CARP: Aquino's Legacy or a mockery?
Quote in the Act

“If they want to celebrate EDSA in Cebu; if they want to celebrate EDSA in Baguio; if they want to celebrate EDSA in Mindanao, let it be. But for you, EDSA Shrine community, stand on this ground because here on this ground, you and I and God had a brief loving encounter for four days and history cannot be changed anymore.”

Socrates Villegas, in a homily delivered at the EDSA Shrine on February 25, 2014; people reacted when the Philippine president celebrated EDSA Day in Cebu and in provinces devastated by super typhoon Yolanda.

“I apologize if we couldn’t act even faster.”

Benigno S. Aquino III, President of the Philippines; when a high school student from Tacloban City berated the government’s slow response to the Yolanda disaster; Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo advised the president to substantiate his apology by fast-tracking rehabilitation efforts in the Visayas.

“You know, like I said, managing is not an easy profession. And he is a very poor manager, we know that. He is a good man, he is an honest man, but he is an awful manager.

Sergio Osmeña, chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and key political ally of President Aquino; blamed the president and his energy secretary for the country’s worsening power woes.

“We try very hard not to make it look like we are running the investigation, even if we more or less are.”

Bernard Loeb, former head of aviation safety at the National Transportation Safety Board in America; on the ongoing investigation of the Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 that vanished without a trace until press time. The Americans were sent to help the Malaysians which ironically are regarded as the world’s foremost experts on crash investigation and on the technology of Boeing 777.

“Pope Francis has underscored, and put a special emphasis on prayer as a diplomatic tool.”

Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican’s secretary of state from 2006 to 2013; disclosed to the media that the present pope uses prayer in papal diplomacy as proven by Pope Francis’ call for a day of prayer and fasting on September 7 last year to address the crisis in Syria and lately in Ukraine, Venezuela and many countries encountering grave difficulty.
As we were going to press for this issue, we were suddenly hit with the news over the radio that the president has apologized to high school students for the slow and inefficient response of the government to the 'Yolanda disaster' — which was riddled, or so some observers say, with politics and corruption. That was phenomenal because he never apologizes. Had apologizing come early in his administration, he could have saved a lot of care and comfort, especially for Filipino overseas workers in China and Hong Kong after his administration bungled the rescue of 20 Chinese tourists at the Quirino Grandstand in August of 2010 after being hijacked by one dismissed policeman, which eventually ended in a bloodbath.

In fact, there is already a long battery of government letdowns that transpired under the reins of this 4-year government. Of late, we have the poor handling of the Zamboanga siege that was protracted for almost two weeks — or 7 months, if one were to consider the thousands of evacuees that are still homeless until today, camping out at the Don Joaquin Enriquez Memorial Sports Complex. Those natural calamities aside, another snafu that needs apologizing would be the non-realization of "Tuwid na daan" which was popularly perceived to be the battle cry of the Aquino government — unless, of course, it was really just a political campaign slogan meant to generate electoral votes without the slightest intention of being accomplished — something which is prevalent in this country. Many areas of this republic have been jokingly regarded as the “promise land” because all the good things that politicians promised their constituents during election campaigns only remain mere promises till thy kingdom come.

Failures in administration come in varying degrees. People tend to condone things that go wrong when those holding the reins of power have tried every possible means but, for one reason or the other, still fail. It would be different if things would go kaput because of greed, an overriding political agenda or "awful" management are some of the bigger factors in the program’s disastrous demise.

But nobody thinks that the president will consider the failure of CARPER something worth apologizing for. Unless, of course, he will be confronted again by some high school students.

This issue opens with a declaration on ecological stewardship by the delegates of the 44th Diocesan Pastoral Assembly of the Diocese of Malaybalay, which is under the leadership of Bishop Jose A. Cabanatan. Our cover story on agrarian reform is written by Kris Bayos, our staff writer. Read on.
A Declaration on Ecological Stewardship: the Position of the Diocese of Malaybalay on Deforestation and Mining Issues

Bishop Jose A. Cabantan, DD (center in green stole) poses with the clergy and religious working with the laity in the Diocese of Malaybalay at the close of the 44th Diocesan Pastoral Assembly on 17-19 February 2014.
Those who study ecology … are in a good position to tell us what is happening since they study the web of dynamic relationships which supports and sustains all life within the earthly household. (CBCP)

We, the delegates of the 44th Diocesan Pastoral Assembly on February 17-19, 2014 at the Diocesan Formation Center 1, Impalambong, City of Malaybalay, have gathered together to prayerfully reflect on the theme: “Mga Binunyagan: Gitawag sa Pagkabalaang Disipulo ngadto sa Pagkamagsasangyaw.” On this occasion, we also express our position on the urgent ecological issues, especially deforestation and mining activities, which challenge our Christian vocation to be responsible stewards of God’s gift of creation.

1. We are Aware of Our Ecological Giftedness

1. The Philippine archipelago is a chain of at least 7,107 islands that stretch 1,840 kilometers from north to south, separated by inland seas and surrounded by ocean waters. It has a total land area of 29,817,000 hectares where about 56 percent is hilly or mountainous uplands, of which 46 percent are composed of 18-30 percent slopes.

2. The Philippines is gifted with a total coastline of 36,289 kilometers—a size which is almost twice that of the United States. As an island ecosystem, our archipelago is naturally gifted with inland waters composed of over 421 river basins equivalent to 31,000 hectares, roughly
Tagoloan River in Malaybalay, Bukidnon is the 13th largest river system in the Philippines in terms of watershed size, as classified by the National Water Resources Board.

72 natural lakes equivalent to 200,000 hectares, and more than 106,328 hectares of freshwater swamplands. In terms of groundwater storage, it is estimated to contain 261,775 million cubic meters. For this reason, our country is theoretically assured of enough supply of water (IBON).

3. Being situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire, where volcanic activity and plate convergence have caused the deposition of minerals, the Philippines contains large reserves of various kinds of minerals beneath its ground. Based on the data of Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), around 9 million hectares, or 30% of the country’s total land area, are believed to contain important metallic mineral deposits; while 5 million hectares are also known to be potential sites for non-metallic mineral reserves. Moreover, “the country’s offshore areas, which cover around 2.2 million square kilometers, also contain placer [or accumulated valuable] minerals, including gold, magnetite and chromite-bearing sands, aggregate resources like sand and gravel, decorative stones, and polymetallic sulfide deposits” (MGB). These gifts have put the country in the world mineral map as 5th in copper, and 5th in nickel.

4. Bukidnon, the eighth largest province in the country in terms of land area, embodies the country’s similar ecological features. The name “Bukidnon” is derived from a Cebuano Visayan word bukid, which means mountain. Indeed, Bukidnon is a landscape of mountains and plateaus, where about 70 percent of the land area has an altitude of 500 meters above sea level. Due to this fairly high altitude, Bukidnon enjoys a pleasant climate.

5. Bukidnon is ecologically significant as it also serves as the “headwater province” of Mindanao. In fact, Bukidnon is the main source of the six major Mindanao rivers (Pulangui River, Tagoloan River, Cagayan River, Maridugao River, Salug River, and Agusan-Cugman River) that flow towards its low-lying neighboring provinces. These major rivers continually receive from at least 321 different tributaries that originate and criss-cross from the different corners of Bukidnon Province. Together with their tributaries, these major watershed arteries cover about 94-100 percent of Bukidnon’s total land area. Thus, the whole Province of Bukidnon may practically be called a “watershed area.”

6. Our forests serve as natural habitat of economically important and endemic flora and fauna. We must protect them at all cost. In Bukidnon, many of these biodiversity areas also contain several natural deposits, such as gold, chromite, copper, manganese, quartz, white clay and limestone—owing to the fact that “the whole of Bukidnon is of volcanic origin-lava and igneous rocks.”

II. We Abuse God’s Gift of Nature

7. The critical state of the Philippine environment is largely a product of unsustainable and irresponsible human activities. Our history reveals, that prior to the arrival of Spanish colonizers in the country, it had an estimated forest cover of at least 90 percent of its total land area. After about 333 years of Spanish colonization, the remaining forest cover was reduced to 70 percent of the total land area. In 1950, shortly after the U.S. colonizers had officially left the country, our country’s remaining forestland were estimated at 50 percent of the total land area. As we know, this percentage is already critical for a hilly country, like the Philippines, which requires a minimum forest cover of 54 percent of its total land area, if it wants to ensure a stable ecosystem and habitable environment (Sajise, Tapay, Enrique, et al.).

8. Despite the critical state of our forest, the Philippine government continued to uphold the pro-colonial policy by imprudently issuing Timber License Agreements (TLAs) to private corporations and individuals. In fact, in 1977, former President Marcos placed almost 90 percent of all forest lands under TLAs and lease agreements. This unsustainable policy continued even 1987 when about 85 percent of the remaining Philippine forestlands were still under license agreement. Unfortunately, the logged-over areas were not successfully reforested. Consequently, in 2002, the Forest Management Bureau (FMB) estimated that the country’s remaining forests is only 24 percent of the total land area. Being a “focal ecosystem,” it is highly probable that the deforested areas would create logical repercussions for the ecological condition of our water, land, living species, and climate—among others.

9. This critical state of the country’s forest is reflected locally in Bukidnon where deforestation continues largely
due to unsustainable logging operations and improper land use. In 2006, the Environmental Science for Social Change alarmingly reveals that Bukidnon has a remaining natural forest cover of 24.9 percent, with the following breakdown: 14.23 percent mossy forest, 2.79 percent primary forest, and 7.87 percent secondary forest. Our former forest lands have been replaced by vast areas of sugarcane, corn, pineapple, and irrigated rice. As we know, the prevailing land use management and monocropping practices have proven to be ecologically harmful and unsustainable.

10. As forests are gone, our mineral resources have become the next target of unsustainable exploitation. Our history also reveals that mining had been a major interest of the U.S. colonizers in the Philippines. As early as 1905, the colonial government had promulgated the Mining Law of 1905 which granted the colonizers the right to acquire public land for mining pursuits. This colonial policy has been constantly reaffirmed in the Philippine Constitutions in the light of Regalian Doctrine which justifies state control over natural resources. As the Mining Act of 1995 provides, “All mineral resources in public and private lands within the territory and exclusive economic zone of the Republic of the Philippines are owned by the State.”

11. As MGB has reported in January 2012, there are already a total of 778 existing/approved mining permits, covering a total of 1.14 million hectares or 3.8% of the country’s total land area. This current percentage is relatively small compared to the prospective 9 million hectares open for mining applications. Our country’s rich mineral resource and the high demand for mineral products in the global market have been used to justify “mining as a development option.” Whether or not the mining industry is the most appropriate development option in our island ecosystem begs prudent consideration.

