

The SONA and the State of the Nation's SOUL

by: Merci Suleik

This issue marks the return of the ALFI NEWS after some time in hiatus. We hope to sustain this publication with everyone's help. Our aim is to bring out our concerns: first and foremost about our commitment to human life, the family, marriage and the relations between Church and State, which it must be emphasized, are not incompatible.

We bring to this first issue a report on the State of the Nation Address given by President Benigno Aquino III on Monday, July 25, 2011, and the nation's concerns, expressed as the State of the Soul of the Nation and affirmed at a parallel congregation on the same day.

The following is what the SONA expounded at length, focusing on the theme, "elimination of the culture of wang-wang." Its positive claims were: "prudent use of financial management" and focus on zero-based budgeting, increase in confidence of investors (citing upgrades by various international credit raters), the PSE index now at 4000, lowering of unemployment, recent survey that fewer Filipinos are growing hungry, conditional cash transfers to the poor, "taxes are going where they should", cutting of rice importation, housing for military and policemen. It went on to denounce the GOCC bonuses and PAGCOR, tax evaders, but studiously avoided the Pajero brouhaha, and justified the postponing of the ARMM elections.

The parallel Soul of the State of the Nation clearly articulated that Filipinos swear allegiance to the same Constitution, the same flag, and claim the same rights and stand by the same duties as citizens. It affirmed the truth about man, commitment to human life, the family and marriage, which the Church, like the State, is committed to protect and defend.

The SONA skirted issues that should concern the Filipino's future. It made no explicit reference to the RH bill, which, if it must be told again, is the one of the issues that has divided this nation. Contrary to the much vaunted "dogma" of separation of Church and State, faith and democracy can co-exist.

Even non-Catholics and non-Christians say that we must reject the proposition that the government can enact any law that removes the most fundamental area of human behaviour such as the intimate exercise of procreative and unitive aspect of every marriage (which Humanae Vitae has explicitly affirmed). The most serious kind of corruption than the kind on which the President hinges his campaign is the rejection of the laws of God and the twisting of moral principles merely to satisfy the dictates and whims of the flesh.

And thus, besides matters of faith, family and life, there are issues which could have been better articulated in the SONA. These are: the state of the economy, the poverty picture, the plight of the OFWS, education, healthcare, agrarian reform, electoral reform, environmental concerns, gambling, peace and order, etc. We need a roadmap. In fine, the SONA was richer in what it failed to say.

At a midyear briefing conducted by professional financial executives recently, it was noted that while the Philippines has enjoyed 15 years of continuous growth, recent figures show that GDP has slowed down, exports which used to account for 60% of total have decelerated, corporate profits have come down from a high in 2010, and while the stock market index is within 3-4% of the 4000 fair value estimate, it is struggling to maintain valuations above the 15 times PER previously held. Consumer spending and bank lending need to improve. Narrowing the budget gap should rely more on an increase in revenue rather than reducing government spending which tends to inhibit growth. The much vaunted Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects promised by the administration have fallen short, particularly in the transportation and power sectors.

At this point, we are not about to question the integrity and good intentions of President Aquino, whose election battlecry was anchored on a fight against corruption. However, integrity

is simply not enough. He must have his eyes on the future too. He must have a mission and vision like every CEO. As the Gospel says, once you put your hand on the plough, you must not look back, but move forward. Integrity, competence and integration are the true hallmarks of a true leader.

In conclusion, all of us must put our hand to the plough. Filipinos have to stop expecting the government to do everything for them. And the SOUL statement indicates that there are now more committed Filipinos who even as they strongly profess faith in God and moral values, are not here to wreak havoc on the nation's efforts to improve our economy. But we have to rise above petty concerns, be united, and focus our vision on a future that is morally upright. As 19th century French philosopher Emile Durkheim said, "When values are sufficient, laws are unnecessary; when values are insufficient, laws are unenforceable."

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ALFI is a multi-sectoral, nationwide organization committed to foster and defend the sanctity of marriage, to promote family solidarity, and to protect life at all stages of development.



The Church and the State: Building Bridges, Not Walls

by: Girlie Noche

The Philippine Constitution has built an inviolable 'wall of separation between Church and State' in order to insulate religion from politics and vice versa. This principle echoes the oft-quoted Biblical edict to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's: in matters of personal salvation, Christian rulers obey the Church, while in matters of public order, bishops obey the law of the State.

Corollary to this principle is the "non-establishment clause" that prohibits the setting-up by the State of its own religion. Jurisprudence explains that government aid to a religious institution is legal, provided the purpose is not to advance or promote a particular faith. The actual use of such aid must benefit the public primarily and whatever benefit religion may receive must be merely incidental.

