PH EDUCATION: SHORTAGE OF SOLUTIONS?
Quote in the Act

“I am proud to be called a radical Buddhist.”

Ashin Wirathu, a Buddhist monk in Myanmar with a hundreds of thousands of followers; denies any role in the riots, the killing of 200 Muslims by Buddhist lynch mobs and the plight of over 150,000 Muslims; but critics say his anti-Muslim preaching is helping inspire the violence; referring to Muslims, he preached to a crowd, “You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog.”

“No country or corporation has the right to pollute the air at the expense of Singaporeans' health and well-being.”

Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore’s environment minister; has called on the Indonesian government to curtail the widespread burning of forests, which they say is causing the stubborn haze enveloping the city-state; the Pollution Standards Index hit 371, which is way above the 300 threshold that is already considered hazardous to health.

“All my life I’ve worked with my hands in the fields; do I have the educational level to keep up with the city people?”

Tian Wei, a wheat farmer in the northern province of Hebei; on the China government plan to move 250 million rural residents into newly constructed megalopolises over the next few years, which is seen as a transformative event that could set off a new wave of economic boom or bust for the next generations; this, however, is perceived to cause social havoc among rural communities.

“I don’t think people have spent enough time systematically training Cambodians for long term.”

Dr. Tracy Harachi, associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington; on the recent initiative of Cambodia to train local social workers in order to curb reliance on foreign aid; this is foreseen to radically change the social systems of Cambodia that, since the Khmer Rouge rule, has relied heavily on foreign aid and expertise to deal with problems of poverty, human trafficking, AIDS, hidden land mines and other social issues.

“They’ve suffered long enough that they don’t deserve to be treated like that.”

Precioso Cantillas, bishop of Maasin diocese and chair of the CBCP Commission for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant people; on the “sex-for-fly” scandal that was exposed by AKBAYAN party-list representative Walden Bello who confirmed that at least three Philippine embassy officials in the Middle East are sexually abusing and prostituting distressed OFWs by offering them repatriation in exchange for sex.
W hen it comes to economics, most of us who do not comprehend what GDP is all about or how a calculator arrives at such percentages, just smirk and watch the world go by. Every time, for instance, President Noynoy Aquino (who, by the way will go down the annals to be the only one who has completely stopped the proliferation of wang-wang and merited it as a presidential achievement) returns from a trip abroad and Malacañang announces the billions of dollars that he brings home in investments, most of us just brush it off—not because such investments are nowhere to be seen, but perhaps because the intricacies of investment business are unintelligible to most Filipinos.

When Malacañang media, which is presently one of the strongest offices of the president, announced that the country has happily crossed the threshold of 7.8-percent growth in gross domestic product by the first quarter of this year, the country should have uproared in jubilation. But it never made a dent, notwithstanding tremendous PR work. For most, it sounded like a freak that was so incongruent with the givens of reality. Those in the know were asking where those figures were coming from.

Yes, where are those figures coming from? Because how can a country attain a 7.8-percent growth in domestic product when, on the other hand, the country’s unemployment has plummeted to 7.5-percent in April 2013—the highest, so far, in three years. According to the National Statistics Office Labor Force Survey, the number of unemployed Filipinos rose to 3.09 million—an increase from 2.89 million in January, while the number of the under-employed stood at 7.25 percent of the workforce. Former Budget secretary Benjamin Diokno tersely says it all: “A fast growing economy is supposed to create more, not less, jobs.”

The heavily hyped investment pledges that the President brings home whenever he returns from a foreign trip should be bearing fruit by now after, say, three years. But lately government finance agencies have admitted that foreign direct investments (FDI) have declined around the first quarter. Central Bank was quick to issue a justification that the decline in cumulative FDI was due “mainly to lower net equity capital investments” in the first quarter and that the FDI outflow of $78 million was a reversal of the inflow of $179 million of last year. This financial gobbledygook sounds Greek to us, but whatever it is, one can be sure that what the Central Bank said was a tacit admittance that there really is a hitch.

Of late, on June 13 to be exact, the Philippine stock exchange index has plunged to 6.75 percent or 442.57 points that closed at 6,114.08—the biggest single-day loss since October 2008, the “worst bloodbaths” in the history of local finance market, so say economists. It was the same day that Philippine peso hit a new record low at 43.00 against the U.S. dollar. It was also the day that traffic in Manila stood still for 6 hours due to heavy flooding, largely due to government neglect and lopsided priorities.

Perhaps it’s about time to get real and accept that the wang-wang president has failed in attracting long-term foreign investments (granting that such is really the best economic fundamental as his technocrats claim) and in creating sustainable domestic jobs for Filipinos without having to go to the Middle East or Europe and elsewhere.

This issue opens with Cecile La Plana’s “The Catholic Vote in Zamboanga Sibugay”. Education being the theme for this issue, our cover story which comes from the research features of Ibon Foundation points out how the PNoy government is addressing, rightly or wrongly, education woes. Read on.
Three days after the successful yet equally-controversial conduct of the Philippine mid-term election, Pope Francis addressed the new ambassadors to the Holy See.

"There is a need for financial reform along ethical lines that would produce in its turn an economic reform to benefit everyone." (Pope Francis’ Address to the new Ambassadors to the Holy See, 16 May 2013, http://www.Zenit.org)

This is his assertion for such need to be addressed which requires a bold move from political leaders to take courageously a change of attitude. The pope further added:

“I urge them to face this challenge with determination and farsightedness, taking account, naturally, of their particular situations. Money has to serve, not to rule.”

Such address is opportune. Time and again it holds true to the very state of the Philippine electoral system—all its electoral stakeholders and the too much politicking embedded, that have taken place in the recently concluded mid-term election. The Pope’s call is Zamboanga Sibugay’s call. Money has to serve, not to rule. Apparently, the self-effacing grassroots level approach which has grown like wildfire to combat the seemingly money-spinning vote buying can account to the sweeping victory of the newly-elected officials. The dire need of the constituents for redemption coupled with its relentless effort has etched a mark in the annals of Sibugay’s historic feat. It was people’s power that moved mountains in a way so civil and generally peaceful. It was the true voice of the people. The “No to Vote Buying” call was boldly initiated by the church as big tarpaulins were framed outside; all over the catholic churches within the diocese. There were no street rallies and no strong opposing “talk-back” figures from the civil society. It was purely prayer-led advocacy and consistent but sustained call that money cannot rule anymore. At the ground, yes there were selling and buying of votes, but where there were evil intentions, good ones prevailed.

Yes! It was a miracle! The top most victors unpredictably claimed the posts. People’s choice has always been kept to one’s self afraid of being pointed and accused to have favored politicians. Like roaring lions, when margins are in great disparity to the incumbents, people came out on the streets and flooded peacefully at the bastion—the provincial capitol—some of whom were soaked in rain and haven’t taken dinner. The people came, mostly by self-will, to witness a less than 3 minute proclamation of Governor-elect Wilter Y. Palma on May 14, 2013 at exactly 12:20 a.m. The Jalosjos’ lost grip...
of Sibugay in an unprecedented turn out. Such a fleeting moment for true-blooded Sibugaynons who dreamed of living free from foreign invasion.

Yes! Foreign invasion in the context of people governing Sibugaynons who are not by blood Sibugaynons themselves. The issue on localization has always been a great controversy. Only when we are free from this invisible bondage of slavery can we become completely independent. Are we Sibugaynons not capable of running our provincial local government unit? Such question should mean and pose greater challenge to the new governor. And this will anchor his kind of local governance against the three-year blueprint he would have to build, together with his legislators. The battle cry of the seemingly-hopeless-governed Sibugaynons for transparency and accountability can be accounted for 12 long years. After 12 years of intertwined birth pangs, Sibugaynons are yet to see the pearl of the southern seas become an icon in the south. And this is what Sibugaynons are looking forward—to achieve greater heights and put Sibugay again in the map same as when we on February 22, 2001 by virtue of R.A. 8973 made Sibugay the 79th province.

Silingan Ka movement

It is believed that electoral processes are manipulated and suffrage is curtailed by vote-buying-and-selling hence the initiative by lay people to bring about change. Looking at this angle and considering the age-old proliferation of graft and corruption Silingan Ka! (You are Neighbor!) Movement was organized in order to address the growing needs for reforms. Unfazed with political and societal criticism and condemnation, the insignificant-turned-unmatched movement with no track record has lived up to the principles it upholds. With minimal resources and no machinery properly in place, it penetrated even the outskirts with massive advocacy and campaign passing unto the remotest the social teachings of the Catholic church and highlighting the involvement of the community, the Sibugaynons, in the electoral proceedings. The power of a few can indeed influence and spark a difference. SK has sustained the momentum to prove its worth and credibility as a movement.

It can be recalled that SK officially endorsed political candidates from both majority parties a day before Easter Sunday. As a political activity, it was done for the purpose of strengthening and molding responsible voters to choose highly responsible, sincere, credible and principled community leaders. The faith-impelled movement was mindful of its objective in adhering to good governance for the purpose of achieving greater peace and bolstering development. SK was developed from circles of discernment for elections responding to the call of Pope Benedict the XVI “to provide evangelical formation and pastoral accompaniment of a new generation of Catholics working in politics...”

The Big Day

Seeing a big crowd unexpectedly gathered and triumphed over an election victory was overwhelming. Like a domino effect, when the gathered crowd saw Governor-elect Palma entered the premises of the bastion of Sibugay, halted at the middle of the seal at the podium, waived his hand…the tremor-like sounds of unstoppable cheers echoed at the walls. The crowd became even more filled with euphoria and tears of joy when one lad ran up the stage and waived the Philippine flag.

Standing on the third floor, I witnessed the unfolding of events. Stirred with emotion, I realized that people indeed can make things happen if they will it. The government forces secured his entry and all other winning candidates such as Congresswoman-elect Dulce Ann K. Hofer (2nd district) and Congresswoman-elect Belma A. Cabialo (1st district). Until the wee hours of dawn, the people patiently
waited and remained seated until the proclamation was over.

Catholic Vote

Being a Pastoral Parish Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) volunteer, I had the privilege to be inside the cordoned area of the Provincial Board of Canvassers (PBOC).

Governor-elect Palma told me “….please tell the bishop, thank you. Without the campaign and advocacy, who am I to win? I am not popular. So there is such thing as Catholic vote!”