12. Meanwhile, the 1991 Republic Act No. 7076 has legalized the activities of people’s small-scale mining. The Executive Order 79 seeks to limit the small-scale mining areas to minahang bayan in order to avoid overlaps and conflicts with other mining rights and tenements holders. This policy makes us worried as we believe that minahang bayan would not solve the problems created by small-scale mining: the unabated use of mercury in extracting gold, unsafe mining practices, lack of environmental impact mitigation, rampant child labor, illegal use of heavy equipment and explosives, non-collection of excise tax, rapid depletion of mineral deposits due to selective unsystematic method of mining, and proliferation of illegal small-scale mining operations, among others.

13. In our province, we are aware of a proposal to set aside about 2,000 hectares as minahang bayan in two barangays of Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. We are deeply alarmed by the news about other proposals to declare some sites in the municipalities of Libona and Manolo Fortich as minahang bayan. We believe that the operation of minahang bayan in Bukidnon would unduly disturb the ancestral domains of our indigenous peoples, including the network of our watershed areas. After realizing that Bukidnon is not a typhoon-free province, we are challenged to strengthen our campaign against mining operations to mitigate the negative effects of climate change.

14. There is a serious policy issue on the mining industry in the Philippines. To date, the law provides that the miners should set aside a fund for the progressive remediation during mining and another fund for final rehabilitation of the mined-out areas. As Christian Monsod has pointed out, “There is nothing in the law about the perpetual accountability or trust funds for the maintenance of structures like the tailings’ dam or the disasters that could happen years later. These risks are not borne by the miners … [but] by the tax payers.” How would post-mining maintenance be done when the mining operators would not provide for continuing maintenance? Who takes care of the perpetual liability of the mining areas left by the companies?

15. We are not totally against the mining industry. We acknowledge our need for mineral products to maintain our civilization. This means that mining industries have to continue in the ecologically conducive countries as long as they are done in a responsible and sustainable way. However, in island ecosystems, like the Philippines, we believe that mineral resources could not be extracted without necessarily damaging the environment.

Having a mining operation in a typhoon-hit country would be too much of a risk and highly irresponsible. This makes us adamantly pessimistic about the possibility of what is euphemistically termed responsible mining in the Philippines.

III. We are Called to Love the Earth as Ourselves

16. Our Christian faith teaches us that nature is “the fruit of God’s creation.” Nature is God’s gift entrusted to the care of human beings. God the Creator decided to put human beings “in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). Being made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), human beings have a vocation and a divine mandate to “perfect creation and develop” it according to the divine plan. John Paul II reminds us that “Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation.” The divine mandate to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:31) has to be extended to our nonhuman neighbors—the natural environment.

17. We believe that God gave us this Earth not only to enjoy its goods but also to appreciate its aesthetic value through contemplation. St. Paul teaches that God’s “eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Rom 1:20). Along this line, John XXIII invites us to see the grandeur of God revealed “in the life of plants and animals, a life that is inexhaustible in its expression, […] rich in allusions to God the Creator and Provider.”

This consciousness is clearly manifested in the lives of our tribal Filipino brothers and sisters who “see the Divine Spirit in the living world and show their respect through prayers and offerings” (CBCP). This reminds us that material creation has spiritual values, apart from their economic values for humans.

18. The Catholic social teaching calls us to respect the “integrity of creation” for the good of the whole planet. This moral principle urges us to “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system” (John Paul II). This world cannot simply be used according to our wishes. It has its own dignity, its own rights and reasons for being; “quite apart from its role in sustaining humans” (McDonagh). We have to respect the limits of the regulative capacity of the planet to cope with the high rates of consumption and pollution.

19. The Church, as early as 1971, has consistently considered the irresponsible “exploitation of nature” in the name of development as “a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family” (Paul VI). It is clear to us that the natural world was unduly damaged and made to suffer due to human sin. The greedy exploiters have misinterpreted God’s command to “subdue” the Earth without discerning God’s original purpose for creation. Together with our bishops, we declare that the “assault on creation is sinful and contrary to the teachings of our
A Declaration on Ecological Stewardship

faith” (CBCP).

20. Our vision of a sustainable world broadens our notion of justice which recognizes “our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it” (Benedict XVI). We are guilty of violating “inter-generational justice” if our generation would bequeath to future generations a planet that is depleted of its resources. This is an urgent call for us not to overexploit the Earth’s resources.

21. In the face of the present ecological crisis, we cannot continue the “business as usual” attitude. We join John Paul II’s call for “ecological conversion” by challenging people to be “more sensitive to catastrophe to which it has been heading.” The Pope categorically declared that the “ecological crisis is a moral issue,” about which the Church could not remain silent or neutral. It would be self-destructive for us to destroy our natural environment. This conviction challenges us to think globally as “the deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all” (Benedict XVI).

IV. We Renew our Ecological Struggle

22. We are convinced that our Christian faith has a particular contribution to the transformation of society that anticipates the coming of God’s Kingdom. Our ecological struggle does not have to start from zero. There are existing concrete lines of action pursued both by the Church and certain social movements that serve as “embers of hope.” Our main task is to participate in and build on these existing movements according to our Christian faith.

23. We remember at least three “dangerous memories” of ecological struggle that awaken us to our vocation as stewards of God’s creation. First, in 1987, some 3,000 residents of the municipality of San Fernando, Bukidnon opted to hold a picket against logging operations, which greedily exploited the dwindling forests. This parish-based environmental protest grew into a diocesan advocacy, which successfully pressured the government to put the whole province of Bukidnon under a logging moratorium in 1990. The second occurred in October 1991 when Fr. Nery Lito Satur was brutally killed in October 1991 due to his zealous implementation of the logging moratorium. His martyrdom inflamed our commitment to care for God’s creation and served as an important watershed for our ongoing ecological struggle. And the third took place in November 1999 when a coalition of civil society groups strategically formed a series of human barricades, which successfully blocked the logging trucks from an adjacent province (Lanao del Sur) passing along the highways of Bukidnon. These events of ecological struggle must have crucially shaped our pastoral outlook and pushed us to understand our Christian vocation to care not only for the community of human persons but also for the larger community of God’s creation, whose fate is inseparably intertwined with ours.

24. As we confront the urgent ecological issues that have chiefly caused the recent human-induced tragedies, we renew our commitment to struggle for ecology.

25. We need to continually deepen our knowledge of ecological issues, including the phenomenon of climate change and the global ecological crisis. We have to start by updating ourselves with the present ecological situation of Bukidnon.

We will make the relevant ecological information available to the grassroots level by producing a module which would facilitate the “education in ecological responsibility” in our media, schools, BECs, religious organizations, and individual families.

We continue the legacy of Fr. Nery Satur by meaningfully commemorating his death anniversary with relevant activities that are responsive to the urgent issues of deforestation, mining, climate change, and poverty.

We celebrate “Creation Day” every September 1. In many parts of the world, Christian churches set the period from this day to October 4 (the Feast day of St. Francis of Assisi) or the Sunday after October 4 as “Creation Time.” The CBCP “wish to introduce this period to our Catholic faithful and acknowledge ‘Creation,’ that priceless gift of the Almighty and Loving Creator.” Hence we need to adjust our monthly celebration to this event.

We undertake all necessary actions to stop mining activities all over Bukidnon, including the proposed sites for “minahang bayan.” This would entail organizing the immediate communities that unjustly suffer from the hazardous effects of mining. Let the ecological issues of mining be prayerfully discerned in the context of BEC life.

We support all ecologically appropriate policies and projects that would protect our biodiversity and promote healthy ecosystems.

We oppose imprudent use of technology and equipment that would destroy the sustainability of the community of life and the heritage of the next generations.

We forge collaboration with advocates against mining and tap the expertise of our ecological scientists in view of helping the Church continually come up with a well-discerned judgment and decision on ecological issues.

We influence the lawmakers both in the local and national levels to sponsor ordinance that will repeal existing mining laws that worsen the problems of poverty and the ecological crisis.

For the Delegates of the 44th Diocesan Pastoral Assembly:

+ JOSE ARANETA CABANTAN, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Malaybalay
February 19, 2014
By Fr. Benny Tuazon

Sometimes last week, after my Radio Veritas Thursday show, I finally made it to the UP-Washington SyCip Garden of Native Trees after weeks of postponement. I caught up with Ime Sarmiento of Hortica Filipina Foundation, Inc. and the San Beda College Alumni Foundation, who spearheaded this once-empty parking lot in UP the planting of 99 native trees and two native palms in an area of 2,500 sqm. As the name implies, this garden of native trees is dedicated to industrialist Mr. Washington SyCip of the famed SGV firm by the Zuelig Group of Companies as their gift to Mr. SyCip, on his 90th birthday. The turn-over was made two years after, on 05 July 2013, a week after Mr. SyCip’s 92nd birthday.

It is amazing to see some 99 native trees planted together. We learned that we have 3,600 native trees, but, until that day, my knowledge of native trees was limited to knowing the narra, banaba, talisay and santol. Now, I know such names as timumad, malabaltik, banato, kalingang, malabagang, sablot; and our native fruit trees like the bignay, binayuyu, lipote, mabolo AKA kamagong and many others. Amazing!

I believe there are few places in the metropolis where you can see such a large number of native tree species. This could be the very first spot where native trees are clustered together, where getting to know them would entail eyeball to eyeball introduction. I was blessed as I was guided through the maze by Ime herself. But even without her guiding presence, it would be easy enough for a first time, non-botanist visitor to learn more about our native trees in this green patch. The trees are grouped together in islands, by families, as you walked through red brick path that meanders around the family-clustered native trees.

Now for Botany 101. The flora kingdom is complicated as the fauna kingdom. But some semblance of order was put together by botanist-scientist Carlus Linnaeus. For us Juan dela Cruzes, Ime advised that we cut corners and jump into the knowledge about the plant families, the genera and species. She also learned this way, a music graduate.

When you checked on each of the tree marker, the local name is prominently displayed. In the tree marker sample shown left, this is BIGNAY. Then the scientific name follows. I did ask Ime why scientists or even pseudo-scientists resort to scientific name calling when referring to plants. This is how it is explained: the local name NARRA is known to most of us Filipinos; but when you go to the Bicol region, NARRA becomes NAGA. In our Southeast Asian neighbors, the local name for NARRA is ANGSANA. But when you humble Pterocarpus indicus, wherever you may be in this world, the common denominator is the scientific name. Therefore, one scientific name refers exclusively to one particular species. But one local name could refer to several different species and different local names could refer to just one tree species.

Notice that scientific names are always written italicized. In our sample above, for bignay, this is Antidesma bunius. There are two Latin words. The first word, whose first letter is capitalized (Antidesma), is the genus (similar to our last name). The second word (bunius), written in lower case, is the species name (like our given first name). A species name could describe certain characteristics or features of the species, like Cananga odorata (ilang-ilang), so called because of its odorous, fragrant flowers; or it could indicate the place of origin of the species where it was first recorded, like Cinnamomum mindanaense (in Mindanao, for Mindanao cinnamon); or it could honor a person, as in Adonidia merrillii (for Manila palm), named after Dr. Elmer Merrill, a renowned botanist. Notice too that “species” is used for both singular and plural forms.

