How realistic is restorative justice?
“Climate change is the greatest manifestation of a crisis between man and nature.”

Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, called for reforestation this week to combat climate change, saying that its effects are as immediate and menacing as the current global financial meltdown.

“The real crisis does not appear to be merely financial.”

Celestino Migliore, the Archbishop permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said last week before the interactive panel of the 63rd session of the U.N. General Assembly on the global financial crisis, pointing out the unbridled profiteering and the unscrupulous pursuit of gain at any cost regardless for the basic rules of business ethics.

“In response to the global economic crisis and the pitiful state of our country, the time to rebuild our country economically, socially, politically is now.”

Angel Lagdameo, Archbishop of Jaro and President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, bewailing the unabated corruption in government, has called on the people to prepare for a new government in disdain of the current that seem to be a hopeless case.

“They are more interested in Philippine politics, news and movie stars.”

Jon Melegrito, communications director of the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NAFFAA); commenting on the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) released two weeks ago showing that only 67% of Filipino-Americans are likely to vote in the US elections, compared with 82% among Japanese-Americans, 73% among Indian-Americans and 72% among Korean-Americans.

“I don’t know about you, but I see Obama Internet ad every day. And I have for six months.”

Sara Taylor, White House political director; commenting on the phenomenal Obama campaign that harnessed the internet and other forms of the new media to organize supporters and reach voters who no longer rely primarily on information from newspapers and TV but on new platforms as YouTube, and SMS.

“I am proud of my name, but if you have a name like mine you will find people run away, are afraid of you.”

Omar Osama bin Laden, the fourth of 19 children fathered by Osama bin Laden; who is presently seeking asylum in Spain after making headlines last year when he married a British woman.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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We almost fell off our rickety chair when Donald Dee, or whoever is he, suddenly popped up on national TV brandishing an air filled with might and extraordinary confidence in a Malacañang press conference last October 29.

Shortly, Inquirer.net came up with the story: “PCCI’s Dee ‘scolds’ CBCP Head,” which opened with “The Chairman emeritus of The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) claimed to have reprimanded Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo over the phone over reports he called for a change in government due to allegations of massive corruption.”

The “scolding” continued: “Beyond that, let me say this very clearly archbishop, that business, we businessmen, need a calm environment to work in. With your statement, you can see that some groups with different agenda are moving.”

The “scolding” ended with: “The business leader said he asked Lagdameo to issue a rejoinder to which the prelate reportedly: I will try to do it.”

Honestly, we could not find any spontaneous reaction, even from our gut, perhaps in the same way that we are at a loss on how to retort in front of lies. We seemed like taken with a mixture of horror and mockery of how haughty one can become if only to hold on to the margins of power—and keep holding on even to the helms of shamelessness.

But Dee’s arrogance aside, the closest we can get to the “calm environment” that he envisions in business is the proverbial Japanese “Sanbiki no Saru” or the three wise monkeys that “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” — but in the context of one who is shrouded with the clutches of evil, as being party to a system that is corrupt.

Yet, this is not the stuff that a true businessman is made of, for how can business thrive in the face of massive corruption such as what is true in the country today where some big business had either to expatriate or die if not do business with corruption itself by learning to dance with the wolves.

It escapes our mind why foremost leaders of this country refuse to be aware of the reality of corruption in our midst. As in any malaise, the first step to healing is acceptance. The country cannot move forward while it is sick, despite calls of Malacañang to move on and let bygones be bygones. Business, too, cannot prosper while the country is grounded on a deep-seated malady as corruption—a social and moral cancer.

We cannot agree more to the observation hoisted by Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo in his latest honest statement: “In the past few years up to today, we have watched how corruption has become endemic, massive, systemic and rampant in our politics. The faces and symptoms of corruption are overprized projects, multi-billion scams of various kinds, election manipulations, anomalous transactions, bribery of both high and low, unsolved murders of media practitioners. Corruption is a social and moral cancer!”

Our cover story is written by Rudy Diamante who explores a better option to the present penal system in the country. But how realistic is restorative justice in a country that cannot even restore itself from a long haul of infirmity. Read on.
Corruption—A Social and Moral Cancer

Quotes from some Prophets of Hope

By Archbishop Angel N. Lagdameo

In this message, we would like to articulate our group’s reading of our situation not in our own words, but as discerned and articulated no less by citizens of our country, members of civil society as such. Let us hear and follow what they are prophesying and challenging us to do.

Twenty million hungry Filipinos will disagree with the proclaimed “Ramdam ang Kaunlaran” with their own experience: “Ramdam ang Kahirapan. Ramdam ang gutom.” According to an executive director of IBON, nearly 72% of Filipinos surveyed last year consider themselves poor. According to June 2008 Social Weather Survey, 59% of Filipino Families (10.6 million) rate themselves as mahirap or poor, 24% rate themselves on borderline poor and only 17% as hindi mahirap, not poor. By poverty it means basically among other things food-poverty or food-borderline. The benefits of the much proclaimed economic growth are not felt by the masses.

The biggest culprit and major cause of our nation’s poverty and hunger is graft and corruption which has invaded all public and private institutions. Corruption is the abuse and misuse of public or private office to unlawfully enrich oneself and those close to him, or induce others to do the same (ADB). It is not only an economic and social problem but by and large a moral issue and a moral problem.

How do ordinary citizens rate corruption in our country? In a Philippine Star INBOX, the question is asked: “On a scale of 1 to 10, with ten as the highest, how rampant is corruption today?” Of a total of 62 respondents, 20 gave a corruption rate of 10 and 5 gave a corruption rate of 10 plus. Nine respondents rated our country with corruption rate of 9; six rated her with 8; two with 7; two with 6, and 3 with 5. Fifteen respondents gave descriptions of corruption. These are ordinary citizens bothered by our culture of corruption.

In the past few years up to today, we have watched how corruption has become endemic, massive, systemic and rampant in our politics. The faces and symptoms of corruption are overprized projects, multibillion scams of various kinds, election manipulations, anomalous transactions, bribery of both high and low, unsolved murders of media practitioners. Corruption is a social and moral cancer!

As to the consequences, corruption foremost in political election damages political legitimacy, integrity and competence. Corruption impedes economic development, worsens income inequity and poverty, endangers public order and safety. Corruption results in bureaucratic inefficiency and demoralization. “Corruption begets bad politics and bad politics begets further corruption” (Michael Johnston, cf. Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. Ehem!)

Is it any wonder that our country is tagged as the most corrupt country in Asia, and the 11th most corrupt among 102 countries in the world? (cf. Transparency International). If we are not horrified, disgusted, exasperated and enraged by these realities, can we still say we love our country?

Let us hear and follow what some members of civil society, prophets of hope (we might call them) have fearlessly articulated about our situation. We agree with Conrado de Quiros (cf. PDI 4/23/08) that in this country, we identify ourselves among the few thousand.”
so easily with the victims of pickpockets or snatchers and throw these small-time thieves to (almost) forever languish in prison. But when it comes to big-time crooks and public officials stealing billions upon billions of the people’s money, it takes forever to prove their crime.

There is so much embarrassing hesitation and false respect to start mounting a campaign to show that corruption is the worst form of crime, because it kills the common good, it kills the poor, it kills the country. It violates God’s commandments “Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not kill.”

Ana Marie Pamintuan (cf. Phil Star, 10/20/08) has yet another prophetic statement to prick our conscience: “When there is corruption at the top, it becomes nearly impossible to eradicate corruption at the lower level of government. There is no moral ascendancy to demand honesty, decency, transparency. And where there is bad governance, it becomes harder to liberate people from the shackles of poverty.”

Listen to another prophet of hope reading the signs of the times. Randy David (cf. PDI 4/26/08) articulated it so well: “So much has been written about the roots of the present political crisis, and some people say it is now time to move past this crisis... Under these circumstances, 2010 elections, if they ever come, will only reproduce the crisis. The appearance of new faces in government may lull us into thinking that we have survived the crisis, and that a new is upon us. But, as the worsening poverty and hunger figures in our country show, unless we institute dramatic changes in the way we conduct our politics, government will, sooner than we think, become irrelevant to the lives of Filipinos.” (There are many more like the three we mention here.)

Here, we can recall what the CBCP has said: “Philippine politics—the way it is practiced—has been most hurtful of us as a people. It is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving of full human development.” (Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics 1997 Sept. 16).

“In the strongest term we condemn graft and corruption as an offense against society and sin against God. God will certainly hold the perpetrators accountable. To combat this evil we also proposed the formation of citizens’ councils to promote public awareness, to monitor the use of public funds, and to initiate charges against guilty officials” (CBCP “Let Integrity Flow Like a Stream” July 7, 2003).

The Bishops again said “Moral accountability calls for radical reforms in various agencies of government to make them more responsive to the requirements of integrity as well as to the needs of the poor” (CBCP “Restoring Trust.” July 10, 2005, no. 10). “We strongly condemn the continuing culture of corruption from the top to the bottom of our social and political order” (CBCP “Seeking the Truth, Restoring Integrity” Feb 26, 2008).

In response to the global economic crisis and the pitiful state of our country, the time to rebuild our country economically, socially, politically is now. The time to start radical reforms is now. The time for moral regeneration is now. The time to conquer complacency, cynicism and apathy and to prove that we have matured from our political disappointments is now. The time to prepare a new government is now. But, who, who will pick up the broken, shattered pieces of our country, hurting from poverty and corruption, to make it whole again? Inspite of the seemingly hopeless and negative prognosis, our liberation may yet serendipitously happen. We are dreaming, praying and hoping that our country may yet have the needed liberators. Yes, liberators who will in a courageous peaceful way effectively and uncompromisingly reform our country. “Upang maitindig natin ang bantayog ng ating lipunan, kailangang radikal nating baguhin hindi lamang ang mga instisyong kundi maging ang ating pag-isip at pamumuhay.” (Apolinario Mabini)
The Real Cost of Debt

By Fr. Sean McDonagh, SSC

During the past few weeks I have been writing about the current financial turmoil and calling attention to the fact that this is not the first time in recent decades that banks have impoverished people and destroyed the environment through their irresponsible lending policies. For the past two weeks I focused on the horrible consequences of reckless lending to countries in the Majority world, formerly called the Third World, in the 1970s. Servicing these loans caused pain, suffering and death to many people during the past 30 years. It also devastated the environment in crucial ecosystems across the world.