It was the first time I heard the phrase a catholic vote. I rummaged through my notes and wrote “a catholic vote”. A guy from outside the cordoned area saw it and said yes yes…there is such thing…as catholic vote. It just happened! My eyes were glued again on the note and became even more spirited. Born and raised in Ipil, a Sibugaynon by blood, I consider myself one of the living witnesses for the last 35 years. I fervently pray that whatever transpired in our beloved province will be a learned lesson and will forever be remembered. After some exchanges of pleasantries, I stood up and like a blue eagle and a flag hoisted in the pole, I walked with head high. I am as determined as these people around—no afternoon snacks, no dinner, and no coffee, but still up.

Appalling news came days after the official filing of protest on May 23, 2013 by incumbent Governor Rommel A. Jalosjos against Governor-elect Palma for massive vote buying, intimidation, threat among others. Sibugaynons will now leave this up to the court and the proper authorities. Let the numbers speak for themselves!

Oh, what economic relief there is if money has to serve and not to rule! We need financial reforms! We need public service ethics and accountability! Let us heed the call of Pope Francis!

(Cecille Ancheta La Plana is part of the Social Action Ministry of the Diocese of Ipil.)
The G8 environmental report says coal plants are the worst of all

By Fr. Shay Cullen

The shocking revelation that environmental damages caused by economic activities like coal plant electrical generation and mining are costing the global economy as much as US$4.7 trillion a year. The report released last 15 April was commissioned by the Group of Eight economic powers and the United Nation’s Environmental Programme.

The G8 nation’s next meeting is at the Lough Erne Summit, June 17-18, 2013 in Northern Ireland. The grim facts of environmental degradation are causing worldwide economic loss and that means greater poverty and health problems.

The loss to the world economy by environmental destructive economic activity is greater than the wealth generated. The short term benefits are mostly for the rich while the environmental damage hurts the poor. The study calculates the impact of air and water pollution, health costs, the damage caused by climate change due to global warming and the destruction costs of deforestation, the rise in ocean temperature and one hundred other impacts.

Coal fired power plants do the worst damage to the environment and the economy. The negative impact and damage is so grave that it negates any economic benefits that the electricity generated helps create. The damage in East Asia alone, including the Philippines, causes economic losses to the costs of $452.8 billion. The wealth generated is only $443.1 billion causing a net loss—that’s bad business for the world economy.

Those who claim that we need to suffer some environmental damage to generate wealth, progress and development are wrong. It is now proven that the losses are greater than the benefits.

It’s not often that environmental protectors and campaigners get good news and have victories in protecting the health of citizens and protecting the environment. Recently, a Philippine court ruling set back the construction of a coal fired power plant on Subic Bay after intensive campaigning against it.

In the Philippines as elsewhere, a real democratic political system does not work to protect the greater good. It benefits the few rich. The so-called economic boom in the Philippines is only for those already rich. The value of their holdings and stocks are rising. So it is really an oligarchy, not a democracy. This court ruling has revealed a dent in that armor of invincibility of the ruling elite. Once-in-a while, a judge is independent of their influence.

State employees are usually beholden to their political masters who appoint them and the energy industry and these politicians are frequently in cahoots with each order. Former industry businessmen get elected and invited by the President into the cabinet. They see that the interests of their masters are protected and enlarged. They get political protection and permits to pursue development projects that are detrimental to the environment.

There is nothing new in that arrangement. Keep the poor poor so they will take the money to fill empty stomachs during election time and the rich can elect themselves. The recent election in May has proven the point. Arnold Padilla on www.preda.org made it clear that the business people and the political elite are one and the same. Dozens of rich politicians from ruling families made fake political parties, a legal right reserved for the poor and the marginalized. These members of ruling families had their fake party approved by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and the Supreme Court and bought enough votes to get themselves elected to Congress and there they can work for the benefit of the rich.

The classic place to see this link up in action is the power plant application project at Subic bay. RP energy, a consortium of Philippine and foreign tycoons, some inner sanctum members of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the government agency (SBMA) in charge of the Subic bay industrial complex had petitioned the court to reverse previous court rulings that the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) permits issued to RP Energy to allow the coal fired plant to be built were invalid.

Their appeal for a reconsideration of this ruling was recently denied by Associate Justice Celia Librea-Leagogo. She denied the motion for reconsideration filed by the DENR, RP Energy, and the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA). The planned 600 megawatt coal fired power plant due to be set up at the Redondo peninsula on Subic Bay is now back to square one. The people in the Olongapo city and surrounding area are happy with this. But RP Energy will be in cahoots with the government officials to get the permits. But community acceptance is not possible.

In all nations, people of conscience and concerned for the well-being of people and nature are challenged to renew efforts to reduce the environmental destruction going on all around us. Every issue is important. Since my recent column, “The Fishing Wars”, the EU has finally made a binding agreement with member nations to abide by the strict quotas and banning of bad practices of throwing millions of tons of non-commercial fish back to the sea dead. Lobbying and speaking out can bring positive change and a healthier world. We are stewards of this beautiful planet; it’s the only one we got. There is nothing much on Mars.
The hope for peace dims. This is the headline of a newspaper a few days ago.

NPA guerrilla units have launched ambushes and tactical offensives that resulted in casualties on the side of government forces. The AFP has increased military operations including the bombing of suspected NPA positions. The spiral of violence continues.

It seems that both the government and the NDF have become pessimistic in coming up with a peace agreement and both sides blame each other for the impasse.

In his encyclical, Evangelium Vitae, John Paul II, regards armed conflict as one of the manifestations of the culture of death. Working for peace, is therefore, part of the mission of the Church in promoting life. To be pro-life is to be pro-peace. The question is: what can the Church contribute in promoting peace? Coming up with another pastoral letter may be an option but it is not enough.

Twenty-five years ago, the CBPC Public affairs committee came up with the following proposals that remain relevant even today:

1. The formation and proliferation of peace organizations—perhaps the recruiting of Basic Ecclesial Communities to be such organizations—will be effective in the creating and sustaining of a general movement for peace.
2. Peace Zones, organized by the ordinary citizenry, should be encouraged and supported everywhere, as many of these formed as possible
3. Peace Program too not directly geared towards a ceasefire or peace talks but towards ensuring development and greater justice for peace should also be multiplied and strengthened.

These proposals envision an important role of BECs as part of a grassroots movement promoting peace. The communities are encouraged to establish “Zone of Peace” where the combatants of both sides are asked to withdraw their forces and allow the residents to peacefully pursue socio-economic programs and projects that will bring about progress and development. At the same time, the communities join the clamor for ceasefire and the continuation of peace talks that would address the roots of conflict and the importance of justice as the basis for lasting peace.

Thus, in 1989, a BEC in Cantamayog, Candoni (Negros) declared the first Zone of Peace. This was followed a year later by the BECs in Tulunan, North Cotabato.

The NPA and the AFP respected these Zones of Peace. The Zone of Peace in Tulunan expanded in four more neighboring barangays. In spite of these success stories, the Zone of Peace was not replicated by other BECs and parishes, except in Nalapaan, Pikit during the height of the armed conflict between the MILF and AFP. There were other Peace Zones established by civil society groups and local communities (e.g. Cotabato, Sagada, Sadanga) but these were not also later replicated.

Looking at the last 25 years, the Church and the BECs have not significantly contributed to the growth of a grassroots movement promoting peace. A peace negotiation without the support and pressure coming from grassroots communities and civil society will not prosper. A peace negotiation is not only a matter between the government and the NDF. We are all stakeholders in the peace process. Perhaps, the time has come to seriously implement the proposal of the CBCP public affairs committee. This means that the leadership in the Church—the bishops and the clergy will have to animate the dioceses, parishes and BECs as well as mandated organizations and renewal movements to act for peace.

Promoting the establishment and proliferation of peace zones in BECs and parishes especially in areas affected by the armed conflict can send a message to both the government and the NDF that the people do not support their war and that they demand a final peace agreement that will lead to lasting peace.
Social conscience based on Shalom

By Abp. Fernando R. Capalla

This reflection focuses on the concept of Shalom as a basis of forming a conscience that determines the morality of any activity in the peace building process. Briefly reviewing the concept of Shalom, we say that this word for Peace in the Hebrew language means wholeness, integrity, harmony and proportion. In the Arabic language it is Salam and means the same as a derivative of Shalom. And from Salam is derived another Arabic word, Islam, which means the Religion of Peace.

Both Christians and Islamists or Muslims then, if we go by the consistent meaning of the linguistic derivatives of Shalom, can say that our sense of right and wrong, which is what we mean by Conscience, is already properly formed and maturely developed when it dictates to us that an act, mental and/or behavioral, is morally right or wrong because it either promotes or does not promote wholeness, integrity, harmony and proportion in the life of the individual and of the community or society.

From this reflection arise serious questions: how is the conscience of an individual Christian or Muslim properly formed? How can it develop maturely? Are these questions included in the character-building and capacity-building seminars of peace advocates and peace builders? Does the promotion of the so-called culture of peace also include the formation and development of personal and social conscience?

Honestly I do not know the answers. All I know is the fact that most character and capacity building seminars given by peace advocates and educational institutions and NGOs in support of peace advocacy and the culture of peace provide for the most part valuable INFORMATION and excellent SKILLS. This can be part of Peace Education which generally is the training of the mind and the intellect.

On the other hand FORMATION of conscience or Moral Education is the training of the heart aided by the intellect based on moral values which are values of the spirit or soul. How to strike a balance between Information and Formation is another question I find difficult to answer. Unfortunately I am not a formator.

Suggestions, recommendations or proposals from our readers on the Formation of social conscience of peacemakers/peace advocates based on Shalom are welcomed and appreciated. We in the Bishops-Ulama Conference and perhaps all Filipinos badly need this kind of formation.

Our country, presently confronted by so much poverty, corruption and socio-political turmoils caused by illegal elections, urgently calls all peace-loving and brave Filipinos—poor and rich, Christians and Muslims, religious and lay leaders—who, imbued with shalom-based social conscience, will question the moral basis of the present administration and consequently work actively and fearlessly for systemic regime change. For, poverty, corruption and fraudulent elections and other injustices are social disorders that militate against Shalom personified by Jesus Christ who is Our Peace according to St. Paul. (Ephesians 2:14).

Since formative seminars and teach-ins on the ground may sometimes be financially costly and security-wise risky, social networking may be the only safe way at the moment. I hope and pray that the Spirit of the Risen Lord will be our light and strength as we take part in the awakening of new social consciousness that gives birth to a new and peaceful nation.
White Deaths Outnumber Births in America

By Shannon Roberts

A new milestone in the gradual decline of white people in America occurred this week. The number of non-Hispanic white deaths outnumbered births for the first time. Significantly, several demographers have said that they are not aware of another time in American history when the dominant racial group in America has shrunk in this way, even taking into account such events as the depression and the two world wars last century. The Washington Post reports demographer William Frey as commenting that the slow decline of the white population will “characterize this century” of American history.