Now, the plant families are Latin words that end with “-ceae” (i.e. Myrtaceae, Lauraceae, Ebenaceae). Plant families are like our own extended families consisting of brothers, sisters, cousins. These family relations are identified by the plants’ scientific names. The scientific Latin family names have its English equivalents: the Ebenaceae is the Ebony family. Now, one can almost be sure that members of this family has fine, premium timber of many uses. A member of this family is our kamagong, whose fruit we call mabolo (Diospyros blancoi); a more popular member of this family is non-native, the persimmon (Diospyros virginiana). With the first names the same, Diospyros, you might call these two species sisters: one settled in our country (the kamagong aka mabolo), the other in China or Japan where the persimmon is a common fruit. Both has fine, premium timber of many uses.

The Lauraceae is the Laurel Family whose most popular genus is the Cinnamomum, cinnamon used for food flavoring.

So as you go through the UP-Washington SyCip Garden of Native Trees and checking out the tree markers as you go along, bear these in mind: this is the surest and easiest way for you to learn how to appreciate and love our native trees. So we hope that you will be inspired to plant your own little garden of native trees; even if you have time and space for only one tree, you will have done your part in preserving our biological heritage. Finally a word from St. Francis of Assisi: “… may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.” Make a difference, be different, plant only our God-given trees! And, by the way, the UP-Washington SyCip Garden of Native Trees is located at Magsaysay Avenue, across the street from Bahay Alumni, behind the UP carillon.

We hope to see you there one of these days. If you need a special guide, call/text Hortica Filipina Foundation, Inc. Ime P. Sarmiento, at 0917.465.0281.
Leonardo Di Caprio has added another nail to the coffin of unbridled capitalism by starring in a film depicting a real-life character in "The Wolf of Wall Street." The person he portrays is the incarnation of everything that is evil in free market capitalism that recognizes no moral bounds. Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" actually adds another expletive to describe this inhuman system: murderous. In Paragraph 53 of the document, he writes: "Just as the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape."

It is obvious that the Pope is not making a blanket condemnation of all economic systems based on the freedom of economic initiative which needs a minimum of free markets, without denying the indispensable role of the State to promote the common good. What he is criticizing is a way of thinking and acting that denies the primacy of the human person, the refusal to define the common good as a social order which enables every single human being to attain his fullest or integral development as a person. He clearly traces the worrisome multiplication of "wolves of Wall Street" to a moral crisis: "One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf Ex 32: 1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption."

I maintain that one way of restoring humanity to capitalism is the encouragement of more family-based enterprises. In a thoroughly research-based publication titled "Family Values and Value Creation: the Fostering of Enduring Values Within Family-Owned Businesses," a group of business professors from Europe and the U.S., led by Josep Tapies of the IESE Business School and John Ward of the Kellogg School of Management, described the role of family businesses in society and their impact on economic growth, investment and job creation, both in advanced and emerging economies. As Dean Jordi Canals of the IESE Business School wrote in the Preface to the book: "Many family businesses have shown over the years that companies do not need to be single-minded about objectives. They know that economic performance is important but the long-term survival of the firm also needs to take into account people's commitment and customer loyalty. Today, many companies and their senior leaders want to be recognized as good social actors promoting not only economic progress but the well-being of the communities in which they operate. These are areas in which family businesses have excelled over the years."

As John Ward wrote in the introduction to the book: "...a close examination of the successful examples in the popular book 'Built to Last' shows a disproportionate number of family firms. And the family firms in that study have stronger cultures than the successful non-family firms. Moreover, what my studies show is that the values at the foundation of the culture of family firms are different. Examining the values statements of family firms and non-family firms shows interesting patterns. The values of family firms are more human, more emotional, more fundamental. The values expressed in values statements of non-family firms are more transactional, more impersonal, more driven by outcomes. I believe this difference is instrumental in the stronger (humanistic) cultures found in family firms." For these reasons, I am convinced that we have to encourage the establishment and preservation of family firms all over Asia to ensure that the new epicenter of economic growth will evolve a more human form of the market economy. For comments, my email address is bernardo.villegas@uap.asia
CHOOSING THE GREEN PLATFORM OF LIFE

By Fr. Shay Cullen

ife is full of choices, and we need to ask ourselves if the choices and decisions we make everyday are truly good, positive, ethical, and virtuous choices. If you were asked what makes you human, different from the rest of God’s creatures, what would you say? Can you answer right away or are you now trying to list what makes us uniquely truly human persons different from the animals?

If you don’t have the answer right away, you may be short on a very human ability that can enhance and enrich your well being and happiness and that is self awareness and consciousness. This is one of the great attributes of being human; to be very mentally alert and conscious that you are alive and exist and that you are a person of great value.

It seems to be elementary to state that fact but great unhappiness arises in people’s lives because they are unaware of themselves, their potential and their goodness. They think they are even bad, perhaps. They are confused, unaware, semi-conscious of their values attributes and place low value of their own lives and existence. How wrong they are. Growing in self-awareness of our goodness and that we exist must be our priority in life and helping our children and others be the same is essential for a fuller, happier life.

We also have another great gift, the great ability to ask why we exist. That is one of the greatest attributes of being human, that we humans have the ability to reason and think. Not only can we be conscious of ourselves, we can also think about our existence and be aware of our place in the universe. We can look at the great universe with billions of stars, planets, and galaxies and say “I am”. How great it is if we can also say I am happy and grateful that “I am”. It’s wonderful to be able to rejoice in being alive and well and to know that it is “better to be than not to be”.

Sometimes people do not realize the joy of being alive until they are almost dead. Near death experiences through sickness or accident and disaster can awaken awareness of self and of life. Only when it is nearly taken from us do we truly cherish it and desperately do all in our power to cling on to it. When we survive, we see the world and ourselves in a very different light with greater, sharper self-awareness.

Another great gift of the human person is free will. That’s the ability to make free choices. Unless we are enslaved by other human beings or some form of addiction that has captured our will, then we can choose what way to live and act. Even when captured by negative forces, we can choose to break free and escape from a negative existence to a happier, free, more meaningful life. Then with freewill, we are free to respond to different realities and challenges before us.

Free choice alone does not make us a true, good, ethical human person. Because many humans make negative choices that are harmful to others, to the planet and are even evil and far from being good, right and just.

This is one way to try and understand and explain evil in the world; some human beings exercise free will in a negative, destructive way. Others are not aware of themselves or of others and much of the world around them. They don’t think or are unconscious about their behavior and choices and are apathetic and indifferent to their own lives and the life of others. But many do choose to be fully human and choose the good and virtuous life.

As part of being fully human, we need to use our ability to know and reason and think about ethical values, to choose the good we have to know it. That’s where the value of learning and education in right and wrong are so important.

Our conscience is an innate value that can tell us what is right and wrong, just and unjust, true and false. Being human has another great unique ability and that is to care for and have compassion and empathy with others who may be total strangers to us. This is that we learn from the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, love of the stranger in need is the greatest love of all. It is that human ability, a spiritual ability, to have compassion and to help others without pay, reward or seeking love in return or benefits for oneself.

You may want to read more on this. Here, I can recommend an excellent newly published book that gives an inspiring powerful message and a guide for life on how we can live a better, fuller life of happiness by choosing the positive, the good and the green—The Green Platform by Declan Coyle. It is all about choosing how to live a better, happier life, choosing a Green Platform of life. It is available at Amazon.com and Irishbooksdirect.ie bookstores.

The one important value that we need to embrace above all is to know ourselves and affirm that we are basically good and capable of greater good, compassion, love and a happier life. shaycullen@preda.org , www.preda.org
IBON Survey: Majority of Filipinos think gov't response to Yolanda damage insufficient

63.1% of respondents believe the national government's response to the risk and damage caused by Yolanda was not enough

As survivors commemorate the fifth month since Typhoon Yolanda struck the Visayas region, results of the latest IBON survey show that most Filipinos think that the national government’s disaster risk reduction preparation and response to the super typhoon was not enough.

Asked if the national government’s preparations to reduce disaster risks and damage that may be caused by natural hazards such as typhoons and earthquakes are enough, 61.2% of all respondents answered no. Only 28.0% of all respondents said the preparations for the typhoon were enough.

Asked in particular if they think the national government’s response to disaster risks and damage caused by typhoon Yolanda is enough, 63.1% answered no while only 28.4% answered yes.

The latest IBON nationwide survey was conducted from January 16 to 24 among 1,500 respondents aged 18 years and above. It employed a multi-stage probability sampling scheme and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3%. The January 2014 round was a non-commissioned survey conducted across various sectors in 16 regions.

Below is the tabulation of results of people’s perception on the national government's preparation and response to reduce disaster risks:

1. In your opinion, are the national government’s preparations to reduce disaster risks and damage that may be caused by natural hazards, e.g. typhoons and earthquakes, enough?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

2. In your opinion, is the national government’s response to disaster risks and damage caused by the typhoon Yolanda enough?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Source: http://ibon.org/ibon_surveys.php
‘Forced migration’ tearing families apart – Cardinal Tagle

MANILA, March 9, 2014—A top Philippine churchman said the issue on “forced migration” and human trafficking will not go away unless the economics of it will be addressed.

On National Migrant’s Sunday, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle talked about the causes of migration and labor exploitation: poverty.

In his homily at the Archdiocesan Shrine of Nuestra Señora de Guia in Ermita, Manila, he said the lack of opportunities in the country forced many Filipinos to work abroad.

And sadly, he said, desperate conditions drive many Filipinos to leave the country, sometimes by any means possible, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

“I hope this serves as a call to the government and the private sector… if only there are opportunities here, many Filipinos would prefer staying here with their families,” Tagle said.

Freedom of movement and residence is the right of every human person, he said, but there are also situations that forced them to do so and tear families apart.

According to him, it is not all dysfunctional issues that split families—it is also triggered by “love”, as they make sacrifices to provide for the needs of their families.

“In the Church, that is one part with reservations—forced migration because of poverty and the consequence is couples separate physically,” Tagle said.

“Other couples separate because of misunderstanding but many Filipinos too are separated from their family physically out of love – a sacrifice of being away to provide for their needs,” he added.

The cardinal also lamented that some Filipino women are forced into mail-order marriage as an escape from poverty.

“Human trafficking and slavery are also there,” he added.

Tagle is a member of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples.

He then called on Filipinos abroad to strive to be known as good people. “Wherever we go, let’s show the best of Filipino and the best of a Christian.” (CBCPNews)

‘In Yolanda-hit areas, Jesus is the face of suffering’

MANILA, March 4, 2014—Lenten activities in typhoon stricken province of Leyte will be focused in preparing the faithful spiritually, a Church official said.