Third World debt repayment benefited the Minority World (formerly called First World) countries hugely in two ways. Firstly, the economist Susan George estimated that, in the period from 1982 until 1990, US$418 billion was transferred from poor countries to rich countries to service the foreign debt. This money ought to have been spent on education, health care, social services for the vulnerable in poor countries and on building up a diversified, local economy. Instead it subsidized the economies of rich countries and increased consumption.

Secondly, most poor countries had very little manufacturing activity and were almost exclusively commodity-producing countries. Between 1974 and 1988, the price of a basket of 28 basic commodities, including lead, tin, zinc, sugar, coffee and teach, fell by a staggering 48%. The Economist magazine estimated that the Minority world saved US$65 billion in 1985 alone. This, of course, kept inflation low in the Minority world during the 1980s and 1990s.

There were two reasons for the drop in commodity prices. The first had to do with the recession in the rich countries, caused by the hike in oil prices in 1973 and again in 1979. The second reason was a direct result of the economic policies forced on Majority World countries by multilateral financial agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These policies dictated that poor countries reshape their agriculture programmes away from subsistence agriculture, geared to feeding the local population, to planting export-oriented crops. For example, many more poor countries were encouraged to plant coffee. This led to a glut in the market and the subsequent collapse in the price of coffee on the world market in the mid-1980s.

Low inflation in the Majority world during the 1990s and the early part of this decade was not due to shrewd economic policies designed by politicians and central bankers as they would like us to believe. It was as a result of an ever larger variety of cheap goods being imported from China. As a consequence China began to run up huge financial surpluses, particularly with the United States. Some of this saving went
into US government bonds, but the bulk was invested in various assets, often property, in various parts of the world. These assets began to increase in value driving up property prices around the globe.

In response to these trends central bankers around the world were faced with a dilemma. They could either target consumer inflation, even though cheap Chinese consumer goods was keeping inflation low anyway, or they could address the asset inflation side of the equation. Unfortunately, the Federal Reserve in the United States, under the chairmanship of Alan Greenspan, decided not to interfere in the market and thus curb the explosive growth of risky and often fraudulent mortgage lending. On October 4th 2008, he told a Congressional hearing that the largely unregulated business of spreading financial risk widely through the use of exotic financial instruments called derivatives, had gotten out of control and had added to the havoc of today’s crisis. As far back as 1994 he had resolutely opposed tougher regulation on derivatives. His status as an economic guru in the eyes of both Republicans and Democrats blocked any effective regulation.

As the property market collapsed many banks had too much debt and too little capital to provide sufficient credit to keep the economy moving. Some of the banks have tried to meet their debts by selling assets. Because confidence in the financial system has evaporated, the value of these assets has fallen through the floor, reducing Banks’ capital even further. Governments have tried to step in with a number of schemes, some to guarantee depositors, others to buy bank shares, reduce interest rates and/or recapitalize the banks. Thus far the financial markets have not responded as confidence in the system is at a very low ebb, probably the lowest it has been since the Great Depression.
Peacemaking through Healing the Past and Building the Future*

By Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J.

I. Mindanao Context

Since the Spanish colonial period, Mindanao has been a theatre of intermittent conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities. In 1996, a peace agreement was signed between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). However, another militant group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued the armed struggle for self-determination.

After more than three years of negotiations, a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was about to be signed by both panels representing the MILF and the Philippine Government in Kuala Lumpur on August 5, 2008. However, the Supreme Court issued a Temporary Restraining Order one day before the signing. This was due to the widespread outcry raised against the proposed MOA-AD whose contents were made public only a few days before the signing. This was due to the widespread outcry raised against the proposed MOA-AD whose contents were made public only a few days before the signing.

In the following weeks, in Central Mindanao, two MILF commanders instigated armed incursions against the civilian population. On Aug. 18, violence broke out in the town of Kolambagan and in some outlying barangays of Kauswagan in Lanao del Norte. Military operations in the Lanao provinces and in Central Mindanao have been carried out and are still ongoing. These are said to be limited to efforts to locate and neutralize the three commanders.

However, Christian communities and Muslim communities have been forced to evacuate from the areas of conflict. Relief operations have been undertaken by government agencies and non-government organizations. The Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro and Xavier University have sent several truckloads of relief goods to evacuation centers in Iligan, Linamon, Munai, and Marawi. In particular, volunteers of the archdiocese have accompanied the shipment of relief goods on Aug. 28 to the town of Munai, which is wholly Muslim. They have also sent goods to the Catholic bishop in Marawi for allocation to Muslim evacuees who prefer to stay with their relatives rather than in an evacuation center.

On Aug. 28 at Xavier University, a Forum on the proposed MOA-AD between the MILF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines was held. The clarifications presented by two members of the government’s negotiating panel and a member of the MILF’s technical working group enabled the audience, composed mostly of academic and civil society groups, to have a more balanced view of the MOA-AD.

On Sept. 15, three women humanitarian workers were held hostage on Basilan island, purportedly by the Abu Sayyaf, an extremist rebel group. Up to the present, negotiations for the release of these humanitarian workers are still being conducted.

On Sept. 24, Catholic bishops came together in Davao to follow up earlier consultations with government representatives and other sectors of society. They agreed to reaffirm the common sentiment that the peace process in Mindanao should continue and be strengthened vis-à-vis the outbursts of violence reported in a few areas. Specifically, government officials requested the religious leaders in Mindanao—including bishops and ulama—to take the lead in holding consultations with local communities with regard to their aspirations and recommendations for lasting peace on the island. In the meantime, the Supreme Court ruled that certain provisions of the MOA-AD went against the Philippine Constitution. Earlier, the administration of President Gloria Arroyo had already stated that they would not pursue the signing of the memo with the MILF.

II. Promoting a Culture of Peace

It is in this light that we can examine six dimensions for building a culture of peace in Mindanao—i.e., for healing the past and building the future of present and coming generations of Mindanaoans.

Since the mid-90’s, culture of peace seminars have been conducted by peace centers in various parts of Mindanao. Much attention has been given to the need for intercultural understanding and interfaith dialogue. In the course of these seminars, peace advocacy groups have identified six dimensions for building a culture of peace in Mindanao.

1. Personal and Family Integrity

"Peace of the heart," notes Pope John Paul II, "is the heart of peace." One cannot be a peacemaker if there is no peace in his
Peacemaking through Healing the Past and Building the Future

human rights as “a common standard of morality.” Increasingly too, modern nations have evolved their political systems towards the principles and goals of democratic rule—e.g., in terms of electoral contests; freedom of association and participation, etc. Over-all, the operative value of justice pervades the efforts of individuals as well as of civil society organizations in countering any violations of human rights.

In particular the rights of minority communities like those of indigenous people are to be respected. The articulation of new rights and operationalizing these through legislation has been pointed out. Some of these newly-accepted rights include: the rights of the unborn fetus in the mother’s womb; the right of minorities to their own culture; and the right of communities to a healthful environment. The prophet Isaiah points out that the work of justice is peace (Opus justitiae pax.)

Pope John Paul II adds another dimension: that the fruit of solidarity is peace (Opus solidaritatis pax.)

3. Poverty Eradication

Extreme poverty can drive people to carry arms. At the outbreak of violence in Lanao del Norte two months ago, a group of indigenous people combatants surrendered their firearms to the military. Their story was that they had been enticed to join the rebel group by the offer of a monthly salary that was much higher than what they would usually be able to earn. Indeed, unemployment especially among the restless youth provides a ripe condition for rebellion or criminal acts like kidnapping for ransom. Government statistics reveal that the Muslim-dominated provinces such as Jolo, Basilan, and Lanao del Sur rank among the ten poorest provinces in terms of provision of basic services such as health, housing and education.

But there have been success stories
too of rebel-returnees who have been given productive employment and turned away from the resort of bearing arms. Economic development generally needs to accompany peacemaking efforts. There will be no peace without development—but, in a cyclical manner, there can be no development either without peace.

4. Intercultural Understanding and Solidarity

In Mindanao, religious leaders have formed a Bishops-Ulama Conference. Over the past twelve years, Catholic and Protestant bishops have been meeting in dialogue with their Muslim counterparts, the ulama, to promote intercultural understanding. Both groups declare that their religions are religions of peace. During outbreaks of violence, including the recent ones, bishops and ulama have issued joint statements condemning the destruction and stressing that the peace process should continue. These messages of solidarity have helped restore the peace. They also convey the important point that Mindanao is not engaged in a religious war.

As an operative value, the resort to dialogue instead of arms has been stressed in interfaith gatherings. These dialogue efforts have also been tried in local circles that include pastors, priests, and imams.

5. Disarmament and Cessation of Hostilities

Calls for a ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table during outbreaks of violence are oftentimes spearheaded by religious leaders of both sides. Local monitoring teams which include religious leaders have also been formed in various places to keep the peace.

Local communities have been encouraged to establish “zones of peace,” keeping away armed groups to assert the people’s right to peace. The call for firearms control is also part of these peacekeeping efforts.

6. Environment Protection

Christians and Muslims as well as indigenous people communities have joined advocacy groups against logging and mining. Protection of watershed areas that affect both upland and lowland communities has been pushed. Much still needs to be done—e.g., in cleaning up polluted rivers and safeguarding the living conditions of communities near factories and processing plants.

Stewardship as an operative value is stressed to underline the need for corporate social responsibility. Waste management practices, particularly in congested urban neighborhoods, have been introduced by local government units and non-government organizations.

In many ways, environmental conservation is a common concern among all cultural communities. A case in point are the ongoing efforts to protect the watershed area of Lake Lanao. The lake itself provides a natural habitat for the livelihood of hundreds of Muslim household living along the lakeshore. Moreover, the waters from the lake provide the source of hydroelectric power that is distributed throughout the island of Mindanao.

III. Towards a Threefold Culture

Several observers of the international scene have made dire predictions that a clash of religions and civilizations may be inevitable in our modern world. In Mindanao, for instance, Muslim–dominated and Christian–dominated areas experience occasional outbreaks of violence due to religious or cultural differences.