While the decline has been predicted for some time, it has happened much sooner than demographers previously thought it would, largely because both births and immigration levels have slowed more than expected. The estimated figures released by the Census Bureau last week show that white people now make up 63% of the country, and that Asian people are the fastest growing ethnic group.

It is now minorities who contribute to the population growth of America. Although, as we have reported before on this blog, even minorities with previously high birth rates often start to curb these as they take on the values of the current majority ethnic group—which is when the overall population will really decline. This is reflected by the fact that women with college degrees of all races have been delaying marriage and childbearing to the end of their 20s and beyond. However, census figures still show that white women are far more likely to be childless than Hispanic or African American women. We have reported before that the majority of babies born last year were from minority groups.

As always, it is interesting to follow who makes up America given that it is still currently the strongest political force on the planet. Both the aging and overall decrease of white people means that the current majority will come to rely on (what are currently) minority groups to support them in their old age. As demography William Frey says, these figures tell us a lot about where America is headed as a country.

(This article is lifted with permission from MercatorNet)

What really happens to women who have abortions?

Once again, the New York Times ignores the evidence and backs supporters of abortion.

By Priscilla K. Coleman

On June 12 the New York Times published an article by graduate student Joshua Lang, “What Happens to Women Who Are Denied Abortions?” Mr. Lang is currently enrolled in UC Berkley’s Joint Medical Program, a five-year Master of Science/Medical Doctorate Program. Sadly, Lang’s desire to push a political agenda was apparently the most salient force behind his shoddy piece. Like many before him, Lang tries to dismiss more than 100 peer-reviewed studies revealing an increased risk of mental health problems by focusing on one counter study that has yet to generate any peer-reviewed publications.

According to Mr. Lang, “There is no credible research to support a ‘post-abortion syndrome’, as a report published by the American Psychological Association in 2008 made clear. Yet the notion has influenced restrictive laws in many states.” This statement actually indirectly affirms the strength of the published evidence regarding abortion as a risk factor for mental health problems, because the evidence presented in courts continues to trump the APA conclusions. The vast majority of research studies on the psychological implications of abortion do not address a “Post-Abortion Syndrome”. Instead, researchers examine abortion as a risk factor in mental illnesses that are identified by mainstream professional organizations.

The results of hundreds of studies published in leading peer-reviewed medicine and psychology journals over the past three decades indicate that abortion is a substantial contributing factor to women’s mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. This evidence has quite reasonably influenced informed consent legislation in many states. In upholding the South Dakota law in 2012, the US Court of Appeals relied upon this body of data.

A critique of the 2008 APA report is
posted at the website of the World Expert Consortium for Abortion Research and Education (WECARE), a group of 10 credentialed scientists working to bring accurate information to the public in dire need of evidence-based facts concerning abortion.

Among dozens of other peer-reviewed studies, Lang ignores the results of a meta-analysis titled “Abortion and Mental Health: A Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research Published from 1995-2009” that I published in the British Journal of Psychiatry (BJP) in 2011. Meta-analyses have much more credibility than the results of individual empirical studies or narrative reviews, such as the APA’s 2008 report. In a meta-analysis, the contribution or weighting of any particular study to the final result is based on objective scientific criteria (sample size and strength of effect), as opposed to an individual’s opinion of what constitutes a strong study. The BJP sample consisted of 22 studies and 877,297 participants (163,880 experienced an abortion). Results revealed that women who aborted experienced an 81 percent increased risk for mental health problems. When compared specifically to unintended pregnancy delivered, women were found to have a 55 percent increased risk of experiencing mental health problems. This review offers the largest quantitative estimate of mental health risks associated with abortion available in the world.

Many women who make the decision to abort do so without a thorough understanding of the procedure. A number of peer-reviewed studies have revealed that feeling misinformed or being denied relevant information often precipitates post-abortion difficulties. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that a high percentage of women walking into abortion clinics are conflicted about the choice. In another study I published with colleagues in the Journal of Medical Ethics, we found that 95 percent of a socio-demographically diverse group of women wished to be informed of all possible complications associated with drugs, surgery, and/or other forms of elective treatments, including abortion.

Lang also offers the misleading statement that “Most studies on the effects of abortion compare women who have abortions with those who choose to carry their pregnancies to term.” This ignores the fact that a minimum of eight peer-reviewed studies have included, as a comparison group, women who had an unintended pregnancy and delivered. Many additional studies have included women who have not experienced a pregnancy or had a miscarriage as a comparison group.

Lang puts great emphasis on Diana Foster’s Turnaway Study, which is presented as superior to any existing studies. But the Turnaway Study has glaring flaws. First, less than a third of the women who were approached to participate agreed to do so. This is unacceptable, because those agreeing may have differed systematically from those who declined. Consent to participate rates should be at least 70 percent. Second, women who obtained or were denied abortions around the gestational limits included women for whom the legal cut-off ranged from 10 weeks through the end of the second trimester or 27 weeks. This is not a variable that can be loosely defined, as there is a wealth of data indicating the psychological impact of abortion differs between first and second trimester abortions. Women aborting at such widely varying points in pregnancy cannot be lumped together.

Lang states that “Women cite not recognizing their pregnancies, travel and procedure costs, insurance problems and not knowing where to find care as common reasons for delay.” Actually, the best documented reason for delay is ambivalence about the decision.

Lang also says that women seeking second-trimester abortions “tend to be particularly vulnerable, given the difficulties of finding an appropriate clinic and the higher cost of a later procedure.” Yes, they are particularly vulnerable, but the primary reason is that psychological and physical risks increase exponentially with delayed abortion decisions.

But the most appalling statement in the whole article is Lang’s quoting Foster’s claim that “later abortions are significantly safer than childbirth.” The risks of late-term abortion to women’s physical well-being are well-documented. For example, using national data, Bartlett and colleagues reported in 2004 that the relative risk of abortion-related mortality was 14.7 at 13–15 weeks of gestation, 29.5 at 16–20 weeks, and 76.6 at or after 21 weeks. This compares to a 12.1 rate for childbirth. Bartlett reported that the causes of death during the second trimester included hemorrhage, infection, embolism, anesthesia complications, and cardiac and cerebrovascular events.

As academics, politicians, and lawyers debate the post-abortion psychological and medical literature, the most expedient route to the truth is likely through women’s own voices. The woman in the story who was denied an abortion told Mr. Lang about her daughter, “She is more than my best friend, more than the love of my life.” “She is just my whole world.” The Turnaway Study, using a seriously-flawed methodology, will likely silence most of these voices and perpetuate the suffering of women rushed through abortion clinics.  

(Priscilla Coleman is Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Bowling Green State University. This article is lifted from MercatorNet with permission.)
Tagle to faithful: Clean up corruption in PH

MANILA, June 8, 2013—The head of Manila’s Roman Catholic Church has led the faithful in performing a simple act of consecration that comes with a promise: the conversion of the Philippines.

Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle asked the people to help transform the country by fighting corruption as an act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“Let’s promise that we will clean the heart of our country from corruption. Corruption has no role in a country consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary,” Tagle said.

The Manila archbishop made the statement in his homily during a Mass at the San Fernando de Dilao Parish Church in Paco, Manila for the National Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“Discrimination has no place in a country that is said to be consecrated to heart of Mary which is full of memories about Jesus,” he said.

“Callousness, greed, deceitful to oppress and destroy others has no place in a country or in a heart that says Mary, our heart is for your heart,” added Tagle.

To achieve this, the cardinal said it means asking God to give then the grace to have a pure heart like Mary.

“On this day, when we commonly consecrate our nation, our families, ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary…we ask the Lord for the grace that filled Mary so like her, we could respond with equal consecration in our lives,” Tagle said.

“We ask that our hearts may also be pure not because its empty but it’s is filled with love, filled with Jesus and when filled with Jesus, it’s a heart that reaches out to others and a heart that will lead others closer to God,” he said.

Church leaders held the National Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in cathedrals, shrines and chapels in all archdioceses and dioceses across the country on Saturday.

It was last January 28 when the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines declared “the holding of a simultaneous National Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on June 8, 2013, feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Bishop slams gov’t slow action on CARP

MANILA, June 7, 2013—A Catholic bishop censured the government for the slow implementation of land distribution to farmers.

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo criticized the present administration’s ineptness to fulfill promises particularly the distribution of land to farmers before the agrarian reform program expires next year.

Pabillo said the 25th anniversary of the of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) on June 10, also served as an evaluation on the failure of the present administration to deliver the promises made to protesting farmers last June 14, 2012.

“The farmers are alarmed at the failure of government to distribute nearly 1 million hectares of land before the agrarian reform program expires on 2014,” he said.

Pabillo, who is chair of CBCP’s National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) stressed that when President Aquino took power, government still had to distribute a total of 1, 209,236 hectares to landless farmers.

“From July 2010 to December 2012, Malacañang was able to distribute only 251, 876 hectares representing a measly 21%, leaving a balance of 957,630 to be given away until the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension (CARP) funding expires on June 14, 2014,” said Pabillo.

“DAR records [shows] that the current Aquino administration is the worst performer as far as land acquisition and distribution (LAD) [is concerned] since the CARP was launched by the Cory administration,” he added.

He pointed out that the PNoy administration actually scored the worst record since 1986, distributing only 251, 876 hectares to farmers since July 2010, representing a measly 21% of the total LAD coverage.

“We are calling the government’s attention to enforce the law. It is stated in the law that they need to finish the program before the end of the expiration date on June 2014. We are hoping that they respond. The land reform program is a program for social justice which is about peace. If there is no social justice, there will be lots of chaos and the country will have no ‘tuwid na daan’,” Pabillo said.

Farmers’ group Task Force Mapalad has organized a gathering of farmers on June 10 in the Visayas and Mindanao to protest the dismal performance of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), most especially its Secretary Gil delos Reyes. (Jandel Posion)
Alone, poor and sick: A snapshot of China’s elderly

BEIJING, China, June 11, 2013—The one-child policy is destroying the entire social system of China. In addition to the approximately 200 million abortions it has caused since its approval (1979), the law is in fact affecting the elderly population, one of the most impressive in the world in terms of its growth rate and absolute numbers: about 160 million people are over 65 years of age. This is demonstrated by a study carried out by Chinese and Americans researchers: one-third of people over 65 is in poor health because of lack of coverage through the health system, while a quarter live below the poverty line.

