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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: A Matter of Courage

by Atty. Maria Concepcion S. Noche

In the continuing debate on the Reproductive Health Bill, it is argued that, in a pluralistic and democratic society such as the Philippines where there are divergent views and differing moral principles, the Catholic Church and any religious denomination should not and cannot impose their teachings and moral norms on the state, the society, and the citizens. Respect for “pluralism,” it is asserted, is the essence of religious freedom.

Furthermore, it is claimed that religion and religious beliefs should not interfere with and have an impact on government policy because of the separation of church and state.

Our Constitution has two clauses related to religion and religious freedom: (1) the non-establishment clause, and (2) the free exercise clause. The former essentially means that the state cannot establish or favor a particular faith or denomination. The latter indicates

that citizens, including public officials, are allowed to freely exercise their faith without government interference or intrusion or obstruction. The government can neither dictate faith nor compel the performance of actions or practices that run counter to one’s faith.

Where are we today? Certain modern “rights,” such as the “woman’s right to choose” and the “right to taxpayer-funded contraception including abortifacient drugs,” have gained elevated significance dwarfing the constitutional and fundamental “right to life.” Legislators and advocates pushing for the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill now also known as Responsible Parenthood Bill – are acting and talking as if the state, the culture, and the society needed to be protected from the Catholic teachings and the religious beliefs of certain believers. They have forgotten to protect the faithful from the government.

Under the RH Bill, a healthcare service provider who refuses to provide information or perform health care services on account of religion will nonetheless have to refer the person seeking such care to another provider who is willing to provide the same service. Employers are likewise mandated to provide reproductive health services to their employees, which may include sterilization, ligation, and a whole range of artificial contraception, without mention of religious or ethical considerations.

For the exercise of religious freedom to be truly meaningful, individuals should be allowed to profess and practice their faith by freely seeking and serving God in their hearts, in their lives and in their relationship with others, without fear of persecution or punishment.

The Bill dangles a criminal penalty of imprisonment and/or fine to compel compliance with its provisions. Believers will find themselves torn between fidelity to God and loyalty to their country. This unjustly limits the right to conscientious objection on the part of health care workers and professionals and employers who take their religion seriously.

continued at the back...

A new voice for life

by Rosie Luistro

“Will the proposed Php3-billion budget be put into generating jobs, into improving education, into more scholarships, and into training birth attendants and health practitioners?” a new voice in Congress recently asked. “Let’s stop going around the problem and go straight to the solution,” she challenged her colleagues.

That voice is Congresswoman Fatima Aliah Quibranza-Dimaporo who is on her first term as Representative of the second district of Lanao del Norte. Already she has created a niche that will be ingrained in the history of the prolife movement. At a very young age she has articulated, not only in the halls of Congress, but in every community she has been invited to speak, what she strongly stands for – LIFE.

But this is of no surprise. Dimaporo rings a bell in contemporary politics and this congresswoman is the second generation of a well-known political clan. Born to a political family, she is no stranger to controversy and political strategies. Educated in very good schools and finishing with high honors, combined with an extensive experience in legislative



work and exposure to international policies, she cannot but have an impact on those within the range of her advocacy. Indeed, her defense of life is remarkable for her grasp of the many social and economic issues involved, primarily the recognition of the unborn’s right to live and the worth of a person not only from birth but through the whole spectrum of life.

As one of the Nine Young Legislators (9YL), a group opposing the Reproductive

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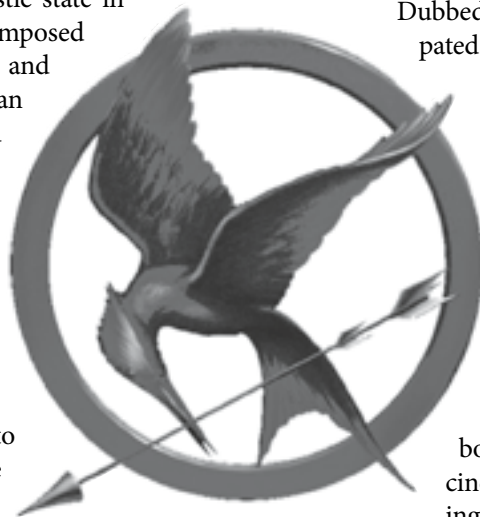
Downplaying the Odds

On the Hunger Games movie

by Nicole Bautista

In Panem, a futuristic state in North America composed of twelve Districts and the Capitol, there is an annual fully-televised event called the Hunger Games. Two tributes, a girl and a boy from each district, are drawn at a special ceremony to “compete” in these games, which is just a better way of saying “to kill each other to be the last one standing.”

