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS BY ALEX ROSS.
SPIDERMAN © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.
SUPERMAN & BATMAN © DC Comics

THE SUPERHERO NAMED MOST OFTEN WAS SPIDERMAN, WITH 24% FOR QUALITIES OF SELFLESSNESS, HUMILITY AND SACRIFICE. SECOND WAS BATMAN, WITH 13% FOR INTELLIGENCE AND HUMANITY. SUPERMAN, WITH 9% FOR SELFLESS SERVICE AND STRENGTH, WAS THE ONLY OTHER SUPERHERO TO BE NAMED ON MORE THAN 5 BALLOTS.

FICTIONAL SUPERHEROES. The first question was designed to focus on those fictional heroes with supernatural abilities; however, nearly 20% of respondents (about 1 in 5) identified real people as Superheroes. Among the names mentioned were Jesus, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Fidel Castro and Romeo Intengan. These answers, combined with the qualities identified amongst the superheroes mentioned, may indicate a perceived connection between what humans are able to achieve and the "superhuman achievements" of superheroes. This is especially evident in the case of Batman, where respondents identified his being human yet striving to be more than human in fighting evil as an admirable quality.

The superhero named most often was Spiderman who was named on 16 surveys (24%), about 1 in 4. He was associated with qualities of selflessness, humility and sacrifice. Second was a tie between a real person and a fictional character. Jesus Christ, with his humility and love, and Batman, for his intelligence and humanity. Both were named on 9 surveys (13%), or about 1 in 8. Superman, with 6 votes (9%), about 1 in 10, for his selfless service and strength, was the only other superhero to be named on more than 5 ballots.

HEROES IN HISTORY. The second question attempted to look at significant persons in history who have heroic qualities and to identify those qualities. The responses here were slightly more diverse, with the top person named being Jose Rizal, on 10 surveys (15%), or about 1 in 7. Rizal was the clearest of all those named in that his most admired qualities were nearly unanimous: his love of country and his people (or some variation on that idea). After Rizal, we again see Jesus Christ being identified, this time for his compassion and love on 9 surveys (13%) or about 1 in 8. Just behind Jesus, was Ninoy Aquino, named on 8 surveys (12%), also about 1 in 8. Like Rizal, Aquino was identified for his love of country but also his willingness to die for his countrymen. This was a slight variation from how respondents identified Rizal's quality. Rounding out the top five named are Pope John Paul II, for his piety and humility and Martin Luther King, Jr. with 4 (6%) and 3 (4%) votes respectively.

Amongst the less frequently listed heroes, Cardinal Sin (prophetic leadership), Cory Aquino (willing to lead in spite of inadequacies), Andres Bonifacio (willing to die for country) and Apolinario Mabini (kindness) were named once each. These four, however, were named on less ballots than both Hitler (for being witty, cunning, and possessing common sense) and GMA (for strong leadership and diligence). Interesting. This may indicate the need for further survey research to see how people define hero and the heroic.

HEROES WE KNOW. The final survey question attempted to identify heroes and heroic qualities in individuals actually known by the respondents. Nearly 50% (1 in 2) of the respondents identified a family member with mothers named 19 times (28%), over 1 in 4; fathers named 10 times (15%), about 1 in 7, and other family members 3 times (4%). The qualities of these overlapped with love, sacrifice, courage and strength named most often.

Only three other individuals were named twice or more, and they were Mother Teresa (3 times for love, energy and availability), Fidel Castro (2 times for being a great leader) and Thomas Green (2 times for spirituality and holiness). In addition, priests were named 15 times (22%), with Jesuits comprising 10 of the priests named.

SO WHAT? In looking at the overall responses, one sees that respondents consistently identified qualities of sacrifice, love, humility and strength/power in those whom they identified as heroes or heroic. These qualities were consistent across categories of heroes/heroines and may point to people associating with the human characteristics of fictional superheroes/superheroines, just as they recognize those qualities in other people whom they admire as heroes/heroines.

However, while there may be similarities in how respondents referred to fictional as opposed to real heroes/heroines, there was a difference. The "strength" associated with superheroes was typically described as power or in physical terms, whereas the strength of human heroes was described as courage, perseverance, and dedication. This may indicate a potentially significant subtle difference that indicates how people perceive the way fictional characters, as opposed to real people, relate to the world. And this difference may explain why some people look to superheroes in times of crisis, for superheroes have the power to overcome and change reality, while human heroic power involves enduring and surviving reality.

Thus we have a small picture of the qualities that make certain fictional and real characters heroes and heroines to some LST students.

While stories of superheroes never fail to give us a "good feeling," they nevertheless remain fictional. Super strength, x-ray vision, telepathy and other extrasensory powers remain childish wishes. In real life what fascinates and challenges me are the real life heroes—people who, though beset with human finitude and thrown into the ambiguity and contradiction of existence, still emerge larger than life. Heroes for me are those who come out of difficult physical and moral ordeals exhausted and wounded, yet possessing greater integrity. They suffer the crucible because of principles and, in the end, become the personification of these same principles. These people are real heroes!

Our collective memory abounds with examples of these heroes. Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to take the place of someone who was to be executed in a Nazi concentration camp. Richie Fernando saved the lives of his Cambodian students and in the process sacrificed his own.



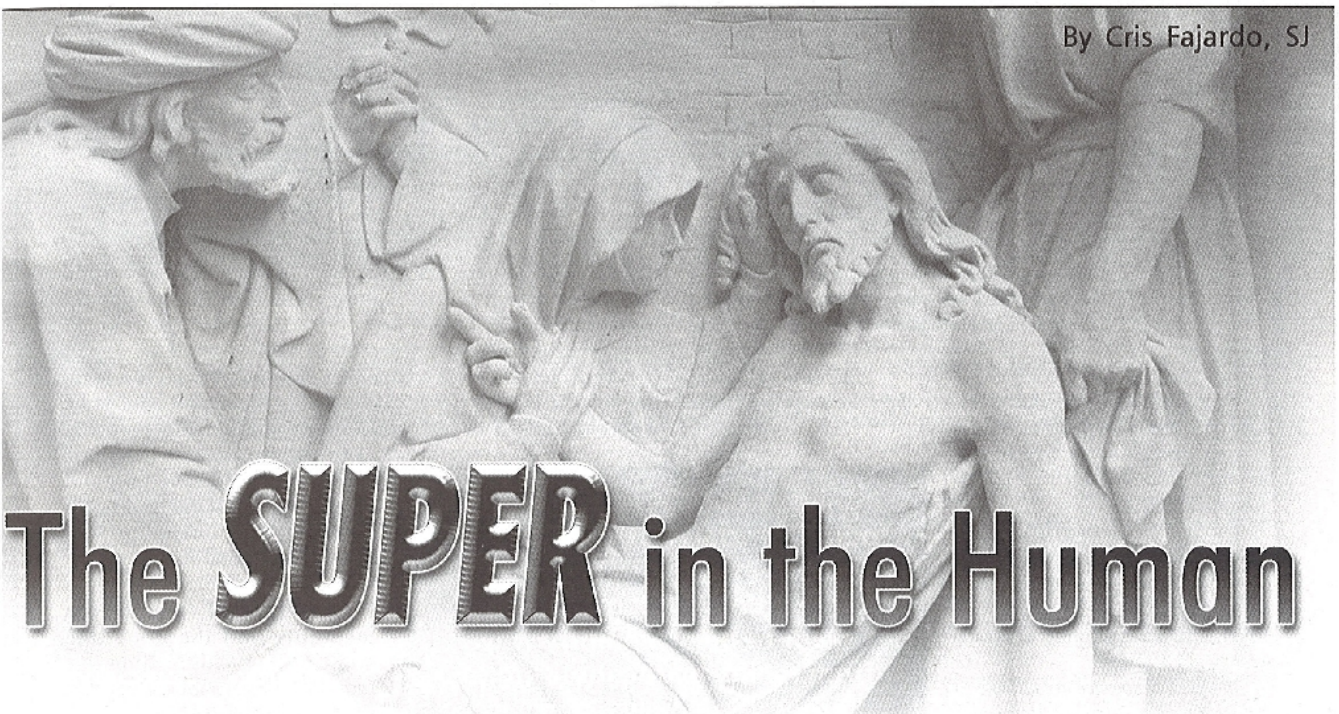
Mother Teresa abandoned her own country and took care of the most neglected found in the streets of Calcutta. These people, among many others, were not protected by magical capes and super genetic structures. They too carry the internal contradictions, fears, insecurities and brokenness that we all carry. Yet, they emerged triumphant, bringing to light in exemplary ways the deeper and mysterious richness of human nature.

