2013: Unchanged Policies and Economic Disasters
Quote in the Act

“If they are hungry, mothers, let them eat, no worries, because here they are the main focus.”

Pope Francis, said during his baptism of 32 babies at the Sistine Chapel on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord as quoted by Emer McCarthy, an Irish journalist at Vatican Radio who breastfed her baby discreetly during the ceremony. Catholic News Service titled its news story thus: “Pope to moms: It’s OK to breast-feed, even in the Sistine Chapel.”

“I prayed that I can also contribute in promoting the formation of righteous political leaders in our country.”

Orlando Quevedo, newly appointed member of the College of Cardinals; archbishop of Cotabato in Mindanao, he was president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines and Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences.

“How does the smog differ from the apocalypse?”

Joe Wong, a comedian from northeast China; writing in his microblog after the residents of Beijing woke up in the morning of January 16 with splitting headaches due to a curtain of haze that covered the city of over 20 million; the US embassy in Beijing sent out online warnings that the air quality level had gone beyond 500, the upper limit of the measurement scale, and was now beyond index.

“Let’s stop all the insults.”

National Defense Commission, a top governing agency of North Korea headed by Kim Jong-un himself; called for what it called “important proposal” on January 16, suggesting a pact with South Korea to stop all cross-border slandering—that as of January 20 both sides cease all the insults they have customarily thrown at each other for decades, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

“Wake up Catholic laity.”

Socrates Villegas, archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan and president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines; in his New Year’s message for his archdiocese he made this challenge: “There is much work to be done. I hope the priests will be more trusting and open with the involvement of the laity. We pray that our laity will wake up from passivity, be fired by the Spirit and dare to change the world for Christ.”

“And if the fury of super-typhoon Yolanda is any indication, the adverse effects of Climate Change are already upon us.”

Antonio J. Ledesma, archbishop of Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao; in his New Year’s message where he also said, “Let us continue to engage in inter-religious dialogue and understanding to show our respect for the dignity of every human person regardless of creed or culture.

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The year 2013 was a time of extremely fatal disasters. And there were a battery of them, natural or otherwise. On September 9, 2013, the country woke up to the news that part of Zamboanga City was taken over by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The standoff with government forces lasted several days claiming scores of casualties, hundreds of burned houses, thousands of evacuees, socio-economic losses that easily could count into billions of pesos—and an embarrassed government that, like it mishandled the Luneta standoff in August 2010 with Chinese hostages by a lone taker, has bungled a protracted military operation with the President himself reportedly at the forefront of a “war-game”.

Typhoon Santi struck Central Luzon on October 12, 2013 with heavy casualties especially in terms of infrastructure and agriculture. But this was soon eclipsed by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that jolted the Visayas, especially the islands of Bohol and Cebu in the morning of October 15, 2013. This temblor was one of the worst in recent memory. It destroyed bridges, ruffled highways, felled buildings, reduced to rubbles some centuries-old churches and claimed hundreds of lives. Seeing people in hundreds of evacuation centers grappling with aftershocks in days following was misery enough. Then came the super-typhoon Yolanda on November 8, 2013, that ravaged the Visayas but especially Tacloban City, Guiuan town and most of the coastal towns of the provinces of Leyte and Eastern Samar. With 350 kilometers-per-hour killer winds and a 16-foot tsunami-like typhoon surge, it was by far the worst typhoon in recorded natural history of the world. The destruction was unimaginable and unprecedented. And the aftermath was equally destructive, if not worse—hundreds of thousands of survivors with neither food nor shelter for the first five days, thousands of corpses strewn in streets and in debris and a government caught in ill-preparedness, insensitivity and seemingly amateurish way of governance. With neither care nor concern for the hunger and misery of survivors, the President and his cohorts opted to debate on the peripherals such as the count of casualties by reducing it into a political advantage but boomeranged into political ineptness and lack of sense. At the end of the day, super-typhoon Yolanda became both a natural and a socio-political catastrophe.

According to the projection of foreign aid agencies (the likes of Catholic Relief Services, Caritas International, Red Cross International, among others—sincere thanks to all of them), the rehabilitation of Yolanda victims will take 3 to 5 years. But definitely not so with the victims of the socio-political disaster that has befallen this country and especially discovered in 2013. It will take years for this country to recover from a deep-seated culture of corruption as signified by the continuing Pork Barrel, the Malacañang maneuverings that maybe exemplified in what it calls the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP), and the machinations of government leaders to fleece the poor and the populace of what belongs to them, among others. And this, without even mentioning the brand of politics in the Philippines that is a complete antithesis of the common good. One surmises that it was rather providential that the Church declared 2013 a “Year of Faith” not perhaps as a religious buffer but a solace and a source of meaning especially for those groping for answers and strength.

This issue opens with the message of Pope Francis on the World Day of Peace. Our cover story is penned by Sonny Africa, the executive director of Ibon Foundation. Read on.
1. In this, my first Message for the World Day of Peace, I wish to offer to everyone, individuals and peoples, my best wishes for a life filled with joy and hope. In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced.

Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace. We should remember that fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.

The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today’s world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another. But this vocation is still frequently denied and ignored in a world marked by a “globalization of indifference” which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.

In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. The tragic phenomenon of human trafficking, in which the unscrupulous prey on the lives and the desperation of others, is but one unsettling example of this. Alongside overt armed conflicts are the less visible but no less cruel wars fought in the economic and financial sectors with means which are equally destructive of lives, families and businesses.

Globalization, as Benedict XVI pointed out, makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers. [1] The many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not
FRATERNITY,
THE FOUNDATION AND
PATHWAY TO PEACE

Message of His Holiness Francis for the celebration
of the World Day of Peace
1 January 2014
only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fuelling that “throw away” mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered “useless”. In this way human coexistence increasingly tends to resemble a mere do ut des which is both pragmatic and selfish.

At the same time, it appears clear that contemporary ethical systems remain incapable of producing authentic bonds of fraternity, since a fraternity devoid of reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation is unable to endure.[2] True brotherhood among people presupposes and demands a transcendent Fatherhood. Based on the recognition of this fatherhood, human fraternity is consolidated: each person becomes a “neighbor” who cares for others.

“Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9)

2. To understand more fully this human vocation to fraternity, to recognize more clearly the obstacles standing in the way of its realization and to identify ways of overcoming them, it is of primary importance to let oneself be led by knowledge of God’s plan, which is presented in an eminent way in sacred Scripture.

According to the biblical account of creation, all people are descended from common parents, Adam and Eve, the couple created by God in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26), to whom Cain and Abel were born. In the story of this first family, we see the origins of society and the evolution of relations between individuals and peoples.

Abel is a shepherd, Cain is a farmer. Their profound identity and their vocation is to be brothers, albeit in the diversity of their activity and culture, their way of relating to God and to creation. Cain’s murder of Abel bears tragic witness to his radical rejection of their vocation to be brothers. Their story (cf. Gen 4:1-16) brings out the difficult task to which all men and women are called, to live as one, each taking care of the other. Cain, incapable of accepting God’s preference for Abel who had offered him the best of his flock—“The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Gen 4:4-5)—killed Abel out of jealousy. In this way, he refused to regard Abel as a brother, to relate to him rightly, to live in the presence of God by assuming his responsibility to care for and to protect others. By asking him “Where is your brother?”, God holds Cain accountable for what he has done. He answers: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). Then, the Book of Genesis tells us, “Cain went away from the presence of the Lord” (4:16).

We need to ask ourselves what were the real reasons which led Cain to disregard the bond of fraternity and, at the same time, the bond of reciprocity and fellowship which joined him to his brother Abel. God himself condemns and reproves Cain’s collusion with evil: “sin is crouching at your door” (Gen 4:7). But Cain refuses to turn against evil and decides instead to raise his “hand against his brother Abel” (Gen 4:8), thus scorning God’s plan. In this way, he thwarts his primordial calling to be a child of God and to live in fraternity.

The story of Cain and Abel teaches
that we have an inherent calling to fra-
ternity, but also the tragic capacity to
betray that calling. This is witnessed by
our daily acts of selfishness, which are
at the root of so many wars and so much
injustice: many men and women die at the
hands of their brothers and sisters who are
incapable of seeing themselves as such,
that is, as beings made for reciprocity, for
communion and self-giving.

“And you will all be brothers” (Mt 23:8)
3. The question naturally arises: Can
the men and women of this world ever
fully respond to the longing for fraternity
placed within them by God the Father?
Will they ever manage by their power
alone to overcome indifference, egoism
and hatred, and to accept the legitimate
differences typical of brothers and sisters?

By paraphrasing his words, we can
summarize the answer given by the Lord
Jesus: “For you have only one Father,
who is God, and you are all brothers and
sisters” (cf. Mt 23:8-9). The basis of fra-
ternity is found in God’s fatherhood. We
are not speaking of a generic fatherhood,
distinct and historically ineffectual, but
rather of the specific and extraordinarily
concrete personal love of God for each
man and woman (cf. Mt 6:25-30). It is
a fatherhood, then, which effectively
generates fraternity, because the love of
God, once welcomed, becomes the most
formidable means of transforming our
lives and relationships with others, open-
ing us to solidarity and to genuine sharing.

In a particular way, human fraternity
is regenerated in and by Jesus Christ
through his death and resurrection. The
Cross is the definitive foundational locus
of that fraternity which human beings are
not capable of generating themselves.
Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature
in order to redeem it, loving the Father
unto death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:8),
has through his resurrection made of us
a new humanity, in full communion with
the will of God, with his plan, which in-
cludes the full realization of our vocation
to fraternity.

From the beginning, Jesus takes up
the plan of the Father, acknowledging its
primacy over all else. But Christ, with
his abandonment to death for love of the
Father, becomes the definitive and new
principle of us all; we are called to regard
ourselves in him as brothers and sisters,
inasmuch as we are children of the same
Father. He himself is the Covenant; in his
person we are reconciled with God and
with one another as brothers and sisters.

Jesus’ death on the Cross also brings an
end to the separation between peoples,
between the people of the Covenant
and the people of the Gentiles, who were bereft
of hope until that moment, since they were
not party to the pacts of the Promise. As
we read in the Letter to the Ephesians,
Jesus Christ is the one who reconciles
all people in himself. He is peace, for he
made one people out of the two, breaking
down the wall of separation which divided
them, that is, the hostility between them.
He created in himself one people, one
new man, one new humanity (cf. 2:14-16).