Here we meet Katniss Everdeen : 16 years old and already the breadwinner of the family. She is a hunter-gatherer; a poacher who sells her kill at a black market to feed her mother and younger sister, Prim. The ball starts rolling at the reaping for the 74th Hunger Games, in which Katniss selflessly volunteers to be the female tribute in place of Prim, whose name is picked out of hundreds.



Dubbed the “Most Anticipated Movie of 2012” even before 2011 was out, The Hunger Games movie has generated enough buzz to make practically every kid old enough to read all three of Suzanne Collins’ best-selling books troop to the cinemas for the opening weekend. Why is

this significant? Surely a story about a young lady who sacrifices herself in order to save her sister from certain death is worth watching?

If you could get over the idea that, for 73 years, thousands of Capitol people have been witnessing the Hunger Games and still delight in it (historical backdrop of dystopian society notwithstanding), then this movie really needs to be seriously dis-

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM...

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For the exercise of religious freedom to be truly meaningful, individuals should be allowed to profess and practice their faith by freely seeking and serving God in their hearts, in their lives and in their relationship with others, without fear of persecution or punishment. Only in this way can this right be truly guaranteed.

By making contraception a matter of national policy and allocating billions of taxpayers’ money for its implementation, the Bill violently disregards the Catholic teachings and unduly and illegally tramples upon the religious beliefs and convictions of the Catholic faithful. Indeed, it is not right to ask Catholics or any group of believers to forcibly pay for practices they deem sinful. To do so is tyrannical and destructive of democracy.

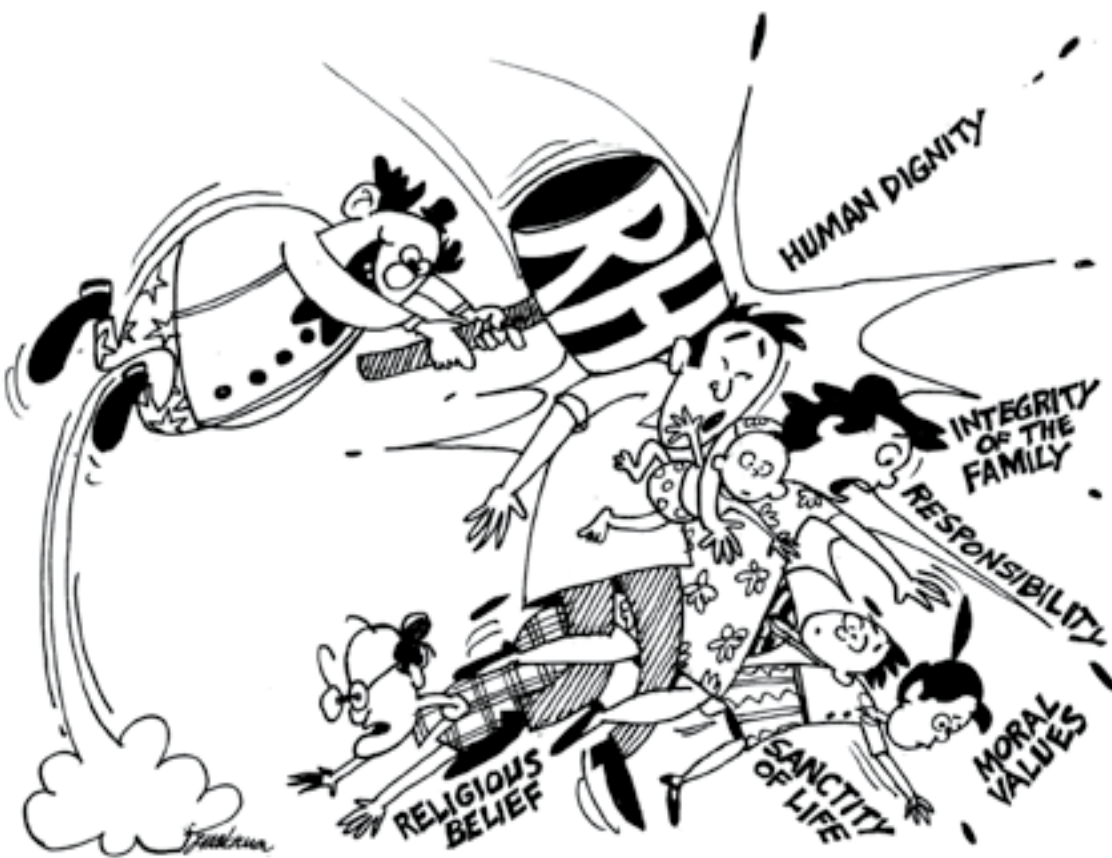
The advocates of the Bill try to silence opposition from the Catholic Church in the name of democracy and “pluralism.”