In this light, the six dimensions for a culture of peace provide constructive areas for healing the past by building the future together. We can summarize these dimensions by means of a threefold Culture of life, of Human Rights, and of Peace. These are all based on the core value of Human Dignity of all human beings—regardless of religion, race, nationality, or social class. Respect for the integrity of human life is translated into promotion of human rights. These in turn are the prerequisites for a just and lasting peace.

The religious traditions of our various faith communities subscribe to the values of this threefold culture. These values in one sense represent what is best in each religious tradition. In another sense, they transcend the boundaries of particular religious beliefs to build a stronger and better world for all.

* Commission V presentation at the 7th General Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, 17-21 October 2008, Manila.
By Rosa Linda Valenzona

A n outsider who tuned into the debate that is raging in the Philippines over what’s politely known as reproductive health could be forgiven for thinking that contraception is banned in this largely Catholic nation and that the legions of light are engaged in a fight against the forces of religious repression for the freedom to take a pill or use a condom.

Development”™? Raul del Mar, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, has described it as pushing an open door. If so, what makes it so objectionable to the church and those legislators and members of the public who are pushing from the other side?

The answer is coercion. The contraceptive-driven fertility decline program of HB 5043 may be the most coercive ever designed outside China. It obliges the government to pro-

person who dares to talk against the program will also be subject to jail sentence and fines.

This program turns the Philippines into a veritable police state with the government using police powers to interfere in the personal affairs of its citizens. It will surely drive a wedge between couples since a health worker must provide sterilization services even in the absence of spousal permission—or incur a penalty; and likewise between parents

of family planning services:

The heavyweights of the global reproductive health agenda are making an all-out bid to displace the church as the conscience of the Philippines.

This is so far from the truth it is laughable. Access to contraceptives is already unrestricted in the Philippines. The government family planning service, which has been in place since the 1970s, has an infrastructure of workers all the way down to the grass-roots. The private sector is equally active; the International Planned Parenthood Federation supports two federations of NGOs providing various types of family planning services: Family Planning Organizations of the Philippines, and PNGOC (Philippine NGO Council), the latter with 97 member groups. Sex education is also an integral part of the high school curriculum.

So what is the purpose of House Bill 5043, which is entitled “An Act Providing for a National Policy on Reproductive Health, Responsible Parenthood and Population

vide free contraceptive services and products; it establishes an “ideal” family size, setting the stage for a proposed two-child policy; it imposes a national sex education curriculum at fifth grade level. Couples would be denied a civil marriage license unless they present a “certificate of compliance” from a family planning office certifying that they have been adequately instructed in family planning and “responsible parenthood”.

If before, quota-driven programs have led to gross human rights violations, this time around this bill could easily penalize with fines and jail sentences workers who will be unable to meet their quota. Employers who refuse to provide reproductive health care services to their employees will likewise be subject to penalties. Worse, it curtails freedom of speech, since any

and children, since the latter can have access to reproductive health services without parental consent. In a generation or two, the six years of value-free sex education the bill mandates for school children will surely create sexually active adolescents.

Railroading and foreign influence

Naturally this legislation, which has a history stretching back more than a decade, has been sold to legislators and the public as something demanded by international human rights codes and a long overdue step for the betterment of families and the nation. But the high-handed tactics of its promoters indicate its true character.

The debate which is raging both in and out of Congress was sparked when two House Committees—Health and Population, and Family

of the Catholic “charter” on human life, Humanae Vitae, and launched an educational campaign to encourage civil opposition to the bill.

In the House, Congress- man del Mar revealed departures from the established procedure in the handling of HB 5043. There were actually four reproductive health bills referred to two House committees. A first hearing on three bills took place on April 29 this year. By the second hearing on May 21, however, the committee chairman announced they would now consider “the substitute bill” (replacing all four bills) and, in the blink of an eye, the committees approved it. Usually a technical working group is convened to painstakingly put together the substitute bill. The question is, where did the substitute bill come from?

Former Senator Francis-
co S. Tatad, an incisive commentator, sources HB 5043 to the Philippine Legislative Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD)—an NGO with offices in the same building as the House of Representatives. Although purporting to be an NGO counting many Philippine lawmakers among its membership, PLCPD is essentially a foreign body. A popular columnist, Jose Sison, reports that PLCPD’s 2008 lobbying fund of two billion pesos comes from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, IPPF and UNFPA the latter two both well known for their global agenda to legalize abortion. PLCPD’s website shows the many programs it has implemented over the years in the name of alleviating poverty—sweet deals awarded to legislators who are PLCPD members? The world over is dotted with similar NGOs initiated by UNFPA to pursue its agenda to legalize abortion. Many who are in the know resent the role of PLCPD and are angry over this violation of their national sovereignty.

All over the Philippines local governments are passing their own versions of the Reproductive Health Bill: Quezon City, Aurora Province, Olongapo City, Sorsogon, Antipolo City... To no-one’s surprise, it appears that HB 5043 and these local ordinances are using one single template and in some parts are word for word the same. It leaves one without any doubt that the long arm of PLCPD reaches throughout the country.

Victory is not assured

Co-sponsored by 113 of the 238 members of the House of Representatives, the bill was only eight votes shy of making it past its second reading when urgent Budget hearings forced that debate to be postponed. No less than three billion pesos (US$62.2 million) has been appropriated for reproductive health programs in the govern-
A culture war, in Asia

Article II, Section 12 of the 1986 Philippine Constitution states: “The State recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution. It shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception. The natural and primary right and duty of parents in the rearing of the youth for civic efficiency and the development of moral character shall receive the support of the Government.”

Under this article and in spite of the fact that the Philippines is one of the most natural family planning and other “traditional” methods (the pill, IUD, condom, sterilization...) and 14 per method, the government agencies have expressed their full support for this bill. When church leaders intervened during the debate cut across partisan groupings; del Mar, the first of them, belongs to the same party as the bill’s principal author, Edcel Lagman. At last count the 238 congressmen appeared evenly spread between the pro, con and neutral positions, making the situation very fluid. The latest impeachment proceedings filed against President Arroyo will very likely cause further delay, and perhaps further dilution of support.

President Arroyo, by the way, has affirmed support for natural family planning methods. However, seven members of cabinet and heads of other government agencies have expressed their full support for this bill. When church leaders conferred with her on the bill she airily responded that the matter is now up to the debate in Congress. Last month she addressed the UN General Assembly meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, a UN program that considers lower population growth as an important development goal.
Personal notes on Christian-Islamic dialogues

By Charles Avila

It was Francis Cardinal Arinze who used to remind his audiences that Christians form about 33 per cent of the total world population and Muslims number around 18 per cent. Christians and Muslims, therefore, are more than a half of humanity. And theirs are the two religions most widespread geographically. Thus, one can understand how the majority Christians of the Philippines can be only a small minority in all Asia, while the minority Muslims of the same country is actually a much bigger majority in the context of its immediate neighbors like Indonesia and Malaysia. It matters very much, then, not only to Islam and Christianity, but also to the world, how the followers of these two religions relate to one another and how they envisage their relationships especially at this time when age-old conflicts do not seem to die down.

A different approach to Dialogue

The wisdom of hindsight is the greatest admirer of the prophetic voice. You always admire those who predicted present happenings earlier. I was in Rome when Pope Benedict XVI made his now famous remarks on Islam at the University of Regensburg in Germany. A friend who’d been around the Vatican for the past twenty years immediately said to me in the aftermath of the violent reactions to the Pope’s speech, “That was deliberate, believe you me.”

“Ratzinger,” my friend said using the pre-papal name of Benedict, “used that quotation from hundreds of years ago to engage Islam in true dialogue, even if through a provocative route. This current successor of Peter is the intellectuals’ intellectual, barring none. We’ve noticed here that people in the past came to Rome to see the Pope (John Paul II). Now they come to hear him (Benedict XVI). Watch out for the next chapters. This is just the beginning.”

The Regensburg speech came at the time his visit to predominantly Islamic Turkey was being announced. Time was, and it lasted quite a while, when the Roman Empire had two capitals, Rome and the New Rome, also known as Constantinople, and the language was less and less Latin and more and more Greek. In time, it became less and less Christian and more and more Muslim. Today Turkey has only 32,000 Catholics in a population of 72 million. Most of them live in Istanbul. Well, “Istanbul was Constantinople,” My friend and had even led in demanding that he apologize for what he perceived to be offensive words in the Regensburg speech, was all ears when the Pope talked about “the many wars” and “much bloodshed every day,” adding that “it is our duty to show that religion is a source for peace and reconciliation in the world.” Those who "use religion in another way," he asserted, do not respect its true nature. The pope emphasized his view that “religion is against violence and open to reason,” and, then looking at his interlocutor, added, "I believe in the dialogue between religions."

Touched by Benedict’s sincerity, the famous critic of the Pope, Ali Bardakoglu said, "I’m happy at the explanation of your holiness." He added that Turkey was giving great importance to dialogue between Christians and Muslims and "we want to go forward together on the path of dialogue."

But Bardakoglu was no wimp, either. His forthright-ness was equally admirable. He invited the Pope to understand their concern regarding an increase in “Islamophobia,” which "expresses the mentality that the religion of Islam is containing and encouraging violence with its history and sources" and which says that Islam "was spread over the world by swords" and that Muslims are "the potential users of violence."

Oh, he was not backing out of his criticism of the Regensburg speech but politely never mentioned the R word.

Like his predecessors – the faith of Abraham

On arrival in Ankara, however, the Pope immediately shared his view with President Erdogan of Turkey that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and love. They worship the same God and, from his standpoint, the real name of Allah is Love. “God is love” was the title of Benedict’s first encyclical letter.

Ali Bardakoglu, head of Turkey’s Directorate for Religious Affairs who had become one of the Pope’s harshest critics hummed the old song and said, “The visit to Turkey has now begun.”

Underscoring the violent reaction to the accusations of violence perceived to be hurled against Muslims by the new Pope in his lecture at Regensburg, some churches were burnt down by Muslim militants and a Catholic nun was murdered.

Allah is Love – Dialogue between Religions

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"recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us" and promote together "peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."

Before he became Pope, Ratzinger reportedly advised the Vatican against supporting the application of Turkey to membership in the European Union. This made some critics say he was more European than Christian, and not quite in sync with the demands of international multiculturalism.