All who accept the life of Christ and
live in him acknowledge God as Father
and give themselves completely to him,
loving him above all things. The recon-
ciled person sees in God the Father of
all, and, as a consequence, is spurred on
to live a life of fraternity open to all. In
Christ, the other is welcomed and loved
as a son or daughter of God, as a brother
or sister, not as a stranger, much less as
a rival or even an enemy. In God’s fam-
ily, where all are sons and daughters
of the same Father, and, because they are
grafted to Christ, sons and daughters in
the Son, there are no “disposable lives”.
All men and women enjoy an equal and
inviolable dignity. All are loved by God.
All have been redeemed by the blood of
Christ, who died on the Cross and rose
for all. This is the reason why no one can
remain indifferent before the lot of our
brothers and sisters.

Fraternity, the foundation and pathway
to peace
4. This being said, it is easy to realize
that fraternity is the foundation and path-
way of peace. The social encyclicals
written by my predecessors can be very
helpful in this regard. It would be suf-
cient to draw on the definitions of peace
found in the encyclicals Populorum
Progressio by Pope Paul VI and Sollicitudo
Rei Socialis by John Paul II. From the first
we learn that the integral development
of peoples is the new name of peace.[3] From
the second, we conclude that peace is
an opus solidaritatis.[4]

Paul VI stated that not only individu-
als but nations too must encounter one
another in a spirit of fraternity. As he
says: “In this mutual understanding and
friendship, in this sacred communion, we
must also… work together to build the
common future of the human race”. [5] In
the first place, this duty falls to those who
are most privileged. Their obligations are
rooted in human and supernatural frater-
nity and are manifested in three ways:
the duty of solidarity, which requires the
richer nations to assist the less developed;
the duty of social justice, which requires
the realignment of relationships between
stronger and weaker peoples in terms of
greater fairness; and the duty of universal
charity, which entails the promotion of
a more humane world for all, a world
in which each has something to give and
to receive, without the progress of the one
constituting an obstacle to the develop-
ment of the other.[6]

If, then, we consider peace as opus
solidaritatis, we cannot fail to acknowl-
edge that fraternity is its principal foun-
dation. Peace, John Paul II affirmed, is
an indivisible good. Either it is the good
of all or it is the good of none. It can be
truly attained and enjoyed, as the highest
quality of life and a more human and
sustainable development, only if all are
guided by solidarity as “a firm and perse-
vering determination to commit oneself
to the common good”. [7] This means not
being guided by a “desire for profit”
or a “thirst for power”. What is needed
is the willingness to “lose ourselves” for
the sake of others rather than exploiting
them, and to “serve them” instead of
oppressing them for our own advantage.
“The ‘other’—whether a person, people
of nation—[is to be seen] not just as some
kind of instrument, with a work capacity
and physical strength to be exploited at
low cost and then discarded when no
longer useful, but as our ‘neighbor’, a
‘helper’”. [8]

Christian solidarity presumes that
our neighbor is loved not only as “a hu-
man being with his or her own rights and
a fundamental equality with everyone
else, but as the living image of God the
Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus
Christ and placed under the permanent
action of the Holy Spirit”, [9] as another
brother or sister. As John Paul II noted:
“At that point, awareness of the common
fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood
of all in Christ—‘children in the Son’—and
of the presence and life-giving action of
the Holy Spirit, will bring to our vision of
the world a new criterion for interpreting
it”, [10] for changing it.

Fraternity, a prerequisite for fighting
poverty
5. In his encyclical Caritas in Veritate,
my predecessor reminded the world how
the lack of fraternity between peoples
and men and women is a significant
cause of poverty. [11] In many societies,
we are experiencing a profound poverty of relationships as a result of the lack of solid family and community relationships. We are concerned by the various types of hardship, marginalization, isolation and various forms of pathological dependencies which we see increasing. This kind of poverty can be overcome only through the rediscovery and valuing of fraternal relationships in the heart of families and communities, through the sharing of joys and sorrows, of the hardships and triumphs that are a part of human life.

Moreover, if on the one hand we are seeing a reduction in absolute poverty, on the other hand we cannot fail to recognize that there is a serious rise in relative poverty, that is, instances of inequality between people and groups who live together in particular regions or in a determined historical-cultural context. In this sense, effective policies are needed to promote the principle of fraternity, securing for people – who are equal in dignity and in fundamental rights – access to capital, services, educational resources, healthcare and technology so that every person has the opportunity to express and realize his or her life project and can develop fully as a person.

One also sees the need for policies which can lighten an excessive imbalance between incomes. We must not forget the Church’s teaching on the so-called social mortgage, which holds that although it is lawful, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, and indeed necessary “that people have ownership of goods”, insofar as their use is concerned, “they possess them as not just their own, but common to others as well, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as themselves”.

Finally, there is yet another form of promoting fraternity—and thus defeating poverty—which must be at the basis of all the others. It is the detachment of those who choose to live a sober and essential lifestyle, of those who, by sharing their own wealth, thus manage to experience fraternal communion with others. This is fundamental for following Jesus Christ and being truly Christian. It is not only the case of consecrated persons who profess the vow of poverty, but also of the many families and responsible citizens who firmly believe that it is their fraternal relationship with their neighbors which constitutes their most precious good.

The rediscovery of fraternity in the economy

6. The grave financial and economic crises of the present time—which find their origin in the progressive distancing of man from God and from his neighbor, in the greedy pursuit of material goods on the one hand, and in the impoverishment of interpersonal and community relations on the other—have pushed man to seek satisfaction, happiness and security in consumption and earnings out of all proportion to the principles of a sound economy. In 1979 John Paul II had called attention to “a real perceptible danger that, while man’s dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways—even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly—through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication.”

The succession of economic crises should lead to a timely rethinking of our models of economic development and to a change in lifestyles. Today’s crisis, even with its serious implications for people’s lives, can also provide us with a fruitful opportunity to rediscover the virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and strength. These virtues can help us to overcome difficult moments and to recover the fraternal bonds which join us one to another, with deep confidence that human
beings need and are capable of something greater than maximizing their individual interest. Above all, these virtues are necessary for building and preserving a society in accord with human dignity.

**Fraternity extinguishes war**

7. In the past year, many of our brothers and sisters have continued to endure the destructive experience of war, which constitutes a grave and deep wound inflicted on fraternity.

Many conflicts are taking place amid general indifference. To all those who live in lands where weapons impose terror and destruction, I assure you of my personal closeness and that of the whole Church, whose mission is to bring Christ’s love to the defenseless victims of forgotten wars through her prayers for peace, her service to the wounded, the starving, refugees, the displaced and all those who live in fear. The Church also speaks out in order to make leaders hear the cry of pain of the suffering and to put an end to every form of hostility, abuse and the violation of fundamental human rights.[15]

For this reason, I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see all those who sow violence and death by arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons disarmament.

We cannot however fail to observe that international agreements and national laws—while necessary and greatly to be desired—are not of themselves sufficient to protect humanity from the risk of armed conflict. A conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognize in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all. This is the spirit which inspires many initiatives of civil society, including religious organizations, to promote peace. I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right.

**Corruption and organized crime threaten fraternity**

8. The horizon of fraternity also has to do with the need for fulfillment of every man and woman. People’s legitimate ambitions, especially in the case of the young, should not be thwarted or offended, nor should people be robbed of their hope of realizing them. Nevertheless, ambition must not be confused with the abuse of power. On the contrary, people should compete with one another in mutual esteem (cf. Rom 12:10). In disagreements, which are also an unavoidable part of life, we should always remember that we are brothers and sisters, and therefore teach others and teach ourselves not to consider our neighbor as an enemy or as an adversary to be eliminated.

Fraternity generates social peace because it creates a balance between freedom and justice, between personal responsibility and solidarity, between the good of individuals and the common good. And so a political community must act in a transparent and responsible way to favor all this. Citizens must feel themselves represented by the public authorities in respect for their freedom. Yet frequently a wedge is driven between citizens and institutions by partisan interests which disfigure that relationship, fostering the creation of an enduring climate of conflict.

An authentic spirit of fraternity overcomes the individual selfishness which conflicts with people’s ability to live in freedom and in harmony among themselves. Such selfishness develops socially—whether it is in the many forms of corruption, so widespread today, or in the formation of criminal organizations, from small groups to those organized on a global scale. These groups tear down legality and justice, striking at the very heart of the dignity of the person. These organizations gravely offend God, they hurt others and they harm creation, all the more so when they have religious overtones.

I also think of the heartbreaking drama of drug abuse, which reaps profits in contempt of the moral and civil laws. I think of the devastation of natural resources and ongoing pollution, and the tragedy of the exploitation of labor. I think too of illicit money trafficking and financial speculation, which often prove both predatory and harmful for entire economic and social systems, exposing millions of men and women to poverty. I think of prostitution, which every day reaps innocent victims, especially the young, robbing them of their future. I think of the abomination of human trafficking, crimes and abuses against minors, the horror of slavery still present in many parts of the world; the frequently overlooked tragedy of migrants, who are often victims of disgraceful and
illegal manipulation. As John XXIII wrote: “There is nothing human about a society based on relationships of power. Far from encouraging, as it should, the attainment of people’s growth and perfection, it proves oppressive and restrictive of their freedom”.[17] Yet human beings can experience conversion; they must never despair of being able to change their lives. I wish this to be a message of hope and confidence for all, even for those who have committed brutal crimes, for God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he converts and lives (cf. Ez 18:23).

In the broad context of human social relations, when we look to crime and punishment, we cannot help but think of the inhumane conditions in so many prisons, where those in custody are often reduced to a subhuman status in violation of their human dignity and stunted in their hope and desire for rehabilitation. The Church does much in these environments, mostly in silence. I exhort and encourage everyone to do more, in the hope that the efforts being made in this area by so many courageous men and women will be increasingly supported, fairly and honestly, by the civil authorities as well.

**Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature**

9. The human family has received from the Creator a common gift: nature. The Christian view of creation includes a positive judgment about the legitimacy of interventions on nature if these are meant to be beneficial and are performed responsibly, that is to say, by acknowledging the “grammar” inscribed in nature and by wisely using resources for the benefit of all, with respect for the beauty, finality and usefulness of every living being and its place in the ecosystem. Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.

In a particular way, the agricultural sector is the primary productive sector with the crucial vocation of cultivating and protecting natural resources in order to feed humanity. In this regard the continuous disgrace of hunger in the world moves me to share with you the question: How are we using the earth’s resources? Contemporary societies should reflect on the hierarchy of priorities to which production is directed. It is a truly pressing duty to use the earth’s resources in such a way that all may be free from hunger. Initiatives and possible solutions are many, and are not limited to an increase in production. It is well known that present production is sufficient, and yet millions of persons continue to suffer and die from hunger, and this is a real scandal. We need, then, to find ways by which all may benefit from the fruits of the earth, not only to avoid the widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs, but above all because it is a question of justice, equality and respect for every human being. In this regard I would like to remind everyone of that necessary universal destination of all goods which is one of the fundamental principles of the Church’s social teaching. Respect for this principle is the essential condition for facilitating an effective and fair access to those essential and primary goods which every person needs and to which he or she has a right.

