Landmarking the Cultural Heritage of the Church: Highlights of the Holy See – Philippines Agreement
Quote in the Act

“When they got very sick and people could not look after them, they buried them.”

Margaret Marabe, a local activist in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea; claimed that people with AIDS were buried alive by their relatives when they became too sick to care for.

“This is a victory for the working class, the toiling peasants and the small traders involved with retail of agricultural products.”

Ashock Ghosh, a Forward Block leader allied with the Communist party of India; on the closure of an Indian supermarket chain in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh shortly after opening due to violent protests and appeal to the local government fearing that super markets would ruin the local farming sector and small-scale retail business.

“I am not gay.”

Larry E. Craig, incumbent Republican Senator from Idaho; after pleading guilty to misdemeanor charge of disorderly conduct when an undercover police officer accused him of soliciting sex in June in a Minneapolis airport restroom.

“The real question for Republicans in Washington is how low you can go, because we are approaching a level of ridiculousness.”

Scott Reed, a Republican strategist; after a string of sex scandals following Mark Foley of Florida, Jack Abramoff and Senator David Vitter, all of the Republican breed.

“The Philippines is willing to give him assistance but he doesn’t believe in the government so what can we do?”

Rafael Seguis, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary; on giving assistance to Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria Sison who was indicted in The Hague for multiple murder chargers.

“But we’ve gone past that era of impeachment. We’re not after impeaching her. Personally, I’d just want to have closure on this issue. We’re not really after the necks of anybody.”

Panfilo Lacson, Senator, on the recent move of the Philippine Senate to reinvestigate the “Hello Garci” issue after his presentation of a new videotape of retired Air Force T/Sgt. Vidal Doble, who confessed to have listened to a telephone conversation between Mrs. Arroyo and election officer Virgilio Garcillano who allegedly rigged the result of the 2004 presidential elections.
TERRORISM is ideological. It is pursued for reasons of politics, religion or both. Which is why acts of terrorism are always justified, because politics and religion justifies—or so it is understood and made so by those enclaved in it.

Banditry is not terrorism. When an ideologue is reduced to banditry, it becomes defrocked of its reason for being, and, hence, of its self-attributed dignity and justification.

The Abu Sayyaf is banditry pure and simple. Given its track record it cannot claim to be pursuing the ends of religion or politics. Even a hardened terrorist will vomit at the modus operandi of this band of bandits who moves according to the rewards of money and not by the dictates of power or a pie in the sky by and by.

Earlier reports have it—and not without solid basis—that the Abu group negotiates for the highest bidder, divides the spoils with their protectors, and pledges allegiance to their sponsors, in much the same way that Kuratong Baleleng did in the 90s. It follows a code of ethics common and valid only to the underworld.

Classifying the Abu with the MILF or the CPP is like classifying a dog with its manure. Be that as it may, but it has earned the Abu a special treatment of an all-out-war from the Philippine government, no less. Now it’s a war between the best generals trained at the Philippine Military Academy and street thugs who should be laughing by now for meriting a good attention. It is not so unlike waging war with a chicken dung, courtesy of the bright boys of Malacañang’s war room.

But what do you expect of the military, much less of this government? At least a short episode with the Abus will be a breather from the “inspired” extra-judicial killings and disappearances. Besides, an all-out-war has bigger budget than, say, abductions or making militants (and some election returns) disappear.

This issue opens with Gemma Rita Marin’s “The Impact of Microfinance in the Philippines.” Poverty alleviation and the empowerment of the poor begin with micro-enterprise not with mega-investments that habitually allure salivating crocodiles of corruption.

Our cover story is written by Fr. Milan Ted D. Torralba, “Landmarking the Cultural Heritage of the Church: Highlights of the Holy See — Philippines Agreement,” is a perspective from within. Which is why, there are issues on the cultural heritage of the Church that come as a surprise. Read on.
The Impact of Microfinance in the Philippines

By Gemma Rita R. Marin

There are many high points in the implementation of microfinance in the Philippines since the 1980s. The experiment of Nobel Peace Awardee Professor Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh to provide small, non-collateralized loans to women at affordable interest rates, famously called Grameen Bank, echoed in the Philippines in the late 1980s. Its first replicators were NGOs, the sector most exposed to the plight of the poor. Among the pioneers include Ahon sa Hirap, Inc., Tulay sa Pag-Unlad, Inc. (now known as TSPI Corporation) and Negros Women for Tomorrow Foundation. These NGO-MFIs offered a wide array of financial products and services. First was credit for productive purposes. The package included provisions for saving such as weekly savings which were kept safe by the microfinance institution (MFI) and could only be withdrawn upon the member’s disengagement from the group and the MFI.

The MFIs also came up with loan facilities for consumptive or providential use such as education loan, emergency loan, hospital bill reimbursement, scholarships and death benefit. Borrowers tended to divert the loan proceeds to pressing financial needs other than the project or stated purpose. On the part of the MFIs, it minimized the risk of unpaid obligations. Other more productive offerings were micro-insurance or mutual benefit association which mitigated the vulnerability of the poor clients. In 2003, housing loans, utility and housing-related credit such as providing solar power were initiated in line with improving the quality of life.

The Philippine government, in its determined fight against poverty, identified microfinance as its national strategy or approach for delivering financial services to the poor. This was concretized with the creation of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) in June 1998. Among its mandates were to develop and promote microfinance by establishing the People’s Development Trust Fund, strengthening the People’s Credit and Finance Corporation as the forerunner of microfinance services, and enjoining private and government financial institutions to open a special window for microfinance.

The following years saw the further entry of microfinance into the mainstream as the banking system began to recognize its responsibility to contribute to poverty alleviation. Through BSP Circular no.272, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas exempted microfinance from the rules and regulations on unsecured loans issued by the Monetary Board. It reversed its policy of prohibiting the opening of banks by allowing the establishment of new banks which were microfinance-oriented, led by the Opportunity Microfinance Bank (a thrift bank) based in Antipolo City. BSP Circular No. 273 also lifted the moratorium on branching for banks engaged in microfinance, and BSP Circular no.282 opened a rediscounting window for microfinance.

However, the achievements and milestones of microfinance in the country have mostly been confined to the level of the microfinance institution and too little on the beneficiary side.

Assessing the impact of microfinance in the lives of the poor

This prompted the International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions-Philippines (INAFI Philippines) and the Institute on Church and Social Issues (JJCICSI) to jointly undertake a research that would look into the impact or contributions of microfinance on the lives of the poor clientele. With funding support from Oikocredit and ICCO, the research team of INAFI and JJCICSI visited ten MFIs around the country, interviewed at least six client–and staff-key informants per MFI, and surveyed more than 300 client-respondents. The research was concluded last May, and its findings were presented in a forum with an audience of almost 50 people coming from the participating MFIs and representatives from the government, non-government and private sectors.

The research employed a framework that measured the extent to which microfinance institutions have achieved the objectives of poverty alleviation and empowerment (especially of the women), for the past ten years. On a scale of 1 to 4 with 4 as very much achieved and 1 as not achieved, key informants gave a score of almost 3.00 to both, indicating that they perceived the twin objectives as achieved. Between the two, however, poverty alleviation was slightly higher at 2.97 vis-à-vis...
empowerment’s rating of 2.83. When the client-respondents were asked an open-ended question as to the other benefits they enjoyed from availing themselves of microfinance services aside from better incomes and more assets, the responses still referred to aspects of poverty alleviation more than empowerment.

The impact of microfinance’s on poverty alleviation

Under poverty alleviation, the indicator on increase in access to financial services / reduced dependence on high-cost credit was seen as most attained at 3.22 while access to social services was lowest at 2.60. The client-survey respondents, numbering 317, confirmed this observation when 72 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they borrow less from the informal lenders. They recognized that the MFI has become a ready source of credit and financial services like savings and insurance. Top reasons for borrowing were
to acquire additional working capital (91 percent) and enjoy lower costs of borrowing (70 percent). Obtaining additional working capital ranked highest since most of the projects funded by the MFIs involved existing undertakings of the clients which were largely retail trading or vending.

As majority of the clients claimed their incomes increased (95 percent) albeit meager in amounts, the additional funds helped them finance the basic needs of the household such as food, clothing, water, electricity and other utilities. It also allowed them to accumulate assets (75 percent) such as TV and refrigerator, and access social services (61 percent), chiefly education. The income earned from the projects, however, was not enough to cover their health and housing needs, hence, the lower ratings registered by these services on the surveys. Any health, hospitalization or housing benefit gained was not derived from project earnings but usually came with the MFI package.

The impact of microfinance in empowerment (especially of the women)

Under empowerment, community involvement topped all other indicators at 3.03 while the increase in capacity in advocacy was least achieved at 2.53. Community members learned to socialize as 80 percent attended meetings and 55 percent participated in trainings. Many of the key informants and respondents confirmed that after their homes and the workplace, they spent most of their time in the weekly group meetings and community activities. They have become more vocal and expressive about their views, but their concerns remained micro. The clients were more interested in community concerns rather than in national or provincial-level issues. They also would rather concentrate on their businesses and the policies of the MFI governing their loan.

Interestingly, the indicator on technical and project skills enhancement was relatively low at 2.69. Notwithstanding the numerous skills trainings offered or referred by the MFIs to the clients, the latter failed to apply whatever learning was gained from the trainings due to uncertainties or unfamiliarity with the market and other risks. They preferred to stay with the usual trading business in which they have long engaged. While this has allowed them to earn steady income, the measly earnings were not enough to finance any expansion in the business, much less hire new hands or create new jobs as the microfinance program would have wanted it.

General character of microfinance in the country

The study is in the process of being put into final form. The open forum opened a venue for healthy exchange and discussion among the participants for clarification, inquiries and further analysis and enhancements of the study. Overall in the meantime, the study gathered that the general character of microfinance in the Philippines is to fund the additional working capital for the existing micro-businesses or projects of the poor clientele. Incomes earned have helped answer the daily household and school needs, but were not huge enough to cover the various social services. Skills have not been significantly improved to allow the clients to engage in businesses that would have meant more hired hands and greater incomes.