Democracy guarantees and defends the rights of the people. Therefore, for democracy to be operative, it is necessary, if not indispensable, to discover again original human and moral values which are derived from the very truth about man and the dignity of the human person. They are values which no State can create, modify or destroy, but can only recognize, respect and promote. History has proven time and again that for democracy to be stable, it needs a foundation of moral principles based upon faith and religion. Democracy, thus, cannot be neutral; it has to be infused with values that are not subject to variation according to different political trends. These values should guide and direct political activity; otherwise, ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power.

“Pluralism” does not imply that all ideas and religious beliefs are equally valid, because they are not. “Pluralism,” therefore, does not require us to mute our convictions, nor does it excuse us from speaking and acting to advance our beliefs. It should instead usher in the development of a genuine religious maturity that would not only respect the freedom of persons to do as they choose within the limits of the common welfare, but which would also infuse them with the fidelity and courage to choose what they know, through their Catholic faith and reason, to be right.

Ultimately, the right to religious freedom is based on the dignity of the human person, being a child of God, free and responsible, with a corresponding obligation to seek the truth and adhere to it when known.

Religious freedom is a matter of courage—the courage to seek the Truth. ■ [mcnoche@philonline.com](#)



YES but NOT YET: Generation Y’s transition to adulthood

by Gladys Golo



The workplace is clean; the workers, young (average age: 25). No one sits idle but neither does anyone seem harried. There is no piped-in music but the sound of the computer keys manipulated by deft fingers, in varying degrees of intensity, create a rhythmic pattern that seems to follow a melodic line.

The overall impression I got as I entered this office was one of positive work ethic.

Talking to the employees, I found them thoughtful. They told me they want a better life than their parents’. They believe in and practice work life balance. They pursue personal development as much as they crave for exciting jobs. The word achievement can be read on their lips. On weekends they join fun runs,

yoga sessions, read about fashion, and tweet about causes they actively support – which includes green living and eco tourism efforts whether at home or in the workplace. They love the convenience of modern lifestyles – paying bills online and travelling to exotic places.

Meet Generation Y. Born between 1982 and 2002, quite a number of them are now in the workplaces. On the surface, they seem poised on the fast lane.

Curiously though, among the group I had a chance to be with, only a handful is married. It is not that they do not want a family, but that they all are too preoccupied at the moment. Most of them want to take on all these adult obligations; their attitude, however, is typically, “Yes, but not yet.” They still want the lure of independence, the magic of spontaneity and the thousand and one possibilities at their disposal.

Considering the five external markers of adulthood – leaving the parental household, onset of marriage, onset of childbearing, completion of schooling, entering the labor force in a full time job – one can hypothesize that young adults are delaying these milestones. In the field of psychology, a new period of the life course has been created. It is called emerging adulthood.