Palo Archbishop John Du said that “in the midst of all these crises”, now is the time for seeking the spiritual well-being of everyone within the Church.

“We really have to prepare the people spiritually that they would be strengthened and nourished not only in terms of material assistance… there should also be spiritual component,” Du said.

In Leyte and other devastated areas, like everywhere in the world, the archbishop said that Jesus Christ is the face of the suffering.

“We would like to at least give meaning to the situation and that the Lord is going to be seen in this situation. The face of Jesus would be seen in the face of poverty,” he said.

The Catholic and other Christian Churches will begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

Lent is the period of repentance, fasting and reflection that prepares the faithful for celebration of Jesus Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

While Catholics are called to sacrifice their excessive lifestyle, Du said typhoon victims already have their share of sufferings.

Nevertheless, he said they still have some work to do during the 40-day yearly religious occasion.

“Suffering without offering is different… The sacrifice is already there. But (we need) to incorporate that into the kind of redemptive, to make it into an offering,” Du said.

One good “offering”, according to him, would be for the salvation of the country, including the public officials.

“We are making our suffering now as an offering for the purification of our country, our government officials, our church people, everyone,” he added.

Du also said that the repair of about 70 parish churches in the archdiocese that were destroyed has been ongoing since early this year.

He said that utmost priority is given to those churches whose roofs were blown away by the typhoon.

“Our rough budget is almost P500 million if we are to restore everything… but we cannot do it yet. We will start with the roofs first then one by one, part by part,” said Du. (CBCPNews)
Malaysian ministry bans use of term 'Allah' by non-Muslims

KUALALUMPUR, Malaysia, March 8, 2014—The Home Ministry of Malaysia has banned the use of the word “Allah” in a children’s comic book, continuing disputes over non-Muslims’ ability to use the word.

An issue of the children’s comic book Ultraman referring to the super hero as “respected as Allah or elder” by other heroes, contains “elements that may threaten public order,” the Malaysian Home Ministry said in a March 7 statement.

“If the matter isn’t curbed, it could damage Muslim’s children faith by equating Allah with Ultraman,” the Home Ministry continued.

The government stated that the series itself is not banned, but the Malay-language issue that uses the word was prohibited, with a maximum jail sentence of three years for anyone caught distributing the book.

The ban comes amid a continuing dispute in the Malaysian legal system over non-Muslim’s right to use “Allah” to refer to God. “Allah” is the Malay language equivalent of the English word “god,” and is a loanword from Arabic. Malay is the official language of the country, and Malaysians of all religions use the word; not just Muslims.

The term “Allah” is used around the world by Arab Christians, and has been included in the Malaysian version of the Bible for 400 years.

Muslims comprise about 60 percent of the Malaysian 30-million-person population, while Christians comprise slightly under 10 percent of the population. While the Malaysian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, Islam is the established religion.

In October 2013, a Malaysian Court ruled against a Catholic newspaper for using “Allah” to refer to God, saying that the term belonged specifically to Muslims, and use by Christians may tempt some Muslims to convert to Christianity.

The court’s verdict “violates the right to religious freedom and freedom of expression enshrined in the (Malaysian) constitution,” said Fr. Lawrence Andrew, editor of The Herald, the newspaper which the suit regarded.

“It is a retrograde step in the development of law in relation to the fundamental liberty of religious minorities,” he added. (CNA/EWTN News)

Pakistani Christians fast and pray for peace and persecuted minorities

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, March 5, 2014—Pakistani Christians celebrate Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, with prayers and fasting. Masses and religious services are being held in all of the country’s churches with a special thought for peace in a nation that is still the scene of attacks against the civilian population, persecution of minorities and violence between the military and the Taliban.

The Diocese of Lahore and Rawalpindi has issued a special message of peace and harmony for the faithful and the whole community, noting with particular force the true meaning of the traditional event: fasting, privation, abandonment of worldly desires and the sufferings Jesus endured for 40 days in the desert, when confronted with the devil’s temptations.

Parishes renew the ritual of the ashes, asking the community to “do more good” and not dwell on the problems and difficulties of daily life.

On this day, every church opens its doors to the faithful. Many services held in conjunction with the first day of fasting and prayer in preparation for Easter.

For Fr. Arshad John, a priest in Lahore, this is "a favourable time to show humility and refrain from the temptations of the world". Hence, the faithful should "give thanks to the Lord, our God," and "fast for Him rather than please someone around us. Fasting for the Lord and doing His will: these must be our priority." The faithful, he noted, should "pray for peace in the country" at this time of Lent.

"In many parts of Pakistan, Christians are persecuted because of their faith," said Fr. Waris Sohatra, from Sialkot, in the Diocese of Punjab.

In particular, the central part of Punjab province has seen many bloody events involving minority Christians.

"During Lent, let us pray for persecuted Christians and the current situation of the country," Fr. Sohatra added. "Let us start the Lenten season by submitting to the will of the Lord, observing the ritual of Ash Wednesday."

"Lent is a time of sacrifice and detachment from the temptations and deeds the world said," Fr. Jamshed Gill, an activist in Hyderabad, the second most populous city in the country, said. "The faithful should fast and put their trust in God's will with regard to their lives," he added. "Lent is a time to turn to the Lord for forgiveness, showing him one's compassion to others." Thus, "Let us ask the faithful to pray for Pakistan, to pray for peace and to pray for all Christians."

With a population of more than 180 million people (97 per cent Muslim), Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world, the second largest Muslim nation after Indonesia.

About 80 per cent of Muslims are Sunni, whilst Shias are 20 per cent. Hindus are 1.85 per cent, followed by Christians (1.6 per cent) and Sikhs (0.04 per cent).

Violence against ethnic and religious minorities is commonplace across the country, with Shia Muslims and Christians as the main target, with things getting worse.

Dozens incidents of violence have occurred in recent years, against individuals or entire communities, like in Gojra in 2009 or Joseph Colony in Lahore in March 2013, or against single individuals (Asia Bibi, Rimsha Masih and Robert Fanish Masih, a young man who died in jail), often perpetrated under the pretext of the country’s blasphemy laws. (AsiaNews)
Beijing threatens Hong Kong, saying democracy will only bring disaster

HONG KONG, March 7, 2014—The people of Hong Kong could face "disastrous" consequences if it adopts full democracy based on foreign models. Instead, Hong Kong must carry out democratic reform based on its own laws, warned Zhang Dejiang, chairman of China's National People's Congress (NPC), amid intense political debate on elections for the chief executive of the former British colony in 2017.

At present, Hong Kong's government is governed by the Basic Law, which was adopted before the former's British crown colony returned to mainland China in 1997, and which will remain in force until 2047.

Under the law, elections to the Legislative Council require a complicated series of steps that ensure a large number of seats for functional constituencies, which are close to the mainland.

By contrast, civil society groups, the Catholic Church and other religious denominations have long been calling for the adoption of universal suffrage.

Never granted under British rule, universal suffrage has been blocked since 1997 by China, which does not want to lose political control.

The 'Occupy Central' movement has emerged to protest against this situation. It aims at putting pressure on the Hong Kong government through peaceful protests to implement full democracy in the territory.

According to Hong Kong NPC delegate Rita Fan, chairman Zhang considers the "Occupy Central" movement as the mainland's greatest enemy.

Zhang said some people were waving the banner of universal suffrage to undermine stability in Hong Kong. For him, "This won't help the cause of universal suffrage."

Indeed, Beijing's meddling in Hong Kong's affairs seems to be steadily increasing.

Although the city is governed by the rule of law, economic and political pressure from mainland China has risen since the great rally of 1 July 2003, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against a proposed anti-subversion bill inspired by Communist policies.

Hong Kong authorities later withdrew the draft proposal, but since then journalists and human rights activists have complained that Beijing has been tightening its control over the city.

(AsiaNews)

Philippine farmers stage Ash Wednesday poverty protest

MANILA, March 5, 2014—Up to 300 farmers from five northern provinces descended on Manila on Wednesday to mark the start of Lent with a rally to protest against the government's failure to redistribute hundreds of thousands of hectares of land to the rural poor.

Labeling themselves the "calvary of peasants," the protesters symbolized their hardship by carrying crosses to the offices of the Department of Agrarian Reform in Quezon City.

"Small farmers have been systematically neglected," said protest leader Jaime Tadeo.

The government has failed to curb rice smuggling into the Philippines that has undercut locally produced paddy farmers, nor has it dealt with companies who illegally seized land destined for poor farmers, he added.

The Philippines government has blamed "technical difficulties" for its failure to successfully complete an ambitious land redistribution program by this year which was first approved by the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1972.

Although the government has reassigned more than 8.3 million hectares to over 5.4 million people so far, farmers and the Catholic Church have complained that the process has been too slow.

"We are suffering from worsening poverty and the denial of our most basic rights to land in the Philippines," Tadeo said.

Last week, Father Edu Gariguez, executive secretary of the social action secretariat of the Catholic bishops' conference, said the government should be sued for its inefficiency.

Nearly 800,000 hectares are yet to be redistributed under the scheme. The government has asked for a two-year extension of the program until 2016 which must first be approved by Congress.

Farmers have complained that recent economic progress in the Philippines is passing them by, a point conceded this week by Socio-economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan.

"We are aware that recent economic growth, at least in the Philippines, has yet to be felt by the poor, particularly small farmers," he said.

The country's GDP grew 6.8 percent in 2012 and 7.2 percent last year, placing it among the best economic performers in Asia. (ucanews)
Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program: Aquino’s legacy or a mockery?

By Kris Bayos

Aside from restoring democracy in the Philippines in 1986, the administration of the late President Corazon “Cory” Cojuangco-Aquino was noted in history for instituting a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) that aims to give land to the landless. But 28 years later, the Cojuangco-Aquino’s own 5,000-hectare sugarcane plantation in Tarlac is yet to be actually distributed to the beneficiaries of her own social reform program.

The Cojuangco-Aquino’s Hacienda Luisita is one of the many vast parcels of agricultural lands that are under the mandatory coverage of CARP under Republic Act 6657. Each of the Hacienda’s 6,212 tenant-farmers is expecting to own at least 6,600 square meters of land from the 4,099-hectare distributable area of Hacienda Luisita. Despite government’s initial payment of at least P471 million as just compensation to Hacienda Luisita Inc. (HLI), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) is still struggling to install the beneficiaries in their CARP-awarded lands.

In September, DAR Secretary Virgilio delos Reyes said copies of Certificate of Land Ownership Awards (CLOA) are currently being distributed to the farmer-beneficiaries. But almost three years after the Supreme Court ordered the actual land distribution to Hacienda Luisita farmers in 2011, DAR is still in the process of surveying the boundaries of each of the parcels that will be awarded. Mr. delos Reyes himself could not say how “soon” the farmer-beneficiaries can access and till the land they have been promised to have.