There is a lot more to be done in the microfinance industry for the benefit of the poor clientele. The MFIs are gearing up for Business Development Services (BDS) to open opportunities for diversified and more value-adding business, creation of new jobs, and higher incomes for many. Government, non-government and private sectors, both local and foreign, are willing to continue promoting or advocating for relevant policies backed up by adequate research. There is also a need to come up with a Social Performance Management System to prevent any mission drift, and to keep MFIs focused and attentive to the microfinance industry’s original objectives of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor.

(Gemma Rita R. Marin is a research associate of the Rural Development Desk of John J. Carroll Institute for Church and Social Issues.)
They have been called “the dirty seven.” It sounds like characters in a bad cowboy flick, but the label referred to the seven abandoned mines that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (D.E.N.R.) has prioritized for rehabilitation.

The tag seems less apt, however, for the places and communities that sustained damage from irresponsible mining, and more fitting instead for the companies that fled the social and environmental havoc they caused. These companies are enumerated in Table 1. The first six are ordered here according to the general risk ranking measured for the D.E.N.R. by the engineering consultancy group Tetra Tech EM Inc. in 2001. (The seventh was not part of the risk assessment and ranking.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Commodity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippine Pyrite Corp.</td>
<td>Bagacay, Hinabangan</td>
<td>pyrite, copper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palawan Quicksilver Mines</td>
<td>Tabubis, Puerto Princesa, Palawan</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basay Mining Corp.</td>
<td>Bgy. Maguindang, Basy, Negros Oriental</td>
<td>Copper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated Mines, Inc.</td>
<td>Ino and Capuyang, Magon, Marinduque</td>
<td>Copper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Mountain Inc.</td>
<td>Tuba, Benguet</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venet Exploration, Inc.</td>
<td>Tuba, Benguet</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Minolco Corp.</td>
<td>Atok, Kapangan and Kitungan, Benguet</td>
<td>Copper</td>
</tr>
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Topping the list, and the only one with rehabilitation funding in the pipeline, is the mine that the Philippine Pyrite Corporation (P.P.C.) abandoned in Bagacay, Western Samar in 1992. The area has since turned into a ghost town, as the local population dwindled when the main source of livelihood—the pyrite and copper mine—shut down due to pressures from an unfavorable international market for minerals, as well as a local labor dispute.

The P.P.C. is yet another illustrative case in which a mining company’s use of a mineral-rich site has not spun off other economic activities that would sustain the local community past the life of the mine.

It is just as well that the out-migration has happened, however, considering that the former mining area has very likely become rather too perilous for human habitation, regardless of the employment opportunities. Local concentrations of arsenic, lead, zinc, copper, cadmium and mercury were measured at high enough levels to threaten wildlife in and around the abandoned site, according to the Tetra Tech assessment of 2001. Metal contaminants have been found in sediments in various creeks that cut through the mine site before they drain into the Taft River in Eastern Samar, raising questions regarding the safety of local aquatic life. Local wildlife was also suspected of ingesting contaminated vegetation, as well as contaminated aquatic resources from the Taft River and its contributing creeks.

The 2005 assessment of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (M.G.B.) affirmed that there was continuing acid mine drainage (A.M.D.) with significant concentrations of iron, copper and zinc in Bagacay. As a result of A.M.D. build-up, the vicinity of the Bagacay mine remains devoid of vegetation and animal life. The M.G.B. also found that tailing dams, dilapidated mill structures and unstable mine pit slopes were in need of stabilization, and that they could be further releasing contaminants that are disturbed and carried off by water in times of heavy rainfall year after year. Excessive siltation continued to cloud portions of the Taft River as well, and was increasingly narrowing its contributing creeks.

Under prior laws governing its mining activities, P.P.C. never was and never will be under any obligation to do anything about this. Consequently, the Philippines’ tax payers are left holding the bag, as the country incurs loans to finance even the most preliminary steps towards the long-delayed clean-up work that should have been required of companies like P.P.C.

The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors approved last June 26, 2007 a US$57 million loan and grant that will fund the National Program Support for Environment and Natural Resources Management (NPSENRMP) for five years. A component of this fund especially targets the “development of full rehabilitation plans for abandoned mines,” as well as initial risk mitigation in the Bagacay site during the first year of funding. (See Box 1.)
This new loan and grant money will reportedly take around a three-month detour through the Department of Budget and Management, and could therefore be under the hands of the D.E.N.R. as early as October 2007. In the meantime, according to engineers at the M.G.B., the D.E.N.R. is preparing the Terms of Reference for the bidding process to select local contractors that could implement the Bagacay rehabilitation and remediation job with the M.G.B.

The fund will clearly focus mainly on planning and policy reform. Apart from the interim efforts in Bagacay, no actual rehabilitation and remediation work will be covered. After this project, the Philippine government will have to find a way of financing what it said was its target of rehabilitating seven abandoned mines.

Whether this will be done through another loan or through the allocation of part of future mining revenues, the money that would be spent to rehabilitate abandoned mines represents opportunity costs. By failing to require mines to provide assurances that they can pay for clean-ups, the Philippines’ policy makers, and the special interests that influenced them, have exposed Filipino taxpayers to burdensome debts and foregone gains. The task of prevention would have been much less costly than the work or remediation that now confronts this already cash-strapped country. These are resources that could have gone into education and health for the poor, and other measures for poverty alleviation, had there been sufficient foresight, integrity and cunning on the part of policy makers to hold mining companies accountable.

At the core of this difficulty is an intractable moral hazard. Governments and all actors outside mining companies do not have the ability to independently secure complete information regarding the repercussions of mining activities. Only mining companies are in the best position to do this. Yet, it runs completely against their interest to be transparent regarding what they should be held accountable for.

This moral hazard plagues environmental regulation in mining industries in different parts of the world. For instance, Robert Repetto, an economist at the University of Colorado, examined ten environment related hardrock mining events including spills and abandonment, involving mines that were run by publicly traded companies in the United States and elsewhere. All ten companies, he wrote in his 2004 report, knew of the risks and uncertainties that led to the events. All but one failed to fully disclose risks and liabilities to investors. It was not good for investor confidence, and not good for business, for a mining company to be accurate and forthcoming about any of its liabilities.

REFERENCES:


During its January 2007 Plenary Assembly, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a pastoral statement on agrarian reform. “The Dignity of the Rural Poor: A Gospel Concern” is an answered prayer of a long sought plea from the marginalized farmers.

The proclamation was like a breath of fresh air that beacons to the otherwise torment afflicting the rural poor. It is the fruition of peasants, PARRDS and the religious communities’ lobbying efforts within CBCP in raising agrarian concerns. A prophetic writing that reiterated God’s assurance, “Never will I leave you: Never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5)

That after all, truth is on the farmers’ side as the statement alludes to the “inequitable distribution of the nation’s wealth and the endemic social injustices that underpin that evil.” It also stressed that while the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was enacted two decades ago, the law nonetheless was “defective in the first place, emasculated in the very beginning in a landlord dominated Congress, and further watered down in its implementation.”

On the summary executions confronting our country today, the CBCP statement was explicit in condemning the “recent extra judicial killings perpetrated by groups from both the right and the left, of farmers whose only ‘crime’ is their continuing struggle for agrarian reform.” Such evil, the document recognized, contributes to the diminishment of the dignity of the rural poor and is a negation of Christian love and of God who is love.

Siding with the powerless farmers, it went on urging the present government: “We ask that the CARP, defective as it is, be finally completed next year (2008) as it has been targeted. And if not sufficiently implemented by then, the program should be further extended and funded more seriously and generously. But we ask that the law itself must be reviewed and improved.”

Peasants and farm workers now have something they could hold on to as the Church has avowed its salvific statement that went beyond the usual rhetoric. It went a step further by proposing the convening of a Second National Rural Congress so that the Church and its people, may reflect upon, “in true Gospel fidelity our present social concerns.”

The CBCP’s Second National Rural Congress: In True Gospel Fidelity for the Rural Poor

By Belinda Formanes

Towards the Second National Rural Congress

During the July 2007 CBCP Plenary Assembly, the CBCP reiterated that it was forty years ago when the Church in the Philippines convened a National Rural Congress (NRC) highlighting the call that ‘the church must go to the barrios.’ This involvement, according to His Excellency Angel N. Lagdameo, CBCP President, was concretized in the formation of diocesan social centers, rural cooperatives, advocacy groups for agrarian reform, and others.

For the Second National Rural Congress, the CBCP emphasized that the rural poor will do the “speaking themselves, the discerning, (and) the proposing of their...
own ideas, the planning of how we must as a people come together to work for the common good of the country and for ourselves.”

In this light, multi-tiered consultations are to be implemented by the bishops:

**Phase One**

To be implemented from July to November 2007 in two parallel tracks: the first group of Diocesan-level consultations to be organized by the Ad-Intra Secretariat—National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) and the Offices for the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and the Indigenous Peoples; the second group of Sub-Regional level Consultations to be conducted by the Ad-Extra Secretariat—Philippine Misereor Partnership (PMP), the Association of the Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) and the Rural Poor Solidarity (RPS), a coalition of non-government organizations and people’s organizations.

These consultations are mechanisms by which representatives of farmers, indigenous peoples and fisherfolks shall identify and analyze their priority issues and recommendations for presentation and prophetic action at the Diocesan levels and the NRC level.

**Phase Two**

To be implemented in the first quarter of 2008, the Second National Rural Congress shall discuss and collate the outcomes of the Diocesan and Sub-regional Consultations. The Congress itself may take two to three days.

Thinking that partnership with the rural poor need not end in the NRC, a post-NRC scenario of engagement with government, church, business, academia, etc. has been proposed to bring forward the most important outcomes of the Second NRC to pertinent agencies and other venues and stakeholders of rural development.

According to Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma, S. J., the actual schedule and conduct of the Diocesan, Sub-Regional and the Second National Rural Congress will likely be adjusted subject to decisions by the upcoming September 13, 2007 CBCP Permanent Council meeting.

On the helm of the entire process under the CBCP Plenary Assembly is the NRC Central Committee with Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma (Executive Chairman), Bishop Broderick Pabillo (Vice Chairman), Bishop Socrates Villegas, Bishop Sergio Utleg and Sr. Rosanne Mallillin, SPC (members).

The Central Committee is to be assisted by the Episcopal Advisory Council, which is composed of Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales (Luzon), Ricardo Cardinal Vidal (Visayas), Archbishop Orlando Quevedo (Mindanao), and Archbishop Angel Lagdameo (CBCP).