In that visit to Turkey, however, both President Erdogan and Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi announced that the Pope spoke about Turkey's entry into the European Union (EU) and indicated that, while his role is "not political but pastoral" he "viewed with favor" its entry into the EU.

He, then, urged the Catholic community to "walk the humble path of daily companionship with those who may not share our faith, but yet profess the faith of Abraham, and together with us adore the one, merciful God."

Many observers could only say, "Tou-ché." The Pope was writing in diplomacy what he had earlier written in the encyclical "God is Love."

An Islamic Scholar in the Philippines

Three things were highlighted in the dialogue the Pope initiated with Islam during his visit to Turkey: religion’s being a source for peace and reconciliation in the world, its being against violence, and its being open to reason.

I remember Ustadz Mohammed Abuhalil Yahya, one of the greatest Filipino Islamic scholars—well known and revered not only in his native Maguindanao and throughout all of Mindanao but equally so in the global ummah or Islamic community from Cairo to Baghdad, from Jakarta to Kuala Lumpur, from Cotabato to Marawi and Jolo.

The Ustadz (theologian, if you wish) used to tell some of us who had become close to him that even before the Prophet Muhammad’s Ramadan retreat of 610, the Prophet already believed like many of the Arabs, that al-Lah, the High God of the ancient Arabian pantheon, whose name simply meant “the God”, was identical to the God worshipped by the Jews and the Christians. In fact, parenthetically, as early as the fifth century, before the start of the Islamic religion, the Christian historian Sozomenos reported that some Arabs had rediscovered what they called the authentic religion of Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian because he had lived before God had sent either the Torah or the Gospel.

When Muhammad received the prophetic call, this Filipino Ustadz liked to tell us, the experience was so overwhelming that he thought he was going mad. In profound shock, he turned instinctively to his wife, Khadija, and begged her to shield him from the divine presence. Khadija then suggested that they consult her cousin, Wārāqā ibn Nawfāl, a Christian known to be learned in the scriptures. So, the first consultant of the founder of Islam was a Christian. The Christian cousin Wārāqā had no doubts at all: Muhammad had received a revelation from the God of Moses and the prophets and had become the divine envoy to the Arabs.

People of the book — protected groups

Muhammad considered Christians, Muslims, and Jews as the “people of the book”—ahl al-kitab—who should always be very tolerant of each other, said the Ustadz. Jews and Christians were always granted religious liberty as dhimmis, protected groups. This may not always be obvious these days but this was originally true. And, the Ustadz asserted, there was never any need to proselytize each other. Muhammad never asked Jews or Christians—not even his cousin Wārāqā—to convert to his religion of al-Lah unless they particularly wished to do so, because they had received authentic revelations of their own. Isn’t this view clearly another source for religious peace and reconciliation?

In forums I attended, the Ustadz shared this view with Abdurrahman Wahid of Nahdatul Ulama who later became President of Indonesia—a man who has always argued for a secular state and not an Islamic one in that predominantly Islamic country.

Theory of a Just War, equality of the sexes — the meaning of Islam

As regards the topic of violence, the Ustadz would tell the story of how, during the ten years between the hijra and his death in 632, Muhammad and his first Muslims were engaged in a desperate struggle for survival against opponents in Medina and Mecca, all of whom were ready to exterminate the ummah. Fighting for their life, they evolved a theology of the just war in the Koran, with which most Christians and Jews would agree, and never forced anybody to convert to Islam. In the Koran, war is held to be abhorrent; the only just war is a war of self-defense.

Actually, Islam simply means the act of existential surrender that each convert was expected to make to al-Lah: a Muslim was a man or woman who has surrendered his or her whole being to the Creator. In practical terms, Islam meant that Muslims had a duty to create a just, equitable so-
Restorative Justice: A Justice that Heals

By Rodolfo D. Diamante

I. Overview of Restorative Justice

A Russian author once said the degree of civilization in society can be judged by entering its prisons. Considering the present state of our prisons and jails, one can say that the quality of present-day society is poor. Our jails and prisons stand as a tragic reflection of the failure of society and its members to achieve community, victimizing not only the keepers and kept alike, but also society. What is revealed is the terrible state of a society that destroys its own members by the negligence especially of the government that is supposed to know its obligations for its citizens.

Our prisoners and detainees suffer more than they have to, mainly because society believes that they should suffer for offenses committed personally or in connivance with others. Prisoners are regarded undeserving of concern and protection. The prevalent societal attitude of apathy has tolerated the sorry plight of prisoners manifested in the following:

- Subhuman living conditions, such as congested and dilapidated jails and prisons, inadequate daily food allowance, beds, toilets and other sanitary facilities; lack of basic services, a clear violation of the U.N. Minimum Standard on the Treatment of Offenders. The budget allocated by government is always too small for the basic needs of prisoners.
- Human rights violation. Solitary confinement is still practiced and corporal punishment prevalent. Prisoners are subjected to other acts of humiliation that clearly violate their human rights.
- Slow judicial process and lopsided administration of justice. Many suspects, not yet found guilty, are already detained while awaiting hearings and sentence that take months and years.

Many detainees suffer a period of detention longer than the sentence that is ultimately imposed. The injustice is greater when they are found not guilty as charged. There are prisoners who are not guilty but are in prison because of inadequate representation in courts and blatant miscarriage of justice.

- Lack of rehabilitation program in penal institutions to prepare prisoners for life in the outside world allegedly due to inadequacy of funds.
- Failure of jails and prisons to attend to prisoners with special needs namely the mentally ill, the handicapped, the very young, the old and the sick. Prison hospital has earned the name the “Mona Lisa Hospital” among inmates’ prison volunteers and guests. You know “they just lie there and they die there.”
- Inadequate training of underpaid personnel whose orientation, more often than not, is more punitive and custodial.
- Graft and Corruption that has become already institutionalized.

II. What we can do

The government would say that there are no easy and quick solutions to the aforesaid problems. Sure, there are no easy and quick solutions. But we have to be determined enough to seek and implement solutions and reforms. But since prisoners are not seen nor heard, they are the most unimportant sector in Philippine society. They cannot vote so politicians do not pay attention to their needs. Since they cannot complain, hardly anybody (with the exception of a few heroic correctional officers and some NGO volunteers) pays attention to them.

Whenever one speaks about the destructive nature of imprisonment and the unfairness of the current criminal justice system, the catch cry goes up, ‘Yes we know that—but what alternatives are you proposing?’ It is a reasonable request. The truth is there are many options that provide more constructive ways of dealing to most criminal offenders. They do not require widespread use of imprisonment. They are effective and non-violent and generally cheaper. What they do require is patience, skill, resources and a whole new mind-set to enable their development. It is a fresh set of processes and values that sits at the heart of the Church’s mission to the world.

A. Definition

Restorative Justice is a process where by all the parties with stake in a particular
Restorative Justice: A Justice that Heals

Offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future.

Restorative justice is a philosophy that embraces a wide range of human emotions including healing, mediation, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation as well as sanction when appropriate. It also recognizes a world view that says we are all interconnected and that what we do be it for good or evil has an impact on others. Restorative justice offers the process whereby those affected by criminal behavior be they victims, offenders, the families involved or the wider community, all need to have a part in resolving the issues which flow from the offending.

Under restorative justice, victims and offenders assume central roles and the state takes a back seat. The process does not focus on vengeance and punishment but seeks to heal both the community and the individuals involved. This is done by a process that puts the notion of reparation, not punishment, at the center.

In simple terms, while retributive justice asks first “how do we punish this offender”, restorative justice asks “how do we repair the damage of this offending?” They provide two distinctly different starting points, embracing two different philosophies.

Under a philosophy of restorative justice, crime is no longer defined as an attack on the state but rather an offense by one person against another. It is based on the recognition of the humanity of both offender and victim. The goal of the restorative process is to heal the wounds of every person affected by the offense, including the victim and the offender. Options are explored that focus on repairing the damage.

B. Origin

Roots of restorative justice can be found throughout the Bible. In the Bible, God is called the just one. What is this justice of God? According to the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures, the justice of God is not the quality whereby God rewards the good and punishes the wicked. God is just when he intervenes in the lives of the underprivileged, especially orphans and widows, to save them from the injustices of men (Deut 10/18). God is just when he defends the cause of the innocent. God is just when he establishes those who have been exploited by wicked men. God is just when he saves the poor.

Surely the scriptural quote most abused and taken out of context has been that of “an eye for an eye”. Public perception of its meaning is usually the opposite of what is intended. The concept of lex talionis, the law of proportionality, simply says that you should never claim more than the value of what is damaged. If a property worth 100 gold coins is stolen, then you cannot claim 200 coins in return. If you took more than what was just, then you in turn could be punished. Martin Buber in his German translation of the Scriptures, translates “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” as “an eye for the value of an eye, a tooth for the value of a tooth”. It is a concept that occurs only three times in Scripture, whereas mercy appears several hundred times.

The emphasis in Scripture was usually on restitution and restoration, not vengeance and punishment. Restitution was seen as a way of setting things right. If property was stolen, then the property should be returned; if damage was done to someone’s house or field, then the person responsible for the damage should repair it.

In the New Testament Jesus clearly states that justice should be based on principles of forgiveness and reconciliation; that retaliation plays no part. He forgave the prostitute, the adulteress, the tax gatherer who was an extortionist, the robber. He charged us both to place distinctions between wrongdoers and the virtuous, yet to see ourselves as all in the same camp—brothers and sisters with varying strengths and weaknesses.

Jesus specifically rejects ‘an eye for an eye’, that proportional response so abused by popular usage. ‘If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other one as well. Give him your coat and your tunic, walk two miles not one.’ (Matt 5/38) This is radical stuff—and quite practical today if properly understood. Jesus is asking for a generous response from those who have been victimized by crime. He knows—indeed God teaches—that unless people take such an attitude, they will usually end up becoming doubly victimized. The first time will be with the actual crime. The second will be through the hurt, bitterness and feelings of vengeance that can so easily poison a person’s spirit if allowed to germinate. These are wise teachings indeed.

III. Restorative Justice--Core Values

• Retributive Justice
The focus of retributive justice is on the offender. Laws and punishment are the core values. Outcomes are measured in terms of: 1) What law was broken, 2) Who broke it, and 3) How should he or she be punished? Important to this process are the ideas of separation, that is, putting people in prison or other placements outside the family and community, and labeling or stigmatization, that is, giving people identifiers like parolee, probationer, felon, ex-con, prisoner, and even defendant. The vision of retributive justice is to create a safe community.