The survey covered about 18 thousand people in 28 provinces. The data points out that 65% of the elderly population is likely to live in poverty for the rest of their lives, given that the pension system cannot cover costs if it isn't receiving taxes from workers, which in any case are far fewer than the elderly. The China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study is only the first of a series of government studies in the social field: next year studies on the mid-range and work in China will be carried out.

Analysts who have studied the results of the research have reported alarming figures. More than 38% of the elderly "has serious difficulty" in meeting their daily needs; 24% have to integrate their pension with an odd job to make ends meet, 25% live on less than 2,433 Yuan (about 300 EUR) a year, the minimum set by the government to define a pauper.

The healthcare situation is also disastrous. About 33% of respondents suffer from a chronic disease: 54% of these have high blood pressure, while 40% are not even able to diagnose their illness. There are very high rates of psychological symptoms: 48% of women and 32% of men show signs of depression. Added to this is the fact that the availability of access to the medical system is greatly reduced for the elderly who live in big cities. Beijing can only provide 1,100 beds per 10 thousand requests for admission.

The government continues to hope in the traditional "filial piety" taught by Confucianism. The study shows that in fact only 38% of the elderly live with their children, but 60% reside "in the immediate vicinity." According to the Asian culture, the eldest son had to take care of his parents when they get older, while daughters move to their husband's house. This also explains why selective abortions in favor of male babies, continues to grow in China.

In any case, the internal balance seems at breaking point. Of the elderly who do not live with their children, only 53% receive financial support from their relatives since the social and family system seem to have become much more mobile than even just 30 years ago. Professor John Strauss of the University of California points out that another factor also must be taken into consideration: "at the moment those over 65 had 3 or 4 children. The next wave will be to those who have suffered the one-child law, and therefore a lot less hope." (AsiaNews)

Top Japanese award goes to Sisilah for peace and interreligious dialogue

MANILA, June 11, 2013—Sisilah, a movement for Muslim-Christian dialogue founded in 1986 by Fr. Sebastiano D’Ambra of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), won the 2013 edition of the Goi Peace Award, it was recently announced by the Goi Peace Foundation. The Japanese agency — founded in 1999 in Tokyo — is committed, as stated in its statutes, to the "promotion of peace, overcoming barriers formed by race, religion or political beliefs." The jury wanted the prestigious award to go to the Philippine movement, because it best mirrored the foundations' own values.

For the promoters of Sisilah the coveted award is a confirmation of the work in favour of interreligious dialogue over the past decades. In past editions, the Goi Peace Award went to famous personalities such as the Hungarian philosopher and scientist Ervin Laszlo, President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica and the doctor of Indian origin Deepak Chopra.

Among the reasons for the award, there is just the "recognition of the many years of unremitting efforts to promote dialogue for peace and solidarity" between Christians and Muslims in the Philippines, particularly in the southern regions. "Your efforts — add the members of the Steering Committee, in a letter sent to Sisilah — have not only advanced the process towards lasting peace in your communities, but have inspired many people around the world with your example of true dialogue based on spiritual values". The award ceremony will be held on November 27 in the Japanese capital in the context of the Goi Peace Foundation Forum scheduled at Nikkei Hall. For members of Sisilah it is a "recognition" of the efforts of all members of the group, who with "generosity and commitment" have been fighting for years for peace in Mindanao. A "visionary" pursuing of Isamo-Christian "peace and dialogue" "as possible, by the grace of God."

Founded in 1986, for more than 20 years Sisilah has been offering projects and initiatives such as the Bishop Ulama forum and training courses for young Christians and Muslims. In recent years the movement has become a point of reference for the ongoing reconcilia­tion between the Philippine government and Muslim rebels of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which for 40 years have fought a war that cost over 100 thousand lives. (AsiaNews)
Large-scale illegal trade in tigers, elephants and rhinos between Nepal and China

KATHMANDU, Nepal, June 11, 2013—Tigers, elephants, rhinos and other rare animals can be had at Tinkar, on the western border between Nepal and China, the largest hub for the illegal trade in protected species between the two countries.

Nepali police, which uncovered the trade after eight months of investigation, released a report on 4 June that it hopes will raise awareness in the international community about the problem.

"The police can arrest the perpetrators of this type of trade, but not the instigators, because they are protected by local political leaders," said Kunwar Kathayat, local police chief.

China's markets are the prime destination for this type of trade. The parts of rare species have great value as luxury items and for traditional medicine in the Asian juggernaut.

In early June, police intercepted and arrested four smugglers, carrying a cargo estimated to be worth US$ 50 million, including five hides and 50 kg of leopard bones, four boxes of tiger teeth, and two boxes containing elephant tusks. (AsiaNews)

As a result of forced sterilizations, 4.6 million women can no longer have children in India

NEW DELHI, India, June 12, 2013—A dozen tables next to each other, sheets stained with blood, doctors and nurses without coats, sometimes without protective masks, and tools only rinsed with hot water are the conditions in which 4.6 million women underwent sterilization against their will in India last year in accordance with the government's birth control policies.

As part of such policies, vasectomies represent 4 per cent of all sterilization operations performed. Instead, most forced sterilizations involve women in the poorest states in India. Bihar, which has the lowest annual per-capita income in the country and the highest illiteracy rate, leads the pack.

Often women are tricked into accepting tubal ligation. Recruited for birth control campaigns, actors go from village to village, offering women US$ 10, or about a week's salary for a poor family, in order to undergo this operation. In principle, it is a free choice but in practice the women are not told that they can no longer have children. Many agree only because of the extreme poverty in which they live.

"I did it out of desperation," said Devi, 25, as she lay on the concrete floor recuperating at the clinic in the state of Bihar. "We're so poor, we need the money. Health officials came to our home. They told us it would be best."

In Bihar, the authorities plan to sterilize 650,000 women and 12,000 men annually, according to the state health ministry. This year the state is planning more than 12,000 female sterilization camps.

Women are the focus of the sterilization drive because India has a patriarchal, male-dominated culture, said Sona Sharma, co-director of the Population Foundation of India, an advocacy group.

"Men fear they will lose their virility or they will become weak if they undergo the operation," Sharma said. "As the breadwinners they make the decisions."

According to United Nations data, 49 per cent of all couples in India practice birth control. Of that group, about three-quarters do so by having the wife sterilized.

India was the first country in the world to introduce a policy designed to reduce population, beginning in 1952 as hunger mounted in the years following independence.

When it comes to female sterilizations, India leads the world with 37 per cent, more than China (34 per cent).

Paradoxically, large-scale sterilization campaigns have not had the desired effects. Even though the population grew by 17.6 per cent in the last decade, 4 per cent less than in the previous decade, on average 18 million more children are born each year. One in five babies born in the world starts life in India. (AsiaNews/Agencies)
Nine-year old Hilary is an incoming grade four pupil. Every day, she does regular rounds among houses near their community in Quezon City to gather “kalakal”, or pieces of scrap, plastic, and metal to sell. This adds little to her parents’ income, which is just enough for their daily meals. When school opens this June, her family does not know where to get the money for her school needs. “Wala po kasi kaming pambili ng gamit,” she said.

Hilary is one of the many Filipino children who have a hard time going to school because the family’s income is not enough. They eventually drop out, not finishing their education because of the growing cost of going to school. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education should be free; elementary education shall be compulsory, and “higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” But as shown by data and trends, this is not the case in the country.

Data from the Department of Education (DepEd) shows that out of 100 Grade 1 students, only 66 are able to continue through elementary and finish Grade 6. Of that number, 58 get to enroll in high school, but only 43 finish it. Of the 43 only 23 are able to enroll in college while 10 enroll in a vocational course. Only 14 out of the 23 higher education enrollees and 7 out of the 10 vocational course enrollees get to finish their degree.

Shortages are also glaring. The classroom shortage is pegged at 152,569 classrooms for school year 2011-2012. There is a shortage of more than 150,000 water and sanitation facilities and some 13.23 million school chairs. There is also a need for around 95,600,000 textbooks. On top of these shortages is the lack of teachers, short by 104,000.

The severe lack of education facilities inevitably reflects on Filipino students’ poor performance. The results of the National Achievement Test (NAT) for elementary supposedly showed improved students’ performance from previous years but with a low achievement rate of 68% in school year 2009-2010. NAT results in the secondary level show even poorer performance with a 45.6% achievement rate.

State neglect

The inaccessibility and poor quality of Philippine education shows that it remains to be a neglected state responsibility. The
PH education: shortage of solutions?

Reducing state support for education and increasing private sector participation remain the administration’s solutions to the country’s education woes.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that 6% of gross national product (GNP) must be spent on education. The Philippine government, however, is spending only 2% of GNP on this social service, lagging behind Malaysia, Indonesia and developed countries for primary education.

The much-hyped increase in the 2012 national government budget allocation for the DepEd only targets to finance the building of 27% of the backlog in classrooms, fill up 20% of the shortage in desks and about 12% of the shortage in teachers. It also sets P1 million to subsidize the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE), which finances poor students to enroll in private institutions.

Despite this increase, the maximum amount that state universities and colleges (SUCs) may request from the Bureau of Treasury got a net decrease of Php142.44 million. Fifty SUCs get a combined budget cut of Php569.8 million in 2012. The 10.1% supposed increase in the budget of SUCs is still a stand-by fund, the disbursement of which would still be subject to the approval of the President.

While allocating insufficient funds to cover backlogs and services in public education and while directing funds in favor of private education, government would allocate more than double this amount to non-productive debt servicing through interest payments at Php333.11 billion and the off-budget Php405.5 billion for principal payments. There is also an 11.5% increase in the defense budget.

IBON computations reveal that if 10% of the debt and defense budgets were redirected to education, the amount would be more than enough to cover remaining education shortages.

On top of state neglect, another issue that burdens students is the rising tuition and other matriculation fees. Last school year, around 324 higher education institutions raised their tuition fees by an average of 10.6%, with tuition increases ranging from Php21 to Php73 per unit.

Reducing state support

Amid these woes, the Aquino administration’s solution is to reduce state support to education further. Its K+12 program institutes Universal Kindergarten and adds two years to high school, thus likewise extending the burden of education expenses on families especially the poor.

K+12 will supposedly put the country’s education at par with the supposed
quality of schooling abroad and arm high school graduates with technical and vocational skills that would land them jobs even without going to college. However, just as it is unable to fully address current shortages in education, government has allocated inadequate funds for this program. For instance, the Universal Kindergarten program entails the hiring of volunteer teachers with an education degree, but due to shortages, the DepEd eventually allowed parents with any background in education to volunteer for the position for a measly monthly salary of Php3,000-Php6,000.