An auxiliary arm of the NRC-Central Committee will be composed of the CBCP Offices: Research (under Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma, SJ., Media (under Msgr. Pedro Quitorio, III) and the Secretariat (under Msgr. Juanito Figura).

The ad intra secretariat for the diocesan consultations on BECs includes: Sr. Rosanne Mallillin of CBCP-NASSA (Coordinator), Msgr. Elmer Abacahin of the CBCP-BEC Office; and a representative of the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples. The ad extra secretariat for Sub-regional consultations on rural issues are the following: Ms. Lourdes Cipriano of PMP (Coordinator), Fr. Jess Malit of AMRSP and Ms. Belinda Formanes of RPS.

A Board of Lay Consultants has likewise been convened to provide inputs and recommendations to the process and composed of the following: Former Comelec Commissioner Christian S. Monsod, FFF leader Leonardo Montemayor, Former Senator Bobby Tanada, and Ms. Mary Racelis of the Institute of Philippine Culture.

Research Institutes have likewise been convened to provide important academic and ground level studies support to the NRC processes. These include the following: ASI, ICSI, PARRDS, HDN, APPC, CSI, PDI, IBON, Philrights, CARRD, UP-SOLAIR, UST-SRC, and IPC-Ateneo de Manila.

The unusual excitement generated by the Second National Rural Congress ushers a newfound, or what others would call, a reawakened church—peasant/rural poor relationship. A kind of partnership that the rural poor is earnestly pinning their hopes ahead—to reclaim their dignity as human beings and be emancipated from the clutches of grinding poverty!
Hegazi Case: Islam’s Obsession with Conversions

by Samir Khalil Samir, SJ

The case has received a lot of public attention: a young Egyptian, Mohammad Ahmad Hegazi, age 25, converted to Christianity some years ago (some say 9, others 6 years ago; according to the Islamic version, it was just a few months ago!). He then married a woman named Zeinab, who also became Christian, taking the name Cristina. In recent months, he asked that his documents show his new religious affiliation. In Egypt, identity cards must indicate the holder’s religion and, so far, Hegazi’s is officially Islam. This means that he is considered to be Muslim for various legal questions pertaining to inheritance rights, family law, etc.

His request has effectively been turned down by administrative authorities, who did not see his request through. So, Hegazi went directly to the government. Why did he ask for this change to be made only now, years after his conversion? Perhaps because the couple is expecting a baby. And if they are registered as Muslims, the child will have to be as well, regardless of the parents’ wishes.

When administrative authorities balked at his request, Hegazi went to the courts to claim his rights, with the help of a lawyer from an NGO. The case is extremely important, more than it may appear, also because it has been reported by media around the world and now the press in Egypt is also discussing it. Initially, reactions came from imams, then from the general public. The vast majority is saying that Mohammad Hegazi must be killed as an apostate. Only a small part dares to quote the Koran—which states that “there is no compulsion in religion”—and states its support for his freedom.

Identity cards

The liberal world in Egypt has for decades been asking that religion be removed from official documents. The speci-
fication of religious affiliation serves only to allow discrimination—of non-Muslims, that is. I myself have experienced such discrimination many times and must say that, despite the promises of many politicians, religion is still indicated on identity cards. There are for example Catholic seminarians who, according to their identity card, are “Muslim.” Almost by default, newborns are registered as Muslim in public records. If one wants the registration changed, he is told that “it’s complicated” and that “there are advantages to being Muslim.” All this is not just a bureaucratic problem.

There is the desire, on the part of certain administrative offices, to use their position to “Islamize” Christians, or simply an aversion to making such a change. This aversion is not due however to the inefficiency of Egyptian bureaucracy. The proof is that, going the other way, there is never any difficulty in changing the identity card of a Christian who wants to become Muslim: this gets done right away! This is therefore a lobby and a tendency in the public administration to Islamize people, starting with their official documents. Something similar happens even in Turkey—the secular Turkey!—where it takes years to change one’s name to a Christian name, as a confrère tells me.

It’s a general phenomenon, aimed at Islamizing the greatest number of Christians possible (there are at least 7 million of them in Egypt. The documents of a family related to me, third generation Christians, still say they are “Muslim.” The children, who go to mass every Sunday, are registered as “Muslims.” This makes it difficult for them to marry Christians, and often in cases like this, people are forced to flee the country in order to be married in a Christian church. The problem is that this situation is upheld by the law.

Under Egyptian law, children “belong to the better religion”, i.e. Islam. That this is stated in a body of law explains the discrimination in question. For example, a Muslim woman does not have the right to marry a Christian man: since children belong to the father, their children would be “Christian.” Legislation as a whole is designed to Islamize. The consequences are also felt outside the Muslim world. In Italy, last year, there was the case of a Tunisian woman who wanted to marry an Italian man, a baptized Catholic but non-practicing. Italian laws required the woman to present a document from her country of origin showing that she is free to marry, which she sought from the Tunisian em-bassy. In reply, the Tunisian consulate asked for a document that shows that her fiancé is “Muslim”! And to think that Tunisia is one of the few “moderate” and highly secularized Muslim countries! Still today, the couple has not been able to marry due to the Tunisian consulates refusal to give the woman a document stating that she is free to marry.

A great debate has been underway in Egypt in past months over the case of 12 Christians: they formally converted to Islam to be able to divorce, obtaining a new identity card that shows their new religion right away. Immediately after, they declared themselves to be Christian again and asked to have their old ID card returned. It seems that the matter will take a positive turn for them and should be resolved favorably this September. As we can see, the “identity card” question has great political importance, and this explains the intensity of the debate underway in the Islamic world. It is in fact a step that should bring the state to a certain neutrality vis-à-vis religions.

The conversion obsession

The Islamic world is truly obsessed with conversions. At least 7 Islamic countries apply the death penalty to those who convert from Islam: Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Mauritania. But in other states, like Egypt, converts are condemned to prison, not as apostates but for contempt of Islam, as Hossam Bahgat, a member of the Egyptian Initiative for personal rights, explains.

According to government daily Al-Massa, all imams are unanimous on the need to kill the apostate Hegazi. They say that sharia (not the Koran) must be enforced and it calls for the death penalty. The more moderate say: if the apostate hides his conversion, does not broadcast his decision, then it is not necessary to kill him; he can live. If he lets it be known, then he causes scandal (fitna) and must die.

I happened to be looking through the web-site of the “Forum of Arab Aviation.” This case—Hegazi’s conversion—is the sole topic of the site’s “Islamic” section. There are 8 reactions registered on the page and they all say that he must be killed. Some are subtle, saying for example: “The government must take the harshest decision to eliminate this problem,” but all the others quote the Koran: “Fitna is worse than killing” (2,191 and 2,217); others say that “Islam is the better
Hegazi Case: Islam’s Obsession with Conversions

religion”; others still “Kill him to avoid *fitna*” (8,39); others: “He who wants a religion other than Islam, his worship will not be accepted and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers” (3,85).

No one quotes the Koranic phrase that affirms freedom of conscience, the one quoted by the Pope at Regensburg last September 12: “there is no compulsion in religion (2, 186); nor the other that says: “Truth comes from your Lord. Let him who will believe and let him who will not believe” (18,29). This was the case in dozens upon dozens of comments in numerous Islamic web-sites in the last week alone. Generally, for every 10 people who call for his death, there is just one who said: “I think that Hegazi should be free to choose.” Others say that, yes, the Koran has the verse that says “there is no compulsion...”, but it has been cancelled (*nusikha*) by the famous “sword verse” (*āyat al-sayf*) that would have cancelled dozens of verses, which however no one can identify: if that would be verse 5 of chapter 9 (known as the “penitence” verse, *al-tawbah*), or verse 29, or 36, or else 41: all these speak of killing the other, and are often applied to apostates.

**Death for the apostate**

In any case, 3 famous imams have pronounced themselves against Hegazi. The first is Imam Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a big expert in his field, who cites dozens of references from the first centuries and concludes that Hegazi has to be killed because the group is in danger and the group takes priority over the individual. The idea is: if this person begins to speak and says that he is happy to be Christian, and smilingly appears in photos with a Gospel in his hands, this is intolerable and is non-Muslim propaganda, which is officially allowed neither in Egypt, nor in other Islamic countries. And since Hegazi is spreading Christian propaganda, he must be killed.

Suad Saleh, Muslim judge and dean of the Faculty of Islamic Science at Al-Azhar University, has stated: yes, in matters of faith there is no compulsion, but Hegazi is spreading propaganda and thus the law must be applied. The judge advises that the apostate be given 3 days to repent and reconvert to Islam (*isti'tābāh*), then “apply the law” (i.e. execution).

The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Gomaa, Egypt’s highest religious authority, stated to the *Washington Post* last June that apostasy “should not” be punished by death, eliciting numerous reactions from Al-Azhar. After many people expressed their approval for a death sentence, he retracted in a confused matter and his stance is still today unclear. On the surface, he wanted to reassure the West by using ambiguous wording, like the one that goes: “Apostasy is to be punished when it represents *fitna* or when it threatens the foundations of society.”

Instead, as we have said, there is no punishment in this world for the apostate according to the Koran. But the imams rely on one of the Prophet’s hadith of Islam handed down by Ibn ‘Abbas: “Kill the one who changes religion.” And they rely on the fact that Mohammad applied this punishment to Abdallah Ibn al-Azhal who, to avoid being killed, had sought protection in the Kaaba shrine, but Mohammad ordered his companions to kill him.

To all this must be added the reaction of Hegazi’s and his wife’s parents. Questioned by Islamic judges, his father denied that his son converted to Christianity. His mother began screaming hysterically: “My son is dead, there will be no relation between us until the judgment day!” Ali Kamel Suleiman, the father of Zeinab, Hegazi’s wife, was more explicit. He declared to the independent daily al-Dustûr: “Bring me my daughter in whatever way possible, even dead.” In our Egyptian mentality, this means: kill her, or bring her to me alive and I will kill her.