**Conclusion**

10. Fraternity needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, proclaimed and witnessed to. But only love, bestowed as a gift from God, enables us to accept and fully experience fraternity.

The necessary realism proper to politics and economy cannot be reduced to mere technical know-how but should be concerned with the transcendent dimension of man. When this openness to God is lacking, every human activity is impoverished and persons are reduced to objects that can be exploited. Only when politics and the economy are open to moving within the wide space ensured by the One who loves each man and each woman, will they achieve an ordering based on a genuine spirit of fraternal charity and become effective instruments of integral human development and peace.

We Christians believe that in the Church we are all members of a single body, all mutually necessary, because each has been given a grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ, for the common good (cf. Eph 4:7,25; 1 Cor 12:7). Christ has come to the world so as to bring us divine grace, that is, the possibility of sharing in his life. This entails weaving a fabric of fraternal relationships marked by reciprocity, forgiveness and complete self-giving, according to the breadth and the depth of the love of God offered to humanity in the One who, crucified and risen, draws all to himself: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35).

This is the good news that demands from each one a step forward, a perennial exercise of charity, of listening to the suffering and of the hopes of others, even those furthest away from me, and walking the demanding path of that love which knows how to give and spend itself freely for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

Christ embraces all of humanity and wishes no one to be lost. “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17). He does it without oppressing or constraining anyone to open to him the doors of heart and mind. “Let the greatest among you become as this child” (Mt 18:1-4). He does it by showing and teaching, and calling us by our names.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus, help us to understand and live every day the fraternity that springs up from the heart of her Son, so as to bring peace to each person on this our beloved earth.

**From the Vatican, 8 December 2013**
Welcoming the Other

By Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, SJ

“War in the name of religion is war against religion.” (Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople)

“A minority is just as much a part of a nation as a majority.” (John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria)

“The equal respect for all mankind allows us to recognize our differences and ‘welcome the other’... to prevent conflict and mass atrocity crimes.” (Mr. Adama Dieng, U.N. Under-Secretary General)

These statements were made when more than 600 religious leaders and representatives of the world’s faith traditions came together in Vienna, Austria, at the 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace on November 20-22, 2013. Since its first World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970, Religions for Peace has become the world’s largest multi-religious organization which includes Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Shinto, Taoist and Zoroastrian religious leaders.

From the Philippines, I was invited to represent the Catholic bishops’ involvement in interreligious dialogue. I joined other Filipino participants like Dr. Lillian Sison, Chair of the RfP Asia and the Pacific Women of Faith Network; Mrs. Lourdes Mastura, representing the Muslim community; Mr. Pablito Baybado, representing the youth sector; Fr. Filemon de la Cruz Jr., O.P., Vice-Rector for Religious Affairs of the University of Santo Tomas; and Mr. Musa Mohamad Sanguila, Director of Pakigdait in Lanao del Norte.

Syria, Korea and Myanmar

“Welcoming the Other” was the theme of the 9th RfP World Assembly. Several speakers dwelt on the timelines of this theme in the light of rising hostility against “the other”... “Is the other a part of ourselves?” asked Dr. Alaa Naseif of the KAICIID Dialogue Center. “Without the other, you cannot feel the full humanity. The other is part of the I,” stated Sheik Abdullah bin Bayyah of Mauritania. “To welcome the other is to recognize the divine in and affirm the dignity of ‘the other’,” stressed Chief Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee. Quoting Chiara Lubich, foundress of the Focolare Movement who fully supported RfP, Madam Maria Voce, the current President, recalled her words: “We must fix our gaze always on the one Father of so many children... turning constantly to this universal brotherhood in God who is our Father.”

Throughout the plenary assemblies, a tarpaulin poster of two kidnapped bishops in Syria—Metropolitan Mar Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, and Bishop Boulos Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Bishop in Damascus—reminded the gathering to continue to pray and call for their release. Mrs. Asmaa Kifaro, President of the Syrian Muslim Women’s Forum, shared a message of hope and peace: “Syria will rise again... Peace and happiness and smiles will come back to the people of Syria.”

Another hopeful sign for peace at the Assembly was the presence of religious leaders from both North and South Korea. “Although Korea is divided by north and south, in our religious communities we are not divided,” remarked Jan Jen
Win, President of the Korean Council of Religionists (North Korea). Echoing this, Catholic Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-joong said, “We will do our best to continue our work to bring peace to all of Korea…. Peace in Korea will surely bring peace to the world.” The presence of an inter-religious delegation from Myanmar was also an indication of the opening of the country to the rest of the world.

At a press conference, representatives of different faiths signed a declaration, “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders.” This document was prepared in early 2013 by a coalition of faith-based humanitarian organizations (including Islamic Relief Worldwide, Jesuit Refugee Service, World Vision International, and RfP itself) in partnership with the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The declaration has this opening affirmation: “A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated.”

**Human Development and Climate Change**

The implications of “Welcoming the Other” were further explored in four simultaneous Commission sessions: (a) Conflict prevention and transformation, (b) Citizenship for just and harmonious societies, (c) Human development that respects the earth, and (d) Religious and interreligious dialogue.

I joined Commission 3: “Welcoming the Other through Human Development that Respects the Earth.” In the course of three sessions, various speakers shared their experiences and challenges along this theme. The eight Millennium Development Goals established by the international community within the time frame of 2001-2015 were often cited as areas of concern – i.e., 1) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; 2) achieving universal primary education; 3) promoting gender equality; 4) reducing child mortality; 5) improving maternal health; 6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) ensuring environmental sustainability; and 8) developing a global partnership for development.

Some stark statistics were cited in the RfP workbook – e.g., an estimated 4 billion people, 70% of the world’s population, live in poverty (including the 1.2 billion who live in extreme poverty or on less than $1.25 a day). In terms of child survival, RfP participants were asked to endorse “Ten Promises to our Children: Religions in Action.” The declaration lists ten simple life-saving behaviors, such as: Breastfeed all newborns exclusively through six months of age. Immunize children and newborns with all recommended vaccines, especially through age 2. Feed children with proper nutritional foods….

Have children drink water from a safe source….

“Our respective religious doctrines are different,” state the signatories, “but we are united in the moral conviction that we must save children from preventable death.”

“Protecting the Earth” posed a corollary dimension to Human Development. In recent years, many religious communities have focused on “climate justice advocacy.” The vivid TV images of the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in the Philippines were a constant reminder to many of the urgency of the situation. In contrast to the oft-repeated prospect of a “clash of civilizations,” faith-based environmental movements manifested an opposite trend towards greater solidarity and interreligious dialogue in action in protecting and conserving the climate as the “last commons.”

Different faith traditions according to the RfP workbook may find their convergence in “a new type of multi-faith, spiritually inspired rediscovery of our place in the web of life, a rediscovery of each other, and a refreshed paradigm of compassionate and inter-dependent living.” Maasai leader Jeniffer Koinante calls this an ethical system of “enoughness.” Indeed if all faith traditions recoil at the notions of suicide and genocide, all the more should religious leaders now condemn the prospects of eco-cide. In its final statement, the RfP assembly states, “Stewardship of the earth is a solemn religious obligation.”

**KAICIID Global Forum**

During the two days before the RfP World Assembly, on Nov. 18-19, a partner organization, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), convened also in Vienna its own Global Forum on “The Image of the Other: Interreligious and Intercultural Education.”

KAICIID itself was established with its headquarters in Vienna only a year ago in November 2012. Three founding states signed the charter – Saudi Arabia, Austria, and Spain – with the Holy See as founding observer. The journey to KAICIID actually started with an historic meeting at the Vatican in November 2007 between King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz and Pope Benedict XVI.

Both religious leaders called “for the promotion of peace, justice and spiritual and moral values, especially in support of the family.” Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran and Rev. Fr. Miguel Ayuso, President and Secretary respectively of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, represented the Holy See at the Global Forum.

In one of the skills-building workshops that I attended, the facilitators demonstrated how “beliefs divide and values unite through dialogue.” Starting from a checklist of about fifty values, the facilitators showed how many of the participants regardless of faith tradition clustered along common values — ranging from survival to self-esteem to internal cohesion and service. The facilitators shared methods for “measuring and transforming the values, cultures and consciousness” of individuals, communities as well as of whole nations. In many ways, the workshop mapped out a strategy for peace education and peace-building.

Summing up the complementary themes of “The Image of the Other” and “Welcoming the Other,” Dr. William Vendley, RfP Secretary General, stated: “All faith traditions make clear that it is a religious imperative to welcome the other. This commitment can guide multi-religious action for peace, the antidote to the rising tide of hostility.”

In the Philippine context, over the past two years, we have had many opportunities of welcoming the other in the aftermath of natural — and sometimes man-made — disasters such as Typhoons Sendong in Northern Mindanao, Pablo in Southeastern Mindanao, and Yolanda in the Visayas; the earthquake in Bohol; and the armed crisis in Zamboanga. “Welcoming the other” involves seeing ourselves in each other,” states the Vienna Declaration of RfP. For Christians, does not the Parable of the Good Samaritan provide an answer to the question of who is the other — and how we should welcome the other? Let this be our own resolve at the beginning of a new year.
Four Resolutions for the Environment the Philippines Should Make

By Fr. Benny Tuazon

What is the future on the world’s fight against climate change? As far as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is concerned, year 2014 will be crucial in view of its projected 2015 showdown in Paris. It is hoped that in that meeting, the UN designated body will finally come up with a deal that will propel and guide all member nations in fighting climate change. In 2014, various meetings will be held from almost all levels and places all over the world in order to hammer out all the possibilities, questions, positions, concerns, etc., to arrive at a package which will concretely and effectively respond to the challenges being posed and the devastations being made by climate change. But the bigger obstacle is how to make it agreeable to all.

Meanwhile, the world is being subjected to so much fracky wacky weather and destructive conditions with the latest being the super typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda), the recorded hottest temperature in November after 134 years, half the US is in snow just mid-December and on May 11, levels of carbon dioxide broke the 400 parts per million barrier. The last time it was that high was three to five million years ago. The list is actually long. But the message is very clear: Time is not on our side. Something must be done now and fast.