The direction of integrating vocational and technical trainings in the high school curriculum is in accordance with the World Bank’s Education for All (EFA) Agenda. As students are expected to work after finishing high school, this also fits government’s inclination to further reduce state support for college education.

Another solution by the administration is to hand the task of addressing school building backlogs to the private sector through the public-private partnerships (PPPs). The assumption is that private firms that win the bidding will take over government’s duty to construct school buildings and facilities. Outside the Philippines, experiences with PPPs in classroom construction show that the public has shouldered more expenses. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the cost of capital of private finance initiatives was 100% higher than what it would have cost the government. There were also poorly designed buildings that had to be maintained at high cost 15 years after their construction.

“Gusto ko pong maging teacher,” Hillary replied when asked what she wishes to become when she grows up. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognizes that education should be directed to the full development of the human personality. But under current circumstances, from insufficient allocation to the outright abandonment of the full delivery of education as a social right, the aspirations of the future generation as well as the country’s thrust for development are compromised.

(IBON Foundation, Inc. is an independent development institution established in 1978 that provides research, education, publications, information work and advocacy support on socioeconomic issues.)
PH Education: Shortage of Solutions?

Government’s recent pronouncement that the growing number of unemployment among educated workers is a result of jobs-skills mismatch does not address the reasons behind job scarcity in the country, research group IBON said.

Latest official figures show that in 2012, almost eight out of 10 unemployed are high-school or college-educated. Three out of 10 reached college-level of education or are even graduates of postgraduate studies, according to the National Statistics Office (NSO).

The research group said that majority of Filipinos are finding it difficult to get jobs because employment is scarce, and not because it reflects a mismatch between the school curriculum and job availability. IBON added that the job scarcity in the country is due to a weak industrial sector, particularly domestic manufacturing, which would have created sufficient jobs in the country. The share of the manufacturing sector to total employment has fallen from 12.1% in 1960 to only 8.3% in 2012. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its 2013 report also recognized that a strong industrial base is vital in increasing jobs and making growth more inclusive and sustainable.

With the absence of government resolve to substantially increase the education budget, the lack of decent jobs in many parts of the country remains a barrier for parents to send their children to school, whether under a 10-year or 12-year education cycle. On the other hand, the same lack of decent jobs is to blame for graduates failing to land the much-needed jobs. NSO figures show that on the average, there are 1.4 million Filipinos under 15-24 years old who did not have jobs in 2012. Year on year, youth unemployment rate was higher in January 2013 at 16.6% compared to the same period in 2012.

According to IBON, reforms on the educational system, such as the recently-signed K to 12 Law, only focus on building skills needed by the global market. With K to 12, students are expected to work after taking up vocational and technical trainings in high school. The curriculum changes remain unsupportive of a progressive economy where students’ skills are developed to contribute to its development.

Changes in curriculum should reflect the country’s development aspirations, the research group said. However, there is apparently no learning area or competency in the present K to 12 curriculum that aims to develop the ingenuity and capacity of Filipino students to develop new technologies and build new forms of knowledge needed to help strengthen the country’s industries. These would have helped create meaningful jobs and provide a sustainable solution to the country’s chronic jobs crisis. (Ibon News)
Parochial school allies with Seminary: 40 seminarians in co-ed plan

By Natalie Hazel P. Quimlat and Jose Fernando Obias

The decision to close the Holy Rosary Seminary High School in Naga in 1986 has changed not only the course of priesthood formation but also the educational sphere in Caceres. As one of the top and most reputable schools in the region, the High School Department of the Holy Rosary Seminary was then perceived to weather whatever difficulty its closure would entail. Unknown to its proponents, the need for preparing would-be seminarians while still in the high school rears up every now and then. Thus, in June of 2013, 40 young men started a life far different from the teenagers of today.

Closing the Seminary High School

During its existence, the Seminary High School produced students who topped and excelled in government-administered exams. They were, so to say, the cream of the crop. However, the High School Department produced a small number of priests. While vocation was present, few became men of the cloth. According to a research conducted by the Caceres Office of Research and Development (CORD), vocations were nurtured and pursued by students from the Preparatory Institute. Because of this, the Archdiocese saw the High School as a liability more than it is an asset, not only to the Archdiocese but to society as a whole.

After several meetings, it was decided, in November of 1986, that the High School Department would gradually cease operations, starting with closing its first year on June of 1987. By March 1990, all remaining students have graduated and the High School Department became a prestigious part of the Church history of Nueva Caceres.

NPS: Breaking New Grounds

In July of 2012, the Naga Parochial School (NPS) celebrated its 65th year with the theme, Breaking New Grounds. Indeed, NPS broke new grounds last March when Director, Fr. Rex Andrew Alarcon, announced that the highly esteemed elementary school for boys will not only accept female applicants come June of this year, but also begin its High School Department.

Part of this sudden change is rooted in the program being implemented by the current Government Administration, the K-12 Educational Reform. Opening a High School Department will provide a choice for the School’s elementary students to continue their education at the Naga Parochial School. And as globalization continues to influence, and at times, dictate, the morality of young men and women, the demand for quality Catholic education increases. By expanding, NPS continues to meet this demand.

On the other hand, the decision to provide a co-educational setting was in part a response to a survey conducted to parents, most of whom opted for the said paradigm shift. At an early age, young boys would be taught how to behave properly around girls and young girls would experience how it is to carry themselves in the company of males. Providing this would allow children to grow up more maturely, not only socially but also emotionally.

As of date, 50 students are enrolled at the High School Department, 40 of which are part of the Seminary High School Program. Of the remaining 10, four are females. Currently, there are 120 females enrolled at NPS.

Re-opening the Seminary High School

If there is one thing that the Seminary High School is known for, it is the kind of discipline developed in its graduates, most of whom are highly regarded leaders in their respective fields. More than twenty years since its cessation, however, it is still the kind of discipline needed by many young men and women, more so by men called to pursue the priestly ministry. Education and formation are so important.

With the re-opening of the Seminary High School, Classical education would go hand-in-hand with the K-12 Educational Reform at NPS. Still focusing on Math and Science, Latin will be taught as one of the subjects. However, as part of adapting to a post-modern world, students of the Seminary High School will now take classes at NPS, where the setting is now co-educational, and live at the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary. They will be entitled to two home visitations every month.

Although many elementary students from NPS have continued their education at the Seminary High School before, having produced 65 priests and 3 bishops, it is not the main goal of the current High School Department to set a quota on how many would pursue priesthood. After all, according to the Minor Seminary Rector, Fr. William Parde, this [education and formation] is their greatest contribution to the community.

Nation building has always been at the core of every educational institution. The reforms established today prove just that, and it is in this way that the Naga Parochial School and the Seminary High School contribute to the leaders of tomorrow.
Continuing education and formation

By Fr. Roy Cimagala

Because of the trimestral plan in our school, the graduation and the start of a new school year come close to each other in the month of June. The sharp transition of the old and the new gives me the sensation that education and formation never end. They just begin and begin, twirl and turn like a spiral.

As I see the graduating class finish their course, I look back at the three years they spent in school and with me. I ask myself, have these guys really learned the skills imparted, and more importantly, developed the proper attitude toward life?

It’s an intense moment of truth, fueling the need to hope and pray, and then review the record and the experiences, and to get another look at the conditions of today’s world to see if there are things to be improved, changed, deleted or introduced in the school.

There are actually quite a lot to be done. Educating and forming students, while relying on some structure, past lessons and tradition, always involve new things and new challenges. It’s a very dynamic affair. And so, we just have to cope with them. We just have to learn to flow with the times.

Truth is nowadays, at least for the young boys who graduate from our school, a big challenge is how to help them keep their humanity and Christianity intact, and also to help them humanize and Christianize the strong technological, not to mention, an increasingly secularized environment that they usually work in.

It cannot be denied that they are very vulnerable to the trend of becoming automatons that undermine their being persons. Since many of them are pressured to work immediately so as to earn and help their family, they tend to disregard certain basic details that actually protect them as persons.

Since they are young and still naïve in the ways of the world, plus a host of other factors like family problems, difficulties in one’s personal life, etc., they don’t mind dancing to the music of a technological culture that often has no human soul. In fact, this technological world offers them a Faustian bargain of some relief.

They can easily compromise their faith, their morals and ethics, since they do not know yet how to assess the cultural and professional environment from the theological point of view. They tend to blindly follow the crowd.

At least when they are still in school, especially when they undergo their on-the-job training (OJT), we take pains in monitoring the working conditions of the partner companies they train in, and we encourage them to talk with their respective mentors and with me regularly.

Still, a lot more need to be done and improved. I, for one, feel that I need more time to be able to chat with the guys more often and more deeply. They have to be helped in maturing their virtues and values, and that just needs a lot of time.

They have to learn how to pray, how to think properly, how to develop a good sense of priorities, how to grow in the virtues—all of them, from humility to order, temperance and chastity, hardwork, fortitude, etc.

The education and formation of these boys go far beyond the textbooks and the classroom setting. A lot of personal interaction, mentoring and spiritual direction are needed. Each one has to be dealt with personally, and not generically.

Each one has to be known as he really is, distinct and unique from the others, and therefore has to be dealt with, motivated according to how he is. We have to know each one’s potentials, and try to help him actualize those potentials. He has to be helped also in his defects and handicaps.

Another important element to consider is the family. Many of the families of the boys are not exactly in the ideal condition. Far from it, though there are some that manage to remain simple and unaffected by the ills of today’s world.

We should try to know the family background of each one, and by some program try to reach out to them. It’s important that close coordination be made between the school and the family, for a more wholesome and effective development of the students.

Since many of the students come from the provinces and are simply boarding in the city, we have to know the conditions of the boarding houses, and again try to do whatever to make those temporary residences conducive also to the education and formation of the students.
Bergoglio, a Revolutionary His Own Way

Liberation theologians extol him, but between him and them there is a chasm. The progressives enlist him, but he keeps himself far from them. The true Francis is very different from the one that some imagine.

By Sandro Magister

In an ongoing honeymoon with public opinion, Pope Francis has also gained the praise of the most revolutionary of the Franciscan theologians, the Brazilian Leonardo Boff: "Francis will teach a lesson to the Church. We are coming out of a bitter and gloomy winter. With him comes the spring.