Because of the parents’ behavior, Mamduh Nakhla, a Copt, director of the “Al-Kalima” Centre for Human Rights, who had submitted to the administrative courts a request for the recognition of Hegazi’s conversion to Christianity, then withdrew the request after having received threats. (AsiaNews)
Mission Impossible:

Eject the Holy See from the United Nations

Many are trying, most recently “The Economist.” But the papal delegation is there, and it wants to stay. And almost all the countries that have diplomatic ties with the Vatican are on its side. The view of the Vatican foreign minister, Dominique Mamberti

by Sandro Magister

In cauda venenum,” the Latin saying goes. And there’s poison in the tail of the July 21 article on Vatican diplomacy in “The Economist.” After two pages full of pleasantries, the article in the English weekly—which is widely read in government foreign offices—ends with this advice for the Holy See:

“It could renounce its special diplomatic status and call itself what it is—the biggest non-governmental organization in the world.” On a par with Oxfam or Doctors without Borders.

The Vatican was not pleased, and decided to react. The response came on August 9, from the head of Vatican diplomacy, the French archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states, in an interview with the newspaper of the Italian bishops’ conference, “Avvenire.”

Here is his complete reply to the conclusion of “The Economist”: “This is certainly not an acceptable invitation! It may have arisen from an imprecise understanding of the Holy See’s position in the international community: a position that can be traced back to the beginning of the international community itself, and has been reinforced above all since the end of the nineteenth century.

“With the disappearance of the Papal States, it has, in fact, become increasingly more clear that the Holy See’s international juridical personality is independent of the criterion of territorial sovereignty. This situation is accepted tranquilly by the international community both on the bilateral level—I recall that there are almost 180 countries that maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See—and on the multilateral level, as shown in particular by the UN general assembly resolution 58/314 of 2004, which expanded the range and prerogatives of the Holy See’s action as a permanent observer at the UN.

“Behind the invitation to reduce itself to a non-governmental organization, apart from a lack of understanding of the Holy See’s juridical status, there is probably also a reductionist vision of its mission, which is not sectarian or linked to special interests, but is universal and inclusive of all the dimensions of man and humanity.

“This is why the Holy See’s activity within the international community is often a ‘sign of contradiction’, because it does not cease to raise its voice in defense of the dignity of each person and of the sacredness of all human life, above all the most vulnerable, and in defense of the family founded upon marriage between one man and one woman. It does not cease to assert the fundamental right to religious freedom, and to promote relations among individuals and peoples founded upon justice and solidarity.

“In carrying out its international role, the Holy See is always at the service of the comprehensive salvation of man, according to Christ’s commandment. It comes as no surprise that there are some who seek to diminish the resonance of its voice!”

Archbishop Mamberti’s response deserves some illustration.

The idea of expelling the Holy See from the concert of nations is not new. Since 1995, “Catholics for a Free Choice” has tried to do this through petitions signed by various countries. The American group is led by a former religious
sister, Frances Kissling, but it’s Catholic in name only—more than that, it’s been officially excommunicated by the bishops of the United States. The campaign was called “See Change,” and it was aimed at expelling the Holy See from the United Nations.

The reasons advanced in support of expulsion were the same ones that “The Economist” has now brought back to light: the Catholic Church is the only religion in the world that sits at the UN as a permanent observer, with “privileges” similar to those of sovereign nations; it thus represents an anomaly that moreover foments disagreement; if the Church strives to bring peace to Burundi, that’s unobjectionable, but when it opposes abortion and euthanasia, no, it is not right that in order to support its own interests it should make use of an international juridical status that doesn’t truly belong to it.

It is no accident that the campaign for the expulsion of the Holy See from the UN heated up after the international conference in Cairo in 1994, on population, and the following conference in Beijing, on women. At both conferences, the Vatican delegation played an effective role of opposition to the pro-abortion policies promoted by the UN itself, and by the major Western powers.

Apart from life and the family, another issue on which the Holy See becomes a “sign of contradiction”—as archbishop Mamberti recalled—is religious freedom. In the bureaucracies of the UN and of the other major international organization that is the European Union, in which the Holy See has the rank of observer, the desire to expel it is fairly widespread. But when it comes down to action, the opposite is true.

In July of 2004, the UN general assem-
A historic ground-breaking event took place in the area of bilateral relations between the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines on 17 April 2007. In the President Carlos P. Garcia Hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Plenipotentiaries of the Holy See and of the Philippines, in the presence of both Church and Government officials and guests, signed the landmark Agreement Between the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines on the Cultural Heritage of the Catholic Church.

Archbishop Fernando Filoni, then Apostolic Nuncio in the Philippines (now Sostituto for General Affairs, Papal Secretariat of State), signed the said Agreement on behalf of the Holy See, and Mr. Alberto G. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, signed it on behalf of the Republic of the Philippines. This international bilateral Agreement is the first between the two Sovereign Entities since diplomatic relations were established in 1951 between the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines.

The present Accord, as it is known in diplomatic language, which consists of six articles, regulates the cooperation between the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines for the protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Catholic Church, in particular, for the safeguarding of the colonial churches, museums, archives, libraries, and works of art belonging to ecclesiastical institutions that have considerable historical value and heritage significance.

In this article, we look into the background that created the environment for developing the idea of a bilateral international agreement and how it can take effect. We will underscore salient points of the Accord, and then point out what this mutual pact hopes to achieve.

Background

Conceptualization. The Agreement is a four-year product of preparations from the moment when a panel of experts was created to draw up the initial draft until the signing on 17 April. The Agreement was, however, conceptualized as early as 1999 when Dr. Jaime C. Laya, then chair of the National Commission for the Culture and the Arts (NCCA), discussed his idea with this writer on the establishment of an agreement to cover the proper conservation of the cultural heritage ensemble of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. He first laid the cornerstone of the NCCA Built Heritage Conservation Programme, in July 2000, that became operational through the passage of three major NCCA board resolutions which authorized the release of grants for technical and financial assistance to identified and declared heritage churches. Copies of these resolutions were furnished to the Most Rev. Orlando Quevedo, O.M.I., Archbishop of Cotabato, at that time President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

Meanwhile, Dr. Laya introduced his seminal idea to Most Rev. Leopoldo S. Tumulak, then Bishop of Tagbilaran and, at that time, chair of the CBCP Permanent Committee for the Cultural Heritage of the Church (CBCP-PCCCH).

Sometime in June 2002, the NCCA made informal inquiries in Rome and at the Philippine Embassy to the Holy See about the prospect of entering into an international agreement with the Holy See on such matter as the safeguarding of the Philippine Church’s ensemble of cultural heritage.

First Draft. The result of these inquiries was the creation of a technical working group (TWG), tasked to study and initially draft the proposed Agreement. Created on 27 March 2003 by the NCCA, the TWG was constituted of one representative each...
Heritage of the Church: 
the Philippines

Photo by Denz Dayao / CBCPMedia
Landmarking the Cultural

from the NCCA, National Historical Institute (NHI), National Museum (NM), the DFA, and the CBCP, the last being represented by this writer, on behalf of the CBCP-PCCCHC.

Meeting during the first half of 2003, the TWG came up with different drafts until it concluded its work on 30 July of the same year and presented the first text of the Accord.

Transmittals. With the endorsement of the NCCA and for the preliminary proposal of this project, copies were then advanced to the CBCP and the DFA, the latter of which was for its consideration and transmittal to its embassy to the Holy See and to the Apostolic Nunciature in the Philippines.

A flurry of activities marked this period when the document was dispatched from one office to another for the purpose of measured study in view of the crucial implications that will bear upon the proper pastoral care (i.e., the administration, management, and valorization) of the ecclesiastical cultural heritage the moment the Agreement enters into full force. Corrections, amendments, and revisions accentuated the Agreement draft as it made its way through the CBCP offices of the Episcopal Commission on Canon Law, Legal Office, and Permanent Committee for the Cultural Heritage of the Church. It was tabled for discussion in the meetings of the CBCP Permanent Council and in the CBCP Plenary Assembly for a number of times.

Holy See Suggestion. At a certain point in the late 2004, the Papal Secretariat of State, through the Apostolic Nunciature, presented its observations to the Philippine side and proposed to make concise the draft into the present six-article Accord. Having studied the proposed text of the Agreement, it arrived at the conclusion that the best way to ensure a true safeguard and protection of the cultural heritage of the Church in the Philippines would be the elaboration of a national agreement guaranteed by an international Agreement.

In this way, the Holy See foresees two Agreements: the one at the international level between the Holy See and the Philippine Republic, and the other at the national level between the Philippine Government and the CBCP. The international agreement is the framework juridically assuring the proper safeguard of the Church’s cultural heritage, while the national agreement is the elaboration of those factors that will go into implementing the protec-

Did you know that...

There are 32 Philippine Catholic colonial churches declared as National Cultural Treasures? The first three—Paoay Church (Ilocos Norte), Bacarra Church (Ilocos Norte), and San Agustin Church (Intramuros, Manila) and all its liturgical objects therein—were declared as such by the late President Ferdinand Marcos by virtue of Presidential Decree (P.D.) 260 that he signed into law on 1 August 1973. The 29 remaining churches were declared by the National Museum according to the above classification on 31 July 2001, in line with P.D. 374. For effective collaboration for their restoration, these said churches were the subjects of a memorandum of agreement entered into, by, and between the CBCP and the NCCA on 7 January 2002.

There are more than 30 colonial churches throughout the Archipelago that the Government declared as National Historical Landmarks? The first batch of churches was declared as such by President Marcos through P.D. 260. These churches are: the Barasoain Church (Malolos, Bulacan), Miag-ao Church (Iloilo), San Sebastian Church (Quiapo, Manila), and the Sto. Niño Church and its convent (Cebu City). Later on, President Marcos amended P.D. 260 with P.D. 375, on 14 January 1974, to include Taal Basilica (Batangas) and Sta. Maria Church (Ilocos Sur). The rest of the churches were declared by the National Historical Institute (NHI).

The preservation, restoration, and/or reconstruction of these declared colonial churches are subject to the supervision and control of either the National Museum or the NHI, both in collaboration with the Department of Tourism?