Another concrete consequence of this principle is the "free exercise of religion clause" which has a dual aspect—the freedom to believe and the freedom to act based on one's belief. This guarantees religious liberty which assures that no person or religious organization would be molested, coerced, penalized or discriminated against on account of religious belief or mode or manner of worship. The Constitution is emphatic. The Legislature is mandated to ensure that religious profession and worship are forever allowed; therefore, no law shall be passed that will diminish, repress or destroy religious freedom.

These are imposed limits to legislative powers which lawmakers are duty-bound to respect and uphold.

Illustrative of this principle is the constitutional recognition that parents, not the State, are the primary and principal educators of their children. This natural right of the parents logically carries with it the right to determine, in accordance with their religious beliefs, the education their children are to receive "for civic efficiency and the development of moral character". This right of parents is, therefore, violated if their children are forced by law to attend lessons or instructions which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs.

The 'wall' metaphor, however, begs the question—how impregnable is it really? Is there strict separation in each and all respects? The Church and the State, as they are, are distinct societies with different purposes for being—one, for the spiritual ends of man, the other, for the earthly and material well-being of man. Each serves different needs of the same human being who is a member of both societies at the same time. Both, however, aim at achieving the common good of the human community.

Those who believe in strict separation are hard put to explain why there are military chaplains, prayers in courts and legislatures, oaths that end "so help me, God", legal holidays to observe religious practices, certain crimes against religious worship that are considered

crimes against the fundamental laws of the State, and other constitutional arrangements regarding Church and State relations. And when we, the Filipino people, in the preamble of our Constitution, implored "the aid of Almighty God", we thereby manifested our religiosity and our unflinching reliance upon Him as a people.

Indeed, religion is an integral part of a person. It is not concerned solely with the future life but with the here and now as well, with the day-to-day ordinary struggles that citizens, including their leaders, contend with each day. And since it is an integral part of the person, civil society should recognize religion as a constituent element of the common good for which it is itself responsible. The Christian religion and other religions can offer their contribution to development (and the common good) only if God has a place in the public realm, specifically in regard to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions. (Caritas in Veritate, #56).

However independent Church and State are from each other, there are necessary connections that exist between them. Distinction and independence do not make it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and vice versa. Nor does neutrality make coordination and cooperation between them impossible. In the spirit of goodwill, Church and State can work together to provide an environment that will foster and promote the fullest and integral

development of each man and of the whole man. The task of achieving the common good, which is a shared objective of Church and State, will surely benefit from a friendly, benevolent and wholesome mutual cooperation between them.

Walls divide, foster enmity and stunt growth and development. The Church is involved in the politics that deals with authentic human development focused on the citizen's very person, his human dignity, his material and spiritual needs, and rights that must be tended to and protected. The State has as its sacred duty the protection and promotion of the basic and inviolable rights of its citizens, notably, the right to life and religious freedom. The Church and State then may well endeavour to build bridges—not walls—bridges that will bring the citizens-faithful beyond the limited and the ephemeral.

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YOUTH SPEAK

Dear Mr. President,

I am a 24 year old Filipino-Chinese speaking to you today to air my sentiments. I am witnessing a huge discussion that could very well affect my future and that of many other young people in our country today.

We the youth worry about the effects of the passage of the RH Bill. I stand against the bill not because the Catholic Church says so, but because my conscience tells me it is wrong. Even before the Church declared its utmost opposition, I already said NO to the bill.

While I laud the intention of this bill, particularly on maternal health care, I cannot support this bill for the simple reason that no matter how the bill claims that it does not promote abortion, it is close enough to it, directly, or indirectly.

Mr. President, I am very much afraid for my future wife, whoever she may be. I am very much afraid for my future children, how many they may be. I am very much afraid for the many others who will face the full effects of this bill once it is passed into law. The many countries around us who have pushed a similar law are already experiencing its unfortunate consequences.

Mr. President, WE ARE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE. Overpopulation IS NOT the issue. It is poverty, and we are using the wrong means to justify our ends. I may not have enough knowledge on economics, or politics, but I think my conscience, and that of many others who oppose the bill, see it in this light. It is not blind obedience to the Universal Church, but an activated conscience that strives to see what is right from wrong.

Mr. President, I ask of you to pray and ask for guidance. Mr. President, I admired your father's tenacity in facing a dictator. Today, I speak to you with the same tenacity he exuded, short of civil disobedience or violent protests. But I say this clearly --

I would rather be put in jail fighting for the right set of values, than a free man imprisoned by a bill that destroys the very foundation of human morality.

Mr. President, you said so yourself, "Kayo ang Boss ko." Today, your boss is airing his sentiments to you. Would you hear him out?