• Restorative Justice
Restorative Justice is based on a balanced focus on the offender, victim, and
community. The values, according to each participant, are: (a) the offender, apology or shaming and reintegration, (b) the victim, the harm and opportunity for forgiveness, and (c) the community, relationships.

Outcomes and measurements for restorative justice programs, based on each core value are:

The offender:
- Apology – either oral or written, recognizing responsibility and not seeing oneself as a victim and realizing and acknowledging the harm suffered by the victim.
- Reintegration – earning his or her place back in the community, particularly through the action plan developed under the healing the harm process.
- Forgiveness – the opportunity is extended for the victim to accept an apology from the offender and to extend forgiveness.

The victim:
- Harm – assessing what harm was done, developing a case plan to repair the harm, and creating an action plan for those responsible for healing and repairing the harm.
- Relationships – healing broken relationships and creating new relationships.

The restorative programs are characterized by four key values:
1. Encounter: Create opportunities for victims, offenders and community members who want to do so to meet to discuss the crime and its aftermath. The elements of an encounter are: meeting, narrative, emotion, understanding and agreement.
2. Amends: Expect offenders to take steps to repair the harm they have caused. The four elements of making amends are: apology, changed behavior, restitution and generosity.
3. Reintegration: Seek to restore victims and offenders as whole, contributing members of society. The elements of reintegration are: acknowledging human dignity and worth, providing material assistance and offering moral and spiritual direction.
4. Inclusion: Provide opportunities for parties with a stake in a specific crime to participate in its resolution. The ingredients of inclusion are: invitation, acknowledgment that the person invited has unique interests and recognition that he or she might want to try alternative approaches.

The vision of restorative justice is creating peace in the community. This vision differs from the retributive justice focus on safety, leading to separating undesirable people, like criminals, from the community, usually by placing them in prison. The result is those people who are different and live on the margins of society are the people primarily sent to prison. Those people include the homeless, mentally handicapped, poor, and minorities.

The focus on creating peace realizes offenders are part of the community and in most cases will return to the commu-

IV. Restorative Justice – Fundamental Principles

The principles of restorative justice have been summarized as follows:

Justice requires that we work to restore those who have been injured: victims, communities and even offenders.

Those most directly involved and affected by the crime—victims, offenders and community—should have the opportunity to participate fully in the response if they wish.

While the government is responsible for preserving a just public order, the community’s role in establishing and maintaining a just peace must be given significance.

V. The Way Restorative Justice Works

The main process takes place at a Restorative Justice Conference (RJC), chaired by a facilitator, to which victims and offenders and appropriate support people are invited. The three key components of the restorative justice equation are the offender, the victim and the community. Obviously, a willingness to co-operate is central to the concept. To be involved in any useful way, the offender must acknowledge responsibility for the crime committed and express honest regret. The full implications of the offense need to be spelled out and confronted. The offender needs also to face the causes of the offending and, where possible, make restitution. Concrete evidence of more appropriate behavior in the future is also required.

Victims need to examine their feelings and take full advantage of any support network that will facilitate healing. Victims are helped to see that their own victimization is only intensified by feelings of retributive action against the offender. Where appropriate they become involved in the process of restorative justice with the offender and the community.

The community’s role is to create the conditions most favorable to the restoration of both offender and victim. It aids the healing process by providing mediators, judges and the like. Provided there is co-operation, the parties reach agreement about repairing the damage where possible. Obviously in
some cases like murder or rape it is not, although healing, forgiveness and reconciliation are still possible after a period. Besides whatever reparation is possible, the offenders may be required to work in the local community for a set period, perform periodic detention or even go to prison. The important thing is that no one gets shut out of the process. Everyone gets heard.

All those involved get a chance to put a human face on the crime. They get a chance to begin a process of healing. They become empowered again. The offenders get to take responsibility for their criminal behavior. Each of these processes produces an added dividend for family life and the wider community. There will be less alienation, stronger bonding among family members, and a greater degree of personal and social empowerment.

It is important to note that not all victims are going to necessarily welcome a Restorative Justice Conference. Many will be very wary. This will especially be true for many child and female victims of violence and/or sexual attacks. Such conferences must at all costs seek to prevent victims from becoming doubly victimized. A major issue here is that of power imbalance between the victim and the offender. This should not be under-estimated. Such cases underline the need for skillful well-trained facilitators.

In a controlled facilitated process the offenders meet the victims at a RJC and have to face up to what they have done. They hear of the victims’ anger and anxiety, and the victims hear the offenders’ explanation. There may be mitigating circumstances; there may not. The offender may apologize, may express a genuine wish to change. Provided there is co-operation, the parties reach agreement about repairing the damage.

It would be silly to claim that all the damage can be repaired immediately—sometimes it never can be. Certainly in murder and rape cases it can’t. But at least those involved get the chance to put a human face on the crime and begin the process of healing. They become empowered again. The offenders get to take some responsibility for their criminal behavior.

Restorative justice involves a shift from state power to community power. It should be remembered that it is only in recent centuries that the state has come to play such a prominent role in citizens’ lives. Prior to that, the community retained most power within its local confines.

The idea of including compensation, reconciliation, healing and forgiveness in criminal justice processes is more than merely corrective. Such elements reflect a whole fresh way of approaching criminal offending in the community. They present a vision of improving life right throughout the community, and of making justice more accessible, effective and fair.

VI. Working Together for Restorative Justice

The UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders on April 10-17, 2000 urged all its member nations to increase the use of restorative interventions in addressing the problem of criminality.

Encouraged by this UN declaration, the CBCP-ECPPC, the Philippine Action for Youth offenders, the Integrated Correctional Association of the Philippines and the Coalition Against Death Penalty are working together to:

- disseminate information about restorative justice
- develop and promote agreed standards and principles for evaluating and guiding restorative justice programs
- encourage more research on restorative justice programs and their effectiveness
- provide a program of seminars and workshops on restorative justice issues
- encourage the adoption of restorative justice principles in the following areas:
  - Criminal Justice System—through using problem solving approaches to crime within all aspects of the criminal justice system—particularly within the local partnerships involving Police, Probation, Local Authorities, Health Service, Voluntary Sector and Community Interests.
  - Prisons—by encouraging prisoners to consider the impact and consequences of their crimes in preparation for their return to the community.
  - Schools—through the greater use of
Pope urges RP gov’t to create more jobs, strengthen land reform program

MANILA, October 29, 2008—Pope Benedict XVI has called on the Philippine government to resolve the problem of unemployment at home and implement genuine agrarian reform program.

The pope said increased work opportunities must be developed in the country so that Filipinos will no longer have to work abroad and leave their families behind.

"Conditions that foster increased work opportunities in people’s places of origin are to be promoted as far as possible," Benedict XVI said in an article posted in the Catholic News Service (CNS) website.

CNS is the official information service of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The pontiff made the appeal in an Oct. 27 speech as he welcomed the Philippines’ new ambassador to the Vatican, Cristina Ponce-Enrile.

"With about 8 million Filipinos working outside the country and sending money home to support their families, the government rightly is concerned about protecting the dignity and rights of its citizens abroad and helping the host countries recognize immigration as a resource for development rather than as an obstacle to it," the pope said.

"Domestic and international policies aimed at regulating immigration must be based on criteria of equity and balance, and particular care is needed to facilitate the reunification of families," he added.

Pope Benedict also encouraged the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to continue and strengthen its agricultural land reform program.

The right of farm workers to own the land they work was recognized through the government’s Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

But the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) lamented the deficient implementation of the 20-year program.

The CARP has expired last June 15 but the government’s Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) still continued its implementation, including the sending of notices of to land owners, the installation of farmer beneficiaries and paying the landowners.

The DAR still has budget until Dec. 31 so its activities, an official said, remain valid and legal because the law itself did not specify the month but the year in which it would end.

"Carefully planned agrarian reforms can benefit society by instilling a sense of common responsibility and stimulating individual initiative, making it possible for a nation both to feed its own and expand its participation in international markets so as to enhance opportunities for growth in the process of globalization," Pope Benedict told the new ambassador to the Holy See.

"I pray that by implementing measures that foster the just distribution of wealth and the sustainable development of natural resources, Filipino farmers will be granted greater opportunities for increasing production and earning what they need to support themselves and their families," the pope said. (Roy Lagarde)
Hunger could kill more people in Afghanistan than the Taliban

AFGHANISTAN, October 31, 2008—A team of experts from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a leading British defense think-tank, said that famine is a greater threat to Afghanistan than the Taliban.

According to its data an estimated 8.4 million Afghans are now suffering from malnutrition and food insecurity.

British charity Oxfam warned earlier this year that around five million Afghans faced food shortages.

A combination of factors—from rising global food prices to a summer drought—has created the conditions for famine in Afghanistan. The approaching winter is making things even worse.

The local population is more interested in food aid from the international mission than protection against terrorism.

“Afghanistan may be on the brink of a calamity which has the potential to undermine much of the progress which has been achieved there, especially in areas ostensibly free of insurgent activity,” the RUSI said.

“If the international community is found wanting, we can expect increasing frustration and anger from a population which once saw the international intervention in Afghanistan as a source of hope.”

The United Nations World Food Programme has estimated that the country will need 95,000 tons in food aid.

“This year alone, DFID has contributed £20.5 million to alleviate the food shortages in Afghanistan,” a spokeswoman for the UK Department for International Development said.

But greater measures are needed. The “best way to deal with the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is through the recovery voucher scheme which supports farmers in drought-affected provinces in the north and north-west of the country.”

“This is designed to increase the purchasing power of poor farmers to ensure that they are able to purchase agricultural inputs including seeds, fertilizers and tools.”

Un’s special representative in Afghanistan has appealed to insurgent leaders to allow aid workers to distribute food ahead of winter. (AsiaNews)

Iraqi bishops describe anti-Christian violence as an intentional political move

ROME, November 3, 2008—The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Iraq issued a statement last week denouncing the anti-Christian violence the country is suffering from as part of an intentional political plan that "seeks to create pain and conflict between the different components of the nation.”