The penalty for violation against the provisions of P.D. 260, as amended by P.D. 1505 of 11 June 1978, is, upon conviction, imprisonment for not less than one
Heritage of the Church: Highlights of the Holy See–Philippines Agreement

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Permanent Committee for the Cultural Heritage of the Church was created on 8 July 1996, during the CBCP’s 73rd Plenary Assembly held at the Betania Retreat House, Tagaytay City. The Assembly elected Most Rev. Leopoldo S. Tumulak, then Bishop of Tagbilaran, to be its first chairman. He served from 1996 until 2005, completing five consecutive terms permitted by the CBCP Statutes. Most Rev. Julio B. Cortes, Auxiliary Bishop of Cebu, succeeded him.

The present members include Most Rev. Leonardo Y. Medroso, Bishop of Tagbilaran (Bohol), Most Rev. Christian Vicente F. Noel, Bishop of Talibon (Bohol), Most Rev. Romulo G. Valles, Archbishop of Zamboanga, and Bishop Leopoldo Tumulak, Ordinary of the Philippine Military Ordinariate, who is also the Permanent Committee vice-chair. Fr. Milán Ted D. Torralba, a priest of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, is the Permanent Committee executive secretary since 1996.

The Permanent Committee serves as a consultative body of the CBCP and of the individual Bishops actively pursuing the proper pastoral care, valuation, and utilization of the ecclesiastical cultural heritage of the local Church in the Philippines through effective means assigned at its disposal by the CBCP Statutes. It advocates for the heightening of awareness and sensitivity to these so-called privileged means of the new and renewed Evangelization that particular Churches must address with primary attention.

The Permanent Committee also interacts with the Holy See’s Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, an advantage made possible when Bishop Tumulak was appointed in May 2000 as consultor to the said Pontifical Commission.

Cultural Treasures were also inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1993, together with San Agustin Church (Intramuros, Manila)?

All colonial churches in the Philippines are automatically categorized as classified historical structures or sites, in accord with NHI Resolution No. 3, of 22 October 1991?

On 31 October 1984, during the 8th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the St. Peter’s Basilica, as well as the entire Vatican City-State, was inscribed, with unanimous consent and applause, in the UNESCO World Heritage List? It was a decision entered into with great importance in the field of international law, and its symbolic value must be obvious to all. (see, L’Osservatore Romano, 24 December 1984, 19).

(Researched by: Fr. MTD Torralba)
Landmarking the Cultural Heritage of the Church: Highlights of the Heritage Agreement

Philippines, the Senate ratifies bilateral international accord in conformity with the Constitution. It was learned that the DFA, after having completed all national prerequisites, anticipates the entry into force of the Agreement.

Salient Points of the Agreement

1. The Cultural Heritage of the Church is also the Cultural Patrimony of the Filipino Nation. This Agreement acknowledges that the identified cultural heritage of the Church in the Philippines is a patrimony that also pertains to the entire Filipino Nation. The preambular statement of the Agreement places this in clearer relief: “…the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines constitutes a very significant part of the cultural patrimony of the Nation.” This cultural heritage ensemble covers “the movable and immovable cultural heritage of artistic and historic significance, comprising the colonial churches declared as legally protected by the Republic, museums, archives and libraries, belonging to ecclesiastical institutions and organizations” (Art. II).

These heritage ensemble and objects, in the words of His Eminence Francesco Cardinal Marchisano, at that time President of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, speaking before the NCCA Commissioners on 11 July 2002, “constitutes an incisive major part of the cultural heritage of the nation.” This acknowledgment is explicitly made with full cognizance of the legal status enjoyed by the Most Rev. Ordinaries as corporations sole under the Corporation Law of the Philippines.

Cloaked with national public interest, the Government obligates itself to provide technical and financial assistance for the proper care and safeguarding of declared heritage churches and appurtenances. With due regard for the provision of Church and State separation, this obligation is manifested as a policy declaration of the Philippines as enshrined in the 1987 Constitution.

2. Philippine Heritage Law to harmonize with Canon Law. Very interestingly, Art. IV of the Agreement calls for “harmonizing the implementation of Philippine legislation with the norms of Canon Law and the exigencies of the pastoral activities of the Church.” Unknown to many, the Church possesses universal laws that stress the importance of church heritage conservation. These present laws are products of the pastoral exigencies of the Church throughout its history and, are therefore, timely and timeless. These canonical norms on cultural heritage care are not only exhortatory and constitutive statements of law, but are, indeed, subjects of genuine implementation.

It will be the task of the Joint Committee, contemplating the Agreement, to arrive at a discernment of legal provisions necessary for furthering the care and protection of the Church heritage ensemble and objects.

3. The Agreement itself is a Commitment to Cooperation. This salient point is best explained by Archbishop Filoni when, as Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, he addressed the assembled Bishops during the CBCP 94th Plenary Assembly on 26 January 2007, with these words: “The Holy See stresses the principle of ‘mutual autonomy of Church and the political community’ “ (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 424).

He continued by saying, “As the Magisterium authentically points out in the Social Doctrine of the Church, this principle does not mean separation nor reciprocal difference between these two Entities, but rather it highlights ‘wholesome cooperation’ in all legitimate actions that serve the common good of our people (Ibid., No. 425). For, the good of people and human communities is served by a structured dialogue between the Church and civil Authorities, which also finds expression in the stipulation of mutual agreements. This dialogue tends to establish or strengthen relations of mutual understanding and cooperation, and also serves to prevent or resolve eventual disputes. Its goal is to contribute to the progress of every people” (Ibid., No. 445).

Performance Indicators of the Agreement

The mutual Agreement seeks to achieve the following results:

1. Awareness-Raising, Heightening Sensitivity, and Fomenting Appreciation. The mutual Accord opens up, not only for the members of the Joint Committee but for all those responsible and concerned with the condition of the cultural heritage of the Church, a good number of didactic materials that bear on the philos- phy, canon law, and theology, as it were, of church heritage management. These materials are simply documents that ema-
nate from the Holy See that demand appreciation and proper action.

Conscientious familiarity with these documents will eventually raise awareness, heighten the level of sensitivity, and foment appreciation for the ecclesiastical cultural goods. These are also expected to lead Church Authorities to acknowledge that the cultural heritage of the Church is a heritage worthy to be shared to the Filipino Nation on the basis of its partaking in the universal value of humanity’s heritage.

Other than this is the acknowledgement that 80% of Philippine heritage was at one time, and still is, created, owned, and managed by the local Church in the Philippines. One cannot also avoid conceding the immense role the Church played in the historical evolution of the Filipino Nation from the very beginning when the fateful decision was decisively made to plant the banners of the Spanish crown and the instrumentalties of the Cross on these shores.

2. Installation of Legal Measures to Guarantee Protection. The Agreement hopes to invest the ecclesiastical cultural goods with a good measure of legal protection designed to preserve, promote, and restore these ensemble according to internationally—and nationally—accepted standards of scientific conservation.

Fundamentally, the Agreement roots itself on those values that inspire both the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines. These values find their expression in the respective laws of the two Sovereign Entities, and these will serve as compelling force for heritage protection. For the Church, this pioneering Agreement envisages to complement Canon Law on heritage conservation with legal protection afforded by the Philippine State.

3. Defining Competencies and Strengthening Cooperation. Premised on the principle of wholesome cooperation and respect for autonomy and independence, the Accord is expected to open channels of effective communication between the two Sovereign Entities. The Agreement stipulates in Art. V: “The Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines shall proceed by mutual accord to resolve any difficulties that should arise in the future concerning the interpretation or the implementation of the present Agreement.”

Already one sees its magnitude in the wake of valid concerns raised not by a few Arch/Bishops and priests when it comes to Government grants allocated to declared churches. This area also foresees a wide space for respectful dialogue with the Government side as regards Philippine Laws enacted during the Martial Law years that were imposed without the courtesy of any consultation. Another contentious area will be the procedures for resolution of heritage contestation where and when these occur. A veritable source of conflict is the appeal to the courts to resolve perceived Church violation of Philippine Laws that ironically were enacted to protect ecclesiastical cultural properties. (Already, a civil case to this effect is now sub judice.)

Conclusion

The proper safeguarding of cultural heritage is a common means utilized by both Church and Government. Being so, proper safeguarding guarantees the perpetuation of the inherent sign-value and significance of the protected cultural heritage property. It is true that Church and Government both differ as to their finality: for the Church, its cultural heritage serves as privileged means of the new and renewed Evangelization. It can only be so, for as the Venerable Servant of God Pope John Paul II affirms in his motu proprio Apostolic Letter Inde a Pontificatus Nostris of 25 March 1993: “Indeed, by its very nature, faith tends to express itself in artistic forms and historical testimony having an intrinsic evangelizing power and cultural value, to which the Church is called to pay the greatest attention.” As for the Government, the cultural patrimony of the Nation, 80% of which is derived from the local Church in the Philippines, provides pride of place, rootedness, and national identity.

By an international bilateral Accord juridically recognized at the international level, Church and Government demonstrate that level of wisdom required for the attainment of a just and peaceful ordering of society. Through it, Church and State leaders offer their unique contribution to the enhancement of the quality of human life founded on the imperatives of the natural moral law.

(Fr. Milán Ted D. Torralba is a priest of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, Bohol, and served his diocese in many capacities. A canon lawyer, he is assistant secretary of the Apostolic Nunciature in the Philippines, and executive secretary of the CBCP Permanent Committee for the Cultural Heritage of the Church. At one time, he was a member of the NCCA National Committee on Monuments and Sites, becoming its head in 2004.)
The Tears of Lady Edita

By Bro. Manuel V. de Leon, FMS

I’ve been introduced to Mrs. Edita Burgos and her late husband in 2001 by a common friend and we had the chance to exchange ideas about what they are doing in Bulacan to help the farmers go into organic farming and at the same time enjoy the simple life of being close to the soil after retirement from teaching.

I cannot imagine Mrs. Edita Burgos, a retired teacher, bringing up her children to be violent individuals and become a threat to national security as what the military officers want to portray them to be. But I must also admit that my knowledge of the Burgos family is very limited. Thus, I am not in the position to debunk whatever information the military has with regards to the involvement of Jonas Burgos who has been missing since April 28, 2007.

I would like to compare Edita to the character in the book of C.S. Song “The Tears of Lady Meng.” The Tears of Lady Meng is a parable about the struggle of a woman seeking justice for the loss of her groom who was sacrificed for the sake of “national security.”

The parable goes like this:

This happened in the reign of the wicked, unjust Emperor. He was afraid at this time that the Huns would break into the country from the north and not leave him any peace.