The stories of our real-life heroes somehow illustrate an important aspect of our Christian-faith. Apart from the Hollywood-constructed superpowers, we can rightly speak of the *super* in the human. It is not "magic stones," nor venoms of genetically altered insects that make superheroes. No, it's not external things that bring out the fullness of humanity. Already "in" us is a *super* which is real. In human beings, coupled with nature, is the supernatural.

Being Supernatural. Enshrined in the Christian Tradition is the belief that human beings, though sharing in the nature of the created universe, surpass the world of mere things. Though composed of the same elements, man is "more than just a speck of nature" (*Gaudium et Spes* 14). Anchored on St. Athanasius' doctrine of *Theosis* – "the Son of God became human, that we might become God"—human beings are recognized as being destined to an end that is beyond the merely human. In God's becoming human in Christ Jesus, human nature was "called" to the supernatural. The mystery of the incarnation so radically transformed human nature that to be human is no longer "just" to be human—to be human is to be a potential sharer of divinity. The supernatural is, thus, interchangeable with grace. It is that which transforms, elevates, and perfects human nature.

A common Filipino expression goes *ako'y tao lamang* (I am but a human being). A few years ago, a friend of mine sought advice about a certain addiction. When I asked how the compulsion developed, my friend simply said, "Cris, *tao lang ako*." Indeed, human nature is the perennial scapegoat for committing something less human. But, a deep appreciation of the supernatural in our human nature makes us realize that being human predisposes us to something bigger and nobler than *just* the human. I should have told my friend, "You are human, that's why you are not *just* human."

Another way of understanding the supernatural in the human is to understand our existential restlessness. A student of mine once shared with me this peculiar condition: "Why is it that I feel so needy, while I am deeply aware that I am already overflowing?" No matter how superfluous our life is, there is in us a natural poverty.



By Cris Fajardo, SJ

The SUPER in the Human

We always seek something more. While we do need others to fill up the void in our being, the love that we can give likewise calls for recipients. These desires are manifestations of the calling of the supernatural in us. The inadequacy of solitary existence, instead of being seen as a defect, is an empowering predisposition to go out of ourselves and find completion in communion with others. As my student eventually realized, the inner ambivalence was a precondition for real and deeper friendships, relationships which bring out self-sacrifice, generosity, and heroism in every person. However, no matter how intimate some human relationships may be, we creatures remain incomplete and wanting. The relational void and its fulfillment in the human sphere point us to the ultimate reality that our unquenchable longing and inner disquiet can only be fulfilled and calmed by the Infinite God.

Unlike Darna's *bato*, which Narda had to deserve by proving her good-heartedness, the *super* in us is not something we deserve. It is also something that we cannot naturally claim as though we are entitled to it. It is the gratuitous act of God's love that transforms our human nature and enables us to share in His divine life.

Gratuity of the *Super*. Unlike *Darna's bato*, which Narda had to deserve by proving her good-heartedness, the *super* in us is not something we deserve. It is also something that we cannot naturally claim as though we are entitled to it. Despite its radical effect, the supernatural is not something that is due to human nature. It is the gratuitous act of God's love that transforms our human nature, thereby enabling us to share in His divine life. As our liturgy constantly reminds us: "The desire to praise you is itself your gift." Human nature's very longing for and directedness toward God is itself given by God. Here, we see how God's love is at work in the supernatural. It is God, who in his prior desire for us to desire Him, sets our hearts on fire to seek him.

While respecting our freedom, God prepared the way and provided us the capacity to desire, hear, accept and respond to His love that completes us. The supernatural is God's very self-giving. This is a relationship involving love and friendship and cannot be otherwise. It is a sharing of inner life. The disturbing asymmetry of this "Wondrous Exchange" all the more highlights the mysterious depth of the love that is involved. God gives His infinite love, while the creature receives from the infinite depth of desire that has been given to him, thus evoking much love and gratitude. The supernatural in us is not something that we put on and off. It is not something that is affected by meteorites and holy smokes. There is no bacterium that can reverse its effects. The supernatural in us is our very humanity. True, in the logical sense, we can still speak of a *pure nature*, but the actual and concrete human person is never simply *pure nature*. To be a human person is to be called from within oneself to be supernatural.

The *Super* that Makes Real Heroes. The supernatural in us does not cause us to fly or allow us to see through walls. It does not grant us telepathy or make us invisible. The supernatural gives us something more. It transforms our humanity and makes the splendor of the Divine shine through us. In a more real, non-fictional way, the supernatural in us makes us more human and not "just" human. It makes us and calls us to be human beings that are larger than the pejorative *tao lamang*. It enables us to love in the most authentic way—the love that heroes exemplify. The supernatural calls us to testify to the much deeper reality in us and hence to be real icons that proclaim the glory of the ultimate Hero—God, with whom, the supernatural calls us to be in intimate union.

By Xavier Alpasa, SJ

OUR Father

Yahoo recently made a global poll (simultaneous with the venture by *Tinig Loyola* into the same theme) of why we are in search of heroes. Here are some attention-grabbing responses:

- *Subconsciencely, we want to believe there are people out there who will save us from the world's mess.*
- *Superheroes are archetypes and as such resonate with us on an unconscious level.*
- *Our human tendency is to believe that we are good people.*
- *We continue to see those heroes as ourselves.*
- *We are always trying to escape reality.*
- *It's part of how we are all able to relate to each other as there is a common set of "symbols" for us all to identify in each other.*

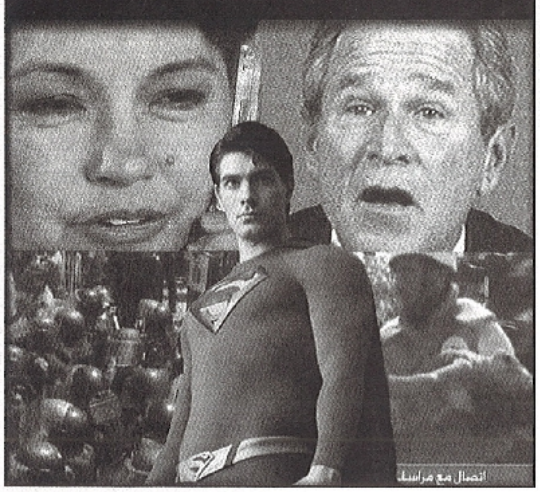
These responses make me wonder: Which of these is reflective of our country? Amidst the current political squabbles and cataclysm there is no denying that we are all searching for a hero. The more significant question is why.

"Meat shop" regulars and Ralph Gehring Library bookworms will agree with me that we are scouting for a credible figure because the political landscape does not have one. The speeches we hear are either advanced campaign spiels for a chizier senatorial post or dastardly designed ploys. We are so maddened, exasperated or already numb that we resort to hero worship, hoping, as the Yahoo survey affirms, there is someone out there who will save us from this mess.