According to the SIR news agency, the bishops said it was their “moral and patriotic responsibility” to affirm that “Christians are an integral part of the entire Iraqi patrimony,” adding that “public officials must move quickly to prevent Christians from suffering violence and to protect them. What has happened (in Mosul) contrasts with the responsibility of the State to protect all citizens.”

The Iraqi bishops also encouraged Christians to continue working with their fellow Iraqis, “in the joy and in the sorrows, to reject living in isolation,” and to give life to Article 50 of the Iraqi Constitution which “guarantees our representation and participation in the responsibilities of the nation.”

The bishops expressed their thanks to organizations and individuals in Iraq and around the world “for their solidarity in this time of trial, for having pointed out that grave dangers of the attacks, and for calling for a return of the displaced and for reparations for the harm that has been done.” (CNA)

early intervention programs aimed at reducing school exclusions and diverting young people away from crime and through non-violent conflict resolution programs.

VII. Conclusion

Restorative justice options are not easy. But they are life giving and should be at the heart of our response to crime. An essential part of the message of any god-fearing person is the concept of forgiveness, mercy and healing leading to reconciliation. Practice entails the changing of people’s hearts from anger, bitterness, hurt and resentment to hearts of compassion, healing and mercy. Even the worst of offenders remain children of God, redeemed in the blood of Christ.

We desperately need a system that gives a better deal to victims that promotes apology, healing, understanding, accountability, personal and collective responsibility, forgiveness and even reconciliation. We need to relearn how to practice compassion and mercy in our dealings with one another. We need a system that reduces imprisonment and only uses it as a final resort for the most dangerous offenders. Restorative justice provides for these to happen. The current criminal justice system does not.

(Rodolfo D. Diamante is the Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Prison Pastoral Care [CBCP-ECPPC] of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines)

References:
Bishop of Orissa: We are being persecuted like the first Christians

BHUANSHWAR, India, November 3, 2008—A pastoral letter signed by six bishops of Orissa was read yesterday in all the churches of the state, where for two months a pogrom against Christians has been underway. The letter is the first document published by the pastors since the beginning of the violence.

It is signed by Bishop Thomas Thiruthalil of Balasore; Bishop Alphonse Bilung of Rourkela; Bishop Lucas Kerketta of Sambalpur; Bishop Sarat Chandra Naik of Berhampur; John Barwa, coadjutor bishop of Rourkela; and Raphael Cheenath, archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar.

"Our people are traumatized by these ruthless and barbaric attacks, and we needed to encourage them not to lose hope," Archbishop Cheenath tells AsiaNews. "Moreover, we felt at this point in the history of Orissa to explain to the people the historical background of the persecution of the Church, the history of the Christians who for centuries who have been persecuted for bearing the name of Christ and for the faith. The early Church went through great hardships and martyrdom; its members were often persecuted and massacred. But history has shown that persecution ultimately strengthens the Church."

In the text, published "too late" by the admission of the bishops themselves, the pastors say they are "humbled by your strong adherence to your faith and by your trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. We are proud of you for your ability to withstand all forms of intimidations and threats."

The results of the violence since August 23 have been extensive: more than 60 people killed amid horrible torture; more than 180 churches (Catholic and Protestant) destroyed; thousands of homes burned; convents, youth hostels, hospitals, and social centers devastated; at least 50,000 Christians who fled the massacre living in the forests or in unsafe refugee camps set up by the government.

In recent days, Archbishop Cheenath presided over the funeral for one of the martyrs of Orissa, Fr. Bernard Digal, who died of complications from the beating he suffered, for hours, from Hindu fundamentalists in the district of Kandhamal, where the series of attacks began. The bishop says that "Now [in the district of Kandhamal] there are no attacks because there is nothing left to be destroyed, burnt or looted - the extremists have razed everything to the ground—there are no burnings or destruction as nothing remains. Now our people are terrified of returning to their homes and villages because firstly, they will be attacked, and beaten up, their lives are still in danger—even though the new district administration is doing much to provide safety to the Christians. Secondly, our people are frightened of being forced to change their religion. Thousands have been tonsured and forced to embrace Hinduism as a prerequisite to return to their villages, as they have been warned that they can stay only as Hindus. And thirdly, many of the Kandhamal Christians have been forced to surrender their land and property, and this is a bleak future for our people."

The pastoral letter asks the government for security; for justice and for punishment of the guilty; for adequate compensation for those who have lost their property. But above all, the letter highlights the reasons for the persecution: "The Church has been standing by the side of the poor and the marginalized. Through education, health, housing and employment programmes, the Church has been bringing in awareness and awakening among the vulnerable communities. They in turn are demanding their rights. This is not liked by the powers that are since they fear their position being challenged by the poor people. Hence, they have taken to violence. But we condemn this and restate our resolve to continue the services of the Church."

The letter thanks "individuals, organizations, civil society organizations, media persons and houses, NGOs, academics, political activists, conscientious citizens" in India and abroad for their support for Christians.

According to Archbishop Cheenath, there has also been a change in the district administration of Orissa. "Christians have suffered," he says, "because of the inaction and at times complicity of the administration and police, but now with the new collector, and the change in attitude, the bishops of Orissa felt we needed to speak to our people." In recent weeks, the police have arrested a number of extremists held responsible for the violence.

(AsiaNews)
Dear Everyone,

Under our Constitution, presidential elections are scheduled to be held in May 2010 with the present administration under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo stepping down from power by June 30, 2010. We are concerned by moves that may derail these events.

Mainly coming from the House of the Representatives, is another move for charter change, this time for a shift to a federal form of government, using as a reason the pursuit of peace in Mindanao. There is also concern about the prospect of Martial Law to abort the 2010 elections.

The peaceful transfer of power through regular and periodic elections, is the bedrock of a democracy. Charter change, if necessary, and the pursuit of peace in Mindanao, which is of the highest priority, should be a part of the continuing agenda of the government, regardless of a change in administration. So is social justice, which is the heart of our Constitution. And we have a right to choose through clean elections those who would lead us to these ends.

Charter Change

Charter change through a constituent assembly was withdrawn in 2007 because the House sensed the citizens’ outrage at the attempt to railroad the proposal for a parliamentary system. Moreover, many senators, whose two-thirds vote is logically necessary to convene a constituent assembly, expressed opposition to interpret the Constitution as requiring a joint rather than a separate vote.

We have faith that if the issue reaches the Supreme Court, it will rule correctly as it did on the “people’s initiative” and the attempts to test the legal boundaries of executive power, despite the recent decision on “executive privilege.” We also believe that any attempt to derail the 2010 elections will be rejected resoundingly by the people in a plebiscite. But not without peace in Mindanao. We support the initiative to start over again with an inclusive transparent process of consultations that will bring all stakeholders to the peace table.

The Catholic Bishops and other religious leaders in Mindanao have already indicated their readiness to help facilitate this process of consultation. Martial Law and Other Means to Keep Power

As for Martial Law, the Supreme Court will again be the final arbiter on the issue of the “sufficiency of the factual basis” for its proclamation. And in the unlikely event that the Court sustains its declaration, the extension of Martial Law will be decided by Congress, by a majority vote, voting jointly. This is a source of grave concern because we see no valid basis for it and there are many who will resist any return to authoritarianism. The situation can lead to turmoil, instability and even violence. And those who will suffer the most will be the poor.

We believe that no public official will choose to go against the overwhelming sentiment of our people for democracy and against any form of authoritarianism. A Marcos, when confronted with the issue of taking lives to stay in power, did not send troops to EDSA to stop the people power revolt. A Ramos backed down from removing the term limits of the Constitution rather than face a nationwide protest. An Estrada chose to leave Malacañang than risk a clash between forces, armed and civilian, for and against him. And an Arroyo can step down gracefully in 2010.

There is after all a statesman in every politician, and it is up to us to evoke and affirm it in them in its noblest manifestation.

May we appeal to our leaders to give democracy a chance to work better by holding credible presidential elections in 2010.

The Mindanao Situation

We declare our commitment to a just and sustainable the cost of divisiveness and political turbulence, and the diversion of national attention from the things that matter most to our people now—livelihood, food, education, health, social reform, CARP extension, equal justice, clean elections - which can all be done without changing the Constitution.

May we appeal to our leaders to give democracy a chance to work better by holding credible presidential elections in 2010. And we call on those who believe that we can make this happen to be vigilant and to make our sentiments known clearly and loudly to those who are in power or who would want their turn at it, so that they will all rise to the challenge of statesmanship.

National Executive Committee

Bishops-Businessmen’s Conference on Human Development

October 4, 2008
A Statement of Concern over Incidents of Violence in Basilan

We, members of the Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi Association of Private Schools (ZAMBASULTAPS) and Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) in Region 9, are quite concerned about the recent incidents of kidnapping and killing in our Region 9 and the Island Provinces especially in Basilan Province. Several of these cases are no longer known to authorities and the media for various reasons.

Last 18 October 2008, Saturday, between 12.45 and 1.00 p.m., Fr. Felimon Libot CMF and his six military escorts (mostly CAFGUs) were ambushed near Tumahubong, Basilan, by an armed group. Fr. Libot was on his way to celebrate Mass in that area. It is not known whether the attack was intended to kill Fr. Libot or kidnap him. Four of his companions were wounded and all are in stable condition. Fr. Libot sustained minor bruises, but otherwise unharmed. The motives behind this attack are still uncertain.

Fr. Libot, a Claretian priest, is the Director of Claret College of Isabela, Basilan, a member of ZAMBASULTAPS and CEAP. Fr. Libot is a Board member of ZAMBASULTAPS.

Last 15 September 2008, peace advocates and development practitioners Ms. Espie Hupida, Program Director of Nagdilaab Foundation Inc, and Milet Mendoza were kidnapped and are still held captive.

We condemn these acts that breed violence and foster instability in our region. We salute the courage of those who protected Fr. Libot. We appeal to the captors of Ms. Hupida and Ms. Mendoza to release them as soon as possible. We call upon our authorities to restore protection and safety of our citizenry. We call upon our government, institutions, organized groups and people of goodwill to pursue relentlessly the path of peace.