Carlo is only 21 but by June he will already have a Master’s degree. Summertime for him involves varied jobs. This particular summer, he will be in Vietnam to do pro bono work for an NGO that gives career education to high school students. But Carlo chooses to be with his parents still, more of a desire to pay forward rather than just out of convenience.

On the other hand, some of Carlo’s counterparts are unemployed. They are the type who may require additional assistance in transitioning out of the house due to lack of purchasing power, hence manifesting a continued dependence on parents. Aside from delay in home departures, there is the phenomenon of cycling in and out of the home, leaving and then coming back, due to the inability to be self-sufficient.

James Marcia who developed the identity status paradigm posited four possible outcomes or statuses: achieved (individuals have explored and made commitment), moratorium (exploration is occurring but no commitments have been made), foreclosed (no exploration has occurred but commitment have been made) and diffused (individuals have not explored nor made commitments).

As these transitions happen, they can create crises in the life cycle of families. One can get stuck in the foreclosed or diffused state longer than necessary. It is in moment of crisis that the family can also show its resilience and true personality. However, families can anticipate and prepare for these transitions by constant communication and deliberate habit formation.

How much of the family structure can help the young adult arrive at a more stable identity outcome? How much of the early years have provided the required scaffolding so that each person can forge ahead and not prolong the transition into adult roles? When should exploration end so that deeper level of commitments may be made?

Positive parental education does not stop at 18, nor does it have to end after college. I once chanced upon a TV show that featured then Pope John Paul II sharing to Ambassador Henrietta de Villa that the Filipinos have two great gifts: their close family ties and their deep faith in God. The parents therefore, will have to continue to ensure that the physical and emotional needs of all their children are achieved, and that all family members, including and more especially those who are retired are equally entitled to the satisfaction of basic needs in this evolving and changing family unit.

The generation Y can also impact positively to their families by accentuating their positive traits, so that they create the bridge that connects the past to a better future. ■

Those who belong to Generation Y want to take on adult obligations but they also still want to enjoy independence, spontaneity and the countless possibilities they have at their disposal.

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cussed. In truth, “dregs” of society or not, a person’s life is special and valuable—killing is wrong. In the movie, not only is that fact challenged, it is also given leeway.

For example, in the arena, the kids must kill someone to be the last one standing. The characters are forced into a circumstance that somehow “excuses” killing. Of course there are the nasty kids, whom Katniss calls the Careers, and it’s easy to understand that, against them, she fights back—they are intent on killing her. She drops a hive of tracker jackers (mutated wasps with lethal stings) on them when they trap her up a tree.

But set self-defense aside, and her excuses fall flat. After the tracker jacker attack, Katniss teams up with Rue, a 12-year-old girl from District 11. Katniss feels she wants to protect Rue, but she also knows that at some point in the Games, if she is to survive, she has to kill the younger girl. Conveniently, Katniss doesn’t find herself having to deal with it—Rue gets killed by a kid from District 1 (whom Katniss shoots without a second thought), and Katniss ends up strewing flowers over her friend’s body to remind the viewing public that, hey, she’s human.

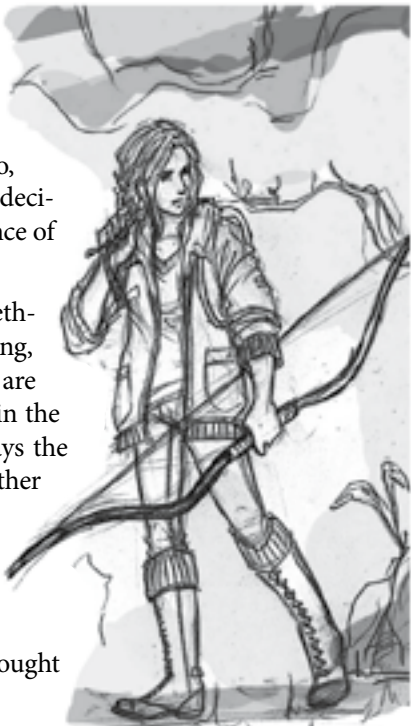
The scene’s touching, but it’s quickly forgotten. As the movie progresses, graver acts leading to heavier ethical questions are thrown into the mix: Is it okay for Katniss to pretend she loves Peeta to gain the favor of sponsors? Is Katniss justified in shooting Cato to put him out of his misery? Is attempting suicide her only option to save herself and Peeta in the end?

