The Politics of World Peace
“Quote in the Act

“All they’re trying to do is run me down.”

Barack Obama, first black U.S. presidential candidate talking about clash over civil rights and controversy over race in a presidential campaign that is most expensive so far, estimated by Fortune Magazine to cost $3 billion dwarving the 2004 electoral bid at $693 million.

“It’s very sad news for us, the Oblates and the Catholic Church.”

Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, OMI, on the killing of Oblate missionary Reynaldo Roda at the Tabawan mission station in Tawi-Tawi, by unidentified gunmen who reportedly wanted to kidnap him but resisted.

“There is nothing more antithetical to Harry Potter than Tolkien’s young Frodo or Lewis’ Prevensie siblings.”

Edoardo Riali of L’Osservatore Romano, calling J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter as the wrong model of a hero because he “transmits a vision of the world and human being full of deep mistakes and dangerous suggestions.”

“As long as we are pumping our money into security assistance and putting all our eggs in the basket with Musharraf, we are making a critical mistake.”

Democratic Senator Robert Menendez, on the worsening political situation in Pakistan, which, according to a senior Pakistani security official has degenerated into “serious repercussions” due to CIA presence.

“A leader without credibility becomes a barrier to progress.”

Bishop Teodoro Bacani, commenting on the latest survey of the Social Weather Station that revealed a plummeting public satisfaction with the Arroyo administration that has habitually failed to combat poverty and graft and corruption in government.

“We don’t have permanent enemies... what we have is a policy that is open to ending confrontation or conflict with any country that is willing to meet us on those terms.”

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, commenting on the Iran-US relations perceivably at the backdrop of the crisis brewing in Pakistan and Afghanistan which may turn out to be more serious than all of Tehran’s nuclear program.
THE onset of the New Year came with the thud; with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto last December 27 at the rally of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the largest political organization in the country; which she chaired. The incident sent shivers to the White House that must change gear if only to undo decades of erratic intervention to “save” Pakistan or else face a most likely scenario where Pakistan’s jihadis must now become unstoppable in its campaign to “Talibanize” the country.

More than the grief over the death of her predecessors in the Bhutto line of politicians who ended up with the same fate, Benazir’s killing summoned a deluge of grief, protests and violence from the masses. To thousands of moderate Pakistanis, her demise has dashed hopes of a reformed Pakistan that came short of portraying her as the “last chance” savior that will catapult the country at par with the better-off Asian neighbors.

Expectedly, she will be raised a martyr. But for what cause? She might have crooned the slogans of democracy, but her track record never measured up. In her two terms of office, albeit short-lived, her administration was convoluted with human rights abuses, abductions and killings of rival party members by government death squads—including her very own brother, Mir Murtaza—and, graft.

In 1995, Transparency International named Pakistan one of the World’s three most corrupt countries. Both she and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, now co-chair of the PPP, were accused of stealing tens of millions from state coffers. Graft and corruption became bywords of her stewardship—and inefficiency defined her rule.

But then somebody shoot her. Whether by reason of strategy, or folly, that indeed, made the difference.

This issue opens up with Kawagi Fernan’s “Civil Society Perspective on Mining.” The ultimate question is: who profits from mining? A political leadership that is burdened with popular accusations of illegitimacy, cheating, lying and tremendous credibility crisis, will find it very difficult to answer such simple question with a straight face. Because everybody knows who really pockets from mining—and all government initiatives, for that matter.

The Vicar General of the Diocese of Borongan, Msgr. Lope Robredillo pens the cover story of this issue with his “The Politics of World Peace”. A paradigm shift which implies a tectonic shift in the operative pursuit of world peace may satisfy the cravings for peace of the human heart. But how about changing the human nature? Read on.
The great lynchpin of the government pro-mining argument is that they will only promote and permit sustainable mining, while severely punishing any company who does not live up to the high environmental standards set by the Act.

Unfortunately this argument is flawed from the beginning, as there is no such thing as sustainable mining. There is smart mining, there is mining that causes limited environmental damage, but these types of mining are rarely of the large scale, thousand hectare coverage variety which the government ceaselessly promotes as the hope of the future.

Mining is among the most destructive practices known to man. Mitigation is possible, replanting an area with forestry, treating the tailings ponds and so on, but an apt analogy given by a local anti-mining advocate was: “if you peel the skin off a fruit and eat the flesh, could you replace the skin and still call it a fruit? A mining company will hollow out mountains and then cover them with dirt, and they will still call it a mountain.”

What is considered as safe mining in other countries is mining done with an eye to the environment in check, and so is done in the far wilderness, in areas where there is little or no human presence. While this raises a host of other problems, no human communities are at risk.

Contrast that with the Philippines. The mining sites that have garnered the greatest attention—Rapu-Rapu, Didipio and Canatuan—are ones where the community itself is rejecting the mine. Rapu-Rapu’s operations affect not only the stretch of the island but the waters upon which the municipalities of Sorsogon depend on for their fishing. Didipio, famous for filing the case against the Mining Act, is an agricultural community that views the coming mine as a risk to their already developed industry. Canatuan is a classic example of a community divided against itself by mining. In the Philippines, the environmental costs of mining are compounded by their human costs.

Even a mine relatively isolated can affect the community, if only because of the Philippines’ geography. We do not have vast stretches of unbroken wilderness. The areas that matter have been populated. The rivers that mining companies will utilize for their water and the forests they will need to clear have already been claimed, years ahead, by the communities living in the area. The ecosystem of the Philippines features deep connections between the coastal lowlands and central uplands. What happens in the far hills reaches to the shore, just as in the Marcopper disaster.

Similarly, the incidents at Rapu-Rapu at the end of year 2005 were an example of geography coming into play, alongside a display in a lack of common sense. The tailings ponds at the Lafayette site overflowed when torrential rains flooded them.
dozen typhoons per year, it seems more than a little senseless that a company had not taken such an obvious consideration as the weather into their planning.

Among civil society, it has long been suspected that there is a disconnect in the government’s policies towards mining and the reality of mining. Both the Act and the National Minerals Policy (NMP) seem to be born of this disconnect, wherein the government considers mining without considering the Philippines’ geography or social status.

The economic considerations of the mining act seem to be the source of this. Money, particularly in the amounts promised by the mining industry—estimates number in the easy billions of dollars—is an attraction enough as it is. An application for an FTAA requires an investment of 50 million pesos. To a government whose desperation for funds is palpable, mining is a windfall and it is easy to replace the reality with its promises.

Everything about the Mining Act and the NMP screams “make more money.” If it did not, then companies would find no reason to invest. If it actually promised to be stringent on mining, tough on violators and interested in development, mining companies would not come here.

The third world is attractive to miners because it is lax and welcoming, not because it has adopted laws as stringent as the first world countries whose populations and governments would respond to mining violations with efficient, legal swiftness. It is absolutely in the interest of mining companies to work in the third world, and make sure that the countries they work with have low environmental and social standards of accountability, if they have any at all.

In the National Minerals Policy, it is recommended that mining be a self-regulated industry, with the DENR, MGB and EMB existing only to facilitate the set up of mines with miners doing their own monitoring. Their accountability to the public is set to zero.

We know why this is so, because miners helped write the Mining Act. And to spend a few million pesos to tap untold billions of mineral resources is good business any way one looks at it.

The Price of Philippine Mining

The Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) that allows for 100% foreign ownership of a mining firm is the biggest draw to mining companies.

Not for legal or logistical purposes—as proven by the case of Marinduque where Marcopper/Placer Dome simply packed up and fled the country to escape responsibility for the mining disaster there—but for monetary reasons. Under the rules of the FTAA, all profits the company makes on its mine are for the company. It will not pay taxes for years. All its profits, all its earnings may leave the country, be repatriated to Canada, or Great Britain or Australia. For these very provisions, the Mining Act of 1995 has been called the equal of the mining laws of such mining-intensive countries as Australia, Great Britain, and Canada.

The connection is quite clear.

Global studies on mining have shown that countries (such as several nations in Africa) who give their economy over to mining remain poor unless they echo the progression of the first world mining countries that developed industries around their mineral extraction. Some of these countries, such as Sierra Leone and Congo are known for their “bloody minerals.” Sierra Leone has some of the richest diamond mines in the world, but their products are treated as “conflict diamonds” an industry perpetuated by way of brutal military force and child slavery.

The Philippines’ own history of mining has shown that the provinces—such as Agusan and Camarines Norte—which produced the highest amount of minerals were among the nation’s poorest. Poverty alleviation from mining has not held true and that was under conditions where the government was guaranteed a share of the profits, when companies were sixty percent Filipino owned.

With FTAs allowing totally foreign companies to extract, not to mention repatriate all wealth or enjoy tax holidays, where then will the Philippines profit from its own mineral wealth?

If tons of gold are being shipped out of the country and the companies are doing this with the blessing of the government, where will the promised riches come from?

To explain at length is to enter a discussion of income transfers, excise taxes and the global economy. To make that long story short, the government hopes to profit off a company’s crumbs. Since the
profits of a mining company under such laws will be so large, the relatively tiny amount that the government will make will still be substantial. This is among those ideas that look excellent on paper but fail to make the translation into reality.

Hence, the disconnect among government officials. They base their ideas on a flawed system and introduce more flawed ideas to prop it up.

When the National Minerals Policy was developed, it was intended to give focus to the country to welcome mining as well as provide a starting off point for LGUs to welcome companies to their provinces. It echoed a great many of the statements of the Mining Act, in some cases going into more specific details. By these, it was undone, revealed to be yet another part of the disconnect.

A perceived stance of a tough but welcome approach to mining is flawed. The Mining Act is not tough on polluters. One of its Implementing Rules and Regulations involves charging companies 50 pesos per ton of spilled tailings, no matter how much environmental damage costs. Put in simpler terms, this means that Marcopper would be charged some eighty million pesos for the estimated 1.6 million tons of tailings that spilled from its dam. After the spill, international agencies estimated that rehabilitation of the Boac River would exceed a hundred million dollars. This fine is not only ridiculous, but openly insulting to the people of Marinduque.