But 2014 is also crucial to every nation specially the Philippines. We have our own perils and concerns. The last year, 2013, had been marked by so much environmental destructions. The list ranges from the double gate-crash in Tubbataha Reef by the USS Guardian and a Chinese fishing boat, to mining, earthquakes and super typhoons, starring Yolanda. Weather patterns reveal that it will be worse. While the UNFCCC has its eyes focused in 2015, the Philippines should seek to start things in 2014. Since it is the season for resolutions, let me give my unsolicited ones for the country for the coming year.

Renewed support for renewable energy

First on my resolution-list is the full-blown no nonsense patronage of R.A. 9513, The Renewable Act of 2008, by our government together with private
FOUR RESOLUTIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT THE PHILIPPINES SHOULD MAKE

Investors. The act was seriously and aggressively supported by environmentalists and interested investors. It was finally passed in 2008 and was expected to propel our country towards a heavily renewable oriented energy industry. Many had hoped that it will be a turning point in our country’s energy industry.

But the expectations did not materialize. Except for some few moves and projects, the renewable energy programs of our country are still very much wanting. With the present escalation of power rates, the need for these “energy silent super heroes” had become apparent.

My unsolicited advice to our government is to allot some funds to develop our solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, and hydro energy. Implement Green Architecture, i.e. incorporate the use of solar energy system and energy-saving methods in the construction of buildings. Multiply the building of wind turbines like that in Bangui. Harness and realize our geothermal potential. Token projects are an injustice to the renewable energy potential of our country. If we are serious in the idea and principle behind the law, we must provide the interest and money to realize them.

Agriculture is our country’s key to progress

Next on my resolution-list is for our government to review our agricultural policies and launch an all out ambition to maximize our agricultural produce and become one of the most reliable and sought after producer and exporter of agricultural products, at least in Asia, if not all over the world. Our country is a sleeping agriculture giant. Our potentials for agriculture products are vast, immeasurable and multifarious. Our country possesses all the necessary elements to become a food czar of the world. Almost anything can grow on anything, anytime and anywhere in our country. We have lands that are so ideal and available for agriculture. We have fresh water for irrigation to sustain plant growth. While stronger typhoons keep on visiting our place, we can still take the risk because we have summers to depend on. Philippine climate is perfect because of its ample supply of solar heat and rainwater.

We have skilled, industrious and committed farmers. The Filipino farmer, in fact, can make do with basic farm implements. How much more if we train and equip them with the latest farm machines? Unfortunately, some of them had abandoned farming and sold their farmlands. The lack of support from government in terms of irrigation, seeds, fertilizers, farm machines, loans, and crop insurance left them no choice but abandon farming and seek other sources of livelihood. In the process, agriculture suffered. The worst sign is the importation of rice, our staple food. Add to that the inferiority of local farm products compared to foreign produce. The scandal on the millions of pesos for the fertilizer fund demoralized them more. The thought of having been allotted funds but have not been given to the right beneficiaries was the last straw to many.

My unsolicited advice for government is to appoint a secretary who would consult our farmers, invite agriculture experts, make economists pencil push, alert congress for some more laws, convince the president on the prospects of agriculture and exercise the department of corrupt officials and practices. Let us dwell on our strength. In time, we can deliver our country to progress through agriculture.

Clean, green and mean

For my third resolution-list, I propose a clean and green with one added element: MEAN. The clean and green projects of cities and institutions were commendable but lacked the spirit of seeing to it that they were sustainable and would effect change. I believe that planners and implementers should be more aware of the meaning and goal of the project and the resolution to accomplish them. Clean and green should not just be a one-time activity and accomplishment. Furthermore, it should not be merely external in nature, but should also include the internal conversion of people. It involves a commitment to keep all places clean because everyone believes that cleanliness is a necessity. It should also attend to sustaining the existence of plants and trees in the city together with their maintenance. Greening should not only be aesthetic-oriented. It is, a matter of fact, health-oriented. The money wasted in the innumerable clean and green failed initiatives should have been more than enough had they been used in a sustainable, impassioned, well planned and honest to goodness quest to attain a clean and green environment.

My unsolicited advice to government is to invite stakeholders to this project, create a complete and doable plan, involve cities, tri-media, social institutions, etc., and invest on educating the whole populace. Let it be a continuous and permanent project. It would also be a good idea to let the people participate in the funding of the projects. Hopefully, our cities will not only look beautiful, but also healthy and safe.

Environment-loving leaders

My last item in the resolution-list is for us to have leaders who possess a very important and big place in their hearts for the environment. No, I am not talking about those who merely advocate care for the environment. No, I am not talking about those who merely plant trees. And no, I am not talking about those who push laws on environment.

We want leaders who are pained by the increase in air, water, and land pollution. We want leaders who prevent further devastation of our land due to irresponsible mining, illegal logging and other similar nature-threatening activities. We want leaders who will implement environmentally related laws wherever and whenever applicable, and whoever will be affected. Good laws have no bearing if not implemented. Good legislators should be complimented with good executives. We must encourage environmentalists to seek seats of power. During elections, we can vigorously campaign for environment-loving leaders to be elected. In the end, we, the people, should be educated and be concerned about our environment. We should remind our leaders of this important responsibility. With an ailing environment, comes an ailing citizenry.

This advocacy does not rely only on government. We are all part of this. This advocacy loathes fence-sitters. This advocacy needs assertive people. The situation calls for alacrity. All of us must make it a habit to contribute NOW in every way we can no matter how small, no matter how fleeting. We must start somewhere. A mile begins with one small step.

“Maybe you and I can’t do great things
We may not change the world in one day
But we still can change some things today...
In our small way.”

“In Our Small Way” – Michael Jackson

Jackson
We will always have differences of views and opinions due to our differences of backgrounds, preferences, visions, etc. In a way, this is good, to be expected, and, in fact, also to be fostered. This variety can only enrich our life in many ways. Many of them come in some unexpected, even unwelcome manners. But the conflicts and clashes can shed some light of clarification, and can even release a certain energy to stir us to action and transformation.

They somehow enlarge our world, freeing us from the grip of our own biases and improper attachments. They introduce us to new things or to some inconvenient truths that are good for us to realize.

Yes, tension is unavoidable in this process, and depending on how we handle it, it can do us a lot of good or it can also harm us. Of course, the best way is always to pray, to bring matters first before God before we present them to others.

Then it is good to have a firm hold of our emotions, our thoughts and words, and to constantly hone our communication skills even to the point of polishing the art of eloquence and elegance. By all means, let’s avoid gutter language and rude manners.

This training is, of course, an ongoing and lifelong process. We can never say we are good enough in this department. Especially these days when events and developments with their issues come to us very rapidly, aided also by our very advanced communication technologies, we should take good care of our formation in this area.

There’s just one thing that, I think, we have to be warned about these days. This is the phenomenon of spins, a conscious, self-serving effort to distort facts and data.

This usually comes about when we are too attached to our views and opinions, when we are not open-minded, when we do not exert effort to understand the views of others, when we think that we are always correct.

And all these can be abetted by our undisciplined emotions and passions, and worse, when we blindly follow, as in being fanatical, some ideologies and the official positions of their leaders, often mouthing empty slogans and clichés.

For example, in the current heat of the relief and rebuild work in the aftermath of Yolanda and the earthquake, there are obvious attempts to make spins to rationalize things, to hide certain things while showing off other things.

We can see that in the Korina-Anderson affair, the PNoy-Mar and the Romualdez tiff, the DSWD and Lucy Torres things. Things are getting confused and certainly are harming the rehabilitation efforts.

The spin also can come about when we happen to be professional communicators like journalists, public relations practitioners, people in media in general who are paid to do the job of communicating.

Like lawyers, they can be tasked to promote and defend certain interests of clients, customers, political parties, different groups and sectors of the population. There is nothing wrong with that. That’s how the cookie crumbles in any society.

But while this profession is very legitimate, we always have to understand that like all other professions, it is subject to the requirements of ethics and morality. No one should dare to practice journalism or public relations work without a clear idea of ethics and morality.

It’s true that media practitioners can highlight certain angles of the issues at hand, but they are not free to make up stories, tell lies, fall into deception and unreasonable attacks, or to wag the dog, that is, when something of secondary importance takes on the role of something of primary importance, often straining credibility.

In the world of politics that sadly now colors the relief-and-rebuild operations, spins usually sprout like weeds. We need to actively expose and uproot them as soon as they come.

There’s always need to continually rectify our intentions, review the data thoroughly, check on the credibility of the sources. Everyone has to work toward the common good, ferreting the truth where they can be found, and always promoting justice and fairness.

There should be eagerness to engage others in a meaningful and respectful dialogue, with the right manners, language, tone and timing. These conditions contribute to sustaining a good and fruitful exchange of views.

Neither should we forget the need for delicacy, understanding and forgiveness, both in asking for it and in giving it readily. Thus, even as boldness and decisiveness are crucial in any dialogue, the traits of humility and simplicity should never disappear. These always create a conducive ambience for dialogue.
The year 2013 has seen more rapid economic growth, rising foreign investment, and praise from international agencies and big business—yet also falling job generation, rising unemployment, soaring prices, growing poverty, and stagnant incomes.

The Aquino administration will be announcing a revised economic development plan and industrial road maps at the start of 2014. However if the policy choices remain biased for foreign investors and local big business, these plans are unlikely to improve conditions for the majority Filipinos. In fact, growth is becoming more exclusionary with every year of the Aquino administration and its unreformed economic policies.

Stellar performance?

The administration, in a yearend report, played up the "stellar performance" of the Philippine economy in 2013 headlined by "some of the highest growth numbers in Asia". Official numbers show five consecutive quarters of at least 7% growth in gross domestic product (GDP) including an average of 7.4% in the first three quarters of 2013.

Net foreign direct investment (FDI) grew significantly with inflows rising 33.3% to US$3.1 billion in the first nine months of 2013 from US$2.3 billion posted in the same period the year before. Foreign investment approvals likewise grew substantially and more than doubled (growing 114%) in the first nine months to Php126.5 billion from Php58.9 billion.

The World Bank's Doing Business Report meanwhile ranked the country 108th in 2013 or a jump of 30 notches from 2012. There was a similar improvement in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report with the country going up to 87th in 2013-14 from 114th in 2010-2011. The three major credit ratings agencies also each gave the Philippines its first ever respective investment grade ratings. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index (PSEi) reached its all-time record-high.

The economy however remains distorted with supposed gains apparently at the expense of national economic development and the welfare of the majority of Filipinos.