The stock-distribution option (SDO), which had delayed the actual distribution of Hacienda Luisita, is among the many loopholes in the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988. Mrs. Aquino had included the SDO as a means for land-owning families like hers to evade the mandatory coverage of CARP. Under this loophole, corporate landowners may give farmer-beneficiaries the right to purchase capital stock of the corporation instead of turning over their land for CARP coverage. For years, farmers held HLI stock certificates instead of land titles as is the essence of the program. Although the Supreme Court had finally ordered the nullification of the SDO deal between HLI and its tenant-farmers, it failed to finally declare the unconstitutionality of the SDO as many agrarian reform advocates would have wanted.

Lawyer Christian Monson, who was appointed as Election Commissioner under Mrs. Aquino’s administration and was a member of the commission that drafted the 1987 Constitution, admitted that the SDO was proof that Mrs. Aquino would not betray her own kind: the landed. Despite being propelled to power by the very farmers she had promised land reform with, Mrs. Aquino “only paid lip service to it”—just like what her son does now despite referring to the masses, farmers included—as his boss.

Looming expiry

The land acquisition and distribu-
tion (LAD) component of CARP is due to expire on June 30. Although the CARP as a social justice program will continue, only the lands with notices of coverage (NOC) issued before the deadline would be processed. In a status report, Mr. delos Reyes disclosed that there are still 822,488 hectares of land that comprise the LAD balance as of June 2013. Of the LAD balance, 210,067 hectares have been tagged as “problematic.” Despite DAR’s backlog and the agency’s need for more time to cope up, Mr. Aquino is yet to respond to calls for him to support the extension of CARP’s LAD component three months into the deadline.

In an interview last February, Ifugao Representative Teddy Brawner Baguilat, chairman of the Congressional Committee on Agrarian Reform, said there are separate proposals to extend LAD by five more years, to amend the existing law on CARP and to legislate a new and genuine agrarian reform law. Baguilat admitted that his Committee can endorse any of the proposed measures but said that the real battle will be at the plenary where landlords dominate the floor. “It cannot be denied that majority of those in Congress are landlords or are scions of landed families. But there are younger set of legislators who are open to the concept of social justice and human rights. There is a general sense of social reform. But let’s see (how they handle their biases) in the plenary,” he said.

Given the fast-approaching deadline, Baguilat said it may not be feasible for Congress to legislate a new agrarian reform law but it would significantly help if the incumbent President “would make a categorical statement or issue an executive order saying that all of the LAD balance are considered as covered,” even if NOCs are not issued before the June 30 deadline. Although Mr. Aquino promised to complete CARP during his third state of the nation address, the government’s direction to wind down the operation of DAR and delegate its functions to other government agencies was seen as an outright contradiction of his claim.

Anxious about then apparent abandonment of the CARP, farmers made all sorts of noise just to get government’s attention and get it to seriously implement the program. Farmers from across the archipelago went on hunger strikes, barefoot marches, camp outs and demonstrations—the latest of which was held inside Malacañang grounds last February 11—but were ignored, arrested, and even harassed for pushing for justice that is due them. Some even failed to live long enough to hold their elusive CLOAs.

Aware of the plight of the farmers, the civil society groups and Church leaders have rallied to support moves to further extend CARP. Atty. Monsod, representing the Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on Agrarian Reform, and Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo, representing the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace, were among the numerous signatories in a January 22, 2014 letter urging Mr. Aquino to extend CARP for two more years and to see the full implementation of the program until he steps down from the presidency in 2016.

“Decisive action to ensure the success of CARP will be especially timely, given that 2014 has been declared the International Year of Family Farming by the General Assembly of the United Nations. There would be no stronger statement that your administration champions the
cause of family farmers by sustaining the very program that would give land to the landless, and thus allow the family farm sector to flourish within our country,” the agrarian reform advocates told Mr. Aquino in their letter.

**Nullify circumventions**

The agrarian reform advocates and farmer groups have also urged the Chief Executive and Congress to create an independent commission to look into the lands that avoided or circumvented the law. Among other purposes, the proposed commission would look into the lands that avoided or circumvented the law, such as the voluntary land transfer (VLT), unwarranted exemptions and conversions, excessive retentions, fake joint ventures, and “take steps to have them declared null and void and subject the lands to coverage and distribution,” they said.

Aside from the SDO, the VLT had also been another means for landowners to circumvent the law on agrarian reform. Under this option, landowners may enter into arrangement of land transfer directly to qualified beneficiaries. But Monsod said farmers are usually shortchanged under these arrangements. “Government must not allow landowners to negotiate directly with farmers because the bargaining positions are not the same. The farmers are in an inferior and weaker position,” he said.

Citing stories from the grassroots, Bishop Pabillo said landowners that availed of the VLT has actually defied the purpose of CARP when they identify the beneficiaries, “who are usually their
dummies or their family members.

The law also allowed landowners and farmer-beneficiaries to enter into leasehold agreement. Leasing back the lands from the farmers is actually considered a transition period where the farmers are being taught of capacity building as owner-cultivator of the farmlands but Monsod assailed DAR for consenting to leasehold agreements lasting for 20 years with some applying for further extension. “How can a transition period be as long as 20 years? Five years is enough. It is very difficult for them to undergo the transition from tenant-worker to owner-cultivator that is why the government should step in a big way to help them towards this transition.”

Monsod said these lands that evaded the law should be brought back to CARP coverage. “If you allow landowners who circumvented and defied the law to keep the land, it will make a mockery of the CARP. They are keeping their land and they brag about the fact that they were able to circumvent the law. How can that be social reform when you allow that to happen?”

But Monsod also admitted that from the beginning of its institution, CARP was meant to fail. “All social reform laws have loopholes because they were legislated by the elite and for the rich and the powerful to take advantage of,” he said.

‘Give it a chance’

Agrarian reform advocates who wrote Mr. Aquino last January also urged the government to condone all unpaid amortizations for lands awarded under CARP. Ideally, farmers will pay for their awarded
lands within 30 years but almost 90 percent of the farmers have been delinquent in their obligation.

Pabillo said the lack of support services like credit facility, planting technology, irrigation systems and farm-to-market roads have greatly affected the productivity of farmer beneficiaries. “It’s best to condone the unpaid amortization and unconditionally award the land to the farmers because there has been no support services to make them productive enough to earn,” the prelate said.

The lack of support service for farmers was traced to the underfunding of CARP. Initially, the program has a funding requirement of P225 billion for its 20-year implementation. However, landlord-dominated Congress only allocated P175 billion for the program and appropriated less than the P150 billion funding requirement for the five-year extension.

Monsod added that recouping the investment in CARP or merely meeting targets should not be government’s motivation. “They missed the point, agrarian reform is not about numbers or deadlines. It is about the outcome. Have the lives of the farmers improve? Has rural poverty been reduced?”

“The deadline is only for the acquisition and distribution of lands,” he added. “The support service will still go on. We hope that there will be a massive example of this government of funding support services to show what can be done if it is done right.”

“Give CARP a chance” is the farmers’ outstanding appeal to Congress. Monsod said a proper audit of the DAR’s performance and the continued implementation of CARP will put new life into the farming sector. “Imagine what that can do to the morale of the poor farmers?”

Earth belongs to all
For his part, Pabillo said the Church would continue to rally behind the farmers in pursuing their rights under CARP. The CBCP NASSA has been instrumental in arranging farmers’ meetings with government officials, providing food and lodging to farmers during their marches and camp outs.

“According to the social teachings of the Church, the earth belongs to all and not only to some. It is not justice if only a few have lands while the majority are landless,” he said. “Until justice is not met, the Church’s support to the poor and oppressed will continue.”

Pabillo lamented the government’s lack of resolve in implementing agrarian reform and the Aquinos’ real intentions for not making CARP succeed. “Is it by design or by incompetence that the CARP is not completed?” the prelate asked. “I don’t know if it is just a lack of resolve or if there is really an intention to not make agrarian reform succeed.”

Mrs. Aquino may have restored democracy in a country torn by dictatorship but her leadership only ushered in an era that stinks of oligarchs and breeds political dynasties. She may be regarded as an icon of democracy but her track record of serving her family’s interest over the common good will remain a stain in her and her son’s brand of leadership and a kind of legacy nobody in their family would be proud of.  

SocialActionNews Facebook Page

Photo courtesy of CBCP- NASSA
Poverty that dehumanizes, poverty that sanctifies

A CBCP Lenten Message 2014

Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

As we begin this Lenten Season in the Year of the Laity, we invite you, our brothers and sisters, to reflect on poverty, particularly the types that contradict God’s Kingdom as well as those other types that promote and establish the Kingdom. We do this following the lead of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, whose own Lenten Message takes its inspiration from St. Paul writing about our Lord Jesus Christ: “He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).

There are many forms of poverty. Those that degrade and dehumanize, we are to reject and work against. Those that paradoxically humanize and sanctify, we are to embrace and through them, by God’s grace, be transformed. We encounter such opposing forms of poverty on three dimensions of human existence: material, moral, and spiritual. Allow us now to describe them in a framework that may help us all observe this season of grace more generously and fruitfully.

Poverty that degrades and dehumanizes

In his earthly life, Jesus was no stranger to poverty. He knew well how people suffered from it and he tirelessly went about lightening their burdens: “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness” (Mt. 9:35).

He worked against this kind of poverty because it degrades and dehumanizes humanity; deforming the very ones created lovingly in God’s image and amounting to a grave insult hurled at God. Such poverty continues to undermine and threaten our existence.

In his apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis declares in no uncertain terms, “No to an economy of exclusion!” (EG 53) This exclusion is the defining characteristic of poverty in our country and in the world today. As the Pope has stressed, “Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons. Poverty today is a cry.” Indeed, it is a great scandal that takes us all to task.

No to Material Destitution

In the material dimension, poverty that degrades and dehumanizes exists for individuals and families as destitution, which is an exclusion from the basic needs of life. In the past few years the poverty rate of the country has hovered at over 20% according to the National Statistics Coordinating Board (NSCB). This means that one in every five Filipinos are in households earning less than the level of income needed for a family to meet its minimum food and non-food requirements. While the poverty rate has gone down from its peak of 29.7% in the early 90s, having such a huge segment of our population living in such abject poverty is an unacceptable scandal. These official figures are further enhanced by the real life perceptions of people. In its survey on poverty for the last quarter of 2013, the Social Weather Stations (SWS) reports that 55% of respondents actually consider themselves poor, up from 50% the previous quarter. Clearly, many people see themselves as being excluded from opportunities to live a decent life.

No to various faces of the Economy of Exclusion

On the societal level, the scandal of material poverty can be seen in various faces of the economy of exclusion.