Another example of this is the issue of submarine tailings disposal as presented in the NMP. Tailings, the waste material generated through ore extraction, is one of the great problems of mines. It must be contained or disposed of. Since it can occasionally be toxic, separate facilities must be created for its management. On an island area, this may prove to be troublesome, but the government—perhaps aided by input from the mining industry—proposed the practice of Submarine Tailings Disposal (STD), a practice where tailings are pumped into deep waters off the coast where they vanish into the depths of the ocean. Out of sight, out of mind. Nowhere in the NMP does it state that STD is outlawed across the globe, and the First World especially, condemns the practice—when done in its own territories.

The government’s insistence that companies can expect that the rules which so hindered their practices in their home countries be absent here is the primary draw for investment. STD is cheap. There are no tailings ponds to maintain, manage and clean up in the event the mine closes.

Yet another provision that has been brought up regarding the Act is the provision that says a mining company need only receive permission from two levels of the LGU rather than all levels to begin mining. While the reality is that local government is indeed fractious and filled with factional power struggles, this type of decision-making renders communities moot. For it is communities, those directly affected by mining that will protest it, while local and provincial authorities will find less to object to. Especially the money.

This forced marginalization of opposition ensures that when it comes to mining everyone who isn’t coming with back hoes and millions in foreign currency, receives little or no attention. Unless that attention focuses on bringing them into conformity with mining, as with the example of indigenous peoples and the Indigenous Peoples Right’s Act.

The Indigenous Peoples (IPs) Opposition

Entering law in 1997, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) sought to give equity to the most marginal sector of the country, the original Filipinos, those who had, in their own way, successfully resisted centuries of colonial interlopers. The minerals of the Cordilleras would have been tapped by the Spaniards had they not been driven off by the tribes.

The IPRA’s passage was hailed for the most part, as it allowed IP communities to finally legally claim the land which they had occupied and worked since, in the IPRA’s terms, “time immemorial.”

This was all well and good until it came to the attention of concerned parties that a great many of these ancestral lands were adjacent or on top of the richest mineral deposits, bringing them into territorial and land use conflict with the mining firms.

This lead to what is known as the attempt to harmonize the IPRA to the Mining Act, in an effort to remove the barriers the IPRA presented to mining. This echoed in an attempted harmonization of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) and the LGU code, to also “grease the wheels” for the entry of mining.

In the case of the IPRA, it was the concept of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) that was hamstring. As the government recognized that the IPs may very well wish to allow firms access to their lands and resources—such as timber—the FPIC demands community level decision making and community given permission to industry.
While it remains in place today, its effective implementation is in question. The trend of the mining act is for the government to wilfully weaken its own regulatory functions and encourage self-regulatory mining. This benefits no one but the miners. In the case of the IPRA and the cases made for its “harmonization” it all but screams a removal of the rights of IPs to self determination.

An interesting side effect of this is again, the timing. The attacks on the IPRA came before it passed into law and continued after, spearheaded by the mining industry. This was in 1997, two years after the passage of the Mining Act and not long after the Marinduque disaster.

In a way it helped to organize the IP groups against mining as the National Council of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) were the first to leap to the IPRA’s defence. Moreover organization is indeed needed and necessary.

The case of Canatuan is an infamous one which displays the outer limits of the FPIC.

An inept bureaucracy and the concerns of marginalized peoples do not mix well. Canatuan and the mining firm with interests in the area—TVI—have helped to explode the area’s native Subanen population. The community is split in two, with pro and anti-mining community members squaring off. The anti-mining side claims that non-native Subanen managed to pass of their FPIC as one for all of Canatuan. The government acted with all speed on this pro-mining choice, but has barely responded to the complaint. In 2007, this came to a head when a delegate from the United Nations Committee for the Eradication of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) found considerable merit to the anti-mining argument and took the government to task for their inaction.

Yet in the interim, the pro-mining side has claimed victory, and TVI’s operations are in full swing. Militarization of the area is increasing, with Special CAFGU (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit) Active Auxiliary or SCAA units patrolling the land.

IP groups are wary that this will soon be the way of doing business across the country—with marginal groups cruelly robbed of promises of their rights to land, life and self determination by the combination of industry, wealth and greed.

The Final Analysis

A desperate country seeks wealth at any cost, inspired by tales of far off lands grown rich and decadent off the wealth buried beneath their soil.

Yet these tales are in a certain way, fantasy, lacking descriptions of the repercussions or comparisons to the reality within which the country must operate.

It may be no surprise to anyone but the reality on the mountainside, in the quiet provinces that no one truly bothered with or cared about until the wealth under them was calculated, their reality is far removed from the one the decision makers in the capital inhabit. But it is the capital that generates the laws, and the farthest province must abide by them. No matter the cost.

Of course, it is not the government who will bear that cost; there is no office in Quezon City that will ever be flooded with tailings. Likewise, Malacañang’s residents will never suffer from heavy metal poisoning.

Yet this risk is seen as risk enough to bring the country to a brighter tomorrow. Long promised but never delivered with failed projects by the wayside. With empty mining towns and poverty indexes a stark reminder of earlier, forgotten failures.

Between the first and third world a struggle rages, as the first seeks to utilize the third and the third seeks to become the first.

The struggle is between the riches we think we can make, and the riches we fail to use ourselves. What is the worth of the world, our world, our nation?

The messages the government is sending out are not simply mixed but largely negative.

If you are marginal, your input on mining is not only unwelcome, but possibly seditious and illegal. The words “economic sabotage” will be used. They will be used liberally.

If you raise a complaint against mining, you are “anti-development” because all development is generated by the whim of the government and the communities must stick to this single plan, and not deviate from it. If there is no room for a tailings pit, then tailings will go into the ocean. Fishermen and farmers will learn to work beneath the earth, because mines need unskilled workers to operate complex machinery.

In exchange for what can never be replaced there will be billions of pesos funnelled into the coffers of the national government, maybe. Probably not. In any case, those billions will be wisely spent by the national government, in the same way that generates the laws, and the farthest province must abide by them. No matter the cost.

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Saved by Hope

By Dr. Jeff Mirus

Having just finished my first reading of Pope Benedict’s second encyclical, Saved by Hope (Spe Salvi), I can pass along a summary of its riches, without obscuring them through excessive personal commentary. As the title indicates, this encyclical is devoted to the signal importance of hope to God’s plan. Benedict’s central thesis is that Christian hope utterly transforms human life.

Hope and Faith

The Pope begins by remarking on the close relationship between hope and faith in Scripture. The Letter to the Hebrews links the “fullness of faith” (10:22) to “the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23); in his first letter, Peter urges Christians to be ready to give a reason for their hope (1 Pet 3:15), that is their faith; and St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that before Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Benedict points out that from the first a “distinguishing mark of Christians” was “the fact that they have a future” (#2).

The pope notes the electrifying impact this had on people in the earliest period as they abandoned the various pagan religions, which offered no credible claims about the ultimate destiny of man, in favor of Christianity. The same is still true today for many who can find no ultimate meaning in life until they encounter the light of Christ. Benedict further insists that the role of hope is vital, for faith can be interpreted (wrongly) in a merely informative sense, whereas genuine hope always goes beyond the informative to the performative. Hope brings a change of life and an active commitment to whatever leads to this ultimate future, this salvation, this fulfillment and happiness.

The Pope argues persuasively that Christian hope should have the same dramatic impact on the contemporary world that it had on the equally materialistic world of the ancients. In one of many particularly fine passages he writes: It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves...
of the universe and of its laws, we are free. In ancient times, honest enquiring minds were aware of this. Heaven is not empty. Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love. (#5)

**The Reality of the Kingdom of God**

In the course of his discussion, Benedict develops the important point that faith, by opening us here and now to what we hope for, enables us to experience the reality of God’s kingdom in this present life. This experience in turn becomes the final proof to us that what we hope for is real and true. The pope thus explicates the seemingly illogical power of faith to confirm itself. Because faith enables us to experience and participate in that kingdom for which we hope, we are able actually to know from this present experience that God’s promises are true. This, Benedict argues, is no mere wish fulfillment, but a legitimate fruit of faith, which is already in some measure the substance of things hoped for.

Another important aspect of our participation in the Kingdom of God is that our hope is not purely individual, but directed always toward a union with Christ, and through Christ to one another. For the Christian, salvation is always a social reality. The inexpressible fulfillment and joy promised by our hope is made possible precisely by a community of love. We cannot prepare ourselves to receive this gift unless we abandon our own self-centeredness and open ourselves to the other and to others.

This is an important point for Benedict because he sees clearly that religion has retreated in the modern period into a sort of private world. He explains that modernity has put its faith in technology and politics as the means for the perfection of the world, leaving only private and otherworldly considerations to the domain of religion. Infected by these same attitudes, Christians have too often learned to frame their aspirations and activities in personal, individualistic and private terms. Then secularists turn and accuse Christians of seeking only a private and selfish salvation. But the restoration promised by Christ is not a private and individualistic restoration, for Christian hope always has a corporate dimension.

The Pope reviews the ways in which first rationalism, then science and technology, and finally politics have become vehicles of corporate hope, vehicles which cannot ultimately go where they need to go to satisfy both the necessary freedom and the intrinsic longing of the human person. He notes that in the course of time “it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me” (#30). This brings Christian hope back to center stage.

**Spe Salvi is a rich reflection on hope in a relatively small package... Its theme of hope as the key to salvation is particularly relevant and reassuring in our own times, which might truly be described as an age of false hope, or even of hopelessness.**

**Settings for Hope**

The pope identifies three “settings” for learning and practicing hope. The first is prayer, in which “we must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment—that meager, misplaced hope that leads us away from God” (#33). While lesser legitimate hopes are also important to us, we must ultimately move beyond even these to the ultimate hope which grounds our faith in God.

The second is action. Benedict sees a serious and important relationship among hope, suffering and significant action. He notes that only those who are full of hope can accept suffering, and even turn it into a hymn of praise. Therefore, it is hope that enables us to bear witness to the truth for the good of man, despite the suffering this may bring. Moreover, a society whose members are incapable of accepting their own suffering will also be incapable of any sort of solidarity with the suffering of others. Only those strengthened by hope can both accept their own sufferings and also share in the sufferings of others, in an extension of Christ’s redemptive love.

The third is Judgment. Benedict argues that the Christian notion of the Last Judgment is rooted not in terror but in hope, hope not just for individual salvation but for the restoration of the entire order of things. This hope can be fulfilled only by God, for the programs of mere men cannot usher in a perfect world without eliminating human liberty, and even then the sins of the architects would ensure the world’s continuing imperfection. In contrast, hope in future justice can fulfill man’s deepest desire while providing a spur to the conversion of hearts here and now.