Economy's duality

There is a severe disconnect between economic growth and foreign investment, on one hand, and job generation. The latest data for 2013 showed GDP growing by 7.4%, FDI inflows by 33.3% and FDI approvals by 114%—yet employment only increased by 317,000 or 0.8% in 2013 from the year before. Job generation has actually been falling steeply in the last three years of the Aquino administration with 1.2 million jobs generated in 2011, down to 408,000 in 2012 and falling further to the 317,000 in 2013. Job generation in 2013 was the lowest since 2000 during the Estrada administration.

Job generation is poor because growth has been driven mainly by the real estate and construction boom. These sectors are only a small part of the economy and, even considering their inter-linkages, such as with finance and manufacturing, account for only around 15-20% of GDP. They are moreover heavily concentrated in the National Capital Region (NCR), Central Luzon and Calabarzon regions where 50-75% of their operations are located. Indeed there is also reason to doubt if the debt-driven and speculative nature of growth in these sectors is sustainable.

The number of unemployed Filipinos reached an all-time record high in 2013 at 4.5 million Filipinos, using IBON estimates correcting for government underestimation; the conclusion is unchanged even using the lower official estimate of 2.9 million unemployed. Also considering the 7.3 million underemployed means that there were 11.8 million Filipinos either jobless or looking for additional work in 2013.

Wages and salaries adjusted for inflation continued to stagnate or fall in 2013 especially upon policy statements by the president and economic planning
secretary against wage increases. The average daily basic pay of wage and salary workers in sectors accounting for 79% of employment—agriculture, manufacturing, trade, construction, finance, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water, and other services—was unchanged or even dropping between 2010 and April 2013 (latest data available).

The year 2013 was also characterized by record increases in prices of basic commodities and services. In particular, the country saw huge increases in power rates, LPG prices, and water rates as monopolies continue to take advantage of government’s privatization and deregulation policies. However due to widespread public resistance, the implementation of water and power hikes have been delayed.

The Aquino government also revived moves to implement the long-stalled scheme to increase MRT and LRT fares as part of its privatization plans. Amid public opposition, government is geared to hike the train system’s fares starting January 2014.

**Extreme poverty**

The release of the latest poverty statistics in 2013 further confirmed the economy’s duality. The economy grew by an average of 5% annually between 2006 and 2012 and expanded by 33.8% over the entire period. GDP per capita in turn increased by 21.5% from Php54,226 in 2006 to Php65,904 in 2012. And yet despite these the official number of poor families increased 405,638 or by 10.6% to 4.2 million in 2012; the number of poor Filipinos increased 1.1 million or by 4.9% over the same period to 23.7 million. The poverty situation worsened despite Php76.1 billion spent on 4Ps conditional cash transfers (CCT) between 2006 and 2012.

The official estimates however use an extremely low poverty line of Php52 per person per day on average nationwide. The inadequacy of official national, regional and provincial poverty lines is highlighted by how government estimates insist on negligible poverty in NCR—official estimates are of only 2.6% poverty incidence among families (76,530 poor families) and 3.9% among population (460,831 poor people). IBON on the other hand approximates around 66 million Filipinos or 70% of the population struggling to survive on some Php100 or much less daily. The devastation from typhoons and the earthquake in the Visayas only pushed more families into deeper poverty in 2013.

Poverty is rising while corporate profits and personal wealth for a few are growing. The net income of the country’s Top 1000 corporations almost doubled from Php599 billion in 2006 to Php1.08 trillion in 2012 amid the high poverty and unemployment. The cumulative net worth of the 40 richest Filipinos meanwhile grew three-fold from US$16.0 billion in 2006 to US$47.4 billion in 2012.

This situation of worst jobs and poverty crisis in the country prompted the strong indignation against the pork barrel controversy that erupted this year. As millions of Filipinos face desperate circumstances, the abuse of congressional and presidential pork became a public outrage—especially since the arbitrary, self-serving and patronage-determined use of public funds is a wasteful use of scarce government resources. The public outrage in 2013 reached a new peak.
with the Aquino administration's lack of preparation to reduce the risks of super typhoon Yolanda. Government's utter negligence after the disaster demonstrated deep-seated and chronic economic and political crises.

All in all, 2013 underscores the need for a new path for the economy. Growth could continue in 2014 barring any sudden adverse internal or external shocks. However this growth will likely continue to benefit a few at the expense of the majority unless there is a thorough change in policies and programs that prioritize national economic development.

There must be a push for real income, wealth and asset redistribution—especially of land but also through higher wages and a progressive tax system. Social services such as education and health should be publicly-provided rather than turned into commodities to be sold for private profit. It is long overdue for the government to begin its fight against poverty and unemployment; pushing for real socioeconomic reforms thus remains a huge challenge in 2014.

(Mr. Sonny Africa is the executive director of IBON Foundation, Inc., an independent development institution established in 1978 that provides research, education, publications, information work and advocacy support on socioeconomic issues.)
MANILA, Jan. 9, 2014—Addressing the sea of devotees who flocked to the Quirino Grandstand on Thursday, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle called on the Filipino faithful to shun the widespread graft and corruption hounding the state.

Tagle, in his opening mass for the Feast of the Black Nazarene, urged thousands of devotees to be proud in professing their faith and devotion to Christ while burying in shame immoral acts, apparently slamming corruption issues involving the anomalous use of public funds.

“My brothers and sisters, let us not be ashamed to proclaim to the world that we are loved by Christ and that we love Him,” Tagle said in the vernacular.

“I find it very puzzling on why acts that we should be ashamed of are being committed with pride. For instance, we are now unashamed to steal when we are supposed to be ashamed of it,” he said in Filipino.

‘Praying is remembering’

In his homily, Tagle challenged the laity to express their faith and devotion through three distinct ways: praying, following, and witnessing Christ in their day-to-day living.

According to him, praying is tantamount to expressing one’s love and always remembering the Lord who has saved His people from distress.

“We, Filipinos, have a beautiful remark about praying. We always say that ‘We never forget to call on the Lord’ and it is in this regard that we can refer to prayer as a means of not forgetting the presence of the Divine in our lives,” he said.

Tagle said that those who truly remember the Lord must also remember fellow individuals who are in need of great help, following the recent calamities that struck the nation.

“If we truly pray, if we are truly united with the Lord, we will not forget our brothers and sisters,” he said, urging the faithful to remember Filipinos who were devastated by Typhoon Pablo, Typhoon Santi, and the Zamboanga stand-off.

He also reminded the public of the recent devastation wrought by the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that jolted Bohol last October 15 and Super Typhoon Yolanda, which left thousands of Filipinos dead as it struck Central Visayas last November 8.

“We might be forgetting about Bohol. And up until when would we remember our brothers and sisters who suffered the wrath of Yolanda?,” Tagle said. “Those who do not forget the Lord will also not forget them.”

Shunning greed, abuses

The prelate said that treading the path of Christ does not simply mean following His footsteps, but also letting His lessons and examples become the life standards followed by the faithful.

“We could not follow Christ if our minds are always filled with the greed for money, more so, if we could swindle and abuse our brothers and sisters,” he said.

“Those who truly think of Christ will never do anything that Christ would not do. In this occasion, we should ask ourselves: ‘Are we truly becoming closer to Christ? Are we following His examples?’" he said.

Tagle urged the faithful to become a witness of Christ through reflecting in their words and acts that the Lord is true and present among them.

“I hope that our attitude and being would reflect Christ as our model, not that we are only good in speaking but our actions reflect otherwise,” he said.

“This is how Christ has loved us. The Black Nazarene is an expression of God’s love for His people. ‘Love for love—the love that Christ gave us is also returned with nothing else but love,” he said.

Tagle said that the laity faithfully expresses their devotion and gratitude to the Black Nazarene as a response to this “unconditional” love.

“We respond through our devotion, and this explains why there are thousands of Black Nazarene devotees,” he said.

“We respond to Christ’s carrying of our burden by carrying His burden as well. This is how Christ has loved us and our devotion is a manifestation of this love,” he said.

Following the Holy Mass was the traditional procession involving the transfer of the Black Nazarene image from the Quirino Grandstand back to the Quiapo Church. Millions of devotees are expected to join the procession.

**Devotion as expression of love**

Tagle said that the devotion showed by thousands of Filipinos to the Black Nazarene is an expression of God’s love for His people.

“Why do we become very emotional in expressing our devotion to the Black Nazarene?…Each of us may have our own answer to this question…but it all boils down to one thing—this is an expression of how God loves us. The Black Nazarene carried our burden simply because of love,” he said.

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“Those who truly think of Christ will never do anything that Christ would not do. In this occasion, we should ask ourselves: ‘Are we truly becoming closer to Christ? Are we following His examples?’” he said.

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Study finds contraceptives boost breast cancer risk

NEW DELHI, India, Jan. 5, 2014—A study by doctors in India suggests that women who regularly use oral contraceptives face almost ten times greater risk of developing breast cancer compared to other women.

“We found long-term use of oral contraceptive pills higher among those suffering from breast cancer—11.9 percent—compared to healthy individuals—1.2 percent,” Dr. Umesh Kapil, a professor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences’ public health nutrition unit, told the Times of India.

The study, published in the Indian Journal of Cancer, included 640 women, of whom 320 were breast cancer patients. Researchers found a breast cancer risk 950 percent—9.5 times—higher in women with a history of using oral contraceptives.

Kapil said breast cancer is caused by repeated exposure of breast cells to ovarian hormones. The contraceptive pills’ estrogen and progesterone may increase this risk through hormonal imbalances.

Dr. G. K. Rath, the head of Bhim Rao Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital, said the relationship between contraceptive use and breast cancer occurrence is not known.

“But there is enough evidence to show the hormonal imbalance caused by them, increasing the risk,” Rath said.

The doctor said other important factors in breast cancer occurrence include early menarche, late marriage and childbirth, and abortions.

Dr. Ajeet Singh Bhadoria, a co-author of the study, suggested its findings could also be relevant to the use of morning-after pills, which contain a higher dose of hormones.

“Awareness about the side-effects of long-term use is a must,” he told the Times of India.

Some contraceptives are classified as carcinogenic by the World Health Organization and their use could increase risk for cervical and liver cancers.

Other studies have indicated that the contraceptive pill increases the risk of deadly blood clots and stroke. (CNA/EWTN News)

Former minister admits: Smog kills half a million people each year in China

BEIJING, China, Jan. 8, 2014—Pollution in China kills between 350 and 500 thousand people each year. This was revealed by an article in the British scientific journal The Lancet co-authored by Chen Zhu, president of the Medical Association of China, formerly the Minister for Health under President Hu Jintao. In the text, the authors admit that “despite best efforts, it will be difficult to control the phenomenon, since there are huge sources of pollution and of very different kinds.”