Boff set aside his religious habit some time ago, got married, and replaced his love for Marx with an environmentalist's fondness for mother earth and brother sun. But he is still the most famous and most frequently cited of the liberation theologians.

When, just three days after his election as pope, Jorge Mario Bergoglio called for “a Church that is poor and for the poor,” his admission among the ranks of the revolutionaries seemed like a done deal.

In reality, there is a chasm between the vision of the Latin American liberation theologians and the vision of this Argentine pope.

Bergoglio is not a prolific author of books, but what he has left in writing is more than enough in order to understand what he has in mind with his insistent mingling with the "people."

He knows liberation theology well, he saw it emerge and spread among his Jesuit confrères as well, but he always registered his disagreement with it, even at the cost of finding himself isolated.

His theologists of reference were not Boff, nor Gutierrez, nor Sobrino, but the Argentine Juan Carlos Scannone, he too at Jesuit disliked by most, who had been his professor of Greek and had elaborated a theology not of liberation, but “of the people,” founded on the culture and religious devotion of the common people, of the poor in the first place, with their traditional spirituality and their sense of justice.

Today Scannone, 81, is seen as the greatest living Argentine theologian, while on what remains of liberation theology Bergoglio closed the conversation as follows: "After the collapse of 'real socialism,' these currents of thought were plunged into confusion. Incapable of either radical reformulation or new creativity, they survived by inertia, even if there are still some today who, anachronistically, would like to propose it again."

Bergoglio threaded this dismissive judgment on liberation theology into one of his most revealing writings: the preface to a book on the future of Latin America written by his closest friend in the Vatican curia, the Uruguayan Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour, secretary general of the pontifical commission for Latin America, married with children and grandchildren, the highest ranking layman in the curia.

"Catholic wisdom" of its people.

He sees the most terrible threat in what he calls “adolescent progressivism,” an enthusiasm for progress that in reality backfires, he says, against peoples and nations, against their Catholic identity, “in close relationship with a conception of the state that is to a large extent a militant secularism.”
Last Sunday he broke a lance for the legal protection of the embryo in Europe. In Buenos Aires his tenacious opposition against the laws for free abortion and “gay” marriage is not forgotten. In the spread of similar laws all over the world, he sees the offensive of “an imperialist conception of globalization,” which “constitutes the most dangerous totalitarianism of postmodernity.”

It is an offensive that, for Bergoglio, bears the mark of the Antichrist, as in a novel that he loves to cite: “Lord of the World” by Robert H. Benson, an Anglican priest, son of an Archbishop of Canterbury, who converted to Catholicism a century ago.

In his homilies as pope, the very frequent references to the devil are not a rhetorical device. For Pope Francis, the devil is more real than ever, he is “the prince of this world” whom Jesus defeated forever but who is still free to do evil.

In a homily a few days ago, he warned: “Dialogue is necessary among us, for peace. But with the prince of this world one cannot dialogue. Ever.”

(Lifted from Chiesa Online)
TO The Right Honourable David Cameron, MP Prime Minister

I am pleased to reply to your kind letter of 5 June 2013, with which you were good enough to inform me of your Government’s agenda for the British G8 Presidency during the year 2013 and of the forthcoming Summit, due to take place at Lough Erne on 17 and 18 June 2013, entitled A G8 meeting that goes back to first principles.

If this topic is to attain its broadest and deepest resonance, it is necessary to ensure that all political and economic activity, whether national or international, makes reference to man. Indeed, such activity must, on the one hand, enable the maximum expression of freedom and creativity, both individual and collective, while on the other hand it must promote and guarantee their responsible exercise in solidarity, with particular attention to the poorest.

The priorities that the British Presidency has set out for the Lough Erne Summit are concerned above all with the free international market, taxation, and transparency on the part of governments and economic actors. Yet the fundamental reference to man is by no means lacking, specifically in the proposal for concerted action by the Group to eliminate definitively the scourge of hunger and to ensure food security. Similarly, a further sign of attention to the human person is the inclusion as one of the central themes on the agenda of the protection of women and children from sexual violence in conflict situations, even though it must be remembered that the indispensable context for the development of all the afore-mentioned political actions is that of international peace. Sadly, concern over serious international crises is a recurring theme in the deliberations of the G8, and this year it cannot fail to address the situation in the Middle East, especially in Syria. In this regard, I earnestly hope that the Summit will help to obtain an immediate and lasting cease-fire and to bring all parties in the conflict to the negotiating table. Peace demands a far-sighted renunciation of certain claims, in order to build together a more equitable and just peace. Moreover, peace is an essential pre-requisite for the protection of women, children and other innocent victims, and for making a start towards conquering hunger, especially among the victims of war.

The actions included on the agenda of the British G8 Presidency, which point towards law as the golden thread of development—as well as the consequent commitments to deal with tax avoidance and to ensure transparency and responsibility on the part of governments—are measures that indicate the deep ethical roots of these problems, since, as my predecessor Benedict XVI made clear, the present global crisis shows that ethics is not something external to the economy, but is an integral and unavoidable element of economic thought and action.

The long-term measures that are designed to ensure an adequate legal framework for all economic actions, as well as the associated urgent measures to resolve the global economic crisis, must be guided by the ethics of truth. This includes, first and foremost, respect for the truth of man, who is not simply an additional economic factor, or a disposable good, but is equipped with a nature and a dignity that cannot be reduced to simple economic calculus. Therefore concern for the fundamental material and spiritual welfare of every human person is the starting-point for every political and economic solution and the ultimate measure of its effectiveness and its ethical validity.

Moreover, the goal of economics and politics is to serve humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable wherever they may be, even in their mothers’ wombs. Every economic and political theory or action must set about providing each inhabitant of the planet with the minimum wherewithal to live in dignity and freedom, with the possibility of supporting a family, educating children, praising God and developing one’s own human potential. This is the main thing; in the absence of such a vision, all economic activity is meaningless.

In this sense, the various grave economic and political challenges facing today’s world require a courageous change of attitude that will restore to the end (the human person) and to the means (economics and politics) their proper place. Money and other political and economic means must serve, not rule, bearing in mind that, in a seemingly paradoxical way, free and disinterested solidarity is the key to the smooth functioning of the global economy.

I wished to share these thoughts with you, Prime Minister, with a view to highlighting what is implicit in all political choices, but can sometimes be forgotten: the primary importance of putting humanity, every single man and woman, at the centre of all political and economic activity, both nationally and internationally, because man is the truest and deepest resource for politics and economics, as well as their ultimate end.

Dear Prime Minister, trusting that these thoughts have made a helpful spiritual contribution to your deliberations, I express my sincere hope for a fruitful outcome to your work and I invoke abundant blessings upon the Lough Erne Summit and upon all the participants, as well as upon the activities of the British G8 Presidency during the year 2013, and I take this opportunity to reiterate my good wishes and to express my sentiments of esteem.

From the Vatican, 15 June 2013

FRANCISCUS

Letter of Holy Father Francis to H.E. Mr. David Cameron, British Prime Minister on the occasion of the G8 Meeting (17-18 June 2013)
The recent mid-term national election makes a mockery of our democracy.

Reports of rampant and large scale vote-buying, disenfranchisement of voters, malfunction of precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines, corrupted Compact Flash (CF) cards, transmission failures and the non-compliance on the election laws by the Commission on Election (COMELEC) which is mandated to manage and protect the electoral processes, create public mistrust among the Filipinos, thus making questionable the authenticity of the result of the 2013 automated election.

Even before election, the refusal of COMELEC to allow interested parties to review the source code, as well as to install the necessary safeguards on the PCOS machine, as provided by law, including the proper implementation of the random manual audit, cast doubt about the sincerity of the COMELEC to conduct a transparent and authentic election. Source code review and other safety features are basically confidence-building mechanisms to attain clean, authentic and credible election.

We could not understand why COMELEC sacrifices accuracy and truthfulness over “speed.” Almost all transactions and decisions of the Commission are characterized by speed, especially in conducting bidding and the buying of the PCOS machines. Ironically, the COMELEC did not show the same speedy consideration to the suggestions and recommendations from election advocates and watchdogs.

We question COMELEC in proclaiming, on an installment basis, the 12 senators without factual or legal basis. It is a violation of election rules relating to winners to be proclaimed only after all ballots are officially canvassed (COMELEC Resolution Nos. 9700 and 9700-A). Yes, we recognize there is an exception, that the candidates who have insurmountable lead can be proclaimed winners if the remaining uncanvassed ballots will not adversely affect the result. COMELEC, however, acted suspiciously when it proclaimed the first six winning candidates for senators on May 16, with only 72 out of the 304 certificates of canvass (COCs) accounted for, representing only more than 13 million of the country’s 52 million registered voters. When it proclaimed the next 3 winning candidates on May 17, about 23% of the totalled clustered precincts (18,187 clustered precincts with potentially 8.6 million voters) are still to transmit the election returns. Obviously, the number of votes can adversely affect the 7th to 12th senatorial candidates. We ask: why did COMELEC proclaim the “winning” candidates without factual evidence? Why did it do so with haste? Can the “8-3-1” conspiracy be true? Can we blame our people from entertaining such thoughts?

While we respect the positive observation and assessment of some Filipinos on the recent mid-term election (being relatively peaceful, the process easier and faster made easier by teachers/BEIs on duty, faster parallel manual counting, etc.), NASSA is not blind to the glaring discrepancies and election violations, the highly-suspicious interventions during the canvassing, and the possible manipulation of election result during the lull hours of transmission, canvassing and consolidation of votes. The COMELEC and its deputies, as well as other stakeholders who subvert the will of the people, should be made accountable for their actions.

Already many people are openly saying that this election is ruled by money. Vote buying is common knowledge. This is against the law and yet the COMELEC has done very little to prosecute perpetrators of this crime. This is another instance of the ineptitude of the COMELEC. Those who buy votes will continue to make people poor so that they can continue buying them!

We join the Civil Society watchdogs in demanding accountability from COMELEC. We call the responsible agencies for a thorough investigation of election irregularities and incidents reported, and challenge all the faithful and people of goodwill, to break the culture of impunity. Huge penalty and punishment should be imposed on those who easily took advantage and violate the law. Public office is a public trust; it should be public service for the common good.

We as citizens should speak now. This so-called automated election with its malpractices will be perpetuated in the coming elections if we do not loudly clamor for accountability. How can we obey and respect our leaders if we are not sure whether they are really elected by the people? The stake is the future of our democracy!