**Final Notes**

Near the end of the encyclical, Benedict incorporates a highly relevant explanation of purgatory, which is an essential component of Christian hope precisely because many people’s lives are characterized by a desire for the good that is never completely extinguished, despite many weaknesses and sins. Few of us, perhaps, are perfectly ready for God or have completely rejected him, and so we hope also in a final period of purification, in which even our hopes will be purified. Benedict also weaves our very prayers and sacrifices for others, including those in purgatory, into his thesis on hope: “Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too” (48).

As is frequently the case with documents of this type, the Pope concludes with an invocation to Mary. This takes the form of a moving prayer highlighting Mary’s own personal hope, the hope that enabled her to embrace her new role as the Mother of the Church, even when all seemed lost at the foot of the cross. Benedict concludes by reminding us that Mary is indeed the star of hope, asking her to “shine on us and guide us on our way!” (#50)

**Spe Salvi is a rich reflection on hope in a relatively small package. The entire encyclical can be read in an hour, though an extended meditation by way of spiritual reading would certainly be appropriate. Its theme of hope as the key to salvation is particularly relevant and reassuring in our own times, which might truly be described as an age of false hope, or even of hopelessness.**

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Biofuel: 'the cure worst than the disease'

By Teodoro C. Mendoza

From hereon, the whole world will have to face the challenge on how to adjust to the continuing increase in oil price. The main reason is over consumption. All the people on Earth use 80 million barrels a day, or about 29 billion barrels/year, a utilization rate which took Mother earth to form and store in nine million years since the Silurian period (Rodolfio, 2007, BP Global Statistical Review of World Energy, 2007). Its tight and declining supply provides clear signal that the era of cheap oil is gone! (Campbell and Jean, 1998).

Compounded by the rising demand for oil due to the winters in the North, the double digit growth in China and also the booming economy of India and other countries have altogether propelled the increase in oil consumption. As a whole, economic growth was accompanied by a growing oil consumption. For instance, an increase in world GDP by 0.1% leads to an increase in final energy demand of about 0.2% (Zittel et al., 2007). In addition, the reduction in Nigerian oil output and the disturbance in the Middle East are further fueling oil supply uncertainties. The Energy Watch Group (EWG) of Germany had projected that the global oil supply will only be 38 Mb/d by 2020 and it will only be reduced further to about 39 Mb/d by 2030 (Zittel et al., 2007).

Our current lifestyle revolves around oil. Oil accounts for 95% of the global energy used for transportation and 11% of generated electricity. It is the energy form used in the manufacture of many products (plasctics, chemicals, road asphalt, cement, fertilizers, pesticides, to name a few (Rodolfio, 2007). Food abundance is due to oil as growing food crops is so dependent on oil-based chemical inputs (fertilizer and pesticides) and the various post-production stages (processing, packaging, hauling, and distribution). It is no surprise that any increase in oil price is triggering a chain reaction in the prices of various commodities and services.

Globally, biofuel as renewable energy source is being peddled as the humanity’s salvation to the energy problems. Is biofuel the solution to the oil crisis? If it is the solution, are there no problems that may result from its break-neck pace of implementation? In a developing country like the Philippines, is biofuel solution compatible to agrarian reform and rural development initiatives? Briefly this paper is written to address these questions. More detailed discussions can be read in the article published in the Philippine Journal of Crop Science (PJCS) issue of December 2007, 32(3).

Biofuel production is a typical agricultural crop production venture. As such, biofuel production requires land, water and crop production inputs. Biofuel production inevitably influences priorities setting on resource use and utilization by producing countries as it is happening already. A clear consequence, it dichotomizes agricultural crop production into 2 major ends: food and fuel. First and foremost, it should be pointed out that all prime agricultural lands have been cultivated or developed to produce the current supply of food. Future expansion will already encroach on fragile and less favorable agro-environments which are too steep, too dry, or with barren soils (Buringh, 1989). In the Philippines, as early as the 1970s, all the prime agricultural lands (10 Mha) have already been cultivated. Biofuel production will inevitably use additional lands over and above the existing agricultural lands that are devoted to food crop production. The Philippines is already a NET FOOD IMPORTING COUNTRY. Where shall we grow biofuel crops without threatening further the country’s food security?

Second, biofuel production will propel water scarcity into crisis proportion in 2 ways: a) feedstock production shall use tremendous amounts of water putting severe pressure on water allocation for food or for biofuel crop production, b) processing shall produce voluminous liquid wastes polluting both surface and ground waters, thus, reducing further the supply of clean and potable water which in turn, shall heighten the need for expensive bottled water that only moneyed people could afford.

The biofuel mania is occurring when the world food supply is dwindling rapidly and food prices are soaring to historic levels. Food price index rose by more than 40 percent this year, compared with 9 percent the year before, “a very serious risk that fewer people will be able to get food,” particularly in the developing world, said Jacques Diouf, head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization: http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/12/17/europe/food.php. This food situation was attributed to the following interrelated factors: global warming, food crops diverted to biofuel and meat production, high shipping costs due to high oil prices. Global warming decreased crop yields in otherwise food surplus producing countries like Australia. More people in the world now eat meat as they become more prosperous. In turn, more grains are fed to animals to support the growing population of meat-eaters. High oil prices have doubled shipping and transport costs. This is critical among net food importing countries like the Philippines. A complex issue is directly related to the use of crops to make biofuels.

Producing biofuel could decrease further the availability of adequate food supplies in 2 direct ways: 1) feedstock production for biofuel will divert the lands, water and other resources away from food crops production as pointed out earlier. For financial viability considerations among investors, biofuel production will be carried out in agricultural lands with developed infrastructures. Private capital will not be used in road and bridges construction as this will erode their profit besides, it is not their duty. As such, lands with developed infrastructure will be the inves-
Biofuel: ‘the cure worst than the disease’

Biofuels is now starving enormous number of people considering its effects on food prices and the low food purchasing capacity of many people in the world (OECD Rpt. http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,508089,00.html). The world’s poorest already spend 50-80% of household income on food. They suffer more now because high fuel prices push up food prices. There are 2.7 billion people in the world living on less than $2 a day. In the Philippines, about 85% of all Filipinos live on less than $2 per day (CIA, 2007). For every 1% rise in the cost of food, 16 million people are made food insecure. What will be the scenario if 850 million cars will be “fed with food” intended for human beings?

Unknown to many people, biofuel does not contribute to energy security especially if corn and other energy-intensive crops are used as feedstocks for bioethanol production. Producing ethanol from corn consumes 25% more energy than it yields. This is true for other starchy crops like cassava, sorghum and others. Biofuels production are neither environment-friendly. Furthermore, their massive production shall further increase environmental degradation in the following ways: a) more land clearing/deforestation will be done to grow the feedstock source which in turn shall lead to more soil erosion due to tillage. Initially, fire as the cheapest and fastest tool for land clearing shall be used. The obvious consequence is the immediate release of ancient-CO$_2$ stored in the plant biomass to the atmosphere; b) drying of peat soils to grow more palm oil which will release more CO$_2$ in the atmosphere; c) the industrial plantation technology that will be used in feedstock production and greater use of oil in the various stages of feedstock production and processing. The largest source of greenhouse gas, are the chemical fertilizers (nitrogen is often the limiting factor in crop production). First, huge amount of oil is consumed in the manufacture of nitrogen fertilizer. Including transport and storage, the energy use ranges from 1.8-2.04 li of oil per kg nitrogen. “Fertilizer energy” is 28% of the energy used in agriculture (Heller, 2000). Second, once applied in the soil, 3-5% of it escapes as nitrogen oxides (NO$_x$). NO$_x$ has 206X global warming potential (GWP). For every 1 kg nitrogen, more than 10 kg CO$_2$ equivalent is emitted in the atmosphere; d) using cellulosic biomass to avoid the critique that producing bioethanol competes with human food, shall deplete the soil with organic carbon so essential in maintaining soil fertility. If done, however, it will backfire as the farmers will compensate the nutrient lost by applying more expensive oil produced chemical fertilizers.

Proponents of biofuels argue that fuel crops planted on ecologically degraded lands will improve rather than destroy the environment. When the government of Brazil re-classified some 200 million hectares of dry-tropical forests, grassland and
marshes as degraded but apt for cultivation; in reality, these are the bio-diverse ecosystems of the Mata Atlantica, the Cerrado and the Pantanal, occupied by indigenous people, subsistence farmers and extensive cattle ranches. The introduction of biofuel plantations in these ecosystems will push further the indigenous people, subsistence farmers and extensive cattle ranches to the agricultural frontier of the Amazon jungle. As corn price increase, more farmers now in the Philippines grow corn in the rolling to sloping uplands. While it is good for them initially, the long term consequences as in land slide when heavy rains occur is difficult to imagine.

On the socio-economic side, biofuel production is neither pro-poor nor pro-small farmers in the Third world countries like the Philippines. As an agri-industrial production set-up, biofuel production thrives on large scale monoculture plantation. Scattered small farms planted to biofuel is difficult to coordinate to assure stable supply of feedstock. Cost of hauling will be prohibitively high. This will trigger land concentration which shall displace agrarian reform beneficiaries, thus, reversing the gains of redistributive agrarian reform achievements of many Third World countries including the Philippines. While biofuel production can create jobs in impoverished rural areas, where the bulk of the world’s poor and hungry live, producing biofuels favor large-scale production, meaning small-scale farmers could be pushed off their land. Smallholders will be forced out of the market and off the land (UN Energy, 2007). An icing of the biofuel cake, many big land owners are influencing AR policies that lands intended for biofuel feedstock production are exempted from coverage under the agrarian reform program of the Philippine government. The strength and tentacles of biofuel lobby may extend further to the point that CARP may no longer be extended or renewed in the country due to the technical, managerial, and financial viability requirements of biofuel production.

Another aspect of biofuel production which should be examined is its structure. Biofuel is a typical agro-industrial production-cum processing systems and it thrives best on economies of scale. This leads to the consolidation of the biofuel supply and distribution linkages, which in turn, provides ample space for maneuver and control by big corporations to extract profits. Profit motive is at the distal end of environmental protection, equitable, and socially-just societal goals. Laws and standards based on limiting lands planted for biofuels are simply myths and preventing the concentration of supply chain and distribution channels among few players—the TNCs and MNCs is illusory rather than real.