The main cause of the blanket of smog is PM 2.5 (particulate matter—Airborne dust 2.5 micrometers per cubic meter) caused by industrial production and intensified by the arrival of winter. The cold causes the ignition of millions of radiators, which in turn increase the consumption of the coal burned in power plants. In Shanghai last month the levels of PM2.5 exceeded 600 micrometers per cubic meter, while in Beijing they have touched 473: the World Health Organization limit for healthy air is 25 micrometers per meter cubed.

The Beijing government has allocated 1.7 trillion Yuan (216 billion euro) to reducing emissions from power stations and moderating the effects of traffic. The head of the environmental protection in Beijing, Wang Bin, argues that “soon” Beijing will follow the road of London, Los Angeles and Tokyo and become a “green city.”

Pan Xiaochuan, a professor at the School of Public Health, Beijing University, is less optimistic: “From the data I have, the air pollution in Beijing has worsened in recent years. Particulates, especially the famous PM10 and PM2.5, which are smaller and more dangerous, have increased.”

One of the most important Chinese environmental scientists, Professor Zhang Shiqui, describes the issue as “a real challenge for China, which must try to balance economic development, the war on poverty and the protection of health. It will be difficult to get citizens to change their habits of consumption, just as it is difficult to convert cars to a more eco-compatible product.” (AsiaNews/Agencies)
Filipino Catholic Laity: Called to be Saints... Sent Forth as Heroes!

A Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines for the 2014 Year of the Laity

OUR dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
You already know surely that this coming 2021 we shall be celebrating the 500th year of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines. For in 1521, Ferdinand Magellan arrived in the Philippines, and in Cebu, he, a lay person, catechized King Humabon of Cebu, his wife and their people. The king and his queen were subsequently baptized together with their followers. It was on this occasion that the queen, newly given the baptismal name of Juana was gifted by Magellan with a statue of the Santo Niño, which was later found in 1565 by soldiers of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, and is now preserved in the Basilica of the Santo Niño in Cebu.

In preparation for the celebration of this providential event of the first arrival of Christianity in our shores, the Church in the Philippines has planned nine years of intensive evangelization, with a theme for every year. For the year 2013, we celebrated the Year of Faith provided by then Pope Benedict XVI. The Year 2014 will be the YEAR OF THE LAITY.

Our Situation: The Gospel of Joy
Pope Francis says “The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity”. (Evangelii Gaudium, 52)

If we were given an opportunity to describe the situation of the Catholic laity in the Philippines, it would be the paradox of poverty and abundance. The devastation that typhoon Yolanda brought upon our brothers and sisters in Samar and Leyte has created surges of pain and anguish all over our land and even beyond our shores. The typhoon left us dazed and lost groping in the dark for answers and explanation. Poor as we are, this pauper among the nations of the earth hides two jewels in her rags. One of them is our music. Our other treasure is our faith. As long as there remains in these islands one mother to sing Nena’s lullaby, one priest to stand at the altar and offer God to God, this nation may be conquered, trampled upon, enslaved but it cannot perish. Like the sun that dies every evening, it will rise again from the dead—Horacio de la Costa, SJ.

The first and most important truth about you Filipino Catholic laity is not poverty but the greatness of your dignity. This dignity derives from God’s unmerited choice of you to belong to God’s holy people. God called you in Christ to be united to his Son. When you were baptized, the Holy Spirit united you with our Lord Jesus the Son of God, and thus you became true sons and daughters of God, partakers of the divine nature. There is no greater dignity on earth or in heaven than that of being adopted children of God, and being made truly his children, and thus co-heirs to eternal life with Jesus Christ. This dignity flows from
the love of God, and made the author of Christ's dignity as Son of God, but also to share in his mission for the salvation of the world.

You share in Christ’s dignity and mission with all others who are likewise united to him by the Holy Spirit. In uniting you to him, Christ also united you to all those who are united with him. With all those who are united to Christ by faith and baptism, you form one body of Christ, whose head is no less than Christ himself. Thus the whole body manifests and prolongs Christ’s life and mission in the world.

You, our dear lay faithful, have as your particular mission the sanctification and transformation of the world from within. In fact, many of you are called by the Lord to do service in the Church and for the Church. Such is the case of lay liturgical ministers and catechists, for example, who perform an indispensable service in the Church community and its institutions. Such also is the case of lay people who are asked to participate in the administration of Church property and works.

Yet, your own specific task, and the special responsibility given to you by the Lord is to find your own sanctification in the world, and to sanctify the world and transform it so that this world becomes more and more God’s world, God’s kingdom, where his will is done as it is in heaven. You are called by Jesus to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The Lord Jesus told his disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature, and to make all nations his disciples. This command to the whole Church falls especially on you, who are in the world.

As Pope Francis has been repeatedly telling Catholics, you must go into the world of the family, of business, of economics, of politics, of education, of the mass media and the social media, to every human endeavour where the future of humanity and the world are at stake and to make a difference, the difference that the Gospel and the grace of Christ bring to human affairs.

**Our Situation: The Challenge of the Gospel**

When we look at our Philippine world with the eyes of faith, there are several areas of special concern which you, our lay faithful should direct your attention and action to.

Pope Francis calls our attention to “the great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ. (Evangelii Gaudium, 2).

**Poverty**

Poverty is a social and spiritual problem in our country. A great percentage of our people live below the poverty line. They do not even have the necessities for decent human living. It is estimated that twelve million of our people have gone to foreign countries in their search for adequate income to support their families’ needs. While this has brought many material advantages, it has also resulted in great harm to family life. Many of our overseas Filipino workers work in conditions of servitude and are often submitted to humiliations. Still a vast number of our people are without work, and many are forced to live in slum areas and in miserable situations. A vast number of our children are unable to go to school, and those who do get sub-standard education in poorly equipped schools. Many have been driven by poverty to cater to the lusts of human predators.

Though there have been significant
economic gains, the same percentage of our people have remained mired in poverty over the past several years. The wealth of our country has remained woefully mal distributed. This endemic poverty is gravely contrary to the will of God. You, my dear lay faithful are in the best position to creatively work our solutions which will satisfy the demands of justice and charity. What are you doing to create wealth, to preserve wealth, and to share wealth? Do the more prosperous among you feel the sufferings of our poor brothers and sisters, and do you think of ways and means to help alleviate their poverty, and help them towards prosperity?

Politics
The second is the problem of politics. We say “problem of politics” because, as we have repeatedly pointed out, politics as it is practiced in our country is perhaps the single biggest obstacle to our integral development as a nation. Politics as presently practiced, and as it has been practised for a long time, is riddled with graft and corruption.

Our elections are notoriously noted for their violence and vote-buying and for the lack of proper discernment in the choice of candidates. Recent developments have highlighted the corruption connected with the pork barrel which those in power are loath to give up despite their blatant misuse for political patronage. It is now clear that our people are poor because our leaders have kept them poor by their greed for money and power. What are you doing to help get worthy people to positions of authority and power? What are you doing to get rid of the politics of patronage, violence and uneducated choices? What are you doing, our dear lay faithful to rid our country of graft and corruption? Do you perhaps participate in corrupt practices by selling your votes, by buying votes, by bribery and acceptance of kickbacks?

Business and Commerce
Corruption in politics is paralleled and strengthened by corruption in business. We know that our tax collecting agencies are notorious for their extortionary practices. Corrupt tax collectors of course imply business people who cooperate in their corrupt activities either to survive in business or to reap bigger profits. It is also known that too many of our tax payers do not pay the correct taxes, while the taxes that are collected are often misspent in over-priced or ghost projects. Corruption in business leads to the further impoverishment of the poor and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor.

Greed and Selfishness
While poverty and corruption are real and great evils; we must search for their causes. Our culture has been contaminated by the twofold greed for money and power that has characterized much of the modern world. In our consumerist and materialistic society, people are valued according to what they have.

Pope Francis says “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised—they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”. (Evangelii Gaudium, 53)

The greed for power is the twin brother of greed for money. Those who have money easily get into power, and when they are in power, they can protect and increase their acquisitions. In our country, winning a government position is often the passport to affluence. Politics in the Philippines is a business proposition.

Truth Suffers
The first casualty of such greed for money and power is the truth. To get money and power, to keep money and power, to increase their money and power, people have recourse to lies and cheating. The truth is easily disregarded and sacrificed. This is true also in the mass media where what is sought after and broadcast is not so much what is true but what is news; the competition among the networks and the printed media is not so much for accuracy in reporting but for ratings which attract more money and build up greater power.

Common Good is Ignored
The second casualty is the common good. The sense and responsibility for the common good is sadly wanting in our country. The culture of greed for money and power caters to the selfish interests of individuals, families and economic and political groups. Our families which are characterized by an admirable closeness are also characterized by a closedness that is unmindful of the common good. This being closed to the common good is especially evident in our politics where political dynasties are nurtured and people vote with little consideration for the impact on the country of their votes. But even our mass media are often tools of vested interests rather than instruments for the promotion of the common good.

In business, in politics, in the entertainment business, in media, profit almost always has priority over service despite protestations to the contrary.

Pope Francis warns us “Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other
people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us: we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. (Evangelii Gaudium, 54).

Challenge and Mission
The renewal of our country thus demands of us all, and especially of you, our lay faithful, a return to truthfulness and the fostering of the sense of the common good. A society that is not founded on truth cannot stand, because a society not founded on truth is either founded on lies or deceit which can provide no stable basis for human relationships and a stable social order. Thus, we must obey the biblical injunction “to do the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). We must seek the truth, speak the truth, do the truth. This means that we must seek what is right, speak what is right, and do what is right; and to do so “in love”, that is, in solidarity with and service of others.

Know the Faith
My dear lay faithful, the greatest challenge for you is to know the content of our faith, and to bear witness to your faith by a life of faith. We wrote to you a few months ago praising your simple but deep faith. Yet we had to point out to you two main deficiencies of the faith of our people: first, that the faith of many is uninstructed and, more importantly that this faith has been separated from life. So many of our people do not even know the fundamentals of our faith! They thus become very vulnerable to the seductions of other religious groups who find them easy targets of their recruitment efforts. Many of our Catholics cannot even answer attacks on basic Catholic doctrines like the divinity of Christ, the Eucharist, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the veneration of images.

Live the Faith
But more harmful even is the separation of faith from life. It is certainly a shameful proof of our failure to evangelize our country that our churches are filled with people, our religious festivities are fervent, our Catholic schools are many, but our country is mired in poverty and in corruption. Many, perhaps the majority of the corrupt people in politics and in business are graduates of our own Catholic schools and are “practicing” Catholics. The majority of those who cheat in elections and those who sell their votes are also baptized Catholics. This is also true of the bribe takers in public offices and the looters of our public coffers. As we noted in our pastoral letter, the criteria for decisions taken by many in politics do not derive from faith but from other sources inimical to the Christian life. The poison of the greed for power and wealth has already pervaded the political and business systems.