28 May 2013
Criminals, rebels, invaders

Truth hurts but it remains the truth. What is evil is unwanted yet evil it remains. This is exactly the predicament of the Philippines. The Filipinos are still by and large good and proper. However, a good number of their local as well as national leaders are either self-oriented or incompetent—especially those who are associated with palace comforts and opportunities. The over-all result of such a socio-political malady is obvious and palpable: The Philippines is rich in natural resources but the Filipinos by and large remain poor. The Filipinos are mostly work-oriented but jobs are few, the pay is low while the prices of consumer goods are high. The canals are full of garbage and the streets are dangerous to drive in and to walk on.

No wonder then that other nations not only in the West but also in Asia itself look down on the Philippines, considering this but a tiny, destitute, and helpless country which is wherefore good to but use but not to respect. So it is that the OFWs are looked upon as wonderful individuals to exploit but not to take seriously, much less to treat with deference. All these are painful to say, nauseating to think about, difficult to admit. To deny all these, however, would not only be futile but also hypocritical. What can be debated with sincerity and candor is a matter of degree—such are how poor and vulnerable really is the Philippines as a country, how used and exploited really are the Filipinos as overseas workers.

There is even this triad of big, dangerous, and even deadly liabilities that besiege the Philippines and its people—courtesy of poor governance, notwithstanding all official protestations and paid publications to the contrary: Criminals who have become more in number as well as openly unafraid of police authorities. Rebels who have been around for so long a time, who regularly sow havoc and even claim lives without mercy. Invaders particularly from Asia and who claim or in fact occupy territories they were exempted from obeying the Commandments—such as in the matter of stealing, killing, and other immoral acts in their defense and affirmation, reason: For the Church, human beings are the darlings of creation.

Such is some kind of a loud wake-up call to the government. No, the country, not even but Manila, is the “gates of hell”—as someone dared to think and write about. But neither is the same exactly the portals of heaven. While the Philippine socio-economic and political predicament are not all authored by the present administration, things are not better after three long years of the tenure and exercise of power. And it has three more years of governance ahead—if not less or more according to civil action or political design. No. It is not even thought of, much less required for a national leader to “walk on water.” But the same has no alternative than to walk and lead the country to a safer place to live in, to a more peaceful nation to enjoy, a more respectable Philippines to be proud about.

Church and politics

“The Church is not to be confused with the political community and is not bound to any political system. In fact, the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each in their own fields, and both are, even if under different titles, devoted to the service of the personal and social good of the same human beings.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Lib. Vat. Ed., 2004 no. 50)

If the State separated itself from the Church, so it is too that the Church separates herself from the State. If the State distances itself from the adoption of an official religion, so it is too that the Church forbids clerics from accepting any public office with the exercise of civil power. All these however notwithstanding, both the Church and the State are meant for the service of the same human beings. While thus separated and independent from one another, the Church and the State however cannot but interact precisely for having the same basic concern, viz., service to the people for their personal and social welfare, viz., human beings gifted with precious human life to care for, endowed with ingrained human dignity to respect or having basic human rights to respect.

Thus it is that it is not uncommon the world over where there is separation of Church and State that they are either at peace or at odds with one another, depending always on how human beings are treated, how they are served or exploited, how they are respected or abused. It can be said that there are usually and primarily three subject matters when the Church must speak and the State either gets angry and contradicts, despises, and dismisses what the Church said or taught, how the latter moved or acted—all of which means Church and State friction:

One: Abuse of Human Beings. When the State looks at human beings as but numbers to count, mouths to feed, individuals to exploit and the like, the Church speaks and acts in their defense and affirmation, reason: For the Church, human beings are the darlings of creation.

Two: Violation of the commandments. When the State through its political leaders think, believe, and behave as if they were exempted from obeying the Commandments—such as in the matter of stealing, killing, and other immoral acts—the Church speaks and acts. Reason: Politicians are not exempted from obeying the Commandments.

Three: Destruction of Nature. When the State not only allows but even promotes the destruction of nature such as through irresponsible mining and other wastage of natural resources, the Church speaks and acts. Reason: Nature is the gift of God to one human generation after another.

If the State listens, this would be for its own good and welfare of the people. Otherwise, who knows what happens next?
There is unity between humanity and economy. Together they go, hand-in-hand, as a necessary paring. What for is economy without humanity? And how would humanity be without economy? This is some kind of a wake-up call to spiritualistic personalities, an injunction to those whose interest and concern are limited but to the supernatural—without concern with the natural, the here and now.

Yes, there are spiritual truths but there are also materials realities. Yes, there is the need of everlasting grace but there is also the requirement of consumer goods. Yes, there is heaven but there is also earth. Hence: Humanity and economy are joined realities here and now. It is like body and soul being together whereas death comes precisely when they are separated. So it is said that while “Man cannot live on bread alone,” it is however also true that without bread, he cannot continue living.

This brings to fore the inherent significance and consequent relevance of the national economy along the content and spirit of “Article XII, National Economy and Patrimony” of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines. It is now said here and there that there are legislators who want and intend to amend the economic restrictions in the said Constitution. As already well known, there are three ways of amending the Constitution: A Constituent Assembly, A Constitutional Convention, A People’s Initiative.

There were previously some three presidential attempts at changing certain provisions in the present Philippine Constitution—not to mention other three movies to do the same at the instance of certain politicians. All of these however remained but intentions and attempts. This time, another move is being prepared for amending the “economic provisions” of the Constitution—more concretely in conjunction with the restrictions of foreign ownership of land and public utilities.

In the event that such restrictions would be thus done away with, some of the questions that come to mind are the following: Does the contemplated amendment then openly and officially admits that most Filipinos are definitely poor and wherefore incapable of buying lands and owning public utilities in the country? And do the wealthy Filipinos then prefer to invest their money abroad for the security and other socio-economic advantages of their investments. After foreigners have in fact bought lands and own public utilities in the country, can Filipinos but and own them back—and under what conditions?

Considering wherefore the intimate partnership between Filipinos and Philippine economy, those pushing for the amendment of the economic provisions of the Philippine Constitution better think much and well. In the event that they succeed in making their desired changes, let them remember that what they do now cannot have but their impact on the generations yet to come.
One stormy night many years ago, an elderly man and his wife entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia, USA. Trying to get out of the rain, the couple approached the front desk hoping to get some shelter for the night. “Could you possibly give us a room here?” the husband asked.

The clerk, a friendly man with a winning smile, looked at the couple and explained that there were three conventions in town. “All of our rooms are taken,” the clerk said. “But I can’t send a nice couple like you out into the rain at one o’clock in the morning. Would you like to take a room for the night?”

“I’ll make out just fine,” the clerk told them. “It’s not exactly a suite, but it will be good enough to make you folks comfortable.”

When the couple declined, the young man pressed on. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll make out just fine,” the clerk told them.

“Okay, let’s try again,” said the older couple. “The hotel manager has a kind heart. He might be willing to look at some sketches and drawings.”

The clerk explained that there were three conventions in town and that all the hotel’s rooms were taken. “But I can’t send a nice couple like you out into the rain at one o’clock in the morning,” he said. “Would you like to take a room for the night?”

“I’ll make out just fine,” the clerk told them. “It’s not exactly a suite, but it will be good enough to make you folks comfortable for the night.”

When the couple declined, the young clerk asked if they were looking for a hotel room. “I’m just passing through,” the elderly man said. “I’ll build one for you.”

So the couple agreed.

As the old man’s name was William Waldorf-Aster and that magnificent structure was the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The young clerk who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. This young clerk never foresaw the turn of events that would lead him to become the manager of one of the world’s most glamorous hotels.

The power of encouragement

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the famous 19th-century poet and artist, was once approached by an elderly man.

The old fellow had some sketches and drawings that he wanted Rossetti to look at and tell him if they were any good, or if they at least showed potential talent.

Rossetti looked over them carefully. After the first few, he knew that they were worthless but Rossetti was a kind man, he told the elderly man as gently as possible that the pictures were without much value and showed little talent. He was sorry, but he could not lie to the man. The man was disappointed, but seemed to expect Rossetti’s judgment.

The old man then apologized for taking up Rossetti’s time, but asked him to look at a few more drawings.

Rossetti looked over the second batch of sketches and immediately became enthusiastic over the talent they revealed. “These,” he said, “are good.”

“This young student has a great talent. He should be given every help and encouragement. He has a great future.”

Rossetti could see that the old fellow was deeply moved.

“Who is this fine young artist?” he asked. “Your son?”

“No,” said the old man sadly. “It is me, 40 years ago. If only I had heard your praise then! For you see, I got discouraged and gave up — too soon.”

Once upon a time there was a child ready to be born. So one day he asked God: “How am I going to live on earth being so small and helpless?”

God replied, “Among the many angels, I chose one for you. She will be waiting for you and will take care of you.”

“But tell me, here in Heaven, I don’t do anything else but sing and smile, that’s enough for me to be happy.”

“Your angel will sing for you and will also smile for you every day. And you will feel your angel’s love and be happy.”

“And how am I going to talk to you?”

“Your angel will sing for you and will also smile for you every day. And you will feel your angel’s love and be happy.”

“Your angel will always be next to you.”

“Your angel will defend you even if it means risking its life.”

“Your angel will protect me?”

“I’ve heard that on earth there are bad men. Who will protect me?”

“I will always be sad because I will not see you anymore.”

“Your angel will always talk to you about me and will teach you the way for you to come back to me, even though I will always be next to you.”

At that moment there was much peace in Heaven, but voices from earth could already be heard, and the child in a hurry asked softly:

“Your angel’s name is of no importance, you will call your angel: Mommy.”

Mommy

Two years passed. The clerk had almost forgotten the incident when he received a letter from the old man. It recalled that stormy night and enclosed a round-trip ticket to New York, asking the young man to pay them a visit.

The old man met him in New York, and led him to the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. He then pointed to a great new building there, a pale reddish stone, with turrets and watchtowers thrusting up to the sky.

“Your angel will be very happy to see you,” the old man said.

“I can assure you I am not,” said the older man, a sly smile playing around his mouth.

The old man’s name was William Waldorf-Aster, and that magnificent structure was the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The young clerk who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. This young clerk never foresaw the turn of events that would lead him to become the manager of one of the world’s most glamorous hotels.
Blood, Sweat and Cheers
Changed Lives of Overseas Filipino Workers
Christina M. Liamzon, Mary Alexis Montelibano-Salinas, Edgar T. Valenzuela and Kim T. Viray

CONSIDERED modern-day heroes by its country and government, millions of overseas Filipino workers defy hardships, loneliness and other negative consequences to be able to provide their families back home a better life, and as a result also help prop up the country’s economy through their remittances. This book tells the stories of 10 Filipinos working and living in Italy. Theirs are stories of courage and faith, daring to against the tide to follow and realize their dreams not only for personal fulfillment but for their families as well. These Filipino migrants do not just tell of the life experiences they have had through the years, prior and during their stay in their host country, but also share the learning and empowerment they received through LSE (Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship) Program, an initiative conceived by the Associazone Pilipinas OFSPES (Overseas Filipinos Society for the Promotion of Economic Security) in partnership with the Ateneo University School of Government (ASoG).