It makes one ask: Is survival more important than being human?

Because in truth, this is a story of a girl who loathes a cruel system, rebels against the system, but in the end, does exactly what the system wants her to do, which is to forget her humanity. The story compels Katniss to make the wrong decisions, and convinces her that it’s “okay” given the circumstances, given the chance of survival.

For young viewers, this idea may be very problematic. Because this kind of ethics challenges the veracity that some things—like deceit, murder, mercy killing, and suicide—are wrong in all circumstances. In showing that Katniss’s actions are okay because of their outcome (she does survive the Games, and saves Peeta in the bargain), the movie tells viewers that the end justifies the means. It downplays the gravity of evil choices and desensitizes viewers not only to violence, but also to other immoral acts, like insincerity.

Dystopian future world or not, Panem cannot redefine good and evil because it cannot redefine human beings, much less take away their freedom (and responsibility) to choose what is right. Hence, the odds that The Hunger Games movie is in favor of leaving its viewers with some nourishing food for thought are low; and that’s quite ironic, considering the Games’ famous tagline. ■



A New Voice... continued from p.1

Health bill in Congress, her commitment to the prolife cause far surpasses what is expected from a very young Legislator.

Watching this pretty, feisty lady speak and witnessing her easy interaction with people, we are glad to have found yet another champion for life, a voice for the voiceless among us who cherish family, who welcome new life as a blessing, not a burden.

Congresswoman Aliah, we support your dedication to fight for what you believe in and we salute that spirit! ■ [rbluistro@gmail.com](#)

Population Myth vs. Demographic Dividend by Merci Suleik

Once again one of the oldest myths of economic literature is being reshaped. The hoary Malthusian proposition of 1798 has become the underlying dogma of those who would belabour the consequences of population on the pace and process of economic growth by raising the bogey of difficulties of feeding the “92.3 million and growing” Filipinos. Proponents of this doctrine make it look as if it is a reasonable proposal to cure poverty and promote economic development in the Philippines.

Of course poor old Malthus never dreamed that price responses, institutional changes, and technological innovations would ever come to pass. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that the productivity of human capital and the importance of technical change put into question the highly pessimistic Malthusian underpinnings of the population bomb theories. Nobel Prize economist Simon Kuznets found that based on simple correlation, and looking at the longer term, a net negative impact of population growth in per capita output was not obvious in the data. Moreover, it has been shown that the growing populations in East Asia have bred the so-called Asian tigers in the region.

Now comes an even more positive window of opportunity in the development of society and a nation – studies that show a demographic dividend that countries may exploit, by laying down appropriate policies that would make possible faster rates of economic growth and human development as fertility rates decline. In the case of the Philippines, the fertility rate has been declining since 2000 when it was recorded at 3.48 to 3.19 in 2011. Indeed it has rather dramatically dropped from around 7 in 1960, reflecting the choices of childbearing women over the years without the state foisting it on them, as it would with the RH bill. It may also be mentioned that this indicator shows the potential for population change in the country and is a more direct measure than the crude birth rate (which gives the aver-

age annual number of births a year per 1000 persons, and is often used to determine the rate of population growth – which recent screaming headlines are being used by RH proponents to scare the living daylights out of us), as it refers to births per woman.

What is the demographic dividend? Simply stated, the demographic dividend occurs when a falling birth rate changes the age distribution so that fewer investments are needed to meet the needs of the youngest age groups and resources are released for investment in economic development and family welfare. A falling birth

Four factors that will benefit the Philippine society: increased labor supply, increase in savings, human capital, and increased domestic demand.

rate makes for a smaller population at young, dependent ages and for relatively more people in the adult age groups – who comprise the productive labor force. It improves the ratio of productive workers to child dependents in the population, allowing for faster economic growth and fewer burdens on families.