We echo the challenge of Pope Francis “We want to challenge “the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism”, who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith. The Church, in her maternal concern, tries to help them experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel. (Evangelii Gaudium, 15). Thus we urge you to promote a continuing education towards maturity of faith among our people, starting with our Christian families. But even more importantly, we ask you to make your faith bear on your day to day decisions and activities. It is only an integral faith, a faith that believes, a faith that worships, and a faith that works in love (Gal. 5:6), that will serve as God’s way “to make all things new” in our beloved country.

Communities of Faith
Since the corruption in business and politics that we must fight against is systemic, we your pastors, urge you to unite in groups which through prayer, discernment and concerted action will renew the social and political fabric of our country. Individual goodness is not sufficient anymore. The good individual will only be swallowed up by the evil system. While individual witness is important, it is in unity that good Christian people will get their strength and attain victory.

To sustain and strengthen you in your efforts, we urge you to read the BIBLE, God’s written word. Read it not only to study it but pray with it. When read prayerfully, the Bible will nourish your life. It will be a lamp to guide you in your journey. It will help you resist temptations; it will help you to know and follow Jesus, our Lord.

Second, we urge you to have recourse to the SACRAMENTS. Value your baptism and prepare well for the baptism of your children. Let parents take seriously the responsibility they undertook at baptism to raise up their children as good Christians.

Christian marriage should be valued not only as a beautiful and solemn ceremony but as a welcoming of Christ into the life of the couple and their future family. Hence, it must be adequately prepared for by pre-marital instructions. Christian married couples should see their marriage as a public commissioning by Christ to serve and protect life and married love itself.

We ask you to have recourse especially to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Eucharist, participated in actively in faith, is the source of Christian life and strength. It is the bread of life and of martyrs. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, on the other hand, will help us heal our moral wounds and give us the grace to fight sin in ourselves and in society.

A Church which “goes forth” is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way.

At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it. (EG, 45)

And finally, we ask you to stand up for Jesus not only in religious activities but in your private and public life. Speak up for Jesus and his Church in public discussions. Do not be afraid to be identified as Catholic Christians. You have been called to be saints; you are sent forth as heroes. Take courage. Choose to be brave!

May the example of our two lay Filipino saints Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod be your inspiration for the coming year!

May the Jesus and his Mother be with you and with us all, and make us, a “pueblo amante de Maria” also truly the land of Jesus in Asia.

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines,

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS, DD
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan
CBCP President
December 1, 2013, First Sunday of Advent
‘Stop the killing of Journalists’

Such was the recent and emphatic, clear, and loud shouts of people from Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao. In particular, such is the lamentation and plea made by the families and friends of murdered journalists—murders that have been long since going on the Philippines. Such is also the anger and disgust registered by the public in general, when journalists are readily eliminated for saying and/or writing the truth—about individuals who are not exactly known for their sanctity in promoting what is proper, true, and just in Philippine society.

One thing really exasperating in this country is the infamous phenomenon that after the assassination of these and those journalists, the atrocity is usually followed by three standard disgusting chapters: Chapter 1: Investigation is done. Chapter 2: More investigation is done. Chapter 3: Much more investigation is done. And that’s it! It is enough to recall the “Maguindanao Massacre” where many journalists were nonchalantly killed and unceremoniously buried—as a matter of course. Some four years later, the investigation still goes on and on and…

Truth is something dangerous and wherefore hated by those guilty of graft and corrupt practices, of depravity and perversion, of vicious behavior and criminal acts. These are antisocial individuals who enjoy living not only errant but also erratic lives. And precisely because they live in lies and survive through hypocrisy, they hate the truth. Woe to anyone who dare expose their real selves and savage persons—especially when the truth about them is publicly revealed by journalists.

Killing is such a horrible act against anyone that among the 10 Commandments, one of these is precisely, “Thou shall not kill.” In fact, even the killing of oneself through suicide is covered by the said Mandate. Among other salient truths that exalt life, it is good to think of the following big celebration of life—all intimately connected with the life of Christ:

First, there is the birth of Christ—the centerpiece of Christmas that the Filipinos in particular avidly celebrate.

Second, there is the celebration of the “Holy Innocents Day”—little children who innocently protected life of the newly born Christ.

Third, there is the Resurrection of Christ which is an affirmation of life—the singular celebration of life.

“Stop the killing of journalists” has a profound significance in the intrinsic value of life, has intrinsic relevance to the proclamation of truth!

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The world extends a helping hand

Notwithstanding all its mortal costs to precious human lives, its destructive impact not only in complementary but also necessary temporal goods thus bringing about the consequent misery of millions of Filipinos who through no fault of their own, happen to be on the way of the worst typhoon so far registered in the modern times, it is, however, still consoling to note that it is the same killer and destructive phenomenon that proves the humanity of man-to-man. So it is that the people disabled by a ruinous typhoon are now being helped by able individuals, families, organization, and others. Surely, the basic universal Mandate of “Love your neighbor,” after all still remains written in the hearts of people.

It is no secret that in this country, there are many cases and numerous instances when public officials bring about public distress, undermine public welfare, and thereby instigate public disgust. And for sure, such errant and even erratic public scandal will continue to take place in the days yet to come. Meantime, however, typhoon “Yolanda” manages to halt such atrocious and shameful phenomena—even but for the time being. But more than that, it took a typhoon of such magnitude in destructive force to do away with the inhumanity of man-to-man, even but momentarily. The following are some of not simply consoling but also deeply inspiring and endearing facts taking place:

The truth that after all is said and done, it is still Divinity that humanity eventually seeks, needs, and ardently calls upon in times of helplessness, anguish, and desperation. God, who is close to man 24/7, understands that man usually becomes close to Him during desperate times. Reason: Where will man ultimately go, whom shall he ardently call upon, in whom can he really hope on? Meantime, God knows that when things are just right and living is relatively easy, man usually takes Him for granted. One thing is certain: He understands!

The fact that, although they may not be saints, it is in such times of great loss and big grief that Filipinos still show their “Bayanihan” spirit—their cultural neighborly concern. Tri-media has been doing its neighborly job rather well in repeatedly showing, talking, and writing about the havoc brought about by the typhoon, continuously asking for help for the people it devastated. And the response is edifying.

The fact that people of the world over—irrespective of their race, color, and creed—are extending their helping hand to the Filipinos in urgent need of assistance even but in such basic human needs as food and water, clothes and shelters. This good news attenuates the bad news brought about by “Yolanda,” Filipinos and foreigners together extending their helping hand: Thank you! Mabuhay! God bless you!
Ignoring ‘hopeless people’

Of late, for one reason or another, there were public pronouncements coming from none other than the President himself that were not only imprudent but also intriguing as they seemed to reveal more and more about his thinking process in conjunction with his exalted public office and his constituency.

This is not in any way meant to look down on him but rather to call attention to his self-appreciation on one hand and his depreciation of people on the other hand—people whom he precisely calls his “Boss” but who become more and more disillusioned with the way he continues to govern them in intriguing collaboration with his close and chosen allies.

In other words, the President is becoming more and more convinced of his personal and distinct intelligence and some kind of a certified ingenuity. Hence, he expressed the following sublime self-esteem: “I am the heir… to the wisdom of great men and women before me.” Right or wrong, this is not really pride but most probably his honest to goodness self-appreciation.

There was also a statement he recently made in conjunction with people who signified their disagreement with some decisions he made and certain actuations he did. To them he said: “Bahala na si Lord sa inyo. Busy ako.” The comment is neither that profound nor that complex to understand as it simply meant to say that complaining people are not worth his attention.

Lately, there was likewise another intriguing pronouncement he made in conjunction with his critics who are growing more and more in number—people who are watchful of his unacceptable options and questionable actuations and thus criticize him for such perceived errancy. His reactive response: “Ignore hopeless people.”

Something is wrong somewhere. It is good to remind the Honorable President of the Philippines—even of the following elementary realities: 1st, he aspired for and is now still holding the highest public Office in the country that makes him a well-known public figure meant and expected to render acceptable and effective public service; 2nd, while not pleasant to hear or to know, criticisms are good reminders to hear, a good checklist to have—not unless the subject considers himself as the incarnation of perfection; 3rd, the thought itself that someone knows everything and wherefore has nothing else to learn from others and thus looks at himself as on the top of the world in intelligence and capability, can be anything but on ground reality.

Would that criticisms thus made be not an excuse for the person criticized to make the puerile excuse that he is but a man. Precisely, what would he still want to be—a petty god or something the like?
One day, a young guy and a young girl fell in love. But the guy came from a poor family. The girl’s parents weren’t too happy.

So the young man decided not only to court the girl but to court her parents as well. In time, the parents saw that he was a good man and was worthy of their daughter’s hand.

But there was another problem: The man was a soldier. Soon, war broke out and he was being sent overseas for a year. The week before he left, the man knelt on his knee and asked his lady love, “Will you marry me?” She wiped a tear, said yes, and they were engaged. They agreed that when he got back in one year, they would get married.

But tragedy struck. A few days after he left, the girl had a major vehicular accident. It was a head-on collision.

When she woke up in the hospital, she saw her father and mother crying. Immediately, she knew there was something wrong.

She later found out that she suffered brain injury. The part of her brain that controlled her face muscles was damaged. Her once lovely face was now disfigured.

She cried as she saw herself in the mirror. “Yesterday, I was beautiful. Today, I’m a monster.” Her body was also covered with so many ugly wounds.

Right there and then, she decided to release her fiancé from their promise. She knew he wouldn’t want her anymore. She would forget about him and never see him again.

For one year, the soldier wrote many letters—but she wouldn’t answer. He phoned her many times but she wouldn’t return her calls.

But after one year, the mother walked into her room and announced, “He’s back from the war.”

The girl shouted, “No! Don’t tell him about me. Don’t tell him I’m here!”

The mother said, “He’s getting married,” and handed her a wedding invitation.

The girl’s heart sank. She knew she still loved him—but she had to forget him now.

With great sadness, she opened the wedding invitation.

And then she saw her name on it!

Confused, she asked, “What is this?”

That was when the young man entered her room with a bouquet of flowers. He knelt beside her and asked, “Will you marry me?”

The girl covered her face with her hands and said, “I’m ugly!”