Fr. Antonio F. Moreno, SJ
President, ZAMBASULTAPS
Msgr. David M. Alonzo
Vice-President, ZAMBASULTAPS
Sr. Maria Bernadette G. Suico, RVM
Secretary, ZAMBASULTAPS
Fr. Christian James DL Castro, CMF
Board Member, ZAMBASULTAPS
Col. Romeo Delgado (Ret)
President, Southern Peninsula College
Fr. Armando S. Bayron
Vice President, St. Columban College
Sr. Mercedes Salud, SFIC
Directress, Marian College
Fr. Filemon Libot
Director, Claret College of Manila
Bro. Eugene Pius, FMS
Director, Notre Dame of Jolo HS Kasulutan
Sr. Amelia G. David, ICM
Superintendent, Pagadian Diocesan Schools

A Solidarity Statement

Green Convergence for Safe Food, Healthy Environment and Sustainable Economy

For the Network opposed to Genetically Modified Organisms (No2GMOs)
on the occasion of the World Food Day
and 2nd year Anniversary of the Green Convergence Movement
October 16, 2008

The Green Convergence Movement supports the No2GMOs Coalition in their advocacy against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the Philippine government’s strong promotion of this technology.

In spite of mounting scientific evidence of likely harm to human and animal health and the ecological balance, the Philippine government has aggressively pushed the development and commercialization of GMOs. This technology enriches foreign multinationals, while threatening our food safety and the economic survival of farmers who must purchase GM seeds at every harvest. Moreover, alien genes and monoculture farming will deplete the biodiversity on which we rely for survival, especially during environmental crises such as the worsening climate change.

If the government is serious in implementing the Constitutional mandate on protecting the right of citizens to a healthful ecology including the peoples’ rights to health, then it should direct relevant agencies to institutionalize...
the conduct of thorough environmental and health impact assessments before these GM products enter Philippine territory.

The Philippine government must safeguard and promote the rights of its citizens to information and consumer choice to know what’s in their food. The Philippine government should assume this role more seriously given the challenges and learnings from the recent issue about the contaminated milk products from China. To conquer more markets and rake more profits, some Chinese manufacturers replaced the cheaper but toxic chemical melamine for protein in milk.

Similar to the issue of GMOs, the reality of the melamine contaminated milk products is a concrete example of the negative global ramifications of the transnational corporation’s abuse and greed at the expense of the public interest, especially in matters of public health and environmental protection.

It is time that the Philippine government, rethink and abandon its development framework and policies which are skewed to favor foreign interests, are prone to corruption, ignore ecological harm, widen economic disparities, and deprive citizens of their right to real participation in developmental decision-making and actions in their own localities.

GREEN overcomes GREED is the only way to ensure safe food, a healthy environment, and sustainable economy for our people.

Dr. Angelina P. Galang Coordinator, GREEN CONVERGENCE

Press Statement of Alyansa Tigil Mina (ALAMIN) on Tacligan Protest

The Alyansa Laban sa Mina (ALAMIN) supports the mobilization of the stakeholder community of Tacligan, San Teodoro, Oriental Mindoro, in expressing their opposition to the proposed construction of processing site within their community. Tacligan is an agrarian reform community, located in a vast productive land of around 300 hectares, formerly owned by Hacienda Lopez.

On September 29, 2006, the community, represented by Samahang Nayan Agrarian Reform Community Cooperative (SANARCO) mobilized their ranks and staged their protest action against the proposed mining project by barricading their area and refusing entry of Intex representatives who were about to continue their Impact Inventory in the area as part of the on-going Environmental Impact Assessment, being conducted by Lichel Technologies, Inc.

The farmer-residents expressed their unequivocal opposition to the project. They said that they were made to answer the survey questionnaire, not knowing the full implication of the study which technically made their area a possible location for Intex’s processing site. They felt cheated and now they made their firm stand not to allow any more meetings or consultations within their area. People in the community stopped working in their farms and organized a protest group, with them carrying placards denouncing Intex and expressing their opposition to the mining project. The company representatives came in a van to conduct another community meeting, but they were met with the protesting community, thus, they had no other choice but to turn back.

ALAMIN stands in solidarity with the farmers of Tacligan who denounce the manipulation of Intex and are strongly committed to protect their agricultural land from the destructive impacts of large-scale mining.

We, in Oriental Mindoro, are united in defending our fragile eco-systems against the threat of large-scale mining, as articulated in our Provincial Ordinance providing a 25-year mining moratorium for the whole province. And we call on Intex and the national government to respect the overwhelming opposition of the people.

FR. EDWIN A. GARIGUEZ
Alyansa Laban sa Mina
St. Augustine Seminary
Calapan City
Sufficiency in Allies

Since the troublesome incumbency of the highest public official in the land, there has been an impressionable number of Impeachment Complaints filed to unseat the said Commander-In-Chief. Considering the many serious exasperating moves and distressing actions thereto attributed, it would not be unrealistic to expect that together with the record disapproval ratings and embarrassing titles appended to the same Office holder, Philippine history might eventually record the not too much impeachment cases filed year after year since 2005 and possibly even up to 2009.

All the other public officials concerned—both pro or anti administration—have been all along surprisingly saying substantially the same things about such Impeachment cases, viz., it is but a political exercise or it is simply a numbers’ game. In other words, the cases are considered irrelevant whether they say the truth, they merit or forward really “impeachable” offenses—or otherwise.

There are even those who claim that impeachment cases are simply “bonus” times for those already expected to block them. In other words, said cases have already nothing to do as to what is ethically right or wrong, what is morally virtuous or vicious. It is the tyranny of numbers that in effect resolves such ethical and moral dimensions of Impeachment Cases.

Time and again, impeachment cases are qualified with “Sufficiency in Form” and or “Sufficiency in Substance”—or insufficiency of one or both. In the event that there is “insufficiency” found in either or both elements according to congressional judgment, then the cases are eventually considered but “garbage”. This practice by the present Lower House of Congress brings to mind a well known song, viz., impeachment cases submitted thereto and submitted infallibly have the following end: “They just lie there. And they die there.”

It might be good to realistically analyze the plight of all the past and present impeachment cases filed before the Lower House of Congress of the Philippines since the incumbency of the Malacañang occupant. The standing fact is that all said cases are made to stand on a tripod: One, “Sufficiency in Form,” which in truth does not matter at all. Two, “Sufficiency in Substance,” which in reality does not also matter, in any way. Three, “Sufficiency in Allies,” which is the political factor that truly, realistically and necessarily matters.

To be more concrete: The 2008 Impeachment Complaint is presumably not only in command of “Sufficiency in Form” but also in possession of “Sufficiency in Substance.” But just the same, even this complaint definitely and eventually goes to the garbage, considering its ceremonial handling by the House of Representatives.

Reason: The subject of the complaint has “Sufficiency in Allies” among them. As long as the well favored and well cared for pro-administration Representatives are the big majority in the House, any and all impeachment cases are but symbolic in nature and significance. So sad but true!

www.ovc.blogspot.com

Rice production and Rice importation

There are admittedly many things happening in this country since year 2004. But one distinct reality among them is the rather longstanding curious phenomenon of rice production and importation by the country.

The thesis long since written, taught and propagated especially by the present government, is clear and simple enough: The Philippines has insufficient rice production and must therefore turn to rice importation. This premise and conclusion are good when written on the blackboard. But the same stinks when placed on solid ground. The theory is great for the rice importers but awful for the rice producers—more so, a big insult to the country.

There is insufficient rice production in the country. While this is a fact, the question is why is this so when the Philippines is an agrarian land. Its soil is well suited for rice planting and its climate of wet and dry season is conducive to repeated annual rice growing and harvesting. Aside from its plenty rivers, not few of its common people dedicate themselves to cultivating farms. In fact, there was a time when the Philippines was a rice-exporting country.

There is rice importation regularly made by the country. This is a fact. But again, the question is why should there be precisely insufficient rice production every year? Is this a static fact that is not simply inescapable but also irremediable? Or is it instead nothing more than the result of a devious and enshrined design to precisely maintain the status quo—for a very profitable reason of specialist group of conniving greedy bunch of official rice importers in the country?

There are published reports to the effect that in the past years, agrarian Philippines usually imported but 10 per cent of its rice need. But this year however, the importation has been in fact doubled, i.e. increased to 20 percent.

Meantime, the Filipino rice farmers have practically begged for the government to buy their palay produce. To date, as some farmers gather their palay harvest, they are afraid that only middlemen—many of whom are foreigners—will buy their produce at practically give-away prices.

Reason: The government has now a great amount of rice in stock such that its sees no need to buy local rice produce. Meantime, the farmers are keeping their fingers crossed for the sale of their palay harvests.

Instead of spending people’s money for this and that glorious project, instead of the costly preoccupation of magnifying political acts and of advancing political interests, Philippines being a basically agricultural country even to the eyes of ordinary citizens, why not decidedly improve the number and quality of dikes and of irrigation canals for palay farming? Why not honestly subsidize the production of good and cheap organic fertilizers for their sale and/or distribution to the farmers? Why not help in farm mechanization, in harvesting facilities, in basically local rice trading? This way, there will surely be high rice production—such big government rice importations would be a curse of the past!

www.ovc.blogspot.com
Such was the bold, loud and glorious pronouncement recently made by Malacañang in brave and triumphant response to the global economic meltdown. It is but right and proper to note the following over-all key element in the said statement: It is but a “plan” in general for such equally generic intents and purposes—such as to help “ordinary Filipinos” by “upgrading infrastructures,” “strengthening the financial system,” “continued support of agriculture,” etc. etc.

Well and great! But as well known, the devil is in the details. Such impressive Malacañang illusory vision and probably even delusional mission have been in substance regularly claimed and proclaimed in one or another well published occasion, before this and that gathering of the cream of Philippines society, foreign dignitaries included.

But then where will the money really come from? How much and why will this or that private institution and or public agency actually provide the money? Who will truly manage and handle, disburse and account for the money? What for and how will the money be altogether spent for such lofty purposes? Who will in sincerity and truth check and counter check the expenditures made? And the least but certainly not the last question goes this way:

Who will pay for the gigantic fund so easy to conceive and propose, and as always, so hard to free from graft and corrupt practices of official thieves and crooked officials?

The truth of the matter is that if but one half or even less of the glowing promises and breathtaking commitments made by the Malacañang occupant on the occasion of one dazzling SONA after another—one too many State Addresses in fact—the Filipinos would all be in “Cloud 9” and the Philippines would be practically in heaven. The standing and palpable reality however is as the citizenry are mostly miserable, hungry and angry, the land is ravaged by war and wasted by endemic greed as well as environmental pillage.