It may be mentioned that the effect of this drop in fertility rates is not immediate. There is a lag that produces a generational population bulge that for a time exerts a burden on society and increases the dependency ratio. (This may be the current situation in the Philippines which UN-MDG and USAID people are exploiting by dangling the carrot of development with the stick of birth control, not to mention their deceptive 2.3% statistic concerning our population growth rate which

NSO has measured at 1.9%.)

Eventually this dependent group will reach the productive age, and the dependency ratio will decline dramatically, leading to what is known as the demographic dividend. The Philippines has a large number of young workers with purchasing power that can increase consumption, savings and investment. Currently the average age is 22.2 years, with nearly half a million graduates available to the labor force each year. By 2015, no less than Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Amando Tetangco, Jr. said, we will reach that demographic sweet spot.

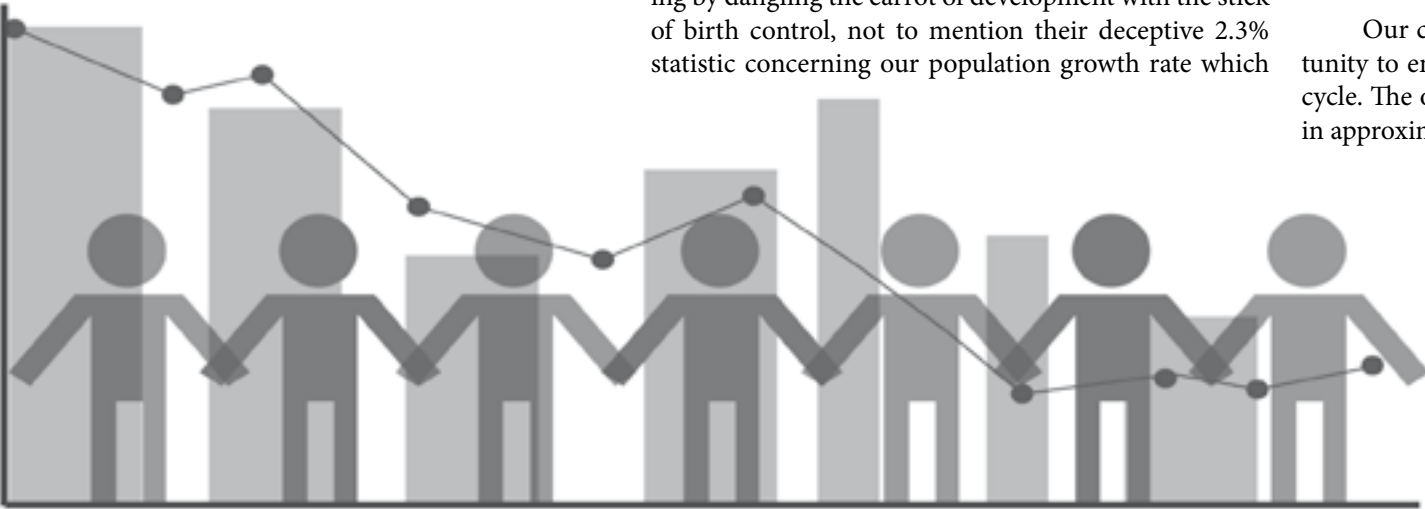
This is the time which a country may exploit by implementing effective policies that can facilitate more rapid economic growth, lessening the strain on families. During the course of this demographic dividend, four courses of action that will benefit society may be delivered through: (1) increased labor supply; (2) increase in savings; (3) human capital; and (4) increased domestic demand.

Among the examples of effective economic policies are: (1) policies that improve human resource capabilities and create jobs, to absorb the large number of teenagers coming of age; (2) open trade policies which can drive faster growth during this window period; (3) policies to generate capital to fuel growth, e.g., policies that encourage personal saving, government and business savings, foreign investments, and development assistance; and (4) policies that promote health, especially of children and teenagers to improve educational performance as well as encouraging responsible family planning.