Beyond this messianic longing, what surfaces is that we resonate with the archetypes of super heroes because the projections we see in politics do not faithfully reflect who we really are. What we recognize deep in our hearts is that we are honorable people. In spite of concupiscence, we know we really do not want to feign, bamboozle, manipulate, use or slaughter people as some have done.

Ironically then, it is not the real public officials but the fictional heroes who adequately reflect our realities. What may initially seem to be a running away from reality by the idolizing of heroes, is actually a dive into the depths of truth. The Gospel truth is that we are created in the image and likeness of God.

Ironically then, it is not the real public officials but the fictional heroes who adequately reflect our realities. What may initially seem to be a running away from reality by the idolizing of heroes, is actually a dive into the depths of truth.



Thus, for the most compelling question of who is a hero, the answer is you. Seneca once said, "Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power." Leadership seminars echo the equivalent message, self-help books prove this, and a few exceptional public officials confess such. The power, indeed, is within.

Enough of the victim mentality and the underdog stance! It is high time we unearth our veritable selves and make our projected heroes real in us. Let us be reminded, however, that we should steer clear of the villain-seeking pitfall that goes in tandem with the hero quest. We become heroes not because we win over someone, we become heroes because we have found our authentic source of power.

Superman goes to the fortress of solitude to draw more inner strength through a conversation with Jor-El, his Father. Batman goes to the bat cave for his gadgets guided by Alfred the butler who is his Father figure. Even Budong dreams of becoming a superhero himself, but what he does not know is that he already has what it takes to be Super Inggo because he inherited his abilities from his superhero Father.

We can learn from these snippets and discover from where we can all draw strength. Aside from the already discovered journey within, let us follow the clues of the Father archetypes from super hero stories and be reminded of the Real One. Once we all, politicians included, connect with HIM, then maybe the Yahoo survey result will be proven right in that the superhero is part of how we are able to relate to each other. This commonality becomes the catalyst for our unity.

The prayer then makes sense and so we pray OUR Father.... ®

By Richard Escoto, OCD

From Sword to Tirador: Rethinking Children's Superheroes



A priest gave this homily in one Sunday Mass.There were three children bragging about their favorite superheroes. The first boy said, "My superhero is Superman. He can carry an airplane and can lift even the planet with his own hands. By just staring at his enemies, he can kill them. So far he is the best." The next answered back and said, "No! Your superhero is nothing compared to my Spiderman. He can slide from one place to another. He can kill his enemies easily by his suffocating web." Then they asked the last boy, "How about you? Who is your superhero?" He answered, "My superhero is no other than Jesus. He is the best superhero!"

Such a simplistic homily for Sunday Mass! This was my initial reaction. And yet it made me reflect for the first time on the impact of media on children. How do the images of superheroes help children in their growth? And what has all this got to do with the Christian faith?

The Sword in his Hands. Because of the "Telefantasya" in Philippine television, children are aware of the sagas of different *Pinoy* superheroes. My nephew is one of them. His superhero is *Panday*. I was amazed at how he adored Panday so much. He imitated his actions with his toy sword. He mimicked his words. At so young an age, he could already sing *Makita kang Muli*, Panday's theme song. So powerful was the image of Panday! My nephew could have fallen and have scratches because of his sword play. He could have been disciplined again and again because he chopped Grandma's rare plants with his favorite sword. He could have been unwelcomed during the family Rosary because he always got the wooden cross and made it the sword of Panday. For him Panday is equal to power, fame and unsurpassing heroism! He could not sleep without the sword of Panday in his hands. He emulated Panday—his costume, sword and values. Because of this influence, he has become so active, alert and creative at his age. He has an animated interaction with his playmates, and he can already gather children and yes, lead a play. The downside to this, however, is his many petty quarrels and rough actions in relating to other children. The complaint of his mother: what happened to her youngest son who used to be placid? Why has he become aggressive?

The superheroes that mass media entertains children with are flying superheroes (or superheroes from above), but the real heroes are the ones totally grounded in our midst.

The Sling in his Eyes. I was with my nephew recently. It happened that one of his playmates had a wooden *Tirador* on his neck. With this wooden sling, I told my nephew about the boy David and how this little shepherd boy successfully put down the giant Goliath with his slingshot. It was not because of the strength of David himself but because of the favor of God that he was able to defeat the giant enemy. From a very humble beginning of shepherding in Bethlehem, this little David became a King. I told him that this King also committed many mistakes but in the memory of Israel, he is a great hero. Although he is powerful, he is so close to God that he is able to say sorry when he committed mistakes.

My nephew remembered so much about the sling of David. From this story, he became more interested in other stories. Every visit I tell him a story—the fruit, the rainbow, the sea, the bread and the last of which was the Samaritan. The impact of these stories was not as immediate and concrete. I didn't see my nephew engrossed enough to have the sling of David or to demand his mom to have the staff of Moses as he did with the sword of Panday. I didn't see him washing the feet of his friends. Nonetheless, in that innocent desire of the child, something was being placed "in there" and that "something" corresponded to the real world in which he lives. In concrete situations, he remembered and made childlike value decisions. I was moved to tears when he gave his coins to the poor boy begging by the car's window. He remembered the Good Samaritan. I was even moved while we were one time in prayer when he asked us to pray for his sick father abroad. He remembered the prayer of the distant Roman centurion for his sick servant. I was deeply moved when he said sorry after hurting a playmate; he remembered the repentant David.

Superhero from above to Superhero from below. The superheroes that mass media entertains children with are flying superheroes or (excuse the term), "superheroes from above." They are supernatural beings and have extraordinary or superpowers. They have their own world. Most often they are in our midst disguised as one of us and with a special mission. They come to our rescue when we need them. They save us and we humans depend on them.

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WALLPAPER FROM TANTRA ONLINE VIDEO GAME

A Credible Witness?

LOVING

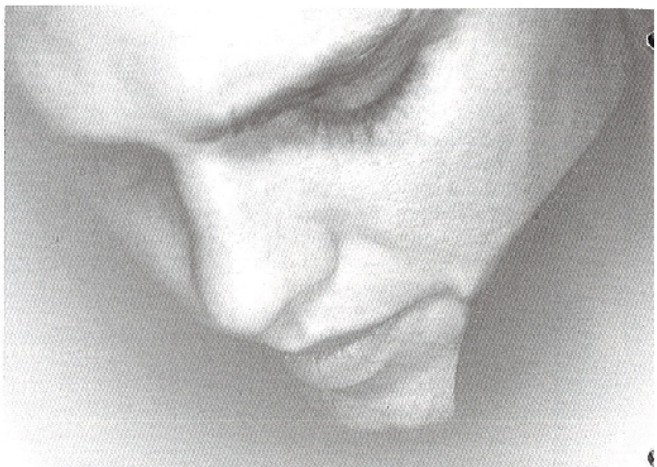
Any discussion of the Church and her role in society will most certainly raise several probing questions. Is the Church facing a crisis of credibility both in the Philippines and other parts of the world? How do young people view the Church? Are they simply voting with their feet and walking away? Are the bishops no different than other individuals and groups who succumb to "offers of assistance" from both public and private sources? Is it immoral or scandalous to enter into a memorandum of agreement by which affordable medicines, rice, and noodles will be distributed to the poor through diocesan social action centers? Questions such as these seem to foster perennial discussion.

Public debate around the Church's role in society—especially in the heavily Catholic Philippines—is, in the opinion of this writer, a good thing. It allows the Church to explain her views and values. It helps form people's consciences and judgments. For those with an open mind, it is an opportunity to better appreciate the Church's prophetic mission.