During this transition stage to more renewable, stable and environment-friendly energy alternatives, extra care and precautions are necessary to avoid falling into the trap of having a “cure worst than the disease—the biofuel malady!” There are many options to reduce oil consumption and they are as follows: improve energy efficiency, shift to organic agriculture and adopt vegetarian diet or less meat diet, adopt ecological lifestyle, minimize the use of cars!—walk/bike ride, shift to real and more renewable and environment-friendly source of energy like solar, wave, and wind energy. The Philippines is a sunshine-rich country. Right now, imported oil supplies 36.8% of our total energy bill (2004, DOE as cited by Lee, 2005). We still have the time to shift our energy sources to these real renewable energy sources, thus, avoiding the biofuel malady.
Just learned that the second national rural congress will be convened by our bishops sometime this year. The first one was held, hold your breath, 41 years ago!

When the announcement came in a priestly gathering recently, I could not help but detect traces of a defense mechanism trying to cover and make up for the apparent neglect.

Could it be that our Church had been indifferent to the plight of our rural poor?

I have my doubts. Even if we have been committing all sorts of mistakes and our inadequacies are too obvious to be labor, to think that we have been indifferent to the rural poor would not be quite right.

We have been with everyone. We may have our deficiencies and excesses, still the fact is that we have been enjoying and suffering life with everyone.

We have been in all this together. Let’s never forget we are all members of the same body, the same family. This should be the given from where to start this second national rural congress.

We should just tackle the proposed agenda with sobriety and thoroughness. As it is, it’s already a tall order: “to facilitate the opportunity for the rural poor to voice out their concerns and their experiences of rural poverty and be heard by the Church.”

We have to be wary of the temptation to turn the occasion into a binge of blaming the usual suspects: the rich, the government, the powerful, etc. This way of resolving problems should be a thing of the past. It’s largely useless, making more enemies than friends.

We have to guard against the tricks of ideologues and the media who will try to make capital out of this event. We have to be ready to pacify the waves of hype, flimflam and gamesmanship that will likely accompany this conference.

Most relevant in this kind of collective exercise is the virtue of prudence, one that always goes with sobriety that seeks to know everything needed to be known, and that blends the demands of charity and justice well.

It is the prudence that goes with restraint, patience, discretion and good manners. It requires studying, consulting and dialogue about possible options and scenarios, focusing more on what unite rather than on what divide, on what build rather than on what destroy.

Never to be forgotten is the distinctive contribution of the Church, which is to relate whatever social issues and problems we have to our ultimate supernatural calling. This can never be considered irrelevant.

It is to echo what St. Paul said: “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and how to abound. In any circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” (Phil 4, 11-13)

All of us have our own personal experiences of rural life. In my case, I consider it as an unforgettable part of my growing-up years. Summers were spent in a fishing village, my father’s birth place.

We used to hike some distance to reach it from where the bus would drop us off. It was then a place with no running water, no electricity. I had to help fetch water from the well, gather firewood, do laundry in a nearby spring, tend the chickens and pigs.

My friends were all sorts, the normal and the not-so-normal, since many had handicaps, if not physical then mental. I had friends who were hunchbacked, hare-lipped, cross-eyed, retarded, etc.

But we were all happy. Hardly anyone felt like an offender because hardly anyone felt offended. Our conflicts and mistakes were settled spontaneously.

Poverty was all around and yet everyone worked hard and was always hopeful. Occasional heartbreaks occurred as I lost some friends just because of common illnesses like diarrhea, flu, chickenpox.

The folks treated my father like a demigod expected to solve their problems. I heard and saw them cry. And yet when I would ask what was wrong, they would just smile and spare me the details. “There’s God and an afterlife,” they would say, giving me a glimpse of their faith. It is this faith that has to be protected at all costs, whatever the social condition.
**Vietnamese Catholics protest stealing of church property**

HANOI, Vietnam, January 7, 2008 — Hundreds of Catholics held prayer vigils in the Vietnamese capital over the weekend as part of a continuing effort to recover confiscated church lands, Agence France Presse reports.

After Saturday and Sunday Masses clergy and laity lit candles, placed flowers, and sang at the iron fence surrounding land once possessed by the Holy See’s delegate to Hanoi before his expulsion in the late 1950s.

“It’s the land and the property of the church. We have the certificate of ownership of the property since 1933,” one priest from the Hanoi archdiocese, told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

The 2.7-acre lot and the large French-colonial villa it holds have been put to other uses by the Vietnamese government. The building has been used as a discotheque, while its garden has been turned into a parking lot.

Undercover police took video and photographs of the protesters, the priest said. “Some Catholic followers were questioned by security officials, and some say they were pressured not to attend the prayers.”

Vietnam has Southeast Asia’s second-largest Catholic community, with some six million adherents among a population of 84 million.

The officially communist government continues to control religious activity and forbids Catholics from studying to become diplomats or police officers. The Church remains barred from operating its own newspapers, schools, and hospitals.

Conditions for Vietnamese Catholics are reportedly improving. Christian festivals such as Christmas are increasingly popular even among non-Christians.

In a December meeting with Archbishop Joseph Ngo Quang Kiet, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung pledged to consider the property disputes. (CNA)

**NSO junk seminar for priests**

MANILA, January 11, 2008 — A provision requiring solemnizing officers to undergo seminar before they would be allowed to conduct wedding ceremonies has been cancelled.

The National Statistics Office made the revocation following a strong opposition from the Roman Catholic Church and other religious sector.

“We realized that it has sparked protests, so we have decided to revoke that particular provision of the administrative order requiring an orientation seminar,” NSO administrator Carmelita Ericita said in a news report.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), meanwhile, said they “are all happy about this turn of events.”

“I am thankful that the NSO listened to our prayers to cancel the requirement,” said Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, CBCP president.

The prelates have been urging the government to cancel the required training since the topics to be taken up in the required seminar have long been part of the priest seminary course.

Lagdameo said their priests don’t need the training anymore because they are updated with the marital laws of the land through their diocesan chancellors and canon law experts.

The NSO policy is in line with the Administrative Order 1 Series of 2007, which embodies the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) governing the registration of authority to solemnize marriage with the civil registrar general.

A provision in the IRR states that before granting a certificate of registration and authority to solemnize marriage (CRASM) to a solemnizing officer is the requirement for proof of training conducted by the NSO which means, unless priests undergo such seminars, they will not be allowed to solemnize the sacrament of matrimony.

Courses offered in the seminar include: Marriage Laws and other related laws, Marriage Registration Procedures, and Registration Procedures of the Authority to Solemnize Marriage. (CBCPNews)
KATHMANDU, Nepal, January 12, 2008—As soon as news came of the death of Sir Edmund Hillary, the hero of the Himalayas, Nepal’s Buddhists lit candles in their homes and monasteries, to remember the man who more than any other helped the population and the Buddhist religion in the northern part of the country.

Hillary, the only honorary citizen of Nepal, died yesterday at the age of 88. In 1953, together with the Sherpa Tenzin Norgay, Hillary climbed to the summit of the world for the first time. Since then, his efforts on behalf of the Nepalese, and in a particular way for the Sherpas (“climbers”), never ceased: he created an international fund for the construction of schools and hospitals in the country, and he always remained close to the population.

The lama Ringboche Namang Tenzing Norgay, abbot of the Longbuche Stupa monastery, has asked all the faithful of the country to honor their “father” by placing a lit candle in their windows. According to Nun Lama, Hillary “was like a godfather for us, as he helped to establish monasteries and schools for the monks, which paved the way to Buddhism for many people.”

Kami Temba Sherpa, the director of the hospital of Kumbu (founded by Hillary in 1976), says “The fund that he directed opened 27 schools, 2 hospitals, 9 health clinics, and a few monasteries. For the Nepalese, and in a special way for the Sherpas, he was a godfather of rare generosity.”

Thongboche Sherpa, a resident of Khumbu, adds “The minority Sherpa groups living in the Khumbu area (the area nearby Mt. Everest), were deprived of basic needs, and Hillary tried his best for the people here in terms of education, health, transportation and even Buddhism and local culture. So, we regard him as godlike figure.” (Kalpit Parajuli /AsiaNews)

NEW DELHI, India, January 11, 2008—India’s Tata Motors unveiled yesterday the world’s cheapest car, one that the company promises will revolutionize the auto industry by bringing car ownership within reach of tens of millions of Indians but which has sparked a lively debate among motor experts, environmentalists and car aficionados.

The four-door subcompact Nano has a two-cylinder 0.6 liter gasoline engine with 33 horsepower, giving it a top speed of about 100 km/h (60 mph), according to Tata. It gets 21.2 km per litre (50 miles per gallon). It would be sold for US$ 2,500.

The basic version has no radio, air conditioning, passenger-side mirror, central locking or power steering and only one windshield wiper.

Tata says its “people’s car” will conform to European emission standards and plans to sell it in Western markets. For some observers that will be a difficult task, achievable only by sacrificing safety and quality. To be approved for sale in Europe the company will likely have to make major technical improvements in safety and pollution controls which would raise its price.

And environmentalists cringe at the idea that millions of Nanos might take to the road in India.

Chief United Nations climate scientist Rajendra Pachauri, who shared last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, said last month “I am having nightmares” about the low-cost car.

The forecast for India’s fast-paced economic development includes a substantial growth in the number of cars. By 2016 car sales should reach US$ 145 billion, four times the current volume.

Presently, the Nano’s “revolutionary” success lies more in marketing and image than in economic output.

“It will be very difficult for them,” said Darius Lam of Autocar International. “They will have to ramp up production [...] and sell lots of these before they make any money from it,” on the condition that consumers actually go for the people’s car. (AsiaNews/Agencies)
Is the heart of man in his weapons? The statistics is staggering. Despite all the effort to limit or abolish war, it seems that war is more normal than peace. For instance, from 1496 AD to 1861, it is claimed that the world knew 3,130 years of war and only 227 years of peace. From 1945 until the 1980s, there have been more than 150 conflicts throughout the world. How normal war is could be gauged from the fact that in the last 400 years, European nations, it is noted, have signed no less than 8,000 peace treaties. One can easily recall Bernard Shaw's observation in his play, “Man and Superman”: in the arts of life, man invents nothing; but in the arts of death—well, look at his inventions for murder and mass destruction; they become more sophisticated as years go by. Nations continue to allot huge budget for their military storehouses. If they are not in open war, they continue to engage in arms race, war of nerves, psychological warfare, war of ideology, cold war! Who can blame Karl Marx for viewing history as a history of class warfare?