As an aside, it has also been mentioned that there is a “second demographic dividend” which relates to a large proportion of older working age people who face longer periods of retirement, who accumulate assets, and also contribute to the economy’s consumption, savings and investment.

Our country should take advantage of the opportunity to enhance the key features of the economic life cycle. The opportunities now present will not last long, in approximately five decades, the window will begin to close. Since favourable policies take time to establish and take effect, especially investments in education, job creation, and health, and failing to act on these policies will have long-lasting damaging effects and set us back even more.

Let’s all sit up straight and take notice of the benefits of the demographic dividend that we have been blessed with. ■ [merci.suleik@gmail.com](#)



Does the RH Bill Defy God?

An earlier paper entitled “The Right to Life – the Greatest of all Human Rights” stated, “Life is a gift of God and not an endowment granted by the State. As such, therefore, the relationship between God, the Giver of life, and man, the recipient of life, is a most profound moral and spiritual relationship over which no power on earth nor any man-made law can prevail or alter, much less breach.”

Thus the separation of Church and State should not mean the separation of the State and its citizens from God, that is, the State must in no way enact laws that will separate or alienate itself or its citizens from God, the Source of Life and the Creator of nature and of all its forces, on whom the State depends for its providential care and sustenance, as stated clearly in the preamble of our Constitution.

And yet the RH Bill promotes the following:

- 1) The widespread use of abortifacient substances and devices that kill the unborn child¹ and the use of oral contraceptives whose carcinogenic substances cause death or ill health to mothers and women users of the pill².

Violation of God’s Fifth Commandment: “Thou shalt not kill”

- 2) The granting of unnatural, abnormal and bizarre rights to children from ages 10, 11, and up to enjoy satisfying sex with access to a full array of contraceptives³ while parents who stop them even out of religious reasons may be jailed or fined or both⁴.

Children will become potential jaegers of their own parents who try to stop them from early sexual experience to prevent promiscuity and fornication among the young by simply reporting them to authorities.

Violation of God’s Fourth Commandment: “Honor thy father and thy mother.”

- 3) A contraceptive culture that often turns love into mere pleasure seeking, cheapens women by making them mere objects of pleasure, weakens marital fidelity causing the breakdown of marriages enhancing adultery⁵, promotes fornication among the young⁶ and the disintegration of stable and civilized families and societies⁷.

Violation of God’s Sixth Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

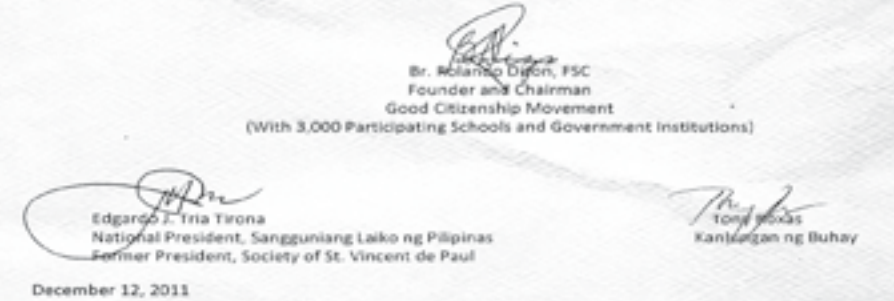
- 4) The brazen violation of the natural law and the replacement of God as the Supreme Lawgiver of moral conduct by the State which now becomes the highest moral authority of the land whose laws citizens must follow or suffer penalties.

Violation of the First Commandment: “I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before me.”

Hence, in the light of the foregoing, should the RH Bill become law, there is reason to believe that it may effectively dispose at the very least, or worse induce, or at worst compel our citizens to choose whether to obey God and suffer penalties the State will impose on them or to obey the State and be disloyal to God and untrue to their own conscience.

A State that implores the help of Almighty God in the preamble of its own Constitution for its survival and well-being does not have any moral right to pass laws that override God’s laws clearly expressed in His Ten Commandments and implied in the natural moral law written in the hearts of men.

And so, with the issues now clearly defined and joined, will our legislators kindly answer the question: Does the RH Bill defy God?