The man said, “Without your permission, your mother sent me your photos. When I saw your photos, I realized that nothing has changed. You’re still the person I fell in love. You’re still as beautiful as ever. Because I love you!”

In a small town, a person decided to open up a night club, which was right opposite to a church. The church and its congregation started a campaign to block the night club from opening with petitions and prayed daily against the business.

Work progressed, however. When it was almost complete and was about to open a few days later, a strong lightning struck the night club and it was burnt to the ground.

The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, till the club owner sued the church authorities on the grounds that the church through its congregation and prayers was ultimately responsible for the destruction of his night club, either through direct or indirect actions or means.

In its reply to the court, the church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection that their prayers were reasons for the act of God. As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork at the hearing and commented:

“I don’t know how I’m going to decide this case, but it appears from the paperwork, we have a night club owner who believes in the power of prayer and we have an entire church that doesn’t.”

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold.

The hedgehogs, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep warm. This way they covered and protected themselves; but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After awhile, they decided to distance themselves one from the other and they began to die, alone and frozen. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth.

Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the heat that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.
**From Noon to Sunset**
*A Spiritual Journal from Midlife to Retirement*

Jose Maria de Nazareno

APPLY titled “From Noon to Sunset”, the book is about an individual journey from midlife to retirement. Aside from testimonies of various personalities—an activist, a retired judge, a military man and a contemplative nun—the author also shares his own midlife journey allowing readers to get a glimpse on how “the unfolding of successive stages of adult life involves many struggles” that could help shape a person’s spirituality and perspective in life. The author is a priest of the Archdiocese of Manila and has written several books including three titles published by St Pauls Philippines.

**Inner Peace**
*Wisdom from Jean-Pierre de Caussade*

Edited by Kathryn Hermes, FSP

TOO many activities, problems in our relationships, at home and in the workplace can sometimes leave us exhausted and over stressed. In moments of disillusionment brought by problems and pains, we realize that we are not in control of our lives and that we can only find its true meaning if we allow the hand of God to direct our lives. This book on inner peace shows us how to deal with the stresses of life. Do not worry about the past or the future. Live in the present moment and leave everything else in the hands of God. A collection of excerpts taken from the classic *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, this book provides everyone the “time-tested spiritual guidance for living a Christian life.”

**A Journey of Faith with the Cardinal**
*Via Lucis Pilgrims*

“What makes pilgrims go on a journey of thousands of kilometers to a faraway land?” Back in October 2011, some 49 Filipino pilgrims took a spiritual journey in the Holy Land, retracing the steps of Jesus on places where he had walked and lived His life. “The pilgrims, while following the way of the Light, realized that they each had their own light to bring to that pilgrimage and their own story to tell.” Written on the pages of this book are their stories of faith, narrating how the pilgrimage has touched their hearts, transformed their lives and led them to see and understand their faith in a new light.

**In Union With Divine Love**
*A Journey into the Spiritual Life of Padre Pio*

Bro. Jess Matias, OFS

ONE of the well-known saints in modern times, Padre Pio’s fame as a miracle worker even while he was still alive has attracted a lot of devotees. This book, divided in four parts, provides a biographical sketch of the famed saint and also include on Part IV excerpts from the letters of St. Pio, short reflections, Scriptural readings and prayer. The idea is to bring the reader-devotee to engage in daily prayer-conversations that would help deepen one’s prayer life. As the author posits, “the words of St. Pio can be likened to an oasis, glistening in the middle of a hot and sandy wasteland: his counsels are precious nuggets of inspiration and comfort amidst the desolation of modern life.”
Kimmy Dora: Ang Kiyemeng Prequel

Ang Kimmy Dora: Ang Kiyemeng Prequel ay naganap sa panahong bago pa sa ang unang pelikula Kimmy Dora: Kambal sa Kiyeme. Ipinakilala ang matalinong sina Kimmy na katatapos lamang ng tatlong kurso sa ibang bansa at nakatamo ng pinakamatataas na karanganal at si Dora (Domingo) na isang mahusay na artista sa teatro subalit may kahinaan ang ulo. Patuturan sila ng kanilang amang si Luisito Go Dong Hae (Ariel Ureta) na patakbuhin ang kanilang negosyo sa pangunguna nina Bridget (Aquino) at Rodin (Milby). Samantala isang misteryosong terorista ang mananakot at sisita sa kanilang negosyo. Maayos naman sila ng kanilang negosyo na katauhan ng terorista at malalagay sa pangerunan nina Bridget (Aquino) at Rodin (Milby).

Ang dapat sanang yugto na magbibigay paliwanag at kaliwanagan sa buong pelikula ay tilaisang katuturangan at walang katuturan ang pag-usad ng kwento. Mahusay na mga artista ang gumanap pero gaano nga ba ang may nagagawa nila kung humingi ng halaga at may mga eksenang papatalino? Sa paggalang at papahalaga sa bawat tao, pati na alam at naipapalabas ng walang mahusay na halimbawa sa kanila sa telebisyon. Ang paggalang at papahalaga sa bawat tao, pati na alam at naipapalabas ng walang mahusay na halimbawa sa kanila sa telebisyon.

Kimmy Dora: Ang Kiyemeng Prequel

RUNNING TIME: 100 MINUTES; CAST: EUGENE DOMINGO, ANGEL AQUINO, SAM MILBY; DIRECTION: CHRIS MARTINEZ SCREENPLAY: CHRIS MARTINEZ; EDITING: CLAIRE VILLAREAL; PRODUCER: ERICKSON RAYMUNDO; MUSIC: VINCENT DE JESUS; LOCATION: METRO MANILA; GENRE: COMEDY; DISTRIBUTOR: SPRING FILMS

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT: 2.5
MORAL ASSESSMENT: 3
MTRCB RATING: PG13
CINEMA RATING: V14

A nga sa panahon ay nagbigay kay Dora kay Dora. Ang dapat sanang yugto na magbibigay paliwanag at kaliwanagan sa buong serye ay tilaisang naka-kaasiwang kirot ng ngipin—gusto mong kalimutan pero ayaw mawala. Sayang ang ipinuhunan ng talino at bagong atake ni Martinez sa kauna-unahang Kimmy Dora dahil nahanay bigla ang buong serye sa mababaw na katawan at walang katuturan pag-usad ng kwento. Mahusay na mga artista ang gumanap pero gaano nga ba ang may nagagawa nila kung humingi ng halaga at may mga eksenang papatalino?

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SRI LANKA. Catholics rejoice in receiving Saint Sebastian relic

Catholics in Sri Lanka are celebrating the reception of a reliquary containing a fragment of the arm of St. Sebastian, a martyr of the third century. On Jan. 12, Cardinal Archbishop Malcolm Ranjit of Colombo received the relics at the city’s airport, accompanied by officials of the diocesan curia, priests, and Catholic members of the Sri Lankan parliament. The reliquary was brought to Colombo by Msgr. Neville Perera, and was a gift from the administrator of the Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua, Msgr. Enzo Poyiana, who received it from Narbonne, the birthplace of St. Sebastian. The St. Sebastian Shrine is preparing to celebrate its 150th jubilee in 2018, focusing on both renovation of the shrine building and the spiritual and material edification of the impoverished people of Kandana. (CNA)

MALAYSIA. Church choir seeks to balance Catholic, local traditions

The “Laudis” chamber choir based in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur is seeking to revive the tradition of sacred music in the local Church, balancing it with an appreciation of local music. “We cannot perform new, contemporary and local music at the expense of the rich heritage that belongs to the Roman Catholic culture; nor can we simply perform the great music of our Catholic heritage at the expense of local tradition, because we are such a multicultural country,” Shanti Michael, a co-founder of Laudis, said. “Music is considered one of the highest art forms for worship and prayer, and choral music is particularly the epitome of internal participation and prayer,” she added. Listening to sacred choral music performed beautifully facilitates the heart and mind in prayer, Michael reflected. (CNA)

PAPUA NEW GUINEA. Church hosts training for journalists

The social communications office of the bishops’ conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands recently held a series of seminars training Catholics involved in media about their role in evangelization. “The Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea needs to … see how she can be more present and active where modern culture and behavior is shaped and promoted,” said Fr. Giorgio Licini, head of the Papuan bishops’ social communications office, told CNA. The courses, which were attended by representatives of seven dioceses, as well as by several religious and laymen, were held at Divine Word National University in Madang, on the north coast of the main island of Papua New Guinea. The Melanesian nation consists of the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, as well as numerous other, smaller, islands. (CNA)

THAILAND. Priest urges peaceful path to reform

A Catholic priest has urged antigovernment protesters in Bangkok to seek justice and reform through peaceful means following a night of sporadic violence in the Thai capital. Addressing several thousand protesters in central Bangkok on Jan. 15, Jesuit Father Vichai Phoktavi prayed for peace and justice in Thailand. “I think that politics and our government in Thailand should be reformed, we need to reduce corruption and there should be more participation from the people,” he told ucanews.com. Fr. Vichai said he was approached by protest organizers on Jan. 14 to help lead an interreligious prayer service to kick off the third consecutive day of citywide protests, dubbed “Shut-down Bangkok” by organizers. He followed on stage a Muslim imam who offered a similar prayer. (UCAN)

PHILIPPINES. Figure skater who can’t always afford coach turns to prayer

Christian Martinez balanced on one leg and swung the other forward. The lanky 17-year-old was on the ball of his foot and looked like he was about to spring upward into the air. “I’ve been in therapy for almost three weeks,” said Martinez. “I’m having this feeling like I need to go. It feels like I’m getting crazy like when I’m not in the ice because I’ve been there and my life (has been) in the ice for so long.” Less than two months before the Winter Olympics, Martinez was off the ice, being treated for an inflamed knee. He said it was one of many injuries likely caused by skating on the rough ice in the Philippines. Martinez, ranked fifth in the World Junior Figure Skating Championships, will be the first skater ever to represent the Philippines in the Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, in February. (CNS)

JERUSALEM. US bishop visits Gaza, says world must tackle ‘intolerable’ situation

A US bishop who traveled into the Gaza Strip called the situation there “intolerable” and said it must be “addressed by the world community. People are denied their basic rights of movement and the opportunity to experience what we call a ‘normal life,’” Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, said on Jan. 13 as he and other church leaders arrived in Bethlehem, West Bank. Pates, chairman of the US bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, was part of the Holy Land Coordination, an annual event in which bishops from the U.S., Canada and Europe travel to the Mideast to show support for churches there. He called Gaza’s tiny Christian community a “long-suffering people” and said the local Christians were concerned about the lack of educational opportunities for their children. However, he added, parishioners at Holy Family Catholic Church were “extremely grateful” for their visit and their support.” (CNS)
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