Exclusion from gainful livelihood. The appalling poverty rate is aggravated by the exclusion of many Filipinos from opportunities for economic advancement. The latest Labor Force Survey pegs unemployment at 6.5% of the national workforce and, more tellingly, underemployment at 17.9% (the latter being the percentage of the workforce that is employed but looking for additional work).

Exclusion from sufficient shelter. Shelter is another basic right to which people are denied when poverty strikes. The Subdivision and Housing Developers’ Association has estimated that the housing shortfall between 2001 to 2011 has reached 3.93 million units. The estimates
of informal settlers alone run from anywhere between 1 to 3 million households, not counting those rendered homeless by recent natural and man-made calamities.

Exclusion from rural development. Centuries of inequitable land ownership, peace issues, and lack of livelihood opportunities have excluded poor rural folk from genuine progress, driving them into the cities in search of a better life. Sadly, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER) is set to expire this June 2014, with land acquisition and distribution targets still unmet.

Exclusion from adequate health care. The poor, who can avail of health care at only public hospitals and local government health centers, are at risk of being further excluded from access to basic health care with the proposed privatization of leading public health institutions such as the Dr. Jose Fabella Memorial Hospital and the National Orthopedic Hospital. Especially vulnerable are children and the elderly, unless government continues to aspire for the ideal of “universal health coverage.”

Exclusion from quality education. While we have had good progress in battling illiteracy, further improvements can be made. The International Labor Organization reports that, in 2010 to 2012, out of every ten grade 1 pupils six finish elementary school and only four are able to finish high school. Overcrowding in schools, large classroom sizes, and double to triple shifts are chronic problems in basic and secondary education. Quality higher education, in particular, is an elusive dream for many. Our Catholic schools in the rural areas continue to suffer from the departure of our well trained teachers in the pursuit of higher monetary gain.

Other faces of poverty. The foregoing are some of the most familiar faces of poverty, but other aspects of poverty also cause concern. In the aftermath of typhoons, droughts, and earthquakes, it is poor Filipinos who are most profoundly affected and further excluded from a decent life. Despite recent progress in the peace accords between the MILF and the Philippine Government, the ravages of war (as seen in the MNLF Zamboanga incursion and the long standing NPA rebellion) continue to affect the poorest who are often caught in the crossfire. The destruction of the environment due to illegal logging and both large and small scale mining disadvantage the poor, especially our indigenous communities, who are often excluded from the benefits of such economic activities. We suffer from ecological poverty due to our neglect of the gifts of creation entrusted to us by God.

No to Consumerism
On the level of a global ethos, the scandal of material poverty shows itself in the ever-growing influence of consumerism. Pope Francis laments that “The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet voracious heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience” (EG 2). In the end, such poverty leads to a self-inflicted emptiness.

No to Moral Destitution
In the moral dimension, poverty can be debilitating on the same three levels. Individually, one can experience dehumanizing poverty as a slavery to vice or sin. “How much pain is caused in families because one of their members—often a young person—is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography! How many people no longer see meaning in life or prospects for the future, how many have lost hope! And how many are plunged into this destitution by unjust social conditions, by unemployment, which takes away their dignity as breadwinners, and by lack of equal access to education and health care. In such cases, moral destitution can be considered impending suicide.”

On the societal level, moral poverty confronts us everywhere as the malady of corruption. As we have written repeatedly, “We face today a crisis of truth and the pervading cancer of corruption. We must seek the truth and we must restore integrity.” More recently, on the pork barrel issue, we renewed the call for vigilance and self-critique. “Our protests should not just emanate from the bad feeling that we have been personally or communally transgressed, violated or duped. It should come rather from the realization that God has been offended and we have become less holy as a people because of this…. We are not just victims of a corrupt system. We have all, in one way or another, contributed to this worsening social cancer—through our indifferent silence or through our cooperation when we were benefiting from the sweet cake of graft and corruption.”

Most widely, as a global ethos, we experience moral destitution as inequality. We see this in the critique of capitalism that Pope Francis makes: “In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting” (EG, 54).

No to Spiritual Destitution
Material destitution constitutes a scandal. Moral destitution frustrates our striving to respond to God’s call of love. But spiritual destitution is the form of poverty that threatens the core of our relationship with God. Individually, we experience it as loneliness and hopelessness. Mother Teresa declares from her vast experience of being among the poorest of the poor that “the most terrible poverty
is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.” Moreover, she is convinced: “We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love… The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty—it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There’s a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”

Then, as a society, we see this poverty in religious intolerance. The Pope has spoken out adamantly against it, which exists even within the Church: “The Lord created us in His image and likeness, and we are the image of the Lord, and He does good and all of us have this commandment at heart: do good and do not do evil. All of us. ‘But, Father, this [person] is not Catholic! He cannot do good,’ Yes, he can. He must. Not can: must! Because he has this commandment within him.… [T] his ‘closing off’ that imagines that those outside…cannot do good is a wall that leads to war and…killing in the name of God… [which] is blasphemy.”

Globally, spiritual destitution appears as relativism and the loss of a sense of transcendence. According to Pope Francis, “It is the spiritual poverty of our time, which afflicts the so-called richer countries particularly seriously. It…makes everyone his own criterion and endangers the coexistence of peoples.… There cannot be true peace if everyone is his own criterion, if everyone can always claim exclusively his own rights, without at the same time caring for the good of others, of everyone, on the basis of the nature that unites every human being on this earth.”

Poverty that Humanizes and Sanctifies

Poverty that degrades and dehumanizes is all around us. One can be disheartened by all this especially in the midst of struggling against it. However, the Christian believes that “the Gospel is the real antidote to spiritual destitution.” Pope Francis precisely encourages the faithful to affirm “that God is greater than our sinfulness, that he freely loves us at all times and that we were made for communion and eternal life.” In the great wisdom that only God possesses, the Gospel proclaims that Jesus resoundingly defeats this poverty by practicing another kind of poverty, namely, the poverty that humanizes or makes one fully human, the poverty that sanctifies or conforms one to his own likeness. This life-giving poverty also has material, moral, and spiritual forms.

Yes to Simplicity, Commitment, and Surrender to God

Material poverty that humanizes and sanctifies is experienced in simplicity of life. Not all are called to choose a life of actual poverty. Many among the laity, the clergy, and the religious do so admirably, whether as individuals or in community, and as a result give a powerful witness to the Gospel. However, all are called to live lives that are marked by a consistent and liberating detachment from such worldly goods as material possessions, resources, power, and social status—a detachment that allows us to be sensitive and to respond to those with less possessions, less resources, less power, lower status.

Such a readiness and ability to respond to those in need finds a stable expression in the moral poverty of a commitment to the Good, the Just, and the True. It is a sustained yearning to participate in the establishment of the Kingdom manifested in concrete decisions and patterns of behavior that always look beyond the private realm of self and family toward the public world of neighbor and society. It is the natural consequence of professing a faith in a God who identifies with the little ones. After all, “how does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 Jn 3:17).

Finally, humanizing and sanctifying poverty endures in its spiritual form as surrender to God (Ps 9:10, Prov. 3:5-6). According to PCP II, to be a Church of the Poor means “a Church that embraces and practices the evangelical spirit of poverty, which combines detachment from possessions with a profound trust in God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 Jn 3:17).

Christ’s Invitation, especially to the Laity

This Lenten season, Christ invites all, but especially the laity, to oppose degrading and dehumanizing poverty and to embrace humanizing and sanctifying poverty. In other words, he invites us to imitate his example. We fight poverty with poverty only because Christ has shown us the way. “Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members” (EG, 186). Much more needs to be done in translating this faith into effective action, in achieving “a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors,” which in the mind of Pope Francis is where the Church relies on the laity (EG 102).

Particularly, we are invited to practice material poverty by taking up a simple lifestyle and works of mercy and justice that attend to the poor and aim for an economy of inclusion, for what the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen calls “total human development.” We are to exercise moral poverty by strengthening our resolve to practice solidarity with the neglected and to denounce injustice and all forms of radical inequality. We are to embrace spiritual poverty by deepening our rootedness in Christ, whose poverty alone enriches us. “Let us not forget.” Pope Francis insists, “that real poverty hurts… I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.” At the same time, “We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted” (EG 279).

May the Lord bless your Lenten observance and send you forth with love and joy.

May Mary, Mother of the Poor show you the way to the heart of Jesus, our pearl of great price!

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, March 5, 2014

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent

+SOCRATES B. VILLELAGAS

Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan

President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines

Francis, Meeting with Students of Jesuit Schools, Q & A, June 7, 2013.


Francis, Lenten Message, 2014.

CBCP, Pastoral Statement, Seeking the Truth, Restoring Integrity, February 28, 2008.


Mother Teresa, A Simple Path: Mother Teresa, 1995.

Francis, Homily at Mass in Domus Sanctae Martae on the feast of Santa Rita, quoted by Vatican Radio, May 22, 2013.

Francis, Audience with the Diplomatic Corps, March 22, 2013.

Francis, Lenten Message, 2014.

'At EDSA love of God and love of country came together'

( Homily delivered by Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop and CBCP President Socrates B. Villegas at the 28th anniversary of EDSA People Power Revolution on February 25, 2014 at Our Lady of EDSA Shrine.)

EDSA People Power is 28 years old and so is my priesthood. I am 28 years old as a priest. I am as old as EDSA People Power. When the Church sent me to Bataan each time I looked back at EDSA, I looked back at EDSA with gratitude, with happiness, with joy, and with pride. And now in Dagupan I still remember EDSA People Power with so much fondness and someday when I’m old and weakly I will sit down and write my memories about EDSA 1986. But I have mixed feelings today. On one side I am happy and grateful to remember, but on the other side I am sad and lonely and I ask myself, “is this all that is left?” After 28 years is this all that we can gather to thank the Lord for an event that made Filipinos 10 feet tall in the family of nations. I cannot resist returning to the Gospel, and returning to the question of the Lord after he cured 10 lepers and only one returned, and said, “Where are the other nine?” But I am not here to accuse you. I am not here to contaminate you with my sadness and loneliness. I am here to bring you joy, the joy of the Gospel, the joy of the Lord.

So with remnants like us and a bishop coming down from the north to be with you and to celebrate and to make sure that the EDSA spirit is not forgotten, then I ask myself, “What is EDSA about?” The celebration of the EDSA anniversary has taken many faces, it has taken many forms. For some people, they celebrate it on the 22nd of February, the focus is the military. For some people they celebrate it on February 25, evening, because that was the time when the former president fled. For some people it is noontime of February 25 because that was the time when the first Lady President took her oath. For some people it is salubungan; for some people it is confetti. For some people it is picnic. For some people it is being offered a boiled corn by a beggar. What is EDSA really about?