Persons who sincerely raise questions provide the Church an opportunity to witness to her faith convictions. The Church must always be ready to provide convincing answers—both in her words and deeds. Consider this fact: in an address to the Council Fathers at the end of the first session of Vatican II, no less than Cardinal Giovanni Montini (who later became Pope Paul VI) posed this question: "*Ecclesia Dei, quid dicis de teipsa*? Church of God, what do you say of yourself?" Montini was asking the Church: What answer do you give to people? How credible is your witness? How do you explain yourself? Those are probing questions demanding answers—at the time of Vatican II and today.

Why I Remain. This reflection now takes a very personal turn. In the context of the current public debate about the Church, I was recently questioned by a small group of students regarding my views on the credibility of the Church. Would I enter priesthood and missionary life, if I had the opportunity to make the choice again? Why stay? What's in it for you? How do I keep faith in an often impersonal structure? The insistence and sincerity of the students' questions have prompted honest reflection on my part. What follows is a personal *credo* on why I love the Church and why I choose to remain and serve within her.

As a first point, I assert that I fully accept my membership in the Church. I cannot say "Church" and mean it to refer to others. I accept my membership in this holy-yet-sinful Church. It is unfair to predicate weakness and sinfulness of others, and somehow exempt myself. I cannot blame the so-called "institutional Church," somehow disassociating myself from the entire body of the Church. We, you and I, are the Church; therefore, I must squarely ask myself: What "face" of the Church do I project? Do I measure up to what the Church expects of me?



Persons who sincerely raise questions provide the Church an opportunity to witness to her faith convictions. The Church must always be ready to provide convincing answers—both in her words and deeds.

Theologians and saints have wrestled with the paradox of a "holy" Church that is also the Church of sinners. But, the Lord himself manifestly foresaw the presence of sinners when he taught the Church to pray: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." The sacrament of penance is an enduring witness of the perennial presence of sin in the Church, but witness, also, of perennial forgiveness. The most popular image of Peter in the early Church was not that of him receiving the keys from the risen Christ; it was the image of Peter and the rooster, which served both as an image of hope for the weak and a call to compassion on the part of the Church. This is the "real" (not idealized) Church to which I wholeheartedly belong.

Secondly, I value my membership in Christ's Church, because scores of people who I love and respect also affirm their allegiance to this community. I immediately think of my parents and grandparents, the parish priest and religious sister who nurtured my vocation, the many lay leaders in Mindanao with whom I have worked, other Maryknoll missioners. I have encountered genuine holiness in Church members: Maryknoll Brother Paul and Jesuit Brother De Vela, the Galindez family who shared their home with me for four months during Cebuano language studies, Maryknoll

By James H. Kroeger, MM

CHRIST'S CHURCH

Bishop Joseph Regan. Our Church community has nourished visionaries and saints: F. Xavier, M. Ricci, A. Pieris, G. Gutierrez, O. Romero, Thérèse of Lisieux, John XXIII. What a special privilege to belong to such a communion of saints—and sinners!

I readily admit that I also *need* the Church. I need the Eucharist, that daily meal where I encounter the very presence of Christ. I treasure having a loving mother in Mary, "Mother of the Church" (Paul VI). I need the "sacramentalism" of the Church: the Christmas crib; First Holy Communion; ashes on my forehead; foot-washing; the Easter Vigil (*O Felix Culpa* – O Happy Fault); the inestimable love of the Sacred Heart; the total prostration of the candidates for ordination while the whole "army" of God's saints is invoked; midnight mass in the dead of winter. I have been nourished by the Church's witness to justice—particularly during the dark days of martial law. I am very much like most Catholics (according to sociologist A. Greeley): I remain Catholic, because I treasure the Church, her rituals, her religious sensibilities, her great story of God's incarnate love for all of humanity.

I cannot find words sufficient to thank the Church for having made me live, for having raised me, for having given me a place of peace for my faith and my prayer. The Church has made my life full and rich. I have had intellectual opportunities beyond my fondest expectations as a Wisconsin farm boy; who would have dreamed of studying in New York, Manila, and Rome? The gift of ministerial priesthood has given me opportunities to encounter people at their innermost core. Through the gift of a missionary vocation I have had the privilege of becoming a "multicultural" person, particularly integrating my culture by birth (American) and my culture by adoption (Filipino). I have known both sides of authority and discipline; I have been trusted with responsible positions in Church leadership; I have found maturity and freedom. Yes, I know Mother Church as my true home! Home is where the heart is.

Renewal—a Necessity. Within this Church of light and shadows, I am totally sympathetic with the "impatient urgency" of those who wish to reform and renew the Church. There *are* serious problems and *lacunae* in the Church. Her credibility suffers each time a case of sexual abuse hits the headlines (though statistics show that approximately only one percent of priests have ever engaged in practices of pedophilia). Respect for the Church is diminished by poorly prepared homilies and perfunctorily performed liturgy. Poorly paid catechists, disregard of women's voices, authoritarian pastors, turning a blind eye to corruption and a deaf ear to the cries of the poor—all these situations reflect negatively upon the Church. All of us—we are the Church—need a greater sense of urgency in addressing—and changing—local situations that do not mirror an authentic image of the Church. There is a need for strong lay involvement if successful paths are to be found through crises. We must passionately desire that this *ecclesial semper reformanda* (a church always needing renewal) can—for the love of God—truly be "God's holy people."

In its commitment to self-transformation, the Church needs to focus both on immediate challenges and also to take the long view. Fidelity to the community, even as it changes, demands believing that our Church, while it is the Church of today and prepares itself to be the Church of tomorrow, remains the Church of always. The great ecclesiologist Yves Congar asserts that any authentic renewal movement must maintain continuity with the Church of always. The Holy Spirit is continually present in the Church, animating the community at its core. True reform, like that of the Second Vatican Council, respects continuity and tradition; though not revolution, it seeks genuine transformation (not restoration). Being Catholic reassures me that in the end, the Spirit will win out—even if I cannot see how.

Recently, I heard a somewhat irreverent, yet loving, response to the slow-moving Church from a frustrated religious woman; when asked why she stayed in the Church, she simply said: "Because I believe that the Spirit is stronger than all this crap, and it's an exercise in humility for me to believe that. I am every bit as hypocritical, as arrogant and as shortsighted as I think the Church is. I stay partly because I need to be humbled. I need to remember that neither I nor the Church has been our best self." Yes, it is possible that one's frustration and even anger can dwell within a context of commitment, of loyalty, of trust. Probably, it is because people love the Church that this same Church has the power to disappoint them.

Further Reasons. The challenging questions posed by the young people I mentioned at the beginning of this reflection continue to reverberate in my mind. Yes, there are a few additional reasons why I continue loving the Church and serving as her minister and missionary.

I am edified at the Church's commitment to promoting justice and to fostering interreligious dialogue. In the contemporary world, these two emphases speak directly to the needs of humanity, to the longings and aspirations of human hearts. To address the thirst for justice and peace, the Church challenges herself to see that "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" (1971 Synod of Bishops). In a world of ethnic strife and interreligious tension, the Church commits herself to "a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples." The Church sees in other faith traditions "significant and positive elements ... profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values ... the religious experience of our ancestors ... the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their

contemplation and prayer" (FABC I:14). Church involvement in justice issues and dialogue endeavors helps make her credible before the contemporary world.

