

Reflections:
A Collection of Sermons and Lectures of
Rev. Dr. Johnny V. Gumban

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College of Theology
Central Philippine University
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FOREWORD

In an age when much of biblical truth is obscured from view in the church because of its accommodation to the prevailing culture, we need forth-telling voices that direct us back to the message of the Scriptures. Dr. Gumban meets this need as he brilliantly exposes the implications of Jesus calling people to His fold and teaching them practically to live meaningfully as His Body through His living Word.

It is my honor to introduce *"Reflections: A Collection of Sermons and Lectures,"* written by Rev. Dr. Johnny V. Gumban, a Convention of Philippine Baptist Church (CPBC) minister and theologian. He has long years of experience on teaching Systematic Theology and Pastoral Ethics and Counseling and the former dean of the College of Theology, Central Philippine University.

Moreover, this book presents a positive call for every Christian to deepen their experience through the avenues of true worship, faith, grace, love, failures and sufferings, Christian growth and ministry, evangelism, Christian pilgrimage, peace, and Christian family. The content is based on evident biblical material to provide readers with a more "simple" material for deeper commitment.

Dr. Valerie May Gumban-Sia, his daughter, has initially chosen these selected sermons where his father used day-to-day experiences to deliver a point. Dr. Sia said: "My father chose to be God's minister. God used his talents to be able to minister to people through his messages and his leadership. I know that my father will agree with me when we pray that as you read his sermons you hear God talking to you through his servant. My father does not want the credit for his works but, rather, to God who gave him these talents." She further notes, "As some

people may know, my father delivered his sermons with no notes on hand. “

It has been the dream of Dr. Edna J. Gumban, his wife, to print a book for her husband’s memory and legacy to the community of believers especially to the Baptist community to share her husband’s thoughts and experiences in a form of sermons and lectures.

The College of Theology is happy to publish this book in recognition of his valuable contributions to the Seminary family and to the community of believers especially to the Convention of Philippine Baptist members.

I do hope that this excellent and practical resource will be another material for pastors and church members for deeper personal relationship with Jesus and for faithful discipleship and mission. It is my prayer that this publication will stir our minds, touch our hearts and find meaning in our mundane and spiritual journey. Hence, this publication is dedicated to him for God’s greatest glory.

Rev. Dr. Bernabe C. Pagara
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WHAT IS WRONG WITH RELIGION?

Isaiah 1:10-20

This morning let me raise one very important question: “What is wrong with religion?” When you consider that question some of us will say there’s nothing wrong with religion because it gives us the impression that God is present with us, thus we honor God. Because of religion we gain respectability and acceptance in our community and we are reminded of our religious responsibilities. So when we ask, ‘what is wrong with religion?’ many of us will say that nothing. I also suspect that there are many of us who would even be shocked to hear that question, especially when it refers to our religion. When our religion is being questioned, we all become defensive. Many of us would say, ‘There is nothing wrong with our religion. See the doctrines that we have? If you are looking for correct doctrine you can find it in the Baptist church. If you are looking for good rituals you will find it in my church. If you are looking for high moral standard you can find it in my church.’ To imply that something is wrong with our religion is shocking to many of us.

Religion is important to us. It is man’s way of expressing his relationship to a power that is outside of him. In our Christian tradition, that power is called God. And when we have established that relationship with this power then we can be sure that this power will work for us. Our responsibility is to appease this power so that he will grant us favor in our day to day life. With this kind of religion we are given the assurance about certain things that are good in life. Religion, therefore, provides us hope not only in little things but also in every big thing that we do. Religion is the bridge between the temporal

and the eternal. My friends, if religion is, therefore, important we better make sure that we have the right religion.

In order to make sure that we have the right religion, first we have to face the implication of this question, "What is wrong with my religion?" Even if we could not believe that something could be wrong with our religion, let's look at what the scripture says. Our text this morning tells us what is wrong with religion. This refers to the religion of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and this serves as a reminder to the people of Israel of what they must do, being a religious nation. The text says, "when you come to present yourself before Me..." in other words, "when you come to be admitted into My presence", or 'when you come to worship Me, remember this; I do not like your sacrifices because they are meaningless. You present to me the fat of animals; you present to me the blood of rams, goat and lambs; all of these I do not need. I have many burnt offerings before Me." according to God. Then He says this, "...remember this, your Sabbath, your festivals, your new moons, your pilgrimages, all of these are nothing to Me. I detest your incense. I detest everything that you do in My presence. Even when you open your hands in prayer I cannot accept your prayers." Why? The reason is simple. He said, "...because your hand is full of blood, because you are not doing good, because you have learned to love that which is evil, because you have done injustice to your fellowmen." The Lord says, "instead of presenting to Me these meaningless sacrifices learn to do these; stop doing evil, learn to do good, be on the side of justice, represent the cause of the widows, encourage the oppressed, and defend the fatherless." This reminds us, my friends, that a bad religion has nothing to do with social ethics; moral conduct; and is confined in the temple but does not bear fruit in the life of people in terms of their relationship with each other. The text