Brothers and sisters you can approach EDSA from any angle but just don’t forget one component. You cannot tell and retell the story of EDSA without God. You can tell the story of Cardinal Sin but do not forget that he was first man of God and the Church before being a man of the streets. You can tell the story of the military, of the businessmen, of the professionals, of the soldiers, of the nuns, but please remember all the time, that the soldiers, the nuns, the businessmen, politicians, cardinals, bishops and priests, all of them will be nothing if God did not walk with us on this hallowed ground in 1986. Sometimes we forget, and sometimes we claim the honor that belongs to God as our own.

Tita Cory has passed on to eternal life and so has Cardinal Sin, and so has many EDSA heroes, but my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how you retell the story of EDSA, I plead with you on your knees, do not forget the rosaries you prayed; do not forget the image of Our Lady of the Immaculate Heart that we put on top of tanks. Do not forget the bibles that we read. Do not forget the concrete pavements that we knelt on, into midnight, into the morning, praying the rosary for deliverance from slavery. There can be no EDSA story without God. But it seems God is so used to being set aside. Even if we set him aside he continues to bless us, it seems. But our country, our government cannot move on if it continues to ignore God. I am not even talking about Church. I am just talking about God. Muslim or Protestant, Buddhist or Hindu, Christian, Iglesia ni Kristo, whatever, we must always remember that our lives are in the hands of God.

But what did we do in EDSA 1986 that made it so extraordinary? It is this. Our faith in God got married with our love for country. At EDSA love of God and love of country came together. That love of country is not alien to somebody who follows the Lord. And love of country would be empty unless it is grounded on the love of God. Through the years after EDSA 1986, the spirit has been manipulated, abused, raped, prostituted. But we must always return to it. EDSA was a gift from God and it will always be so. Can we do it all over again? I don’t know. Do we have to do it all over again? I hope not because 20 years of dictatorship and four days of EDSA should be more than enough for us never to repeat the mistakes of history. Shall we live it again? God forbid no more because if we have to do it again it will only mean we have not learned our lesson. Cardinal Sin used to say, tongue in cheek, “to err is human; to forgive is divine; but to repeat is stupid.”

Let us allow EDSA to make us wiser. Let us allow EDSA to keep us vigilant. In EDSA 1986 we told the whole world, God is with us. At EDSA 2014 the question I throw to you is, “Are you still with God?” The issue is not God is with us. The issue is: Are with God or have we strayed from the path of God.

I will return to Dagupan but I leave with you one request. Please take care of this hallowed ground. This church, this place minus Megamall, minus Robinsons Galleria, this place is sacred. Please take care of it. Even if you are only one of the ten lepers who would thank the Lord, take care of it nevertheless. Even if you are only a handful remnant remembering our moment of glory, stand on this holy ground nevertheless. You know why I asked Father Nilo for permission to say Mass tonight? It is because I need the spirit of EDSA. I will return to Dagupan strengthened, invigorated, energized because this church is special; this hallowed ground will always remain holy. Take care of it, against all odds. And please tell your children and your children’s children that EDSA is holy and it is people that will keep it holy, and that is you.

If they want to celebrate EDSA in Cebu; if they want to celebrate EDSA in Baguio; if they want to celebrate EDSA in Mindanao, let it be. But for you, EDSA Shrine community, stand on this ground because here on this ground, you and I and God had a brief loving encounter for four days and history cannot be changed anymore. On this hallowed ground, for four sacred days the Blessed Virgin Mary walked with us; the Lord of Peace walked with us. Keep it sacred, no matter where you go, because here you will always find the living God.
**Hardness of heart, source of discord**

It was not long after the national elections. People were rejoicing for the choice of a new President, especially so on the occasion of this inauguration accompanied by a promising speech with many promising resolves for a promising tomorrow for the country. Not long after, the first challenging event in three chapters took place: Luneta Hostage Crisis which became the Luneta Hostage Massacre which became the Luneta Hostage Shame. Practically the whole world, watched the deadly event through its well televised coverage from beginning to end. Such was especially true in Hong Kong because the victims of the disgusting episode from beginning to end were young and elderly tourists there from. They came to the Philippines for joy and relaxation, anticipating pleasant times and memorable experience. But what took place was exactly the opposite: Their tourist bus was hijacked and then brought to Luneta. It began with but one gun drawn by one man. Later on, many guns were drawn by many men. Much later, one gun was fired and some tourists were killed. Not much later, many guns were fired and practically all tourists were killed. The bus was even burned. The remains of the tourists were later on flown back to Hong Kong. Happy they left their homes. Dead they returned thereto.

It was no secret at all that the policemen concerned bungled their task, demonstrated their helplessness—not to mention their ignorance on how to do their job in such a precarious situation. So it was that instead of bringing the Hong Kong tourists to safety, these instead suffered from senseless and cruel deaths.

A day or so after, the President accompanied by a Department Secretary went to Luneta to visit the burned tourist bus. With his typical smile, he looked at the wreckage—and then went back to Palace. And that was it.

No sorrow was seen. No pity was expressed. No “sorry” was said. And thus it is to this date. No sorrow felt for the long and intense suffering of the helpless tourists. No sorrow was expressed for the innocent and defenseless tourists killed with neither remorse nor mercy. No sorrow mentioned to the loving and grieving relatives the tourists left behind. No sorrow extended to their government committed to the welfare and safety of the citizens.

So it is that a distinct hardness of heart is exhibited. So is that such is now the source of progressive discord. So it is that thousands of OFWs in Hong Kong are worried about their future. When his underlings commit a gross and moral blunder, it is not but right and proper for their leader to say “Sorry!” There is a whale of difference between propriety and insensitivity, between reality and delusion.

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**The old normal**

Time and again, there are people who speak and/or write about the "New Normal" probably to mean the adoption of new values, the observance of new behavioral patterns in the passage of time from then to now. There is the "New Normal" about how the means justify the end, how one adores his or her ego, how certain individuals think and feel that people do not really matter. There is also the "New Normal" that marital infidelity is the rule, that children should not be born. The same "New Normal" has something to do with the stance that what is profitable is right, what is altruistic is silly. In other words, the "New Normal" seems relevant to nowadays errant action and reaction patterns—improprieties, blunders, character flaws—that have now become standard.

Whatever the said "New Normal" really is, it might not be altogether wrong to talk about the "Old Normal" concretely in the Philippine scene, viz., certain realities that remain odious, some actuations that are still detestable but still around up to these days—all excuses and arguments to the contrary notwithstanding. Most of such "Old Normal" are socio-political factors that have been plaguing the Filipinos in the past and they remain as such in the present. These are realities that are odious to call attention to. But as rightly said: "Truth knows no party." This is something great about the truth, viz., it respects neither power nor wealth, it covers both the past and the present—irrespective of whether those involved therein would want to think, to affirm or to disclaim.

Following are some of the more known and more pervasive "Old Normal" which reigned in the recent past and which continues to rule in the present times. They are hereunder expressly enumerated with malice towards none but with truth in mind:

- The quest for power plus the consequent wealth build-up specifically in the sphere of politics. This is to say nothing about the kingdom of political consanguinity. And as their standard accompaniments, there are still the ever present trio of the infamous guns, goons, and gold.

There was already the standard and predictable electoral manual cheating. Then came the amazing computerized election fraud. And as expected, those who happen to successfully cheat in the elections, are experts in converting public office into self-service.

Who does not know that graft and corrupt practices are constitutive elements of infamous politicos from the local to the regional up to the national levels—such that there is now firmly established BOC or Bureau of Corruption? Just to seal this reality of the "Old Normal," there is something worthy of special mention: The long standing Hacienda Luisita spectacle!
Some kind of a preamble though simple and brief is in order to better situate a gross socio-economic malady long since notoriously existing in this country. On one hand, there are the farmers tirelessly tilling the land—toiling hard and sweating much while suffering from destitution and despair. On the other hand, there are the landowners—enjoying the fruits of the long and tedious labor of farmers and thereby living in boundless opulence and consummate comfort. In other words, while certain landowner dynasties act with delirious ease and live in enormous opulence, there are thousands of farmers who live in abject poverty and depressing uncertainty. Behold the long-lasting utter contradiction: Wealthy hacienderos and impoverished farmers. Gloating farm owners and lamenting farm workers. Haughty landlords and abused land tillers. This atrocious phenomenon has been long existent and firmly established in this suppos-
edly “Land of the Morning” and/or “Bayang Magiliw.” Is this really the land where the morning sun tenderly shines for everyone—or only for a chosen few? Is this really the country that is not only lovely but also lovable for everybody or merely for some privileged and selected clans? Is this really the land where there is “More Fun”—precisely when “Planting rice is never fun”?

It is not only depressing but also revolting when landlords are worshipped by landless farmers who do the planting, attend to the caring and doing the harvesting of their farm products—with them thereafter having barely enough to eat and less to live by. No wonder then that a past matriarchal government vowed to remedy such a gross agrarian social malady. No wonder then that the so-called “Agrarian Reform Program” was made as the centerpiece of the priority agenda of the same government. But surprise, surprise! The said government came and disappeared. The Program was said to have been acted upon and even extended to cover the agenda of present government.

But there are hitches along the way: First, the past matriarchal government belonged to a formidable haciendero dynasty. Second, the now existing reality wherefore is that there is more than a million hectares of prime agricultural areas that prove immune to the same program. Third, the present bachelor government—a direct descendant of the matriarchal one—is a direct heir of infamous “Hacienda Luisita” that occasioned the bloody “Mendiola Massacre,” not to mention the lamentable Tarlac killings, not to say the loss of no less than a chief judicial office for a final and executor judgment dissolving the sacrosanct “Hacienda.”

There are brewing moves among farmers who are merely insisting in having what is theirs according to law based on truth that is productive of justice and causative of peace. The dissolution of certain haciendas? Perhaps! The distribution of “Hacienda Luisita?” Well, good luck! Or it is next time—after 2016?
Barefoot and dirty, the girl just sat and watched the people go by. She never tried to speak, she never said a word. Many people passed, but never did one person stop.

Just so happens the next day I decided to go back to the park, curious if the little girl would still be there.

Right in the very spot where she was the day before, she sat perched on high, with the saddest look in her eyes. Today I was to make my own move and walk over to the little girl. As we all know a park full of strange people is not a place for young children to play.

As I began walking towards her I could see the back of the little girl’s dress indicated a deformity. I figured that was the reason the people just passed by and made no effort to help. As I got closer, the little girl slightly lowered her eyes to avoid my intent stare. I could see the shape of her back more clearly. It was grotesquely shaped in a humped over form. I smiled to let her know it was okay, I was there to help, to talk.

I sat down beside her and opened with a simple “Hello”. The little girl acted shocked and stammered a “Hi” after a long stare into my eyes. I smiled and she shyly smiled back. We talked until darkness fell and the park was completely empty. Everyone was gone and we were alone. I asked the girl why she was so sad. The little girl looked at me and with a sad face, said, “Because I’m different.”