In order to keep them in check, he decided to build a wall along the whole northern frontier of China. But no sooner was one piece built than another fell down, and the wall made no progress.

Then a wise (?) man said to him: “A wall like this, which is over ten thousand miles long, can be built only if you immure a human being in every mile of the wall. Each mile will then have its guardian.” It was easy for the emperor to follow this advice, for he regarded his subjects as so much grass and weeds, and the whole land began to tremble under this threat.

Plans were then made for human sacrifice in great numbers. At the last minute “an ingenious scholar” suggested to the Emperor that it would be sufficient to sacrifice a man called Wan “since Wan means ten thousand”. Soldiers were dispatched at once to seize Wan who was sitting with his bride at the wedding feast. He was carried off by the heartless soldiers, leaving Lady Meng, his bride, in tears.

Eventually, heedless of the fatigues of the journey, she travelled over mountains and through rivers to find the bones of her husband. When she saw the stupendous wall she did not know how to find the bones.

There was nothing to be done, and she sat down and wept. Her weeping so affected the wall that it collapsed and laid bare her husband’s bones.

The legendary story of Lady Meng, as well as the contemporary story of Mrs Edita Burgos, are genuine and powerful that should give us inspiration. Their loved ones have been sacrificed in the name of the moral claim guided by the policy of the highest order – national security. The danger is when we equate genuine or comprehensive peace with national security and the rulers regard people as so much grass and weeds or tools for economic development and national defence.

When rulers use national security as a “demi-god” that feeds on human flesh and blood, then it is a savage and cruel god. Ancient tribes used to offer animals for their gods. But it is heart-rending to know that in contemporary times, animal offerings are not good enough. To gain their favour, nothing less than human blood would do. They are no different from the ancient Phoenicians who offered human babies on a red-hot altar to their fire god Moloch.

As we read the papers everyday, we hear people disappearing or killed without the benefit of due process. It takes no less than the Chief of Justice of the Supreme Court to call for a summit to address the issue of extra-judicial killings. It has reached a stage that has alarmed the international community. The challenge now for us ordinary peace-loving people is how not to become apathetic to the situation. We cannot simply remain a bystander. We, too, need to shed tears to bring about the collapse of the wall of the culture of impunity prevailing in our political life as a nation.

The world or a society that refuses to shed tears for the victims of injustice is a heartless world. Tears are signs of life. Tears well out of the heart of love and restore to the human community the ability to love. They revive our soul for a promise and a future. People who don’t shed tears are no less than the statues—a piece of stone.

Let our tears become tears of rebellion. Let us wage a revolution against the brute forces that rape our dignity as Filipinos. Let us rebel against the forces that rape our conscience, our virtue. Let the powerful rage in fury. But their fury is no match to the power of the truth. The truth shall set us free.

To Ma’am Edith, take consolations in the fact that the history of a nation does not consist mainly of emperors, kings, presidents and military generals. What makes history are the people like you, with whom the soul of Lady Meng lives as they struggle for truth, love and justice.
Lifestyle and Entertainment

By Fr. Roy Cimagala

This is a standard section in all papers, radio and TV. No matter how serious the press may be, there’s always this part that seeks to lighten people’s minds and hearts.

If only for that reason, it deserves not only a good space and airtime, but also praise from everyone. I have met many men and women, otherwise serious in their endeavors, who follow closely, either openly or secretly, the items there. It’s clear they enjoy it.

But precisely because of its immense popularity, everything has to be done that it properly serves its audience. This should always be in our mind. Its instant allure should not blind us to this concern.

That moral dangers and abuses abound there cannot be denied. First, the tendency to be frivolous, flippant, seems to be a permanent threat. Then there is the easy slide to vulgarity and bad taste that are getting to be more common these days.

Many people are complaining that values promoted in this section, not very openly, of course, but as it were, in hints and shades, are rotten. It seems they advance all possible variations of the capital sins.

The spin of the stories, the celebrities placed in the limelight in all their luscious glory, at least subliminally hype vanity, pride, greed and gluttony, lust and sensuality, laziness, avarice, envy, etc. They tease and gratify the senses, while poisoning the spirit.

It appears that the now fashionable idea of lifestyle and entertainment includes the element of absolute freedom as to what can be done, said and shown in this section.

Any limitation set by whatever law or standard is considered against the very nature of that section. Talk about censorship, and you’re bound to provoke a blistering storm of protests!

I’m actually all out in support of literary or artistic freedom. The problem is that while freedom, artistic rights and privileges, and creativity are supposed to bring us to our potentials’ highest level, without any guiding law they bring us down instead, like water seeking its own lowest level.

This has always been the challenge. The passage of time, the great strides of progress, the accumulation of a wealth of experience, have hardly improved the picture. On the contrary, there are indications things are deteriorating.

We don’t have to eyeball our surrounding to see there is a glorification of the body, sex, and worldly values—materialistic, consumerist—at the expense of the spiritual values.

The problem is not only a matter of focus. It’s now a matter of a systematic negation and even war against anything that has to do with the spiritual and supernatural values that are supposed to govern us.

What’s happening there obviously is a mere reflection of a deeper crisis swamping our culture today. Without conscious effort to refer ourselves to God, we get lost about what true freedom is, or what comprises our authentic development.

Sadly, to many, freedom nowadays is purely a matter of choice. Artistic privileges and creative licenses are entirely a matter of self-expression. Any reference to any objective law or goal outside of the subjects concerned is considered a violation to their nature.

With this frame of mind, the idea of human development can go free-for-all, completely subjective and loose. Legitimate human and material values get spoiled as they are detached from their proper context and purpose.

Pope Benedict talks about a gripping relativism that is ailing the world these days. This is the sick ethos of considering everything as relative to oneself, to a culture, to time and place, etc. Nothing is held absolute and objective.

This, I think, is the core of the problem. And as the Pope says, there is a certain tyranny involved, since the only absolute rule relativism follows is precisely that everything is relative.

We should congratulate ourselves, since we are still in relativism’s beginning stage, still playing it coy and sweet. We are not yet in its ultimate, most rotten stage!

But there’s an inherent contradiction in this madness. It can’t last. But its exposure and untangling depend on us. Do we take the challenge?
Terrorist attacks an act of cowardice, says bishop of Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, India, August 26, 2007—"The Church of Hyderabad condemns this terrorist attack in the strongest possible terms. It is horrendous that elements can unleash such a horrific wave of terror on innocent citizens. These bomb blasts are acts of cowardice," said Msgr. Marampudi Joji, Catholic archbishop of Hyderabad, as he slammed the two blasts that yesterday killed at least 42 people and injured another 60 in two separate attacks in the state capital of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

Msgr. Joji called on all Christian doctors and nurses—a few thousands—to work throughout the night to help victims. All Catholic institutions like schools, hospices and parishes are open all night to offer hospitality, food and safety to families afraid of going home.

The first blast occurred at 7.50 pm (GMT 2.20 pm) at Gokul Chat Shop in Kothi. The second one took place a few minutes later about five kilometres away during a laser show in an auditorium in Lumbini Park with about 500 people present. The blast ripped through the middle row of the auditorium when the show had just begun.

"The two places, where the bomb blasts occurred, were a pool of blood. One bomb was in an amusement park and another in a fast food place that are in the centre of the city. Dead bodies were one on top of the other. Some bodies do not even have heads. Other bodies are crushed beyond recognition. Many are seriously injured in the hospitals. The whole city is in turmoil," an eyewitness told AsiaNews.

Andhra Pradesh Home Affairs Minister K Jana Reddy called the two blasts "a terrorist act." A senior local police official said the explosives used in the twin blasts today were similar to those used by terrorists in the Mecca Masjid (mosque) blasts in May this year, a case which remains unsolved.

For Union (Federal) Minister of State for Home Affairs Sriprakash Jaiswal, the explosions are the handiwork of some terrorist group “bent on destroying the unity of the country.”

Andhra Pradesh is the third most populous state in India with 76.2 million people, 80 per cent Hindu, 9 per cent Muslim and 4 per cent Christian.

As a result of the latest incidents security in the state capital has been further tightened in view of 10,000 weddings that are scheduled today, which will bring many people together but also provide opportunities for clashes and violence.

Talking to AsiaNews Archbishop Joji expressed his “deepest sorrow to the victims of these attacks and their families.” The prelate “asked for special prayers to be recited at all masses so that Christ may console the families of those who have perished in these bomb blasts. [. . .] Perhaps the most important help that can be provided is to offer a sense of hope in this time of seeming hopelessness.”

Thousands of Catholic medical staff, doctors and nurses, were given a special dispensation from Sunday mass to offer all possible assistance to the victims of the attacks.

Several Catholic parishes are located near the affected areas. For this reason, Msgr. Joji “personally phoned all 30 parish priests in the diocese to be on high alert and be very cautious of any suspicious activity in and around the churches and schools. [...] I have told them not to panic, but trust in God and take preventive measures to ensure the safety of the Church and our personnel.” (Nirmala Carvalho / AsiaNews)
Praying at Our Lady of Tewatte to heal sick people and a sick nation

TEWATTE, Sri Lanka, August 27, 2007—May the “Lord heal us and Our Motherland” was the theme of the National Day for the Sick celebrations held at Our Lady of Lanka Basilica in Tewatte. Some 500,000 Christians from around the country as well as people from other faiths were present at the event, all keen on praying for peace in the country.

About 300 priests and religious from various dioceses attended the bilingual (Sinhalese and Tamil) blessing of the sick. The apostolic nuncio, Msgr. Mario Zenario; the archbishop of Sri Lanka, Msgr. Oswald Gomis; his predecessor, Msgr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando; and Mgrs. Thomas Savundaranayagam, bishop of Jaffna, and Msgr. Marius Peiris, auxiliary bishop of Colombo, were also present.

During the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the Rosary, pilgrims called upon Our Lady to give inner peace and health but also to heal the country from its many ills.

“This is my tenth year of attending the blessing of the sick and I totally feel the touch of Mother Mary’s love for me,” said 78-year-old, wheelchair-bound Colin Emmanuel from Kirimatiyana parish in the diocese of Chilaw, 125 km north of the capital.

Tamil Jesim Pararajasinghem and her husband Paul Raj said that they felt duty-bound “to pray not only for their own physical ailments but also for the evils that affect the nation like corruption, injustice, human rights violations.”