The following more salient foresights are much more than rumors and gossips—while the prayer and hope remain to the contrary: First, the Malacañang occupant is definitely not prepared much less disposed to relinquish great power and huge influence even in 2010. Second, Charter Change is definitely on deck with deliberate design, decisive move and open promotion. Third, the underlying intent and fundamental objective of the said Change is the extension or continuation of the Malacañang incumbent in Office—under whatever constitutional provision.

It is thus not altogether improbable that the above planned “P100-B Fund,” together with the decisive procurement of many other proposed big foreign and local government debts, have but one and the same well hidden but much protected pivotal finality, viz., to fund not only the decided Charter Change but also the projected plebiscite.

The P100 billion fund therefore is not to shield the economy, but someone else—and the grand designs.
God's hands

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "NO ADMIT-TANCE."

When the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that the child was missing.

Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little boy was sitting at the keyboard, innocently playing. "Keep playing," whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit."

At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing."

Then, leaning over, Paderewski reached his right arm around the boy, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." That was the way it is with God. What we can accomplish on our own is hardly noteworthy. We try our best, but the results aren't exactly graceful flowing music. But with the hand of the Master, our life's work truly can be beautiful. Next time you set out to accomplish great feats, listen carefully. You can hear the voice of the Master, whispering in your ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing."

Feel His loving arms around you. Know that His strong hands are there helping you turn your feeble attempts into true masterpieces.

Remember, God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called. And He'll always be there to love and guide you on to great things. Life is more accurately measured by the lives you touch than the things you acquire.

Can you sleep while the wind blows?

Years ago, a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals.

Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. 'Are you a good farm hand?' the farmer asked him. 'Well, I can sleep when the wind blows,' answered the little man. Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him.

The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work. Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, 'Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!'

The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, 'No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows.' Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away.

The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

When you're prepared, spiritually, mentally, and physically, you have nothing to fear. Can you sleep when the wind blows through your life? The hired hand in the story was able to sleep because he had secured the farm against the storm.

We secure ourselves against the storms of life by grounding ourselves in the Word of God. We don't need to understand, we just need to hold His hand to have peace in the middle of storms.
Stories have such tremendous power as to change a person’s life perspective or a nation’s course. So many anecdotes of conversion and transformation have been retold throughout history—a 360-degree turn-around inspired by the power of stories. Through the lens of a person’s story, another is enlightened and empowered to make a difference in the life of others. This book, a collaborative venture of Lay Forum Philippines and Institute of Spirituality in Asia, puts together a collection of commanding stories narrated by simple people from the margins of society. These are stories woven from the very fabric of their lives that speak of struggles and hopes for a just and equitable society, and faith that is constantly being challenged as they strive to give witness through their service in the Church and proclamation of the Gospel. The 20 stories found in the pages of the book are sure to inspire and tug the heart, if not challenge many of us, who have been so comfortably ensconced in our pretty little corner seemingly oblivious of the burning issues calling for our involvement as followers of Christ. Three theologians share their reflections, insights and interpretations on the stories told, thus providing a deeper analysis of the spirituality of lay people, involved in Church renewal and social transformation in the country.

This volume on the lectionary comes just in time for the new liturgical season about to begin. The book is a commentary on the Sunday texts, using a literary-liturgical way of interpreting the three readings. Aside from the usual elements one has to expect from a lectionary, this book has additional features that can be very useful and enlightening for any liturgist or preacher who wish to deepen their understanding of the word of God. For one, it explains the responsorial psalm which ordinarily is not given attention to in other lectionaries. Another is that the interpretation of the readings is done within the context of its respective liturgical season. Published by Paulines Publishing House, this volume offers a rich resource for liturgical catechesis and various forms of liturgical ministry. The author, a professor of biblical studies and director of the Joint Doctor of Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union, is also involved in the areas of biblical interpretation and biblical theology.

Dubbed as a pastoral notebook, this volume tells of a spiritual journey of a shepherd who has given much of himself at the service of his flock. The book documents the journey of Most Rev. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, OP as Archbishop of Caceres. In his foreword, the archbishop describes the volume as a “journal of an Episcopal pilgrimage.” As such it vitally serves as a virtual map that shows the growth of the archdiocese under the pastoral guidance and leadership of a caring shepherd. The archbishop adds, “Perhaps it is usual for a pilgrim upon reaching a particular juncture in the pilgrimage to pause in his wanderings and survey the pathways so far covered. Not to make a judgment of victory and success, but to simply enjoy the view of the past, to sigh in deep relief for the simple joy of being able to look back in time.”

Long before the phrase preferential option for the poor found its place in the annals of the Philippine local Church, those words were already being formed in the mind of Gustavo Gutierrez, the great thinker from Latin America and the father of Liberation Theology. That was way back in the late 60’s when renewal brought by the Second Vatican Council was sweeping the entire Church. In Gutierrez’s world of Latin America, the “flux of events, both ecclesial and socio political,” established the “social context in which the theology of liberation was born and grew.” Considered as one of those “who have shaped the universal church’s reception of the Second Vatican Council’s teachings”, Gutierrez’s liberation theology posits a “dialectical relationship between God’s free gift of salvation on the one hand and the human efforts at liberation in history on the other.” In this volume locally published by St. Pauls, Nickoloff puts together a collection of Gutierrez’s selected writings on theology and liberation. Profound in insights, the essays present a theological analysis on the topic.
Cast: Toni Gonzaga, Vhong Navarro, Dennis Padilla, Arlene Muhlach
Director: Cathy Garcia-Molina
Producer: Malou Santos
Screenwriter: John Roque
Genre: Romantic Comedy
Distributor: Star Cinema
Location: Manila
Running Time: 110min.

Technical Assessment: ●●●
Moral Assessment: ★★★
CINEMA Rating: For viewers 14 and above

Walang inaabot ng 25 anyos sa lahi ni Winona (Toni) sa kanyang mother side kung kaya’t nangangamba siyang bago sumapit ang kanyang ika-25 na kaarawan ay mamamatay rin siya. Ito rin ang dahilan kung bakit hindi siya nagpapaligaw kahit kanino at ibinuhos na lamang ang oras sa paghahanapbuhay para sa bulag na ama (Dennis Padilla). Hindi niya alam na may lihim na pagtingin sa kanya ang kanyang kababata at kasero na si Bong (Vhong Navarro). Nang sumapit ang kaarawan ni Winona ay tuwang-tuwa siyang nakaabot siya ng 25 anyos. Itinuturing niya itong extension ng kanyang buhay. Ngunit malalaman ni Bong na may malubha palang sakit si Winona at hindi na rin magtatagal ang buhay nito. Lilitihim ito ni Bong kay Winona sa pagbabasa na bigyang kasiyahan at pag-asa ito sa mga nalalabing niong araw at ibabahala rin si Bong sa sarili na babantayan at poprotekta na si Winona. Pero darating ang oportunidad kay Winona na makapunta ng Japan. Mapigilan kaya niong tungkol sa kanyang sakit? Magkatuluyan na kaya sila?


**INDONESIA**

**Prosecutors rule latest Bali bomber appeal invalid**

Lawyers for the three men facing execution for the Bali bombings which killed 202 people filed a desperate last-minute appeal to save them from the firing squad. But prosecutors said the appeal was invalid as the bombers Amrozi, his brother Mukhlas, and Imam Samudra, had exhausted their legal options and must now die in line with their 2003 sentences.

**CAMBODIA**

**Former Khmer Rouge leader to stay in prison**

Probing judges at Cambodia’s UN-backed genocide court have refused to release former Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan nearly a year after he was arrested. The 77-year-old former head of state stands charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity for his alleged role during the regime’s brutal rule from 1975 to 1979.

**VIETNAM**

**Flooding claims more lives**

Officials here said floods have killed 55 people including 18 in the capital, Hanoi. The capital has been hit by the worst flooding in almost 25 years. The National Flood and Storm Prevention Committee said victims have drowned, been struck by falling trees or collapsing buildings, and several were electrocuted by live power lines.

**PAKISTAN**

**Suicide bomber attacks Pakistani check post**

Officials here said at least eight soldiers have been killed in a suicide attack on a security check post in a Pakistani tribal region bordering Afghanistan. The bomber ploughed his explosives-laden vehicle into a checkpoint in Zalai, 20 kilometres west of Wana, the main town in South Waziristan.

**CHINA**

**Death toll from Chinese mine explosion rises**

The death toll from a gas explosion at a coal mine in northern China has risen to 24, as rescuers gave up hope of finding 20 miners alive in a separate accident. Rescuers working their way through the shaft of the colliery in Shaanxi province found another body on Nov. 2, four days after a blast ripped through the mine. Officials said hopes of finding at least five other missing miners alive were slight.

**S. KOREA**

**S. Korea unveils new economic stimulus package**

The government here has unveiled an economic stimulus package worth almost $US11 billion to help assure a soft landing in Asia’s fourth-largest economy in the face of a looming global recession. The finance ministry said it will also expand fiscal spending and offer additional tax cuts, raise the size of bond sales to fund intervention in the foreign exchange market and offer a state guarantee on foreign currency deposits at local financial institutions.

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Abducted aid workers set free**

Two Bangladeshi aid workers abducted in Afghanistan last month have been freed. Reports said Akhter Ali and Mohammad Shahjahan were helping to provide micro-finance, education and health services to the poor. They were freed on Nov. 1 at Ghazni. The two had been kidnapped from Ghazni, a province in the southwest of Kabul, on October 23.

**BANGLADESH**

**UN chief urges action on climate change**

Speaking at news conference here, UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon warned that the international financial crisis must not halt global efforts to fight climate change, warning any future failures would be "catastrophic." "We cannot allow the financial crisis to impede our efforts to fight the climate change," he said.

**IRAQ**

**Bishops call violence vs Mosul Christians intentional**

The recent wave of violence against Iraqi Christians in Mosul is intentional and part of a political plan to create discord among Iraq’s different communities, said Iraq's Catholic bishops. "The displacement of Christians from Mosul, in the tragic way it was done, is intentional and very dangerous. Apparently it falls under division and fragmentation of the country," they said.
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