I immediately said “that you are!” and smiled. The little girl acted even sadder, she said, “I know.”

“Little girl,” I said, “you remind me of an angel.”

She stood to her feet, and said, “Really?”

“Yes, ma’am, you’re like a little guardian angel sent to watch over all those people walking by.”

She nodded her head yes and smiled, and with that she spread her wings and said with a twinkle in her eye, “I am.”

I was speechless, sure I was seeing things. She said, “And since you thought of someone other than yourself, my job here is done.”

Immediately I stood to my feet and said, “Wait, so why did no one stop to help an angel?”

She looked at me and smiled, “You’re the only one who could see me, and you believe it in your heart.” And she was gone. And with that my life was changed dramatically.

So, when you think you’re all you have, remember, there is an angel always watching over you.
Gospel of God’s Grace
Sunday Reflections Cycle A

THIS book is a compilation of Gospel reflections written by the priests and perpetual professed members of the Society of St. Paul. The reflections were written by the contributors between 2010 and 2014, two significant dates in the life of the Institute. The SSP marked in 2010 their 75 years as a province in the Philippines and Macau, while 2014 celebrates their 100 years of foundation as a congregation. This collective effort is a celebration of God’s grace and faithfulness. As mentioned in the book’s presentation page, the Gospel reflection “is not just a communication of the rich exegesis behind the texts”… but “a storytelling on how the message of the text has truly been a life-experience and faith-experience for the Pauline priest or brother.”

Something Happened on My Way to Happy Ever After
Rissa Singson Kawpeng

SHORT, brief, entertaining, but profound in its message. This inspirational book is a collection of articles that were published in the editor’s column of Kerygma Magazine where the author is the editor-in-chief. In this collection, the writer shares with her readers the struggles and challenges that she has had to face first as a single lady and later on as a married woman. Matter of fact and simply presented, the true to life stories are bursting with lessons that readers can learn from and apply in their lives. The author has also written other volumes, including Confessions of an Impatient Bride, Discover Your Inner Beauty Queen, Oh, God, I’m Still Single, and Love Handles: How to Find and Date Your Lifetime Love.

Easing the Pains of Battle
Spare Families from Court Cases. Mediate!
Maria Gracia de V. Rinoza-Plazo

THE ever-changing lifestyles of modern families nowadays have given more reasons for family members to fight each other. Accusation of infidelity and abuse between husband and wife, fight over inheritance among children, a father’s failure to provide support for his children—these are just some cases that threaten to destroy a family and to which family court judges are challenged to deal with while balancing “stoic logic with a touch of compassion.” The author, who in her own words, describes herself as “a lawyer who doesn’t like to sue”, would rather mediate and help her warring clients to come into an agreement out of court. This book deals with true stories of men and women, children and parents who at one time or another have been involved in family disputes and needed mediation to settle their differences amicably.

Solace in Suffering
Wisdom from Thomas à Kempis
Edited by Sr. Mary Lea Hill, FSP

IN this season of Lent, a good book on the topic of suffering helps one to get a profound new insight on the value of pain and other physical inconveniences that modern life offers us. This book which is a collection of excerpts from the classic Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis shows us how “to relate our pain and hardships to those experienced by Jesus.” Life’s difficulties, be it caused by suffering from sickness, injustices or inequality, become meaningful and meritorious if seen through the eyes of Christ and borne with him. With this disposition, one finds meaning in suffering, something that is too real in our lives, but the spiritual value of which we often take for granted.
B
ased on the book by Robert M. Edsel and Bret
Witter published in 2009
and entitled Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Great-
est Treasure Hunt in History,
The Monuments Men opens
with Adolf Hitler building the
grand Fuhrer Museum to be
filled with great art works
stolen from all over Europe
by the Nazi soldiers. Hitler
has, however, issued orders
to destroy everything should
the Reich fall and he die. To
find and retrieve the stolen
art works and return them
to their rightful owners, Har-
vard professor Frank Stokes
(George Clooney) recruits a
team of seven men, most of
whom are past their prime with
hardly any preparation for a
mission that will them expose
to real war. His team includes
medievalist James Granger
(Matt Damon), architect
Richard Campbell (Bill Mur-
ray), sculptor Walter Garfield
(John Goodman), Jewish art
dealer Jean Claude Clermont
(Jean Dujardin), British scholar
Donald Jeffries (Hugh Bonn-
eville), Preston Savitz (Bob
Balaban), and a young Ger-
man-speaking recruit, Sam
Epstein (Dimitri Leonidas). A
woman, Claire Simone (Cate
Blanchett), helps out the team,
since as a former secretary of a
high ranking Nazi officer, it was
her job to log the whereabouts
of the stolen artworks.

The title The Monuments
Men is the pet name of Army’s
Monuments, Fine Arts, and
Archives Program, a group
of art historians and experts
formed in 1943 to trace and
rescue the cultural treasures
stolen and stashed away by the
Nazis during their oc-
cupation of most of Europe.
It is said that in reality there
were 350 “monuments men”.
The film’s main attraction is
naturally its visual contents,
and it must be said that in this
department, The Monuments
Men has redeemed itself with
the exquisite reproductions
of great art. They appear so
real that it won’t be a surprise
to hear the audience gasp in
horror as the paintings are
torched by Hitler’s troops.
While the art works look real,
the story lacks dramatic mo-
mentum due to its episodic
 treatment which prevents the
narrative from cohering and
the characters from growing
into the flesh and blood men
who in reality had great pride
in their mission.

The Monuments Men is
refreshing in that, at the end
of the day the viewer realizes
it is a war film that is not fo-
cused on blood and violence,
not on destruction of human
lives, but on the preservation
of the life of a civilization. The
moral question may be, Is it
worth risking your life to save
art works? The film takes the
viewer by the hand and pos-
es another equally important
question: Why are art works
so important? Works of art not
only reflect the artists’ percep-
tion of their reality but also
mirror an entire civilization’s
state of soul. Paintings and
sculptures are in themselves
teachers of history. Towards
the end of the film children
of the current generation are
shown viewing the artworks
restored to their rightful places
in the museum. CINEMA
asks, on the side, if the film’s
focus on two works of art—a
multi-paneled painting carted
away from a Belgian cathedral
(which majestically opens the
movie), and a Michelangelo
sculpture of Mary and the child
Jesus (which would demand
the life of one of the mono-
ments men protecting it)—is
actually a veiled statement
about the value and indelible
presence of Christianity in the
development of civilization in
Europe? It will be
remembered that some years
back there began a move to
erase Christianity from history
books, to which Blessed Pope
John Paul II remarked that if
Christianity were removed
from European civilization,
then nothing would remain.
MISSION of all the baptized. "The papers is a "basic Christian vocation," and the title indicates that "to be a catechist" told CNA March 7. He said the book's being a catechists today," Fr. Choondal explained. "The papers explore the dimensions of a role, and formation of catechists," he provided a new emphasis on the identity, role, and formation of catechists," he explained. (CNA)

THAILAND. Korean Masses strengthen migrant community in Thailand

Last February’s introduction of Sunday Masses celebrated in Korean at a parish in the Thai city of Pattaya has united both emigrants and tourists from South Korea. “This regular Korean language Mass unites, strengthens, and revitalizes faith life in the parish,” Fr. Giovanni Lee Sung-hyun, chaplain at St. Nikolaus parish in Pattaya, about 80 miles southeast of Bangkok, told CNA Feb. 24. He added that the other sacraments are also offered in Korean, in response to a growing influx of Korean emigrant workers, as well as tourists, to the port city. "Understanding and interiorizing the Word of God is very important," Fr. Lee commented, adding that the Thai language is a major impediment for Koreans’ participation in the liturgy, which hinders their spiritual growth. Celebration of Mass in Korean makes for "a participatory church, and also connects to the nostalgia of Korean liturgy," added Fr. Lee. (CNA)

NORTH KOREA. Pyongyang reportedly detains Christian missionary

The North Korean government has allegedly detained a 75-year-old Christian missionary named John Short, possibly for distributing Christian pamphlets. "I know he’s courageous and he’s in God’s hands," Short’s wife Karen told The Associated Press. "I believe that at the right time that the right thing will happen and he will be released," she added, saying she had been “shocked” by her husband’s detention. Short reportedly had Korean-language Christian literature with him, and his wife said that could be the reason for his detention. “He knew North Korea was not a tourist destination but he cares about the people and he wants to help,” she told Agence France Presse. The Shorts, originally from Australia, are currently living in Hong Kong. (CNA)

MONGOLIA. Catechesis in Mongolia educates laity for evangelization

A new catechesis program of the Church in Mongolia is promoting holistic formation of the human person as part of the evangelization of the central Asian nation. “The course … is meant to form catechists with a working knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as the Church and its mission,” Fr. Giorgio Marengo of the Consolata Missionaries, told CNA March 5. The Prefecture Apostolic of Ulaanbaatar, which serves the entire country, has recently established a two-year long course in catechetical formation, giving a fundamental formation in theology and the life of the Church. The formation program began in September; Fr. Marengo said it began with Christ’s life and the significance of the Paschal mystery, and is currently discussing the sacraments. (CNA)

SOUTH KOREA. Pope will meet Asian youths in August

Pope Francis will travel to South Korea in August for Asian Youth Day and to preside over the beatification of a large group of Korean martyrs, the Vatican spokesman said. The pope will leave Rome Aug. 13 and fly to South Korea, staying in the country Aug. 14-18, according to Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman. He said no other countries would be on the itinerary. The main point of the trip, Lombardi said, is to participate in the youth gathering Aug. 13-17 in Daejeon, South Korea. The theme of Asian Youth Day is "Asian youth, wake up! The glory of the martyrs shines on you." Sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, the gathering is expected to draw delegates from 30 countries. Lombardi said Pope Francis also will visit South Korea’s capital, Seoul, and meet President Park Geun-hye. (CNS)

EGYPT. Are Egypt's Christians persecuted? Copts' answers vary

Egypt’s minority Christians have various opinions regarding claims that they are being persecuted in their predominantly Muslim country. In separate interviews with Catholic News Service, Copts — the name for Egypt’s indigenous Christians — agreed that their nation was facing major difficulties, including turmoil and violence, which had touched their personal lives in some way. Most of 12 interviewees, from a variety of professional and educational backgrounds, expressed similar concerns that Coptic immigration to the West was endangering the community’s historic presence in the North African country, where Christians make up about 10 percent of an estimated 85 million people and constitute the Middle East’s largest Christian minority. But they offered different views over whether they thought they were being targeted for their faith and, if so, over whether the situation was worse now than it has been in the past. "There have always been difficulties," said Fr. Kamil William, professor of Old Testament at Cairo’s Faculty of Religious Sciences, which is run by Egypt’s Catholic patriarch and bishops. He refused to use the word "persecution," which he described as "a systematic ... institutionalized attempt to harm an ethnic group." (CNS)
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