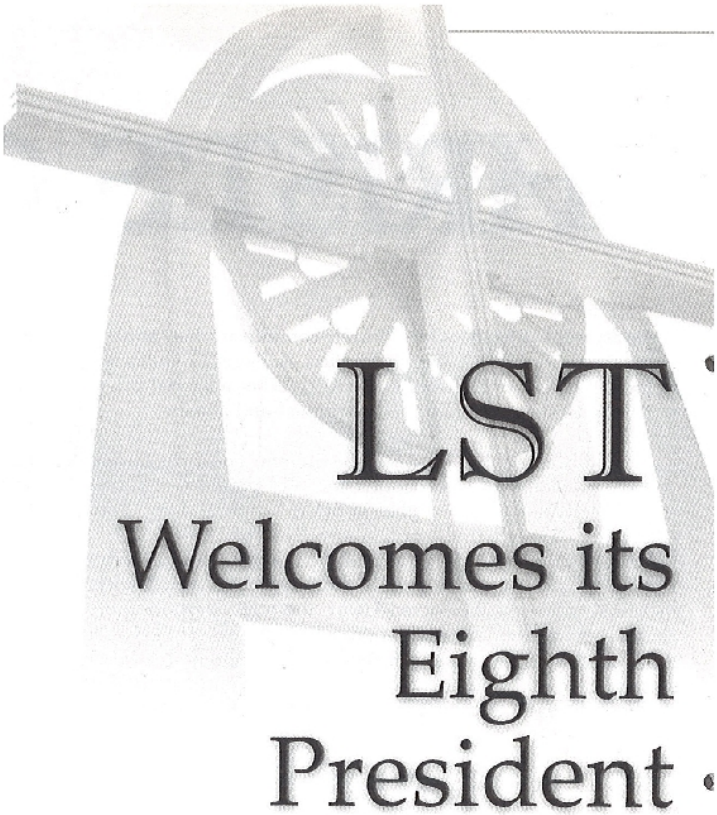
An additional sign of credibility is the Church's commitment to the arts: painting, sculpture, music, literature, architecture. Art expresses the depth of the human; art lifts the heart and spirit; art captures life's meaning and significance. Art appeals to the aesthetic dimension of humanity; it can elevate the human spirit when daily events and tragedies seem to overwhelm us. When the Church employs symbol and art in her effort to foster humanization and evangelization, I feel personally enriched and inspired.

Another profound sign of credibility is the Church's "paschal perspective" on life and faith. Suffering and the reality of a broken world are existentials of the human condition; suffering seems ever before our eyes; it is in the body, soul and heart of each of us. And, when the Church tries to meet humanity in a special way on the path of its suffering, she provides a convincing sign of authentic love. The theology of the paschal mystery is imbedded in the heart of the Church. The liberating cross of Christ, the folly of God, is the source of salvation and all true liberation. Thirty-five years ago, when Joseph Ratzinger was asked why he remained a Christian in the Church, he noted the centrality of the paschal mystery: "In truth, man will be redeemed only through the cross, through accepting his own and the world's passion which, in the passion of God, has become the place of liberating meaning" (1971 Interview).

A final reason why I, the author of this meditation, say my personal *credo* in the Church is because through this faith community I have been gifted with many deep "God-encounters." They have been fostered by my Catholic family milieu, my seminary and novitiate experience, my thirty-day retreat, my thirty-six years in mission, my innumerable experiences of God's boundless, undeserved grace. Emerging from a deep sense of gratitude and humility, I can say, "I am loved by God." In some small way I share the joy of Thérèse of Lisieux when she cried out: "I've found my vocation, and *my vocation is love*." She discovered where she belonged in the Church: "To be nothing else than love, deep down in the heart of Mother Church; that's to be everything at once."

Pope Paul VI, who challenged the Church with this question: "*Ecclesia Dei, quid dicis de teipsa?*" has also said that the Church is "the visible plan of God's love for humanity." Thus, the credibility of the Church is greatly served by living witnesses of love; their lives far surpass any verbal rationale that could be provided. If ever I am tempted to say "the Church should do this, the Church should be that," I must immediately say "I should do this—and do it with great love." Is the Church facing a crisis of credibility? The only crisis she faces is the crisis of authentic, compassionate love.

James H. Kroeger, MM, a theology professor at Loyola School of Theology, has recently published *Once Upon a Time in Asia*.



LST Welcomes its Eighth President

Fr. Jose Mario C. Francisco of the Society of Jesus is the new president of the Loyola School of Theology. The Archbishop of Manila, His Excellency, Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, D.D., presided over the Eucharistic Celebration during Investiture Rites last June 27, 2006. The good Cardinal said: "Fr. Francisco is thus more than equipped to head and lead the Loyola School of Theology. He is academically accomplished in all fields that the LST covers. His published works and annotations have contributed much to the understanding of culture, especially when it applies to our own country and people. He has brought his knowledge to bear on his pastoral involvements in organizations such as the Jesuit Volunteers of the Philippines and the environmental group, Haribon."

Born in Biñan, Laguna, Father Francisco has been a Jesuit for 38 years. Should there be a stereotype of *the* Jesuit, he exceeds conventions, a young confrere says. "He is not only very intelligent; he is highly spirited, alive and multi-talented." An esteemed professor emeritus describes him as a man of wide interests in Literature and Philosophy with expertise in Hermeneutics and the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. And oh!, many long-timers of LST attest to "his enviable dancing skill."

Last year, this indefatiguable Jesuit was the Gasson Professor at Boston College where he taught courses on the relation between faith and culture, especially in Asia. Among his publications this year are *Science and Religion…and Culture in the Jesuit Tradition* (Australian Theological Forum Press) and "Christianity as Church and Story and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Philippines during the 19th century" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity* Vol 8. Much of his published work

like *Sermones: Fray Francisco Blancas de San Jose, O.P. (+1614)* center on Christianity in the Philippines. He has lectured and participated in many local and international conferences on various issues. There are many other things that can be said about him. Fr. Joseph Smith, SJ, however, sums it all, when he says, "We are lucky to have a man like him here."

In this interview, Father Francisco sets down his plans for the school where his expertise and person will surely be put to good use.

TINIG LOYOLA: What is your vision for LST?

JOSE MARIO FRANCISCO: At this time, this vision comes from the mandate given to LST by the Jesuit Major Superiors of East Asia and Oceania as well as by the Provincial of the Philippines. First, LST is to become more Asian in atmosphere, content and methodology, something that is not contrary to our service to the Philippine Church and nation. This Asian thrust would enrich our training of our own students for we are situated in Asia and linked to our neighbor Churches and peoples. Second, we should make LST's programs and administrative structures more efficient and more responsive to changing needs. For example, Fr. Provincial has approved the recommendation of Fr. Robert Grimm, S.J., assistant Treasurer of the Jesuit Curia in Rome, to form an active Board of Trustees which would help LST respond better to its external environment.



"If we say that our society is suffering from political instability, moral corruption, we should realize that this is our responsibility. We are involved."

TL: How would this Asian mandate relate to LST's students, both Filipino and international?

JMF: International students, most of whom are Asian, comprise almost one fourth of LST's studentry, and their concerns and experience should be heard in classes and forums. The mandate to be more Asian pays attention to the emerging religious, spiritual and theological questions that arise out of Asian contexts. The question of the importance of world religions is common to Asia, including the Philippines. Though we have a predominantly Catholic population, some of our brothers and sisters belong to Islam. The sizeable ethnically Chinese Filipinos have religious and cultural influences from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Our international students have much to contribute to the theological discussion of these questions.

Another shared theological question concerns poverty. We have many poor in our countries, and how Christianity reflects on poverty and works for its eradication is critical for all. Thus the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) speaks constantly about this.

In my address upon installation, I emphasized that a theology rooted in the Philippines must also dialogue with theologies from other contexts. International students at LST will have a chance to know the Churches of Asia, including the influential Philippine Church. Even those who will not work in Asia would benefit from learning how Christianity is lived and understood in other contexts. This would hopefully help them reflect on the challenges in their own context. Differences help us understand each other and different contexts—our own and others'. Don't we gain more insight into ourselves and our cultures when we come in contact with others?

TL: During your first months as President of LST, how have you begun implementing this vision?