simply says that what is wrong with religion is that it provides man the necessary requirements so that he can make believe that he is rightfully related to God. Religion provides us rituals, observances and practices, and encourages us to do pilgrimages, but all of these are the devices of man. Man has made it that way so that the god he created is a small god, not a big god. Man is religious but in his religiosity he makes for himself a small god; one which he can control. A small god is one whom he can please with the little things that he does, like offering sacrifices. A small god is one who can easily be excluded from all of the important things that he does. For that matter, my friends, the god of all religion is possibly a very small god. Thus, when we put it in this perspective, it means that you may believe that what you are doing is correct but you are doing this not to please God but to please yourself. You are doing this to be assured that everything is okay because you can control the god that you have created. God Almighty says He is not this god who is talking to you.

The God of the Old Testament, my friends, is not a small god. You read the Old Testament and the first thing that you encounter about this God is that He is the Creator. The meaning of *Yahweh* means the God who is responsible for every existence here on earth. That is why the Bible says, He is the Almighty God. He is the God who judges creation and He can never be created by creation. The God of the New Testament is the God of Jesus Christ who is gracious; the Almighty God who has come to you in humility. He has come to be related to you. He is your Father. This suggests not a small god but somebody who can be respected because of His love and His deeds. The God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus Christ is the same God who was revealed by Jesus Christ when He came. Now, my friends, let us consider carefully what this means in our daily

life. The God whom we worship must be a 'big God'. This 'big God' knows whether your heart is right with Him or not. That is why God did not honor the sacrifices and rituals of the people stated in our text because this God knew that these were all superficial things. Deep down in their hearts, they were not right with God. Their hearts were not right with God because they did not learn to honor each other by loving each other. Their hearts were not right with God because they did injustice to each other. Their hearts were not right with God because they did not learn to be on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the weak. The God who is big knows, therefore, you better stand before Him in fear and trembling because there is no sin that is hidden from Him. Everytime we present ourselves before this big God, we face judgment, thus, fear and trembling must grip our hearts because we are not perfect caused by our sinfulness. This is the sinfulness that we can hide from our friends and neighbors but is open to God. When we come before Him, the first thing that He examines is our sinfulness because we can never have a right partnership with God in everything that we do unless we are clean before Him. My friends, when we come before this God He does not only judge us but He also offers us forgiveness. In verse 18 He says, "Come let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson they shall be like wool." He offers forgiveness and a new start. This is the God who is big enough to erase all unrighteousness that we have committed. My friends, this God is the God who knows.

Secondly, this big God cannot be confined in one place alone. This was the mistake of the people during that time. They thought of God as One confined only in the temple and so they were confident that outside of the temple they were free to do whatever they wanted to do. Now is that not the God that is

convenient for us? If God was only present here, we could not worship Him anywhere; we could be judged by Him here, but outside of this place we could do anything we please. We could cheat our neighbor and God would not know because He is only in this place. We can steal and that is all right because God is in this place only. But the God who is big is not that kind. We encounter Him, for example, in the New Testament when Jesus Christ encountered that Samaritan woman. After a long discourse with her sinfulness Jesus Christ said, "The time will come when you will not only worship Me in this mountain or in that temple in Jerusalem but you will worship Me anywhere because God is spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Do you know what this means? It means that this big God, my friends, is present in your private lives. Even when you are in your closet, the God who is big is present there with you. There is nothing hidden from Him and so it is important for us is to present ourselves cleanly and honestly before this God. It is the only thing required.

The third thing about this God, my friends, is that that He does not work for us, neither does He play for us. It's very interesting that after the world cup or soccer was over and Brazil was declared victorious over Italy, the newspaper, the following day, revealed the prayers and the jubilation of the Brazilians when they said, "God is Brazilian." Did you read that? Now is that not, by the way, expressive of our human nature? Whatever we do we want our God to be with us. A boxer, for example, before knocking out another boxer will make the sign of the cross as if to say, "God help me to knock out my opponent." Is this not also the predisposition of armies of the world? Before they go out to kill their fellow soldiers on the other side they pray that this God be with them. But our big God does not work for us alone, neither does He play for us

only. He is the God of everybody and He provides us the means to do our best. When it comes to playing, do your best. God has already provided you the resources. Don't praise God when you win only, and don't blame God when you lose. The God whom we worship is the God we cannot control.

This big God is a God who also invites. He says, "Come let us reason together." He does not force us but He invites us. He is like saying, "Consider what I offer and once you consider you will not at all refuse." What does this God offer? This big God is saying that if you learn to be obedient and to do that which is good you will eat the best from the land. If you do that this big God will provide you the abundance that you need. This was the error of Israel because they were prone to forget this. Israel was a nation that always broke their covenant relationship with God. As a result, God granted them to experience slavery.