Mr. President, I am a 24 year old Filipino knocking at your heart to rethink your position very clearly. I pray you see the dark realities of this bill, and see it in your heart to do what is most prudent for the Filipino people.

For the Filipino-Chinese Catholic Youth (FCCY)
by Jan Richmond Tieng / 13 July 2011

Dear Representatives,

We have placed the nation at the brink of greater peril when we brought to the floors of Congress the Reproductive Health Bill. Taking this legislation closer to its passage provokes the reality of the many risks that are involved. We earnestly ask you, dear members of Congress, to consider the real welfare of the youth as the prime victims of the repercussions so closely linked with the RH Bill.

We are for responsible parenthood and we, too, desire to see every Filipino family free from the burdens of poverty. However, we believe that the prospect of repercussions taking their toll should cause us grave concern. While the RH Bill posits itself as a comprehensive attempt to relieve our people of a particular ill, it is this very claim of comprehensiveness that blinds it from its cons. It is a solution that imposes itself over a span of issues while it remains oblivious to the threats it poses. We raise concerns over poverty and population, maternity and death, ignorance and disease but we wish to take action by intervening in waning demographics, promoting "health" without regard for detriments, and condoning, instead of correcting, parents' inability to aptly educate their children.

To ignore impending dangers to demography, public health, and family integrity is sheer absurdity. The RH Bill is an ambition to resolve a complex of issues with one hasty "comprehensive" solution. If we are to secure our nation's future, then we must learn to gauge the worth of our ambitions based BOTH on what these intend to do AND what these will inevitably cause.

We cannot afford to gamble our future. We cannot afford to legislate what constitutes harm to our people. If there exists no warrant against the consequences of the RH Bill, and while it is clear that there are other measures that strike poverty at its core, then we could conclude with certainty that the RH Bill is not worth passing. Given that the detriments outweigh the benefits, putting off the RH Bill's passing is certainly justified.

We appeal to the public's reason and we beg off from emotions. Unfortunate stories of individual families, although real, must never constitute a compromise for the State to ignore cons and glorify pros. In this context, we cannot permit public opinion driven by compassion to outweigh truths and facts which are understood out of reason.

The RH Bill is not our best option, and neither is it our last. Why the haste to force uncertainty into reality when you have in your hands the opportunity to give the Filipino people what they really, direly need: quality education and employment opportunities, genuine rural development, and the protection of the integrity of the Filipino family and society? Opposition to the RH Bill would not have lingered if the arguments against it were not valid, if the chances of detriments were slim, and if the strong need for it were justified. But the arguments remain valid, and the threat of detriments remains real, and our need for it is greatly surpassed by dire needs.

Dear Representatives, consider greater truths beyond imagined predicaments, consider the country's future beyond sensationalized stories, OPPOSE THE RH BILL.

For the Pro-life Youth of UP Diliman
by Kiboy Sagrado Tabada / 28 May 2011

"The primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is MAN, the human person in his or her integrity."

(Pope Benedict XVI)

IN THIS CORNER...

Manny Pacquiao -- A Great Boxer...a Faithful Servant.

by: Rosie Luistro



Manny Pacquiao is easily one of the most famous Filipinos in the history of our country and one of the leading athletes in the world. And yet humility is not a virtue that this champion lost in his evolution as one of the best among the rest. This is what makes him more than just a great boxer. He knows who to give homage to, he knows what teachings to follow and he knows who and what he owes.

And so we hear him say these now famous quotes:

"Hindi naman ako pwede mag pro-RH dahil madasalin akong tao. May takot ako sa Panginoon. Ang boss ko kasi ang Panginoon. Ayokong labagin ang kautusan ng Panginoon" 14 May 2011

<http://rp1.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/05/14/11/pacquiao-voices-stand-rh-bill>

This is what makes him more than just a great boxer -- he is first and foremost God's faithful servant.

As he faces peril within the ring, there is one thing as certain as the throwing of punches. There is always that Prayer in his corner as if completely blocking the glare in the dome and the pandemonium surrounding him for that one single, silent and profound moment of religious communion. Those who have followed PacMan for several years all know that as his fame grew so did his humble and gentle person. It is the way he acts and the way he speaks as he refers to his Lord as his boss. Indeed, our praying warrior is changing the world and teaching us not only what humility, grace and compassion mean but how precious LIFE is.

Bravo Congressman Manny Pacquiao!

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Humanae Vitae for our times

by: Merci Suleik

Forty three years ago, on July 25, 1968, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical, Humanae Vitae. Subtitled "On the Regulation of Birth", it reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the Church regarding issues pertaining to human life. Since its promulgation, it has been a controversial encyclical, and has become a "sign of contradiction", just as Jesus Christ was. And yet, much more than ever, today Humanae Vitae is appropriate for our times, however much it is misunderstood and even rejected as being out of sync with our "modern" life.