ADDENDUM

The Ten Commandments of God are known to be God’s own articulation of the natural moral law that transcends and is prior to all organized religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam included. Written in the hearts of men, it is also the only moral bedrock upon which all democratic and civilized governments and societies are founded and the only source of hope for peace and harmony among men of all religious beliefs, including those who have none.

To the unconvinced and the uncertain, the RH Bill appeals to one’s conscience so that one must decide whether it is moral to “err” on the side of respecting and protecting life rather than err on the side of extinguishing it.

Which of these two courses of action will please God, the Giver of Life, or arouse His wrath?

This is the all-important central question legislators must answer.

ALFI General Assembly

This year’s General Assembly for Alliance for the Family Foundation Philippines, Inc. (ALFI) could not have taken place at a better time. The crusade to thwart anti-life legislation had been noticeably gaining ground the past year, different groups were coming up with initiatives to make their life-affirming sentiments known, and people of faith seemed to have awakened to the fact that their moral convictions were being trampled on.

Congress being on a six-week break at the time of the March 10 General Assembly seemed to all the more stress that while lawmakers were on recess, the fight for life never takes a break. Hence, over a hundred people gathered at the Parents for Education Foundation-run Woodrose School in Ayala Alabang Village, Muntinlupa on that Saturday morning for several hours of sharing, learning and fellowship.

ALFI president Atty. Maria Concepcion Noche’s words served as a vital reminder for the packed auditorium about how the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill is a vehicle through which people’s religious freedom is being trampled on. Contrary to what many misguided folks have been insisting, it is the RH bill that is guilty of imposing one’s religious views on others – healthcare workers and medical professionals are forced to participate in practices that go against their religious convictions (referring patients to others who would provide the services concerned is participation nonetheless) and employers must either provide RH services to their employees or

suffer the consequences, based on the legislative measure pending in both chambers of Congress.

“By dangling a criminal penalty of imprisonment and/or fine, believers will find themselves torn between fidelity to God and loyalty to their country. This unjustly limits the right to conscientious objection on the part of health care workers and medical professionals. For the exercise of religious freedom to be truly meaningful, individuals should be allowed to profess and practice their faith by freely seeking and serving God in their hearts, in their lives and in their relationship with others, without fear of persecution or punishment. Only in this way can this right be truly guaranteed,” Noche pointed out.

Coming up with a national policy on birth control also has repercussions on society that Filipinos still need to understand and reject, the lawyer added.

“The present set-up allows respect for religious beliefs of everyone. But once a national policy on contraception is legislated, that changes the landscape altogether. Making it a matter of national policy or institutionalizing contraception via RH Bill and allocating billions of our scarce resources, will deprive us of our choice because the government will effectively have made that choice already for the Filipino families,” she explained.

Noche reminded everyone that moral principles are necessary for sound decision-making as regards policies that will benefit the common good – something that needs to be explicitly stated nowadays due to calls for religion to have no place in the public square.

On the contrary, “As demonstrated by St. Thomas More when he defied the sovereign of

which he was a ‘good servant’ and chose to serve God first, religion has an important place in the political process. For indeed, it has been proven time and again that for democracy to be stable, it needs a foundation of moral principles based upon faith and religion.”

Also gracing the event was Lanao del Norte Representative Fatima Aliah Dimaporo, who shed more light on the ins and outs of influencing legislation from different levels. Speaking from the heart and showing a keen understanding of the need to hold fast to one’s moral convictions if the good were to be upheld in society, the congresswoman related experiences of working side by side with the youth in New York as part of the World Youth Alliance, and of speaking up even when doing so would be going against the grain. She enjoined the crowd to do their part as citizens, because ordinary citizens have the power and the duty to influence the direction of public policy if they get involved.

Dr. Jose Sandejas, Adviser to ALFI’s Board of Trustees, provided a systematic presentation of the area of population and demographics, and Mr. Josemaria Fernandez rounded off the entire program as master of ceremonies.

After the program, the attendees partook of some refreshments while exchanging stories and experiences, and sharing strategies to carry out in the continued advocacy for life and family. #—Diana Uichanco



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