“We need this war to end so that peace may return to Sri Lanka and its ethnic groups go back to living in harmony,” they said.

According to Fr. Merl Shanti Perera, who manages the basilica, “people from other faiths were present at the celebrations.”

Preparations for the Day of the Sick began last Wednesday. Pilgrims arrived from across the country, setting up tents under the trees that surround the church. The administration provided drinking water as well as sanitation and health care facilities.

The Tewatte basilica, north of Colombo, was built starting in 1946 in thanksgiving for sparing the island the horrors of the Second World War.

“Our Lady saved our wonderful country once before from war,” said a female student, “and so I believe She can save it again now in this crucial moment” in its history. (Melani Manel Perera / Asia News)

Church leader rejects nuke plan

MANILA, Philippines, August 23, 2007—A Catholic bishop says he does not agree that an “ominous” nuclear power should be located anywhere in the country.

Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz was reacting to plans of the Department of Energy (DoE) to develop nuclear energy to ease power shortage.

The DoE said the Philippines have potential ideal sites for nuclear facility which could also bolster the national economy.

The agency’s review into nuclear energy has suggested that this country should be like the other nuclear-powered nations that reduced their dependence on costly imported fuel.

“We are organizing a team to study nuclear technology including safety nets to ensure that the plants that would be built pose no harm to the environment and the people,” said Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes.

But Cruz belittled Reyes’ claim, saying the country “does not even know what to do with garbage,” how much more with the potential danger the project possess.

“It (the government) does not even know what to do with garbage. It cannot even keep the floods away from no less than Metro Manila. And now, it wants to go nuclear!” Cruz lamented.

He also mentioned the problem of illegal drugs, “jueteng” and smuggling which the government “cannot even stop”.

“What will the government do in the event of terrorist attacks directed at the plant? Where will the government throw the nuclear waste?” Cruz asked. (CBCP/News)
Default Mode

The present administration must be in a default mode on prudence and the pursuant right judgments. It is not enough that it issues faulty Presidential Proclamations and shameful Executive Orders every now and then to the consternation of the Supreme Court.

It is neither enough that it recently declared an “all out war” in Mindanao so that not only many good soldiers are killed to the great sorrows of their families. Furthermore, thousands of innocent men, women and children have to abandon their homes and leave their farms behind for safety. While the administration may be keen in bringing to justice those guilty of the 10 July barbarism committed against the soldiers concerned, it may not claim innocence for the more killings and bigger destructions still in the making on account of the on-going war.

Lo and behold, considering that the above aberrations appear to be still insufficient—and there are too many to mention—the present administration just came up with another dangerous idea, another ominous plan: Nuclear power! The encompassing reason alleged appears ostensibly nobly acceptable at first glance, viz., to lower the electric power rates. What it does not want to remember much less admit is that the government itself is the ultimate cause of costly power in the country.

But there are questions the national leadership itself might want to consider and hopefully give reasonable answers: How much again will it cost the Filipinos to have a working nuclear plant? What company again will the Government engage, what contract again will the Government sign? What about the fault line detected at the grounds of the present non-functional nuclear plant? Where will the government throw the nuclear waste? What will the Government do in the event of terrorist attacks directed at the plant?

If the national leadership could even invent acceptable answers to the above questions—specifically on the matter of the handling of public funds, the disposal of nuclear waste and the relevance of terrorism—then let it put up nuclear plants in every street corner all over the land!

But then, this government does not even know what to do with garbage. It cannot even keep the floods away from no less than Metro Manila. It is incapable even of cleaning the country of illegal drugs, not to mention jueteng and video carera. It is not even able to stop smuggling and get the smugglers. And now, it wants to go nuclear! Is this the glorious legacy that the national leadership envision to leave behind hopefully by 2010? Or is this the key component of the glowing vision of the Philippines as a first world Country come 2030?

Psychological Incapacity

It is an open secret that practically all marriages “annulled” by the government forward the ground of “Psychological incapacity” on the part of either or both spouses. It is also quite known that especially so in these “annullment” cases, the best lawyers are not those who know the law but those acquainted with the fiscal and judge concerned. All these however notwithstanding, it might serve not only the truth but also the awareness of the general public what “Psychological Incapacity” really means and what actually implies when such ground is formally attributed and judicially proven as appended to a husband and/or wife.

For a start, it will be good to expressively and clearly say that “Psychological Incapacity” is a very serious accusation against someone with grave and lasting deleterious consequences in the latter’s dimension as a person, as an individual, and as a man or a woman. Woe to any husband/father or wife/mother who owns such an attitudinal and behavioral liability, or who accepts such a mental and affective disability—although such is not the honest and real truth. It is not only mean but also demeaning to the good name and reputation of anyone to be branded and known as someone afflicted by “Psychological Incapacity”.

Question: What really is “Psychological Incapacity”? The nomenclature itself already says something pitiful and irremediable, viz. an incapacitated human psyche. It is in fact a serious adversity of a personality constitution, the more immediate expressions of which range from ingrained immaturity and gross irresponsibility to deep emotional instability and marked lack of remorse—all of which cut deep into the meaning of being an adult.

Question: What are the actual consequences of “Psychological Incapacity”? A subject party who is psychologically incapable, is precisely that, viz., he or she is disabled in his or her psychological constructs from being someone sober, better, sounder. The party concerned neither listens to corrections nor learns from experience. Such a liability is usually the product of a downright personality disorder.

Questions: What is the cure of “Psychological Incapacity”? None. This is why it is the summit of contradiction that someone proven psychologically incapable and given an “annulment” of his or her previous marriage, would still be allowed to enter into another marriage. This too is open to “annulment”—and so too with all his or her other subsequent marriages, one or the other.
EDITORIAL

On one hand, there is the national leadership who long since has been proudly and loudly pronouncing its resolve to clean the government from the infamous graft and corruption. Sometimes last year or so, Malacañang committed no less than 2 billion pesos precisely to fund its avowed crusade against graft and corruption in government. And there is even the public entity specifically identified as the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC) and categorically established to uproot grafters from the present administration.

On the other hand, PAGC said the following rather revealing facts: First, it has in fact submitted no less than some 90 graft cases to the Office of the President for pursuant action. Second, it said the same highest office in the land had done nothing on the said cases except in conjunction with 2 or 3 of them. Third, it pointed out that some PAGC lawyers are in fact contemplating of leaving the Commission precisely on account of their perceived waste of time and effort in working on the cases which after all are but nonchalantly treated by the Presidential Office. One thing is certain: Even but a single graft case in government is already one too many, one could just wonder what some 90 graft cases really mean and actually imply.

It is not hard to think and forward the following fundamental reason to explain in general the above predicament or impasse existing between the office of the President and nothing less than a Presidential Commission: As publicly known, the present administration has long since engaged in the devious and odious practice of “Transactional Politics” whereby it appoints as political beneficiaries high ranking officials in the bureaucracy as their ample rewards. Those beneficiaries successfully worked (honestly, justly—or otherwise) to promote its interests (honorable, noble—or otherwise.)

If rewards for appointment in the Bureaucracy is on account of “otherwise” causes, then PAGC should understand that the personalities concerned in the said cases are practically untouchable. PAGC could just imagine if after dismissal of the appointees thus concerned they “spill the beans”! PAGC has now enough good lessons on what is “Transactional Politics”, and how it works.
The Seed

A successful Christian business man was growing old and knew it was time to choose a successor to take over the business. Instead of choosing one of his Directors or his children, he decided to do something different. He called all the young executives in his company together.

He said, “It is time for me to step down and choose the next CEO. I have decided to choose one of you.” The young executives were shocked, but the boss continued. “I am going to give each one of you a SEED today—one very special SEED. I want you to plant the seed, water it, and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from the seed I have given you. I will then judge the plants that you bring, and the one I choose will be the next CEO.”

One man, named Jim, was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly, told his wife the story. She helped him get a pot, soil and compost and he planted the seed. Every day, he would water it and watch to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other executives began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Jim kept checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks went by, still nothing.

By now, others were talking about their plants, but Jim didn’t have a plant and he felt like a failure.

Six months went by—still nothing in Jim’s pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had trees and tall plants.

But he had nothing. Jim didn’t say anything to his colleagues, however. He just kept watering and fertilizing the soil—he so wanted the seed to grow.

A year finally went by and all the young executives of the company brought their plants to the CEO for inspection. Jim told his wife that he wasn’t going to take an empty pot. But she asked him to be honest about what happened. Jim felt sick to his stomach, it was going to be the most embarrassing moment of his life, but he knew his wife was right. He took his empty pot to the board room. When Jim arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other executives. They were beautiful—in all shapes and sizes. Jim put his empty pot on the floor and many of his colleagues laughed, a few felt sorry for him!

When the CEO arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted his young executives. Jim just tried to hide in the back. “My, what great plants, trees, and flowers you have grown,” said the CEO. “Today one of you will be appointed the next CEO!”

All of a sudden, the CEO spotted Jim at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered the Financial Director to bring him to the front. Jim was terrified. He thought, “The CEO knows I’m a failure! Maybe he will have me fired!”

When Jim got to the front, the CEO asked him what had happened to his seed. Jim told him the story.

The CEO asked everyone to sit down except Jim. He looked at Jim, and then announced to the young executives, “Hold your next Chief Executive Officer!

His name is Jim!” Jim couldn’t believe it. Jim couldn’t even grow his seed. “How could he be the new CEO?” the others said.

Then the CEO said, “One year ago today, I gave everyone in this room a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today.

But I gave you all boiled seeds; they were dead—it was not possible for them to grow. All of you, except Jim, have brought me trees and plants and flowers.

When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Jim was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new Chief Executive Officer!”

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The Cow and the Pig

There was once a man who was very rich and very miserly at the same time. The villagers disliked him intensely. One day he said to them, “Either you’re jealous of me or you don’t understand my love of money—God alone knows. But you dislike me; that much I know. When I die, I won’t take anything with me. I will leave it all for others. I will make a will, and I will give everything to charity. Then everyone will be happy.”

Even then people mocked and laughed at him. The rich man said to them, “What is the matter with you? Can’t you wait a few years to see my money go to charity?”