The underlying theme of Humanae Vitae is that man and woman, in their conjugal act, must recognize that such is an act of mutual love, of mutual self-giving, that is in consonance with the will of the Author of life, who has lovingly shared this gift of transmitting life to his beloved creatures. Hence, any act that impairs the capacity to transmit human life as the Creator intended through natural law is offensive to the moral order, frustrates the norm of marriage and contradicts His design and will as the author of life.

The Holy Father was said to have told Cardinal Gagnon on the eve of the encyclical's issuance, "Don't be afraid, in twenty years they will call me a prophet." And indeed in the over forty-year journey of Humanae Vitae, the following four "prophecies" of the consequences of methods of artificial birth control have come true, such as:

- "how wide and easy road would...be opened up towards conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality..."
- "...the young, who are so vulnerable...must not be offered some easy means of eluding its (moral law) observance..."
- "...man, growing used to the employment of contraceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman, and no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer

as his respected and beloved companion...

• ...a dangerous weapon would...be placed in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral requirements...favoring...even proposing upon their peoples, if they were to consider it necessary, the method of contraception which they judge to be most effective...placing at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy..." Indeed, Humanae Vitae predicted a general lowering of morality should contraception become widely available. Contraception has led to so many vicious wrongs in society: it facilitates the sexual revolution which leads to much unwanted pregnancy and abortion, has made women more open to sexual exploitation by men, the increase in the divorce rate, teenagers becoming more sexually active, babies born out of wedlock, abortions, sexual activity outside of marriage, the spread of AIDs, etc.

Humanae Vitae reiterates, "the Church, which interprets natural law through its unchanging doctrine, reminds men and women that the teachings based on natural law must be obeyed, and teaches that each and every conjugal act remains ordained to the procreating of life." Contraception, to be blunt about it, violates the procreative and unitive meaning of the human sexual act.

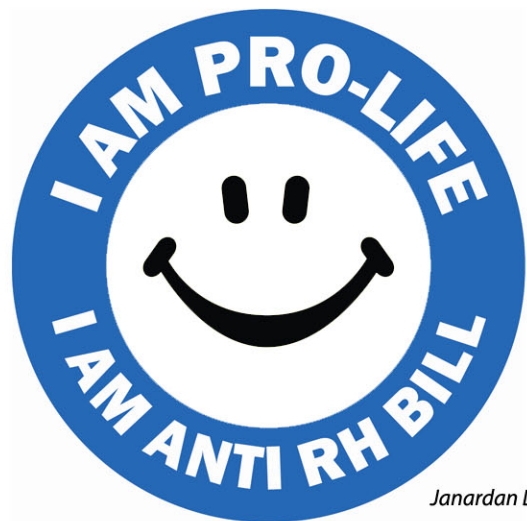
As is obvious, Humanae Vitae remains true even for our "modern times" and its "prophecies" have been fulfilled these past forty three years. It may be pointed out that the fourth "prophecy" regarding government intervention in the most personal and reserved sector of human intimacy has come to pass with the insidious Reproductive Health bill. This bill would consider babies as "burdens" and not gifts, speaks of "accidental pregnancies" as if getting pregnant were like being hit by a bus. If pregnancy results from a conjugal act, it actually means that something has gone right, not that something has gone wrong! To be fertile is to be in the right state of

health. The bill would make women thwart their fertility as if fertility were a disease that needs to be cured, insisting on considering contraceptives as "essential medicines".

A fallacy that is being propagated by RH supporters is that the Church wants married couples to have as many children as possible. This is untrue. The Church expects spouses to be responsible about bringing forth children that they can support, educate and love. They may limit the size of their families...but in a moral way that does not contradict the nature of their bodies, that does not flout the very reason for an act of love, for that is what true sexual union is about. Modern forms of natural family planning which have been found to be a highly scientific, safe and reliable way of determining when a woman is fertile are acceptable, and so a couple who would avoid pregnancy would abstain during a woman's fertile period. Abstinence is another way of expressing love. True, it is difficult, but isn't dieting, exercise, or other forms of self-denial happily embraced despite the difficulties involved?

So, why are our legislators pushing a "non-reproductive and non-health" bill? Perhaps it might be good to look at what institutions are lobbying for the lucrative benefits of a proliferation of contraceptives, and why the people in the developing world have been targeted for their widespread distribution. Natural family planning will not make money for anyone. Natural family planning will not ensure that developed countries and institutions can corner the resources of developing countries. Humanae Vitae is not the issue really. It's all about my favourite quote from the movie, Wall Street, "Greed is good."

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