**The Heart of Man is not in His Weapons**

For all that, however, the heart of man longs for peace. That yearning is classically expressed by the Prophet Isaiah: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again” (Is 2:4). Understandably enough, this hope for peace, this pining for a conflict-free human experience, is central to all religions. Jews expect the fulfillment of the divine promises about the final peace (cf Zec 9:9). Christians affirm that when Jesus comes again, peace will be established (cf Col 3:15). International peace is one of the 10 basic principles of Baha’i faith. Buddhists look forward to world peace once it is established within individuals.

Indeed, even ideologies accept peace as part of their goal. Socialism, as well as communism, postulates that once the state withered away after a period of proletariat dictatorship, there will be a classless society where peace will be achieved. In fact, even those who wage war have no other purpose than peace. For even they who make war,” writes Augustine of Hippo in his classic, *City of God*, “desire nothing but victory—desire, that is to say, to attain peace with glory. For what else is victory...
than the conquest of those who resist us? And when this is done, there is peace. It is therefore with the desire for peace that wars are waged, even by those who take pleasure in exercising their warlike nature in command and battle. And hence it is obvious that peace is the end sought for by war. For every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace. For even they who intentionally interrupt the peace in which they are living have no hatred of peace, but only wish it changed into a peace that suits them better. They do not, therefore, wish to have no peace, but only one more to their mind.”

**Powerful Nations Define Peace**

The problem then is not that the heart of man is in his weapon; the problem is that people are not willing to pay the price of real peace. In most cases, nations approach peace in terms of self-interest. It is something like the peace that obtains in the family because the man dominates his wife and children, or, among brothers and sisters, because the domineering brother imposes his will on the rest. There is peace because the power of the strong remains unchallenged. In his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II analyzes it thus: “In a word, it is a question of transferring in the sphere of internal conflict between social groups the doctrine of ‘total war’, which the militarism and imperialism of that time brought to bear on international relations. As a result of this doctrine, the search for a greater balance between the interests of various nations was replaced by attempts to impose the absolute domination of one’s own side through the destruction of the other’s side capacity to resist, using every possible means, not excluding the use of lies, terror tactics against citizens, weapons of utter destruction.”

There is peace, in other words, because stronger nations weaken if not ruin others militarily and economically. Nowhere is this truer than in the Philippines. Since its independence, the country has been dependent on the US for its military supplies and, consequently, can be dictated upon whom to fight. What Claro M. Recto said in 1956 remains true: “In a polarized world of Giant Powers we can be described as totally unarmed… The result is that, whoever we depend on for arms necessarily is in a position to dictate to us why, when, how and against whom the arms are to be used. Thus we are deprived of the sovereign right to determine who shall be our enemy or our friend or our ally.” As for economy, Recto said that it was heavily dominated by aliens and not meant to develop to bring welfare to the common people. Its economic policy, which remained colonial, “has for its basic objectives: to keep the Philippines the agricultural country that it has always been; and to attract to the Philippines foreign investments.” This dependency state of the poor nation is ensured through the local elite that further the interest of foreigners. In the end, it is the powerful nations that control the wealth of the smaller nations. Thus, weakened both militarily and economically, other nations have scarcely any chance to fight the powerful.

In this connection, John Paul II, in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, asserts that various mechanisms employed by powerful nations worsen the poverty of Third World nations: “One must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost automatically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest. These mechanisms, which are maneuvered directly or indirectly by the more developed countries, by their very functioning favor the interests of the people manipulating them. But in the end they suffocate or condition the economies of the less developed countries.”

**War of Nerves and Arms Race**

But how is peace maintained among those who are powerful? While on surface they are not at war, yet they are engage in
competition both militarily and economically. Historically, what took shape was a cold war between powerful nations, led by the United States on one side, and by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the other side. The war of nerves had the effect not only of preventing an open war between the two, but of dividing the Third World countries, which were too weak to fight the powerful, into two blocks, and which served as their puppets, almost capable of nothing except to bark or wag. Russia had her Warsaw Pact, the US her NATO and SEATO. But, while the cold war was beneficial to the rich nations, it further undermined the poor countries and made them dependent on the mighty. Billions of dollars that should go to development were used in the production of arms, and dragged them into wars for which they should not have been involved in the first place. The wars in Vietnam, Korea, Israel, Afghanistan, Congo, Kenya, are a few examples. In these poor countries themselves, the ideological war between East and West is continuously waged, like the one between the government forces and the New People’s Army in the Philippines.

Arms race is the main strategy of this war of nerves. Each side tries to outdo the other in terms of military superiority on the conviction that it assures resistance by the militarily inferior country in attacking its more powerful enemy. Arms race therefore “promotes” peace. Which is why, although both the East and West have arsenals of arms that are enough to destroy humanity and the environment, they continue to spend trillions of dollars every year in order to ward off threat by the enemy. The thought of mutually assured destruction, which is possible under a nuclear war, “guarantees desistance by the mighty”. “An insane arms race swallowed up the resources needed for the development of national economies and for assistance to the less developed nations. Scientific and technological progress, which should have contributed to man’s well-being, was transformed into an instrument of war... The logic of power blocs of empires... led into a situation in which controversies and disagreements among Third World countries were systematically aggravated and exploited in order to create difficulties for the adversary.”

Small Nations in the Face of Precarious Peace

In this kind of politics, only the powerful nations, it can be seen, would find the world peaceful, but never the weak ones that experience year-round instability and poverty. How then do the small nations, given their weakened position, respond to this precariously “peaceful” situation? What are ants to do in a quarrel between elephants? A recourse that presents itself is for the poor nations to align themselves with, and serve as satellites of, the powerful. Here, for instance, one pursues a mendicant foreign policy. As Recto eloquently noted after the war, “in the world of parliament of the United Nations, it is no more difficult to predict that the Philippines will vote with the American Union than that the Ukraine will vote with the Soviet Union. American policy has found no more eloquent spokesman and zealous advocate, and Russian policy no louder critic and more resourceful opponent, than the Philippines. Americans may disagree violently with their own foreign policy, but it has no better supporter than the Philippines.”

Another alternative would be to organize small countries against any form of domination by the powerful nations. Recto, for instance, as early as 1954, envisaged an Asian solidarity “against colonialism in any form, political or economic, from whatever source and direction and by whosoever imposed upon an Asian nation. And ‘Asia for Asians’ is the only principle they can understand because most of them are still suffering from the effects of the colonialism that first deprived them of the blessings of freedom a couple of centuries ago.” In 1969, he envisioned Asian nations having mutual relations which could expand into a network of multi-lateral collaborations. “It will produce a truly united Asian bloc of nations which can be an effective force for peace and render valuable assistance to people who are still struggling for their freedom from foreign control.”

Given, however, the realities of the contemporary world, it is almost impossible not to be caught up in the over-stretched and overwhelming power of the wealthy nations. Still, some have a different way of looking at world realities and for them, peace resulting from the existence of a few powerful nations and of the many that are poor and weak is not real. For them, an authentic one can come if these wealthy nations are toppled down. Which is why, a new reality emerged: the phenomenon of international terrorism. The fall of the twin towers in New York on Sept 11, 2001 was so far the loudest expression of that protest against the kind of peace defended by the powerful. Unable to fight their enemy face to face, they resort to terrorism in
retaliation for what they perceive as injustices done to the poorer nations. Why most organized terrorists come from Arab countries may be an indication that for them the imperialist countries have for decades done them great injustice that has to be corrected if the world is going to survive and experience authentic peace.

But others have recourse to another way to gain leverage with the powerful countries: going nuclear. For possessing nuclear weapons, a nation may be hated, but she is definitely feared. All know that a nuclear war would be devastating. It will destroy not only military installations, but will kill millions through spread of radiation and contaminate large areas. Since no one in his right mind will allow that to happen, as it result in the obliteration of this immoral civilization, no nation will ever wage a large scale war even with a small that has nuclear weapons. Thus, peace is assured. No wonder, less powerful nations like Iran, Iraq, North Korea and others lust after possession of weapons of mass destruction, thinking that once they acquire them, they would gain the respect of powerful nations. (The only problem would be—what if an outlaw gets the nuclear bomb? That would drive everybody scared, including the powerful!)

Anyway, such is the politics of peace that obtains in the present world. But, in reality, it is merely the absence of a large-scale war. In many parts of the world, there is war engaged in by two or three countries or war within the same country. It is a war that owes its origin to the unjust world order and to the unjust order within the nation itself. There is conflict because the needs of the many who are poor and disadvantaged are not addressed. This is true of the Philippines. As Time puts it in his cover story, “The War with No End,” "What is beyond dispute is that the government is in seemingly perpetual conflict with a significant portion of its population. The NPA should be a cold war relic, a forgotten insurgency rotting away in the Southeast Asian jungle. Instead—and despite its bloody purges, its ‘sparrow unit’ death squads, and its defunct ideology—it remains an enduring symbol of the failure of successive governments to improve the lives of ordinary Filipinos."

Is Real World Peace Possible?

Small wonder, then, that many people believe world peace is scarcely possible to achieve? The British Philosopher, Bertrand Russell, is not alone in his skepticism of world peace: “After ages during which the earth produced harmless tribolites and butterflies, evolution progressed to the point at which it has generated Neros, Genghis Khans, and Hitlers. This, however, I believe is a passing nightmare; in time, the earth will become again incapable of supporting life, and peace will return.” Reinhold Niebuhr is similarly skeptical. He thought that while individuals may be converted to peace, yet, the “immoral society” would never rid itself from the curse of war. Indeed, the road to peace is com-

‘Unite the Church against Abortion’

WE welcome the UN adoption of the moratorium on the death penalty, passed on December 17, 2007, and we think it is a logical conclusion to extend it to a moratorium on abortion. As matter of fact, human life begins from the very moment of the conception. Therefore without making concrete efforts to respect human life and protect it from that very moment any pro-life movement, any efforts to build a culture for life, and any movement to protect human life (including the adoption of the moratorium on the death penalty) sounds empty. To give a direct example, the number of serious criminals executed every day is only a tiny proportion compared with the thousands of innocent human lives that are silently killed by abortion every day throughout the world.