How to Turn Your Passion into Profit
8 Keys to Build a Truly Rich Business
Bo Sanchez and Dean Pax Lapid

THE key to helping people get out of poverty is to help them become successful entrepreneurs. In this book, missionary preacher turns millionaire Bo Sanchez teams up with Dean Pax Lapid, professor of Entrepreneurship at Asian Institute of Management, in dishing out solid recommendations on how to succeed in business and become truly rich in the process. Explaining the “hardware” and “software” of starting a business, the two successful businessmen laid out key concepts that would provide impetus to would-be entrepreneurs and help them avoid hazards that make businesses flop.

Startle
Gathering Light from the Word of God
Jose Ramon Villarin, SJ

BE inspired with this collection of reflections on the Sunday Gospel. As readers go over the pages and ruminate on the reflections, they will realize that each essay speaks something personally to the heart. Allow the Word of God to “awaken you, that love may startle you and lead you to unexpected openings and to some surprising space in your life.” A scientist with a doctorate in Atmospheric Sciences from Georgia Institute of Technology, the author is the 30th President of the Ateneo de Manila University. He was one among many scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change who, with former Vice-President Al Gore, were awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for their work on climate change.

Meditations on the Mass
Anscar J. Chupungco, OSB

A FRUIT of prayerful reflection, these meditations on the Holy Mass by the world-renowned liturgist, Fr. Anscar Chupungco, will surely enrich the faith of Catholics. Far from just merely commenting on the different parts of the Mass, the author’s approach was to meditate prayerfully on the meaning of the liturgy, placing it in context according to the reality of the Church and the world. A Benedictine monk, the author was an internationally-known expert in liturgy. He was a long time executive secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. He founded the Paul VI Institute of Liturgy in Malaybalay, Bukidnon and established the Graduate School of Liturgy in San Beda College, Manila.
CAST: Will Smith & Jaden Smith  DIRECTOR: M. Night Shyamalan  SCREENWRITER: Gary Whitta and M. Night Shyamalan
PRODUCER: M. Night Shyamalan and seven others  EDITOR: Steven Rosenblum  MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Jim Weidman
GENRE: Drama/Action/Sci-fi/Adventure  CINEMATOGRAPHER: Peter Suschitzky  RUNNING TIME: 100 minutes
DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia Pictures  LOCATION: Costa Rica

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT:  ●●●½
MORAL ASSESSMENT:  ●●●½
CINEMA RATING:  PG 13  MTRCB RATING:  PG 13

AFTER EARTH

After the earth had been so polluted for human habitation, humans fled it and went to build cities on a distant planet called Nova Prime, where, unfortunately, another species had settled and developed predators (called “ursas”) to drive away new settlers. On Nova Prime, Kitai (Jaden Smith) fails his cadet promotion test—he is reportedly good with theories but on the field fear immobilizes him. His father, Cypher Raige (Will Smith), a respected warrior known for his ability to “ghost”, mastering himself so he can fight without fear. Cypher takes Kitai with him on a space mission, but an asteroid storm damages their ship, sending it off track and reeling into Earth’s orbit. The ship breaks in two, and father and son are the only survivors. The distress beacon is in the ship’s half that landed 100 kilometers from the other half where Cypher and Kitai are. Cypher’s legs are broken, leaving Kitai to go solo to retrieve the beacon which could lead to their rescue.

After a series of box office misfires that earned for him a shower of rotten tomatoes from critics, (Lady in the Water, The Happening, The Last Airbender) director M. Night Shyamalan finally redeems himself with After Earth, a film that unmistakably bears his signature, albeit a subdued one. Because the movie is unabashedly CGI-enhanced, people may tend to compare it with others of the same genre, but Shyamalan wisely remembers that central to the story is the relationship between father and son. Thus, the importance of close-ups of Cypher and Kitai, particularly while Cypher is directing his son through dangerous territory aided only by a fragile cyber connection. The viewer will not, therefore, find slimy creatures or gargantuan monsters at every turn, or cute little elf flowers (as in Epic), talking birds (Rio), and breakdancing penguins (Happy Feet), as these would distract from the story’s main point.

After Earth is a coming-of-age story where both father and son learn from each other. Its poster slogan “Danger is real; fear is a choice” is repeated like a mantra throughout the movie, not so much verbally as visually, and it hits the mark. The son is ever fearful and insecure from a lingering guilt over his sister’s death, aggravated by the lack of emotional warmth from an absentee father whom he nonetheless admires. In the process of overcoming his fears he blurts out his resentment and defies his father’s order, risking his very life. After Earth’s saving grace is its confidence in knowing what it wants to say and how to say it—to bleep with what critics will say! In real life, we reach a critical point where fear and faith may collide. Sometimes what others may think is a cowardly, defiant, or suicidal move is actually a leap of faith. Kitai’s jumping off the cliff is a leap of faith that finally banishes fear from his consciousness. He lives, and lives up to his name, which is Japanese for “hope”.

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KOREA. Catholic population growing in South Korea

Recent statistics indicate that the Catholic population in South Korea has increased over the past year. Last month, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea released a publication titled Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea 2011. The report, prepared by the Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea, states that at the end of 2012, there were 5,361,369 Catholics in the country, an increase of 1.6 percent—or 84,959 individuals—over the last year. This accounts for just over 10 percent of the total population. According to the report, these numbers have “slightly and consistently increased at a yearly average of 2 – 3 percent during the past 11 years.” (CNA)

THAILAND. Construction begins on new home for elderly

A new home for the elderly in Thailand will seek to restore respect for senior citizens and to fight the escalating problems of elderly abandonment and suicide in the country. Bishop Joseph Chusak Sirisut of Nakhon Ratchasima said that there is an absence of “social care centers for the elders in this whole region.” Construction has begun on a new home for the elderly in Korat, its foundational stone laid under the patronage of Bishop Sirisut and Fr. Paul Cherdchai Lertjitlekha, provincial superior and president of the St. Camillus Foundation Thailand. Lertjitlekha explained that the effort is not seeking to encourage children to “abandon their elders” to nursing homes. Rather, he said, such homes are “a last resort” that can help to ensure that the elderly’s right to health care and pastoral care is fulfilled. (CNA)

LEBANON. Faith leaders seek release of kidnapped bishops

Lebanon’s Maronite Catholic patriarch and Syria’s Greek Orthodox patriarch called for the release of two Orthodox bishops kidnapped in Syria. “We demand the kidnappers and the countries concerned” to release the two bishops and the two priests kidnapped before them, and all those who have been kidnapped on Syrian territory, said Lebanese Cardinal Bechara Rai, the Maronite patriarch, and Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X in a joint statement from Bkerke, the Maronite patriarchate north of Beirut. The Orthodox leaders were kidnapped April 22 in northern Syria while on a humanitarian mission. (CNS)

INDONESIA. Police rejects compulsory headscarf for female officers

Indonesia’s law enforcement authorities are resisting pressures from Islamic extremists to force female police officers to wear the jilbab, a traditional scarf that covers the head but not the face. Fundamentalist groups want all women to cover their head but police is adamant that all its officers respect the force’s rules, which require that all members wear the same uniform in every province and regiment, except Islamist-ruled Aceh. The controversy over headscarves for women police officers has been brewing for weeks, and the police stand has drawn negative responses from some human rights groups like the National Human Right Commission (Komnas HAM) as well as lawmakers from a number of political parties. (Asianews)

VIETNAM. Police arrest blogger as crackdown widens

A prominent Vietnamese dissident blogger and former soldier has been arrested by police in Hanoi for criticizing the government, amid concern that the crackdown on political dissidents shows no sign of abating. Pham Viet Dao, 61, is currently being held by police in the capital. The Vietnam News Agency on June 13 reported that he was arrested “for abusing democratic freedom to infringe on the state’s interests, and rights and legal interests of organizations and citizens.” Nearly 50 bloggers and activists have been jailed this year already and many more arrested. (UCAN)

JAPAN. World’s longest living man dies at 116

The oldest man in the world also considered the longest living man in history, died June 12 in Japan at the age of 116 years. The Japanese Jiroemon Kimura died of natural causes in the Kyoto hospital, Kyoto, at 2:08 in the morning. Hospitalized on May 11 with pneumonia, in the last days his vital signs, blood and urine suffered a sudden degeneration. In December, the Guinness World Records confirmed the record, stating that he was “the person with longest life in human history.” (Asianews)

TAIWAN. Ex-president attempts suicide in prison

Chen Shui-bian, the former president of Taiwan in prison for bribery, attempted suicide on June 3, the justice ministry reported. Chen apparently tried to hang himself in the bathroom of his cell with three towels. An officer found him lying on the floor in a daze. The man is now recovering in a hospital in Taipei. Prison authorities said that Mr. Chen is suffering from a severe depression and in recent months had repeatedly confessed to his psychologist that he wanted to kill himself. (Asianews)

PHILIPPINES. Rights groups urge release of Laos activist

Dozens of Philippine human rights defenders held a "ritual of remembrance" outside the Lao embassy in Manila today to call for the safe return of highly acclaimed activist Sombath Somphone who was abducted six months ago. Clarissa Militante, of the group Focus on the Global South, said the Lao government should ensure Sombath is found and returned safely to his family. Some 100 activists from all over Asia, Europe, the United States and Australia sent "messages of hope and support" for today’s event, Militante said. (UCAN)

INDIA. Bamboo coffins help curb Indian deforestation

Constructing coffins out of bamboo could be one way to curb rampant deforestation in northeastern India, according to a youth group in Mizoram that has launched a movement to develop eco-friendly methods of burial for the state’s Christians. The idea, mooted by the Young Mizo Association (YMA), has been lauded by the state’s Environment and Forests Minister, H. Rohluna. Some 98 percent of the state’s population is Christian, many of whom use expensive teak and sal trees for coffins because of their durability and high density. But the YMA, who launched the “Green Mizoram” initiative three years ago, of which the coffin campaign is this year’s focus, thinks a change to bamboo coffins would help check the rate of felling there. (UCAN)
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