JMF: I have been spending much time talking to people, including superiors of our religious and seminary students. Outside faculty meetings, I have talked with many faculty members individually. I have met with the LST Student Council as well as the lay, international and religious sisters as distinct groups. Meetings with the staff are planned. All this gives me a perpective of the LST situation and personal contacts within the different constituencies of our community.

This is helpful in identifying LST's strengths and needs in moving forward. I have appointed a Committee on the Asian Mandate and asked different faculty members to be in charge of various areas such as LST-Student Relations, Physical Plant, and Development. It has been challenging, even exciting, to be creative in approaching academic concerns such as improving student learning or administrative issues like compensation for faculty.

TL: How do you see the response of faculty and students to all these innovations?

JMF: I am genuinely happy with the general response. The faculty has been helpful and responsive. They are committed to their ministry and strive to be of greater service to the Church. They participate actively during our meetings and give valuable comments.

Perhaps because of my experience as a student during the turbulent '60s and '70s, I expected much negativity but was surprised by the students' attitudes and dispositions. They are serious in their preparation for ministry and devote time for their studies. I wish though that they would be much more reflective about, even disturbed by, the religious and spiritual questions from our contexts and peoples. Filipino Christians, for example, tend to take our Faith for granted and sometimes miss the opportunity to deepen that Faith in the face of our world today. I am also happy that the superiors of our religious and our seminarian students support LST's commitment to serious theological preparation for ministry.

TL: What would you like to say to the students through *Tinig Loyola*?

JMF: Open your eyes to what is going on in the world. Reflect critically and always ask how these events relate to and challenge the Faith of the Church, the Faith we profess at the Eucharist. If our Christianity is vibrant, then Christianity will make a difference. This is how I see the work of LST: we form Christian ministers—lay, ordained, religious—precisely to serve God's people and make a difference in the world.

By Perry Inso, RC

Women and Islam

I would like to share my impressions about Islam on the struggle of Muslim women within their institutionalized religion, using my experiences in three different places.

I was assigned in Davao for two and a half years and had the chance to work with some Muslim students in Mindanao. Prior to working with them, I was warned by a group of friends to be careful in employing activities that would require them to hold hands or to touch one another. I was also told to be careful about mentioning the name Jesus, because they might be offended. As a consequence, even before I worked with this group, I was a bit cautious and guarded. But to my surprise, my experience with them was the exact opposite. They were so open and very accepting, debunking the prejudices of my friends.

There was one experience though, that really touched me to the core. I met a young Muslim woman who was so open in sharing with me her struggles and difficulties. First, with regard to getting an education. She said in her family this was not very much encouraged because she was a woman. Her place was at home to take care of the children and the husband. But then, this young woman believed so much in education because this was a way for her to get out of poverty. So, when she learned that there were scholarship grants offered to deserving students, she took her chance. She went to school against the will of her parents. She didn't receive any support from them, and therefore she had to find ways and means to get extra money to make both ends meet: the scholarship did not include funds for daily allowance. It was hard for her. Another struggle she had to contend with was the fear of discrimination inside the campus. Because she wore a veil, she was easily identified as Muslim. She said the stigma of being a Muslim couldn't be erased: they were all judged to be members of the *abusayaf*, were violent, dirty, etc. So, for her the problems she encountered came both from within her family and from the outside.

I saw the same struggle when I had the chance to go to Singapore together with my other sisters, as part of our formation that required us to be exposed to different religions and races. There was just a slight difference though, in terms of education. For Muslim women there, getting an education was encouraged, but the problem was deciding on the kind of education that would best suit each one and would not make Muslim men feel inferior. It is generally believed that Muslim men do not want to marry women who are academically superior or who are even their equal (and these women want to get married). The male mindset of being a little better and wanting to be the leader in the household still holds true. All these things have a lot to do with the persistence of such beliefs that work and family are two different areas of life and that men are intellectually superior to women. And so, women question their place in the Islamic community: Why can't they do what they really want? Why do they always have to consider men? They are also fearful that if they get married their husband would marry again. So to keep this from happening, a woman is expected to be a good cook, a good wife, and a good mother. That's why job and family can't go together.

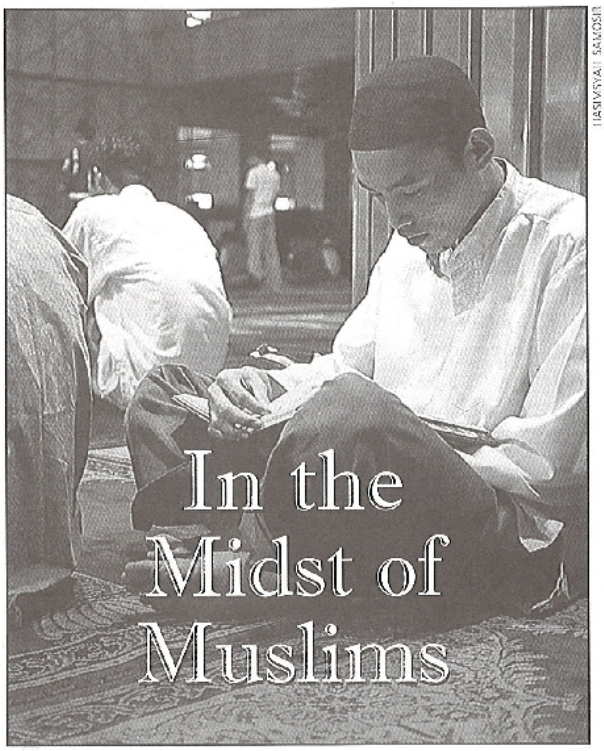
Women question their place in the Islamic community: Why can't they do what they really want? Why do they always have to consider men?

When our LST class went to Quiapo to visit the mosque in time for their Friday observance, I saw and heard some aspects about women which were more or less similar to the experiences of the other women I've encountered before. There, we were given a short orientation and a chance to ask some questions before we observed the actual prayer. Two things struck me. One was the structure of the mosque. There was a wall as high as five feet that divided the place of worship which I didn't see in the mosque we visited in Singapore. The men occupied the space in front of the wall and the women behind it. It was obvious that there was more space for men than women. Second, there was the response given to me when I asked if women could lead the prayer. I was told that women definitely could not do this because of their monthly period. They become irrational and emotional during those times. I wanted to argue, but if I did so I might be told, "Ah, you must be having your monthly period, sister."

Reflecting on my experiences, I see that the struggle of Muslim women within their religion is very real. I also see that behind this struggle is a cry for equality, freedom and respect for human dignity. This made me see too that this reality is not only true in Islamic community but in Christianity as well. All this has fueled my desire to study Islam, to understand it better. I find myself invited to be more open to other religions—to listen, to share not just on the head level but more on the level of experience, religious experience. I am grateful for the privilege to be able to enter another world and realize its impact on my own world, my own journey towards God.

In the Midst of Muslims

By Romy delos Santos Jr., OMI



JASMYSAL SAMOSIR

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

After my first year of theology here in LST, I was sent to Sitangkai, Tawi-tawi for my pastoral year. Sitangkai is the southernmost municipality of the Philippines. It lies about fourteen kilometers east of the coast of Sabah, Malaysia. In just an hour in a speedboat, you can reach Malaysia. Sitangkai is called the "Venice of the Philippines" due to the use of boats as primary transportation, although foot-bridges connect the houses in the municipality.

For almost one year, I stayed in a place they called "Halu-Sugbo," 45 minutes away from Sitangkai. Staying in "Halu-sugbo" is literally living "within" the sea; people stay in stilt houses that are connected by bamboo or wooden bridges. At first, I thought it would be difficult for both Muslims and Christians to live in one community. But I was wrong. In the place I stayed, the Samals and Visayan speaking people are living harmoniously in a small community. The chapel and the mosque are just ten meters apart. An Oblate priest even helped in the construction of the mosque; he asked financial support from other people so that the mosque could be built.