Therefore I give my full support to the launching of a worldwide movement aimed at a moratorium on abortion, including the manipulation of embryonic stem cells for research, artificial fertilization, and the destruction of deformed fetuses because these embryos and fetuses are perfect and precious human beings made in the image of God.

The statement of Toward the Culture of Life issued by the CBCK on March 15, 2007 reaffirmed the position of the Catholic Church in Korea against abortion and all embryonic stem cell research. It is a logical conclusion to extend it to a moratorium on abortion, as matter of fact. It is a logical conclusion to extend it to a moratorium on abortion. Therefore I give my full support to the launching of a worldwide movement aimed at a moratorium on abortion, including the manipulation of embryonic stem cells for research, artificial fertilization, and the destruction of deformed fetuses because these embryos and fetuses are perfect and precious human beings made in the image of God.

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We Christians are all invited to practice the moratorium against abortion in our daily life here and now. A true culture of life has to be built from 1, and you. For this, we the Christians have to commit ourselves to create a genuine culture for life by respecting and treasuring every single human life in whatever form. Those embryos and fetuses are innocents, disarmed, voiceless and vulnerable human beings.

FR. CASIMIRO SONG
Secretary of the Life 31 Movement of the Korean Bishops Conference
January 7, 2008

(Source: AsiaNews)
plex and difficult, but because peace—not sword—is in the heart of man, it is possible and plausible. Some scientists have observed that there is now a growing consciousness in the current generation that, unlike centuries before, does not accept war as a necessity or source of glory.

The Fundamental Principle: Humanity is One Family

But where do we start? As can be gleaned from what has been noted so far, the fundamental defect of the politics of peace in our time is that it is premised on greed, selfishness and self-interest—there is peace if my own country prevails and lives in peace, if my country reigns supreme, is sufficient in all its needs, and has access to the sources of what it wants, without having to be concerned that this entails domination, exploitation, destruction of other nations. For this reason, the fundamental basis for real world peace is to think and act in terms of the whole humanity as one family.

Says John Paul II in one of his messages for World Day of Peace: “This seeking of peace must be based on the awareness that humanity, however much marred by sin, hatred, and violence, is called by God to be a single family. This divine plan needs to be recognized and carried out through the search for harmonious relationships between individuals and peoples, in a culture where openness to the Transcendent, the promotion of the human person, and respect for the world of nature is shared by all.” He continues: “There will be peace only to the extent that humanity as a whole rediscovers its fundamental calling to be one family, a family in which the dignity and rights of individuals—whatever their status, race, or religion—are accepted as prior and superior to any kind of difference or distinction.

He goes on: “For this to happen, a complete change of perspective will be needed: it is no longer the well-being of any one political, racial, or cultural community that must prevail, but rather the good of humanity, expressed in the recognition and respect for human rights, sanctioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It is necessary, then, to abandon ideas and practices—often determined by powerful economic interests—the political, cultural, and institutional divisions and distinctions by which humanity is ordered and organized are legitimate insofar as they are compatible with membership in the one human family, and with the ethical and legal requirements which stem from this.”

From a Buddhist perspective, the same fundamental basis of real world peace is echoed by the Dalai Lama in his article, “A Human Approach to World Peace”: “A universal humanitarian approach to world problems seems to be the only sound basis for world peace. What does this mean? We begin from the recognition that all beings cherish happiness and do not want suffering. It then becomes both morally wrong and pragmatically unwise to pursue one’s own happiness oblivious to the feelings and aspirations of all others who surround us as members of the same human family. The wise course is to think of others also when pursuing our own happiness…. We are facing problems because people are concentrating only on their short-term, selfish interests, not thinking of the entire human family. They are not thinking of the earth and the long term effects on universal life as a whole.”

This principle is enormously important, and its significance cannot be overestimated. If this fundamental basis is recognized, it will become clear why, for instance, an offense against human rights is an offense against humanity itself, why earth resources have a universal destination, why real peace is intertwined with the integral development of the poor and disadvantaged countries and why these countries have the right to share in the enjoyment of material goods, why disarmament is in accord with human solidarity, why the poor must be the agents of their own development, to mention a few. Of course, an understanding of the consequences of this principle requires a change in our perspective, even a paradigm shift. But it will definitely imply a tectonic shift in the way we do the politics of world peace, if such peace is to satisfy the longings of humanity’s heart.
The Jesuits elect their new superior general and discuss the reasons for their decline. But the Vatican authorities have already said what they expect from the order: more obedience to the pope, and more fidelity to doctrine.

by Sandro Magister

Since the day following the feast of Epiphany, 226 Jesuits from the five continents have been meeting in Rome in a general congregation, the thirty-fifth since Saint Ignatius of Loyola (in the illustration, with pope Paul III) founded the order in 1540.

The assembly will elect the new superior general of the Society, in the place of the outgoing Peter-Hans Kolvenbach. And on February 21, Benedict XVI will hold an audience with the newly elected head, together with the delegates who have come to Rome representing the almost twenty thousand Jesuits all over the world.

Moreover, the congregation will discuss a report on the Society’s strengths and weaknesses, and a dozen questions concerning the identity and mission of the Jesuits in today’s world. Including their vow of special obedience to the pope.

The discussion will last for several weeks, and will be held behind closed doors. But it is already known what the critical points will be. These were indicated with words that were sometimes harsh, in the homily for the Mass that opened the session on January 7, from an authoritative non-Jesuit: Cardinal Franc Rodé, prefect of the congregation for institutes of consecrated life.

It is easy to guess that Cardinal Rodé expressed the thought and expectations of Benedict XVI. One thing that preoccupies the Church’s leadership is the influence that the Jesuits have on the bearing of the other religious orders, and on the formation of priests and theology students in the many schools and universities that the Society operates all over the world, beginning with the Pontifical Gregorian University, which prepares many future bishops.

“It is with sorrow and anxiety,” Rodé said in the homily, “that I see that the ‘sentire cum ecclesia’ of which your founder St Ignatius frequently spoke is diminishing in some members of religious families.”

And again: “With sadness and anxiety I also see a growing distancing from the hierarchy. The Ignatian spirituality of apostolic service ‘under the Roman Pontiff’ does not allow for this separation.”

And further on: “The doctrinal diversity of those who at all levels, by vocation and mission are called to announce the Kingdom of truth and love, disorients the faithful and leads to a relativism without limits. [...] The exegetes and theological scholars are involved in working together under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings. [...] May those who have to oversee the doctrine of your magazines and publications do so in the light of and according to the rules for ‘sentire cum ecclesia,’ with love and respect.”

It is no mystery that of the last seven theologians scrutinized by the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, four belong to the Society of Jesus: Jon Sobrino, Roger Haight, Jacques Dupuis, and Anthony De Mello.
“God’s Word: Source of Justice, Reconciliation and Peace”  
(Micah 6:8; 2 Cor 5:17-20)
enough, not touching our hearts, consisting only in the observance of external rites. This is what the prophets and our Lord Jesus precisely condemn. We do well to remind ourselves what God, through the verse quoted above, wants us to do if we have true faith in Him manifested by a genuine practice of religion. Only if we fulfill what God requires of us, marvelously summarized by Micah, can we eliminate injustice in our midst. Injustice, a situation where human persons are not given what is due to them, causes division, conflicts and even fratricide. The insurGENCY that has been going in our country for 38 years, the deep political rupture and the prevailing economic inequality are among the signs that our country is in a situation of injustice.

We have been longing for peace, the biblical “shalom”, which does not mean only the absence of war or trouble but the enjoyment of all what is good, a foreshadowing of the dawning of God’s kingdom. But peace cannot take place unless we are fully reconciled to God and to all our brothers and sisters.

Already within the Old Testament, God has prefigured the reconciliation of human beings with Himself in not ceasing to offer them His pardon. He is “the God of tenderness and of pity” (Ex 34:6). But the perfect and definitive reconciliation has been accomplished by Jesus Christ, for it is an important aspect of Christ’s work of redemption. By Christ’s redemption we have become a new creation, fully reconciled to God as St. Paul says: “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

On God’s part the entire work of salvation and reconciliation is already accomplished. However, reconciliation among human beings is far from being accomplished. Thus St. Paul defines apostolic activity as “the ministry of reconciliation”, which may last till the final coming of God’s kingdom. Following the example of St. Paul, Christians must ever be mindful of the “ministry of reconciliation”, making great efforts to be the architects of peace among all brothers and sisters, bringing them into full harmony with God through the redeeming act of Christ. The profound demand of this reconciliation is this: the sinner reconciled by God cannot render to Him a pleasing worship or sacrifice if he does not first of all reconcile himself with his fellow human beings (Mt 5, 23 f).

For our country to achieve peace or “shalom”, the elusive dream of our land, all Filipinos must learn how to reconcile with each other, forgiving one another from their hearts just as “God no longer takes account of the trespasses of men” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). But full reconciliation will take place only when we do what God requires us: to do what is right, to show constant love and to walk humbly with Him. May Mary, “the mirror of justice”, intercede for us so that our country will finally enjoy the peace of all God’s children.

Most Rev. Arturo M. Bastes, SVD, DD
Bishop of Sorsogon
Chairman of ECBA-CBCP
7TH General Assembly of Chaplains and Volunteers in Prison Service

November 27-30, 2007
Bukal ng Tipan, Maryhill, Taytay, Rizal

DECLARATION

WE, the 202 participants—23 priests, 16 religious sisters, and 163 lay workers in prison service—from 55 arch/dioeceses, prelature, apostolic vicariate and 5 religious groups and organizations, came together to the 7TH General Assembly of Chaplains and Volunteers in Prison Service from November 27-30, 2007 in Bukal ng Tipan, Maryhill, Taytay, Rizal, to share our experiences and deepen our understanding of “Discovering the Face of Christ Among the Prisoners”.

In this assembly we were given the opportunity to understand the meaning of the following:

• God has preferential option for the poor. This option is grounded not on who the person is but on who God is;

• God is a benevolent God who desires fullness of life for all;

• God is against poverty and oppression, injustice and dehumanized conditions;

• God’s love for humanity, the poor especially, goes beyond the moral disposition of the poor, whether they take advantage of those poorer than they are, whether prisoners are repentant or not. Nothing in them (and for that matter, in us), can diminish this love;

• That prisoners, with few exceptions, are poor both materially because of their dismal, subhuman conditions in prison and sociologically because of their marginalization from the rest of society;

• That to minister to the prisoners is to channel God’s benevolence, compassion and mercy; to enter the despair and hopelessness of another and to allow ourselves to be affected, to be distraught, to be confused and even to be desperate. But we believe that our solidarity does not end in pain but that this empathy will drive us to alleviate the suffering and bring about healing;

- That we are called to be “heralds of God’s infinite compassion and forgiveness”

The assembly provided us with information and insights from practitioners on the many aspects of correctional systems, basic human needs, community engagement, human rights, and pastoral care to prisoners, and ministry to the released prisoners and restorative justice.