The villagers didn’t believe him. He said, “Do you think I’m immortal? I’ll die like everyone else, and then my money will go to charities.” He couldn’t understand why they didn’t believe him.

One day he went for a walk. All of a sudden it started raining heavily, so he took shelter under a tree. Under this tree he saw a pig and a cow. The pig and the cow entered into conversation, and the man overheard what they were saying.

The pig said to the cow, “How is it that everybody appreciates you and nobody appreciates me? When I die, I provide people with bacon, ham and sausage. People can also use my bristles. I give three or four things, whereas you give only one thing: milk. Why do people appreciate you all the time and not me?”

The cow said to the pig, “Look, I provide milk while I’m alive. They see that I am generous with what I have. But you don’t give them anything while you’re alive. Only after you’re dead do you give ham, bacon and so forth. People don’t believe in the future; they believe in the present. If you give while you are alive, people will appreciate you. It is quite simple.”

From that moment on, the rich man gave all he had to the poor.

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The Worlds of Human Morality

Michael D. Moga, SJ

In his foreword Fr. Moga says that "one major concern among many religious proponents of ethical life and among rationalistic philosophers is the presentation of an ethical life that is universal, a way that everyone should follow." Supporting such a concern, the book uncovers certain basic structures from where morality that flows is part of human experience. Divided in 16 chapters, the book presents a universal structure of human morality. We human beings experience and interpret morality in many ways. The complexity of moral experience oftentimes leads a person to develop guilt feelings both authentic and inauthentic. The book proposes a thesis that moral experience originates from our way of life and a change in our orientation will alter our experience of morality. This thesis if valid, dares us to live life in a more human way and embrace the moral life more authentically.

The Spirit Blows Where It Will

Msgr. Ruperto C. Santos

Already his 6th book to date published by St. Pauls, Msgr. Ruperto Santos' latest reflects his rich pastoral experiences of ministering to the Filipino migrants in Europe. The reflections found in this book are the fruits of various Life in the Spirit Seminars Msgr. Santos conducted among Filipino migrants not only in Rome and other Italian cities, but also in England, Belgium, Greece and Germany. As Msgr. Santos goes from one city to the next ministering to Filipino communities, the reader also gets to journey with him. Cardinal Rosales, writes in his foreword of the book, "although Msgr. Santos recalls in his book the many religious travels, visits, and pilgrimages made with friends, it is not so much the places he wants to remember, but the truths, the virtues, ideals and noble experiences, and pious thoughts that have brought fellow travelers together and inspired them to a greater trust of God." Indeed, as Msgr. Santos asserts in his writings, man is on a continuous journey. Just as Jesus Himself was a migrant on this earth, so are we. Continuously we are on the move, searching for greener pastures, in a way, making us understand that our true home is heaven. Currently the Rector of Collegio Filipino in Rome, Msgr. Santos is also the National Coordinador for the Pastoral Care of Filipino Migrants in Italy since 2003.

The Ten Commandments

Rose Pacatte, FSP and Peter Malone, MSC

How do we make our catechism more interesting to young people and adults alike? How do we get their attention to take a second look and reflect a little more deeply to moral issues that we are confronted with daily? Teaching Catechesis to a tech-savvy generation always remains a challenging task. This latest book from Pauline Publishing House gives a fresh take on the Ten Commandments, offering an exciting approach to the study of Christian faith. The book explores the drama of moral life by creating a dialogue between Scripture, the Ten Commandments, and film. The authors, Rose Pacatte, FSP and Peter Malone, MSC, are two internationally-known media specialists. Pacatte is an award-winning author of books on Scripture and Film. Malone was former president of SIGNIS (World Catholic Association for Communication) and also author of several books on Film. The two have earlier written a three-volume series titled Lights, Camera... Faith! A Movie Lectionary for Cycles A, B, and C. This present volume features movie synopses, film commentary, film dialogue with the Scriptures and the Decalogue, points for reflection and conversation, suggested prayers among other things. Indeed, an excellent resource for catechists, film educators and professionals, and for anyone who seeks profound meaning in movies.

Lights, Camera... Faith!

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Volume 41 • Number 9
Overweight teenager Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blonsky) and her best friend Penny (Amanda Bynes) top their school day swooning over the song-and-dance TV show of Corny Collins (James Marsden). Tracy dreams of one day appearing on TV with her idol Corny, but her grotesquely fat mother Edna (John Travolta) would rather see her happily running the family’s laundry shop. However, her father Wilbur (Christopher Walken) welcomes her fantasy, telling her to follow her heart. An opportunity comes for Tracy when the show announces auditions. In complete school uniform, Tracy signs up but show producer Velma Von Tussle (Michelle Pfeiffer) scoffs at the pudgy girl who sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb in a line of svelte chorus girl types. Corny likes Tracy’s bubbly and natural ways and gives her a break, irritating the control-freak Velma. Serving as a surprise and somewhat spoofy addition to the show, Tracy becomes an instant hit.

Hairspray owes much of its entertaining quality to the songs and dances which spin almost nonstop, matching the light but well-woven plot. The tunes are catchy and the dances jaunty. Set in Baltimore USA 1962, the movie features many songs that lampoon racial discrimination. Its attractiveness lies in its lack of pretension—it does not come on like it’s reaching for the Oscars, but as a natural-born musical spiced up by a dash of comedy it certainly makes you feel it’s worth the price of admission. The main strength of the movie, however, is the cast—each actor seems born for the role as they each perform to advance the movie’s message. The screen crackles when newcomer Blonsky as Tracy comes on—at home with her flab and tantalizing with her smile. Pfeiffer with her blonde curls, frosted blue eye-shadow and top-rate acting is every inch a lovely witch. Travolta as the obese mother, however, seems gimmicky. This is what happens when the star is bigger than the role. In a fat suit that jiggles as he moves, Travolta comes across as Travolta in drag pretending to be Edna; this sort of distracts from the guile-free appeal of the movie. However, when at last it is time for Travolta to dance, and you half-expect him to segue into pelvis-grinding “Saturday Night Fever”, Travolta succeeds in funny spoofing himself.

The likable characters played by the relatively less known actors enhance the real-life credibility of the story. In its own gentle way Hairspray aspire to rid viewers of prejudice. First it seems to say that racism is evil, as dramatized in a pro-integration march and as finally reflected towards the end when the whites and the blacks celebrate racial harmony in song and dance. Next it sets the self-conceit of the “beautiful” against the healthy self-confidence of the “ugly”—between the lines you hear that “beautiful outside does not necessarily mean beautiful inside or even beautiful at all” and that “with faith in your dreams you can also overcome your overweight without shedding a pound.”

ANSWER TO THE LAST ISSUE: KINDS WORDS CAN BE SHORT AND EASY TO SPEAK, BUT ECHOES ARE TRULY ENDLESS. -- MOTHER TERESA

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PAKISTAN

Pakistan lacks religious freedom, says priest

Christians here still face persecution for their faith, a Church official said. This, according to Catholic Bible Commission of Pakistan secretary Fr. Emmanuel Asi, is a contradiction of “the father” of the Pakistani nation’s dream of religious freedom. Christians make up only 1.5% of the 167 million Pakistanis. Asi said they are often treated as second-class citizens, denied basic human rights and victimized by social discrimination and political oppression.

S. KOREA

More funds for North’s flood victims

The South Korean Unification Minister has invested over 40 million dollars in sending essential relief services for the victims of the devastating floods that hit North Korea in recent weeks. The fund will also be used for reconstruction of destroyed houses. The N. Korean gov’t. said the torrential rains killed at least 300 people and left 300 thousand homeless, even if non governmental sources reported of a far higher toll. The calamity also damaged harvests, wiping out more than 11 percent of the national production.

JAPAN

Majority of whales killed are pregnant—report

Over 50% of the whales killed by Japanese whalers in the Antarctic Whale Sanctuary in 2006 were pregnant, a report said. A Japanese survey of their most recent whale hunt in Antarctic waters showed that of the 505 whales slaughtered, 262 of them were pregnant, including one of the three giant fin whales. The report was released ahead of the resumption of a Federal Court case the Humane Society International is taking against the Japanese whaling company Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha Ltd.

CAMBODIA

The world’s largest snake hunt

Seven million: that’s the estimated annual toll in the world’s largest snake harvest on Tonlé Sap, this country—the largest freshwater lake in south-east Asia. Tonlé Sap’s water snakes were largely undisturbed until about two decades ago, when declining fish catches and demand for meat for local crocodile farms left Tonlé Sap’s desperately poor fishermen with little choice but to set their nets for the snakes. About 70 per cent of the snakes caught are rainbow water snakes (Enhydris enhydris).

ISRAEL

Rebel group sneaks 40 tonnes of weapons to Gaza

An Israeli intelligence assessment of the militant Islamic group Hamas disclosed that Hamas has smuggled 40 tonnes of weapons into the Gaza Strip, apparently intent on resuming suicide bombings in Israel. A senior officer of Shin Bet, the domestic security agency, told the cabinet in private testimony that Hamas’ exiled leadership in Syria was plotting attacks to sabotage peace talks between Israel and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

CHINA

China suspends US meat imports

The government here has suspended imports of various animal products from some major US companies in an apparent attempt to turn the tables on American complaints about tainted products from China. The US and other countries have cracked down on Chinese products since the US authorities found in April that tainted Chinese pet food ingredients poisoned North American dogs and cats. Since then, a growing number of Chinese products have been found to be tainted with potentially toxic chemicals and other adulterants.

MALAYSIA

Gov’t about to lift monkey export ban

Thousands of wild monkeys could soon be trapped and shipped off to countries like China and Taiwan, ending a 23-year old ban on the trade in primates. A news report revealed that the trade ban—put in place by the government due to dwindling numbers and global concern about animal cruelty—was lifted recently. The move is largely expected to affect macaques which were heavily traded in the years before the ban.

INDIA

Terrorism is cowardice, says bishop

Terrorism is an “act of cowardice”, a senior prelate said, as he condemned two separate blasts in Kothi recently that killed 42 people and injured another 60. “The Church of Hyderabad condemns this terrorist attack in the strongest possible terms. It is horrendous that elements can unleash such a horrific wave of terror on innocent citizens. These bomb blasts are an act of cowardice,” said Hyderabad Archbishop Marampudi Joji.
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