On occasions like "baptism" or marriage in the Muslim rite, Christians are invited to witness the celebration and ceremony. There are many cases of mixed marriages and it is up to the couple to decide whether they want to have the Christian or Muslim style of wedding. During mealtime, visitors have to sit in a circle of eight to ten persons and then the food is put at the center; people eat facing each other. There is sharing; it does not matter whether you're a Christian or a Muslim.

In that gathering you can talk about political, social and even moral issues, but talk about God is a different thing. I never encountered a gathering where we talked about God. I think it is because they did not want to offend us and on our part we also did not wish to offend them. To talk about God would certainly lead into heated debate, since they really believe that it is only through Allah that all will be saved. For them Allah is so powerful that you cannot call him "father" as we Christians do. I heard also that they have 99 names for God and the 100th name is Allah. They call him the supreme, all-knowing, all-powerful, and above all, all-merciful God, but not "father," because they believe that this would degrade Allah.

Their prayer is presided over by an *imam*, who is simply a prayer leader. One time, I asked a friend of mine whether the *imam* knew what he was saying and I was amazed when my friend said that they didn't really know the meaning of what they were praying. They just memorized the prayer. They were not really aware of its meaning. Muslims there believe that everything that is created is through Islam and that we are all Muslims and that is why, every time they have converts they don't call them converts as we Christians do. For them, they are *Balik Islam*, because they really believe that converts are just going back to their original religion which is Islam.

They believe also that there is only one God, and that Muhammad was the last in a series of prophets and messengers. These messengers were mortal men, and they included many others like *Moses* and *Jesus* whom they called as *Nabi Isa*. Christians believe Jesus to be the Son of God rather than a mere prophet. They also believe that their Qur'an would remain perfect, preserved by God from distortions while the Christian Bible had been altered over time from the original form given by God.

Muslims in Sitangkai also observe the rituals of praying at certain times of the day, facing in the direction of Mecca, preparing themselves through symbolic purification, and observing the proper order of prayers. Depending on the situation, the ritual of ablution requires either total washing of the body or a less elaborate ritual of washing the hands, mouth, face, and feet.

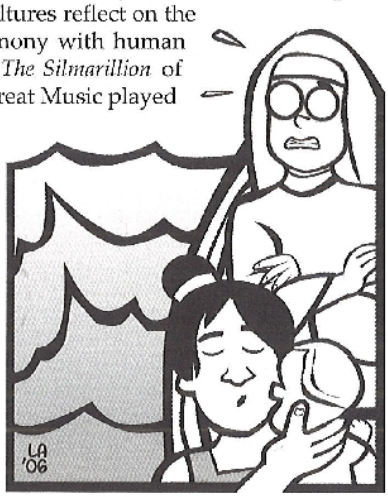
The issue of God is not actually a problem there, because they do not discuss it with Christians; they just simply respect each other and welcome those who want to be a member of their faith. For our part, the Oblates (OMI) are there to help these people in whatever way we can, including helping them build their mosque. Most of our schools in Tawi-Tawi and Jolo have a mosque inside the school and students are allowed to do their worship or *sambayang* together with their *imam* who is usually their teacher in Islam. Most of our students there (maybe 90%) are Muslims. We, Oblates, believe that it is through education that we can help these people so that they may know what Allah wants them to do. Knowing Allah's will for them would certainly lead them to do what is right and to do good for themselves and for other people. In this way, we can see the beauty of their religion, Islam, as an authentic way of life.

By Mary Rosalie Abellanosa, OSB

WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

I frolicked with the vistas as we crossed the Pilar Sorsogon coast, the southwest monsoon powering the waves that racked the out-rigger boat I was in. I know our beautiful archipelago lies on the seismically active nervelengths of the Pacific. At that time, Lady Mayon was restive. I began to pray when a wise old woman announced: "All stay put and be quiet"; some women started to scream. I donned my life jacket with some consolation that I would not be so cold; I planned to attend Mass when I would arrive home—if ever. My eyes wandered as the passengers, especially the children and the babies kept still. I felt that the boat would break apart as it creaked and groaned.

My thoughts brought me back to our study of evil in theological anthropology. I recalled how different cultures reflect on the phenomenon of evil. Evil works in harmony with human experiences: as found in myths, such as *The Silmarillion* of J.R.R. Tolkien. Here the universe is like Great Music played by angelic sub-creators following God's will. How do we overcome evil? Would superheroes with a great sense of responsibility and commitment and a strong belief in justice and humanitarian service save us? Would Superman hear and come to our rescue? Will the compassionate Buddhist Bodhisattva Kuan Yin (known as "she who hears the weeping world") save those who are periled by the sea? Calling her name according to tradition is enough to save one from any harm.



Just then, I was distracted by another great "wham"! I recited Fr. Dan Mcnamara's words: "We do not know what we do not know." I calmed down. Nauseated, I decided to think of Christ. Now C.S. Lewis crossed my mind; he said the story of Christ is a myth like the others, but with a great difference: he is alive and his story really happened. I was back to the classroom again; faith seeking understanding, faith humbled in acceptance that evil is not a problem to be solved.

We find salvation in God through Christ. "We are called to lessen evil." I prayed some Latin formulas, which gave me some consolation. I remembered Christ sleeping in the hull of the boat while his disciples panicked. He stilled the waves. All of a sudden, before me was our monastery, quietly nestled in the beautiful vista of mountains, seas and expansive clear blue skies. The peaks of lady Mayon could be seen from the northeastern side. My three-hour ordeal in the sea was finally over.

FROM SWORD... continued from page 11

But there are real heroes who are totally grounded in our midst. They have experienced what it is to be truly human, what it is to be limited. But because of the grace and the favor from God (and their own selflessness), they have become instruments for a better world. They are in solidarity with our present sufferings for they themselves have experienced the pains of life. We may call them the "superhero from below." And these we can emulate realistically.

Media has given children of today so many superheroes. Certainly, these images affect the growth of children. Children look for heroes in their lives whom they can identify with. We can not remove these heroes from them. However, we have so many unexplored heroes who can be of help to teach the children to grow holistically, to live not in a "super ideal world" but to live grounded on earth. The Bible presents the lives of men and women who can be emulated; they have God for their strength. They were called and they responded with faith and love.

Instead of Wonder Woman, we have Judith and Ruth; instead of the wise Professor X, we have Solomon; instead of the Invincible Man, we have Paul passing through prison cells without the guard's notice; instead of Robinhood, we have the Good Samaritan. Instead of superheroes from above, we have the superheroes from below! Is it possible that children could know them more? Don't they make more sense in real life than media's superheroes?

The priest ended his homily at that Sunday Mass. The two boys questioned the one who had made Jesus his best superhero. "Wasn't Jesus killed? He was helpless, he was put to death. Why will you call him the best superhero?"

"My superhero doesn't kill his enemy, like yours does. Jesus was able to convert them. Bad persons are turned to good people and become agents for a better world. That is why he is the best!" testified the boy.

The Gospel that Sunday was about the call of Matthew, the public sinner.

By Vito Competente, Jr., OCD

Taking the Super Extra to Gawad Kalinga

In our imagination, they fly, break through walls, lift objects of great weights, breathe underwater, read others' thoughts and more. They are our comic superheroes, created by our rich and creative minds. They are beautiful aspirations of what weak human beings could be. Or, are they?

Superheroes in a deeper sense are heroes not because they have something "super extra," but because they make "super extra" of what little they have. This is a character of bringing the self to rise beyond what one normally does.