The assembly addressed the issues and concerns affecting the prison ministry and the challenges and the struggles that many of us experience as we minister to our brothers and sisters in prison.

In the light of the aforementioned, we declare:

1. That many jails and prisons are not able to answer the basic services that prisoners are entitled to. Most jails and prisons are overcrowded and the prisoners are abused. These inhuman situations must be rectified. We will advocate and lobby for penal reforms and will continue formulating programs that will address this deplorable conditions in accordance with the Gospel values and the local laws and the many UN Standards and Norms in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice;

2. That our present justice system fails to address the needs of prisoners, victims and the community. We advocate that programs, laws and systems be put in place to implement a shift of paradigm from punitive, retributive system to restorative justice—a justice that restores, heals and protects; a justice that makes the offenders accountable for what they have done; a justice that provides restitution to the victims who are most of the time ignored and forgotten by the current justice system; a justice that engages the community in facilitating the healing process, thus leading to the re-integration of the victim and the offender to the community;

3. That we who, despite our limitations and countless problems, are able to work to make God’s love visible. We offer various services through our Integrated Prison Pastoral Care Program that support and nurture the prisoners’ faith, respond to their material needs and provide assistance to safeguard their fundamental rights and dignity;

4. That we can be of better service to the members of the prison community if we are united, equipped and encouraged. We can do this by having better coordination, undergoing capacity and development programs and coming together in fellowship, undergoing theological and pastoral updating and caring for each other;

5. That we are aware that much is still to be done to seek alternatives and better approaches in addressing the problems in the criminal justice system.

We ask for the grace that our involvement in prison ministry that is rooted in God’s benevolence, be guided by a steadfast hope in a transformed situation, a stubborn hope in a future and a radiant hope in promised healing and wholeness.

With the help of God, through the intercession of our Mother, Mary, we consecrate all our efforts to this end.
My dear people of God:

Peace!

I would like to bring to your attention for reflection, discussion and action an issue which has been given extensive coverage in mass media.

This is about the farmers of Barangay San Vicente, Sumilao, Bukidnon and their continuing struggle against injustice.

Let us recall that in 1996 the 144 hectares of the land claimed by the Sumilao farmers were awarded to 137 of them as beneficiaries. However, through machinations of power and money, the land was converted from agricultural to agro-industrial in 1998.

Though this resolution was legally questionable, the Sumilao farmers respected the decision of the Supreme Court that the land can be converted to an agro-industrial status within a five-year period. However, none of the conditions and provisions contained in the conversion order was fulfilled at the end of the term. Hence, by law, the land must revert back to its original agricultural status open once again to CARP.

In view of this, the Office of the President issued an Executive Order (EO) revoking the Conversion Order for not complying with the rules of conversion. However the EO does not include a Cease and Desist Order for the company to stop its hog shelter construction activities; neither does it include the necessary Notice of Coverage.

Let us not forget that over and above legalities, the Sumilao concern is a moral one. It is about the dignity of the human person. It is about justice and human rights. It is about their right to be heard. It is about a people fighting for freedom, refusing to be controlled by external dictates, struggling to stand up, for the right to determine his own future.

The question may be asked. Is it right for the rich to own everything and let the poor remain slaves to the caprices and whims of “good and generous” employers? The Sumilao farmers’ answer is “No”.

Hence, we witness once again an exemplar of the indomitable Filipino spirit in this small group of people. Perhaps, insignificant to society in terms of status and number. They were even unpopular in their own district (“No prophet is acceptable in his hometown” (Lk. 4:24), yet these people walked 1,700 kilometers, through mud and dust, cold rain and scouring concrete, plagued with disease, fever and fatigue. They have awakened our conscience and made us aware that there is something very wrong in our society.

For us, however, the issue is far more significant. When we see these people unfazed by a colossal corporation, standing up to claim what is theirs legally, and morally, it becomes for us a question of our spiritual standing: whether we are truly children of God, source of all that is life-giving in this seemingly hopeless world. Dare we remain in the background, deaf and mute?

My dear People, let not apathy, cynicism, faithlessness, hopelessness or pessimism grip our hearts! We are Christians, people of hope. What we hope for we have already attained in substance albeit partially. The risen Lord with us is already, an assurance of victory over sin and death.

Let us hope and pray, then, that these urgent concerns facing the country will find a peaceful resolution soon before it is too late.

Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us!

+HONESTO Ch. PACANA, SJ, DD
Bishop of Malaybalay
January 13, 2008
Electoral reform

IT is a widely and wildly known fact that Philippine elections have been anything but honest, orderly and peaceful. There is no need really to mention the usual loss of lives plus the standard loss of ballot boxes, the counting of ordinary votes cast by the living plus the extraordinary votes cast by the dead, the anticipated burning of precincts plus the expected burning of certificates of canvass, together with the failure of elections here and there plus the failure of re-elections now and then.

In other words, lying, cheating and stealing, posturing, shouting and fighting, add here the loud accusations and louder counter-accusations—these are constant accompanying elements of the local, regional and national elections in the country. This is saying nothing about the non-mystery of vote buying, vote padding and vote switching. And there is the perpetual difficulty of vote counting. In plain language, it would be a first class miracle of some sort, were Philippine elections altogether truly laudable and really tolerable.

Year 2010 is not that far. Yet even this early, expressly and publicly, aspiring presidential candidates from the opposition, from the administration and from nowhere are already being slowly but surely heard and numbered. There are even reports to the effect that election propaganda materials are in one way or another already being heard and seen in certain places. In other words, there are marked indications that 2010 is certainly an election year.

What is however truly strange about the over-all picture of 2010, as a signal election year is the practically complete stillness and silence about the imperative of electoral reform this country badly needs. There is the urgent question about the personalities in the Commission on Elections from top to bottom of the election personnel in the country. There is the pressing matter of cleaning the Voters’ Lists of long dead and buried individuals, of gross multiple registrations together with disqualified voters. And there is the compelling need of automation about which millions of pesos have already been spent, thousands of voices have been raised—and there is still nothing categorical that can be said about it, neither anything concrete seen about the same.

No wonder then that not few people appear convinced that 2010 could be anything but an honest-to-goodness election year. And this perception is not only premised on the utter lack of serious and deliberate moves in undertaking electoral reform. The “stand down” posture is particularly true on the part of the ruling government that is supposed to have the mandate and the needed logistics, to act accordingly as late as now.

Or is it true after all that “NOEL” is a distinct possibility precisely when presidential elections among others are mandated by the Philippine Constitution? Would there be instead a Charter Change? Or would the State of Emergency be then declared for reasons deliberately staged? If so, would the people in general simply keep quiet, merely stay still? While it is possible that there are some individuals whose imagination is not only fertile but also wild, and whose thoughts wherefore are along the lines of the previous queries, it is however a given that it has become so hard to trust the present administration, to believe that it will do what is right, true and just.

Sinister years

PHILIPPINE history is certainly not without its sinister years, i.e., specific time frames that have either caused serious and lasting socioeconomic turbulence in the political situation of the country, or foreseen to bring about much disturbing and enduring political liabilities with alarming immoral undertones with big adverse impact all over the land. With malice towards none but with truth in mind, the marked suffering of the people in the recent past years and the already perceived distinct political disorder yet to come some two years from today, can be thus noted—more for remembrance and caution than simply a pessimist approach.

2001

This otherwise apparently promising year, all began when Filipinos were then rejoicing for the exit of a profoundly disgraced and effectively dismissed Chief Executive. Replaced according to the Constitution by his second in rank, there was reasonable national anticipation of ethical revival and moral recovery in national governance. This great expectation was in fact further enhanced with the official pronouncement made precisely during the National Hero’s Day by the successor of the eventually impeached President. She loudly and clearly renounced the pursuit of the presidential office. Reasons invoked: To unite the people. To undertake electoral reform. To work for national development.

But not long after the popular rejoicing and clapping for such an apparently generous and even heroic option, some kind of an alleged miracle or a vague mystical event happened. The same subject party claimed that no less than God spoke to her. This was even supposedly followed by the advisory of a Pope—who was in fact then already dead. The avowed over-all heavenly message was that she must run for the Office of the President because the nation needed her. And again, in the spirit of a proclaimed heroic decision, she did. Thus began the painful and pitiful calvary of the Filipino people.

2004

This was a bad, bad, bad year. Would that it were possible to forget this year, to remove it altogether from Philippine history. But there were events that took place in full view of the people, not to mention with full details and in full color. Lest it become too cruel to national memory, it will be enough to mention but three famous—or quite infamous—quotations that say: “Hello, Garci!” “I am sorry.” “Noted.” And that is enough to make people cry or laugh, to launch a thousand and one funny or sick text messages.

2010

Enough to say that this forthcoming year though still far ahead, is already creating a good amount of worries and fears. There is no stopping it from coming. In the same way, neither is there the least certainty about the good or the evil national and local politics have in store for the people. One thing is sure: the year can be anything but promising in social justice and peace.

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In these disturbed and disturbing times in the country, the children and the youth are pitiful victims in many ways and for so long a time now. This is not only on account of the plague of poverty and misery a good number of them suffer from—such that not long ago a young girl went to the extent of committing suicide primarily on account of hopelessness in pursuing her studies. This is neither simply about their consequent predisposition to sickness vis-à-vis their usual non-access to public welfare. Nor is this merely by reason of the downright killings, the exploitation of women and children, the proliferation of prohibited drugs and many other criminal acts they hear if not actually witness.

There is in fact the marked domestic liability a good number of Filipino children and youth experience daily for difficult and long time-spans. This is the depressing continuous absence of their fathers and/or mothers from their homes who have to seek whatever available employment they can find abroad—not minding the attendant dangers. For one reason or another, it has been established that relatively few families become financially stable of OFW remittances. And in the event that this domestic material sufficiency becomes a reality, the children and youth still suffer from psycho-emotional instability.