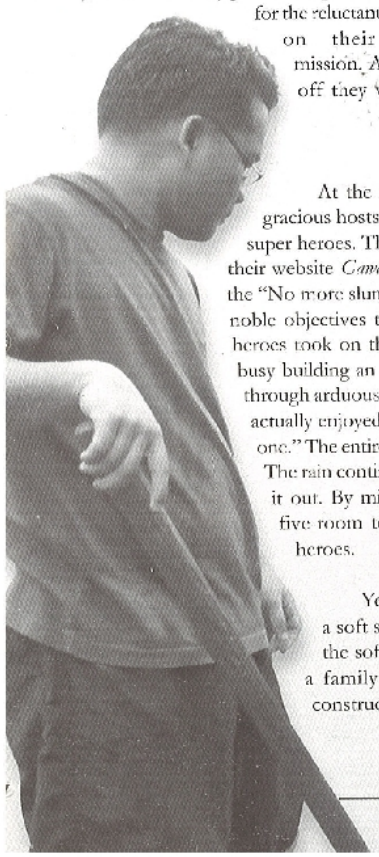
On August 20, 2006, an opportunity for LST students to make something "super extra" arose when the outreach committee held its first activity with *Gawad Kalinga* in Maralit, Paranaque City. A number of students responded to this hero-like call and braved obstacles like rain, superiors, Sunday gimmicks, apostolates, worries about hard labor and more. The dark clouds and chilling breeze during the early hours of the day provided a perfect setting for the reluctant heroes on their first mission. And yet, off they went.











At the mission site, they were greeted by throngs and throngs of gracious hosts. Even with nothing yet done, they were already received like super heroes. The place was a "squatters" area adopted by *Gawad Kalinga*. In their website *Gawad Kalinga* is translated as "to give care," and is bannered by the "No more slums. No more violence. No more poverty" slogan, a slogan of noble objectives that need concretized results. As soon as they arrived, our heroes took on the "No slum" challenge. They immediately got their hands busy building an apartment. Surprisingly, unlike comic super heroes who go through arduous tasks with difficulty to defeat the "evil one," our LST heroes actually enjoyed heaving pails and pails of gravel and sand to win the "good one." The entire morning they labored, cheered on by smiling shanty dwellers. The rain continued to drizzle but yells of encouragement and jokes drowned it out. By mid-day after cementing almost half the second floor of the five room tenement, there seemed to be a pause from our worn out heroes.

Yet a gentler "battle" ensued. All good comic super heroes have a soft spot, the bad ones don't. For our LST heroes, it was time for the soft part. Each of them, in small groups, brought their meal to a family and shared lunch and stories with them. From brute construction workers, men and women alike, they were transformed into caring and loving human beings, cuddling children, laughing with the moms and dads, singing with gusto while some even went dancing. It culminated in a fun-filled mini-party beside the house that our heroes had just built, well, at least helped build.

Our concept of superheroes comes from our desiring something "super extra" like piercing eye sight, invisibility, magnetic capacity, shape shifting and much more. But what is really hidden behind this desire for "super extras" is our quest to do something noble, something good, something worthwhile. Our LST heroes have just demonstrated that these "super extras" are nothing more than the willingness to be of service to those in need of our help.

The outreach committee would like to express its gratitude to all who supported and joined this *Gawad Kalinga* activity. *Maraming salamat po sa inyong lahat.*

By Jesse James Luzano, CMF

LST'S STUDENT COUNCIL New Shepherds of the Flock

Another school year has begun with a new batch of dedicated and hard-working student leaders. The Student Council is headed by Roland P. Jaluag, SJ, *President*, Leovardo Medina, CS, *Vice President*, Rachel Joyce Marie O. Sanchez, *Secretary*, and Benedick D. Piangco, OCD, *Treasurer*.

The composition of the new Student Council is noteworthy. Although most come from different religious (men) congregations, a lay young woman joins the company, to represent hopefully the concerns of LST's lay students. The Council also consists of Filipinos and one international student. We can therefore expect an exchange of a variety of ideas, opinions, and concepts grounded in different customs and traditions. Truly, they are like the disciples of Christ, looking not at differences but striving to build a community of unity through diversity. Let us now hear from the President of this multi-faceted Student Council, Lando Jaluag, SJ.

TINIG LOYOLA: As the elected President of the student body, what are your plans and projects for this school year?

ROLAND JALUAG, SJ: As I shared during my induction as President, my incumbency will be inspired by our vision of building community in LST, namely a community of supportive friends, a community of learned theologians for the Church of Asia, and a conscientious community that reaches out to others especially the poor. Concretely, we have formed six special committees:

1. **Apostolic Synergy.** We hope to maximize the cultural, congregational and institutional backgrounds of the students of LST. We believe that when we share our personal and institutional resources, we enrich each other's theological and apostolic preparation. We start from small and doable things. For instance, through the Socials/*Kapihan* Committee, modules, materials, books on recollections, retreats and seminars from different congregations are gathered and these are now available for everyone's use in our *Kapihan* office.

2. **Church of Asia Matters.** This is in response to the call to make LST a Theological School of Asia. This committee is tasked to organize projects that will help the students understand in a deeper and more creative sense the concerns and challenges of the Church of Asia.

3. **Students' Theological Development.** This is to develop a culture of "active" theologizing on the part of the students. This committee is tasked to facilitate the recognition of the best papers written by students. We will ask the awardees to present their papers to the LST community. The committee will also explore the possibility of coming up with a folio of best theological papers written by students.

4. **Constitutional Commission.** It's about time that the LST Student Council have its own Constitution and By-Laws. For the past years, we are guided by "tradition" of doing things passed on by the previous councils. We believe that it's time to reflect, articulate and put into writing our governing principles and way of proceeding. Last year's Student Council started in this direction already; we hope to finish the work they had started this year.

5. **Special Projects Committee.** We believe in involving the students in the call to serve the LST Community. We hope that this committee can provide students the venue to share their time and talents for the benefit of everyone.

6. **Student Council Newsletter.** We are also coming up with a news bulletin to update the students on the concerns, hopes and activities of the Student Council. We hope that with this newsletter more students will be encouraged to actively support and be part of the different endeavors of the Student Council. We recognize that in building community, communication is a significant factor.

TL: As newly elected president, how do you plan to deal with problems and challenges that may arise?

RJ: We work as a team. We discuss the different concerns and challenges that come our way, and we make sure that we arrive at a consensus. It's good that we have very dedicated committee heads. They help us a lot in the implementation of our projects and plans. I also believe in supporting the individual charism of the officers of the Student Council. Our Vice-President, Leo Medina is working very hard to organize the Constitutional Commission. Dhyck Piangco, OCD is making sure that our finances are in order. And, Rachel Sanchez is very efficient in facilitating the flow of communication in the Student Council. She's also our direct link to the lay students of LST.

TL: How do you envision the SC's relationship with the School Administration, given the fact that the President is also new?

RJ: We just had our courtesy call with Fr. President. We are glad that he is very supportive of our plans and hopes for the council. We have agreed to organize dialogues with the students of LST. Fr. President wants to know how we can improve our school's services and curriculum. He also wishes to know how the school can address the special needs of our international and lay students.

TL: Do you have any words of wisdom for your co-seminarians, religious, the lay students, the professors, administrators, faculty and staff?

RJ: Let me end this interview in the same way I ended my induction speech as president, by quoting the words of Father Roque Ferriols, S.J.: *"Kapag ang labat ay nasabi na, ang pinaka-mahalaga ay hindi pa rin masasabi." At nais kong makipagsapalaran at gamitin ang mga kataga ni Padre Roque sa konteksto ng paghilingkod sa Konseho ng mga Mag-aaral ng LST. Mga kaibigan, kapag nasabi na ang labat, ang pinaka-mahalaga ay hindi pa rin masasabi. Dahil ang pinaka-mahalaga ay kung ano ang sabay-sabay nating ginagawa at magagawa para sa kapwa.*