But the big and profound woes of both parenting at home and teaching in schools are the continuous spectacle of flagrant graft and corruption especially among many high-profile public officials in the land. Add hereto the reality that the rich, powerful and influential manage to be above the law such that only the poor and the helpless are brought to prison and stay there. In other words, very bad examples of dishonesty and deceit are amply provided by a good number of infamous elders as a matter of course. And the ample moral garbage thrown by these characters is definitely destructive of the right and sound value formation of children and young people in the country.

The big predicament of parents and educators is the glaring fact that the children and youth are taught what is right, true and just at home and in schools—while they behold the public and even proud display of gross dishonesty and vulgar duplicity in their cities and municipalities, in the regions and in the nation. Instead of being simply disoriented, they in effect become misguided and deformed.

The worst part of this sick socio-moral acclimation is this: When these children and young people become adults themselves, they will make their country pay dearly for their twisted value system. And this is neither amusing nor funny to think about and expect.
The window

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour a day to drain the fluids from his lungs. His bed was next to the room’s only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed next to the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed would live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the outside world. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake, the man had said. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Lovers walked arm in arm amid flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man could not hear the band, he could see it in his mind’s eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Unexpectedly, an alien thought entered his head: Why should he have all the pleasure of seeing everything while I never get to see anything? It didn’t seem fair. As the thought fermented, the man felt ashamed at first. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and found himself unable to sleep. He should be by that window—and that thought now controlled his life.

Late one night, as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help. Listening from across the room, he never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running. In less than five minutes, the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now, there was only silence—deathly silence.

The following morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendant to take it away—no words, no fuss. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

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Worry not bug

For months I notice the painted rock that sat on Karen’s coffee table. The rock was painted and its face had a smile that just made you smile when you looked at it. I examined the rock and painted on the bottom was “why worry”. Curious I asked Karen where she got the rock.

She told me that during a very stressful time in her life, a friend that she worked with gave her the rock. Her friend told her that when she looked at this rock, she was to remember not to worry so much. Her friend called it her “worry not bug”. There was a poem with the rock, she went and got it and as I read the poem I thought how true it was:

Why Worry by Author Unknown

10% is related to my health which worsens while I worry, and only
8% is “legitimate,” showing that life does have real problems which may be met head-on when I have eliminated senseless worries.

Karen went on to explain that she used to worry about everything and everyone. She now uses the rock as a reminder not to worry about the things she cannot change. She also went on to tell me that when she finds herself worrying, she asks herself what percentage this worry is? Most of the time she found what she was worrying about was the 40% things that will never happen.

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Violence, Society, and the Church
A Cultural Approach

Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM

“What is there in a culture that facilitates and legitimizes violence? Why do certain cultures legitimize particular types of violence?” The questions posed by the author in his introduction situate readers to the reality of violence which the book lucidly explains. History has much to tell us how violence been a part of society since the pre-modernity period. Thanks to the development in sciences and various disciplines, we now have a greater understanding of what constitute violence and how cultures can play a part in legitimizing it. In these contemporary times, violence is manifested in all types and manner: ideological conflicts, terrorism, pathological forms of nationalism, racial violence, ethnic cleansing, famine, domestic violence, workplace abuse, cyberspace violence, intercultural violence. Provocative in its presentation, the book gives an anthropological view of the roots of violence in modern society. Although insights from various disciplines have been applied for clarity, the main emphasis is on culture and its capability to initiate and legitimize violence. The author’s personal reflection on the nature of violence and its causes can resonate with those who at one time or other have experienced violence in their lives. Fr. Arbuckle uses culture models to draw his point, thus aiding readers to a deeper understanding of their “experience of cultures at the local and global levels.” The book does not also shrink in admitting that the Catholic Church, possessing a culture of her own, has much to discern and to own regarding her own contribution in legitimizing violence. Published by Claretian Publications, this volume is a sequel to earlier works by Fr. Arbuckle on the relationship between culture, society, and Church.

Transforming Society
Reflections on the kingdom and politics

Melba Padilla Maggay, Ph.D.

Just how possible is it to transform Philippine society? To free it from the culture of corruption that continually feeds the perpetuation of dehumanization poverty? Although this book posts no definite answer to the question, it however, “shares perspective and lessons learned out of hard-won struggle.” Maggay goes on to say that the book serves as “signposts for fellow travelers,” a guide for those who continue to seek justice and meet the face of Christ in their suffering neighbor. In her introduction, the author uses the story of Lazarus as a springboard to highlight her point, thus challenging readers to reflect on what each can do to bring about change and transformation in Philippine society. Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, SJ proposes his own insights by saying, “the book offers useful reflections on attitudes and strategies, dangers and traps in the arena of social involvement...it offers a timely reminder to keep our focus on God and His work in the world...” Grounded in Scriptures, these sociological reflections surely challenge the Church and each one of us in particular. The book dares us to look deeply into our hearts and see what and how, we as an individual and as a church have to do to bring transformation to society.

Mga Tilamsik-Diwa ni Soc Rodrigo

Bernie C. Santos and Corazon Lalu-Santos, Mga Patnugot

This book is a collection of short poems penned by Soc Rodrigo. For the younger generation who never knew Soc Rodrigo, but probably heard of him from their elders, this book provides a glimpse of the man. He was not only a writer and orator but a great poet as well. As a public servant, he fought the dictatorship and got detained for it. His poems are rich in insights. His discourses include love of country, the importance of science as guide to Christian living and God’s presence in the life of his people. Published by Jesuit Communications, the volume is compiled by Ateneans Class ’58 as their project to celebrate their 50th jubilee.

Stirrings of a Heart in Prayer

Fr. Salvador G. Agualada, Jr., CMF

Simply said, this book is one of those easy read that can be finished in one sitting. But one should not be fooled by its simplicity, because scattered among the pages are profound reflections by someone who is spiritually attuned in his relationship with God and to the realities around him. A collection of homilies, addresses, essay and poems, this volume has been written by the author at various times and circumstances of his life; as a seminarian, and as a priest. His insights, rich as they are, give the readers a glimpse of himself, his joys, hopes and dreams in life. Fr. Agualada’s reflections show us that indeed, we can find and experience God in all situations of our life, be they issues that disturb us or circumstances that bring us joy. When we talk of these experiences to God, they are transformed into a prayer. Thus, they become “stirrings of a heart in prayer.” Fr. Agualada is the Director of Claret School of Quezon City. This is his first book.


ANSWER TO THE LAST ISSUE: WORDS WHICH DO NOT GIVE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST INCREASE THE DARKNESS. — MOTHER TEREZA

Pope John Paul II

Clues: 1) T, 2) H, 3) E, 4) C

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quotes in quiz booklets available at book sale stores in SM, Robinsons, and selected malls in Manila. For mail order text 0919 2803036.
BANGLADESH

Ex-PM charged with extortion

A metropolitan trial court has formally charged Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with extortion for allegedly receiving $440,000 from a businessman when she was still in power. Her sister, Sheikh Rehana and cousin Sheikh Selim, who was also a former minister, were likewise charged for their participation in the alleged extortion.

E. TIMOR

Australian PM visits Timor

Australian PM Hon Kevin Rudd visited East Timor to lend his support to efforts to stabilize and rebuild the nation after last year's violence. More than 2,000 Australian-led international forces and UN police remain on patrol, deployed to restore and maintain calm after unrest flared on Dili's streets.

PHILIPPINES

Catholic Priest killed in RP

A Catholic priest has been killed in the Southern Philippines on January 15. Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) missionary Fr Reynaldo Roda was shot dead inside a Catholic school in Tabawan, in Tawi-tawi province. The incident is under investigation.

CHINA

Youth crime rises

The number of juvenile criminals in China has doubled to 80 thousand over the past 10 years. Blame goes to China’s one-child policy, creating a generation of single children who are unable to respond to social challenges. But analysts argue that rather than the said policy—the education system and social environment should be blamed.

BURMA

US to boost sanctions

The US gov’t will lead a global campaign to step up sanctions against Burma’s military rule if it persists to snub calls for a transition to democracy. At least 31 people were killed and hundreds more missing, after the military cracked down on protests last year led by Buddhist monks.

NEPAL

Probe Kathmandu ‘killing field’

The government’s failure to protect the site of alleged army killings in Kathmandu signals an unwillingness to probe past atrocities, Human Rights Watch said. “This site may reveal horrific killings linked to the Nepali army, and the government has got to move more quickly to investigate,” said HRW. Officials earlier made fine-sounding statements on human rights, “but when it comes to actual cases it’s doing precious little to investigate effectively.”

IRAQ

Attacks on Christian churches persist

Fear haunts Iraqi Christians as attacks on churches continue, Fides service reported. On Jan. 9 in Kirkuk, two car bombs exploded close to the Chaldean church and the Syrian Orthodox church of Mar Ephrem. No one was reportedly hurt.

INDIA

Business embracing Eastern philosophy

Multinational corporations are turning to eastern philosophies to counter work related stress. Vedanta, an Indian philosophy, is now being taught at institutions such as Columbia Business School and London Business School.

CAMBODIA

HRW urges gov’t to ensure safety of Buddhist monks

A human rights group urged the government to ensure the safety of Buddhist monks whom police attacked during a recent peaceful protest against the imprisonment of monks in Vietnam to the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh. HRW said the gov’t should “emulate” the police involved for what they did. They are Cambodian citizens (monks) who deserve protection, not more mistreatment, from the Cambodian government,” the group said.

TAIWAN

Nationalists earn landslide victory

Taiwan’s opposition nationalists, who favor closer ties with China won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, boosting their party’s chances of regaining the presidency in March. The win by the nationalist Kuomintang dealt a devastating blow to the party of President Chen Shui-bian.

PAKISTAN

Abducted Christians released

Christians abducted last Jan. 4 by alleged Taliban militants in Waziristan province were freed on Jan 13. Asianews said the victims were freed after an intense “political pressure” on the kidnappers. Altaf Masih, Babar Masih, Emanuell, Sakhawat Masih and his son Imran Masih were traveling to Wana a Der, when the abduction happened.

IRAN

Iran to answer nuke questions

Officials here will be answering all the remaining questions from the UN nuke watchdog related to the country’s controversial atomic program next month. “We will try to solve all the outstanding questions by mid-February,” said Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, Iran’s atomic energy organization head.
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