This God gives us another choice. He says, "But if you resist and rebel you will be devoured by the sword." This is the God who is big. He provides us the choice. He does not at all destroy our human freedom. He encourages us to express our freedom but within the limits of our responsibility to Him and to each other. This is the God who can redeem us. He is the God who is in our midst today; a big God, not a small one. Because He is a big God He demands obedience. Worship must be followed by obedience for the God whom we worship is a big God.

Let me close by reminding you this nursery rhyme. I tried to recall it this morning and when I could not remember it properly I asked my grandson to recite it for me and he got it right. This is the nursery rhyme, "Pussy cat, pussy cat where have you been? I've been to London to visit the queen. Pussy cat, pussy cat what did you do there? I frightened a little mouse

under her chair." Now that may seem funny to us but is that not our situation, my friends? If you study carefully this nursery rhyme it's not only funny and strange, but it is also unfortunate. Here is a cat that had the opportunity to be in the presence of the queen, and yet what did she do there? She did nothing but scared the little mouse under the chair. Isn't that what we are doing everytime we worship? While in the presence of God; in the presence of the majesty of God where we are being challenged to do the best that we can, we do foolish things like scaring mice under the chair. That is a foolish religion. It is a religion that is wrong. A right or correct religion will challenge us to relate worship and social ethics; to interpret our faith in our daily conduct. A religion that is "right" with God but is not right with our fellowmen is not at all the kind of religion that is acceptable before God. A right religion makes right our relationship with Him and our relationship with each other. Amen.

BLESSED ASSURANCE

Romans 8:26-28

The other day I had the opportunity to meet an old man. I say 'old man' and I emphasize that because there are times when I think that when I am in the midst of people, I'm the oldest of them all. That was a rare opportunity because I met somebody older than I am. As we were talking about life he expressed to me the wisdom of his experience. At one time he reminded me of one important saying in Hiligaynon, "*Iyaulo, iyakulo. Iyakalag, iyabakiro.*" This is an interesting saying because it expresses many things about our beliefs. For example, it expresses the belief that when it comes to the ultimate, no one can trust anything except himself. *Iyaulo, iyakulo. Iyakalag, iyabakiro.* To each his own. I think that this impression about life is the result of an experience in which people, for example, cannot trust each other anymore. When we live with each other the only person we can trust is ourselves in the long run. There are people who would say they could not even trust their wives to be faithful to them. There are wives who would say they could not trust their husbands to be faithful to them.

Today, in our so-called family system, children cannot trust their parents, parents cannot trust their children. This is one reason for the problems today. There seem to be the breaking up of human relationship simply because this element of trust is lacking in our relationship. Thus, so many people would no longer seek for the true basis of trust. The only thing that they can manage is to trust their selves. Is this correct? The interesting thing about this is that while we toss our trust on ourselves, we know that it does not go very far. Paul mentioned in this particular passage, "We do not even know how to pray."

True prayer is the prayer of the spirit within us. According to C.H. Dodd, a New Testament scholar, prayer is, 'the divine within us imploring the divine above us.' When it comes to prayer we do not have anything to do with that. It is the spirit moving within us. There are two reasons why, even in prayer, we cannot trust ourselves. Number one is we do not know the future. Because we do not know the future, what we ask for right now may no longer be needed tomorrow.

The second reason why we cannot trust ourselves is because we do not even know what is good for us. There are many people who thought that something is good for them but when they had received it, they realized they did not want it at all. There are many people, on the other hand, who would say, "I do not want that thing." It would turn out, however, that it was exactly what they need. In the history of the Christian church, the one who invented and discovered the program we call today 'Sunday School' was one time ostracized in the fellowship of the church. He was condemned. He was sent out of the fellowship of the church because he was suspected of introducing something very secular into the life of the church. Many people initially did not like Sunday school as a program. Today this program has been institutionalized in the life of the church. Consider also the experience of the disciples. Remember the time when they were in the middle of the sea caught in a raging storm and they were scared. But what scared them more was the presence of what they thought a ghost approaching them. They were scared, according to the Scripture, only to discover that the so-called ghost was Jesus Christ himself who became their Savior. When we trust ourselves, we do not go far because we do not even know what we want. Paul, in this particular passage, suggests that we can only trust God. Trust God. This is the blessed assurance that we

have; trust God and the promise is sure. Look at this promise which is stated in our text, "Everything works together for good to them that love the Lord." How many of us in our Christian experience will be able to verify this? Everything works together for good to them that love the Lord. Many of us who have been in our Christian faith for so long a time will be able to say, "I can say that this is true because there were many times in my life that something happened to me. At that particular moment, I did not like it but when I look back I realized that it was better that it happened."

There was a woman who was bitterly disappointed in her love affair. She wanted to commit suicide but she was prevented from doing that because of a simple Bible study that she attended. She was prevailed to preserve her life, and to continue her membership in the church in spite of the fact that she was weak. She was encouraged to rely on the power of prayer, and to listen to the counsel of the members of the church. Years later, she looked back and said, "Praise the Lord, I was not able to marry that man". The man who broke her heart turned out to be a gambler and a drug addict. His wife suffered much. This woman who did not marry that man was spared. She could look back now and say, "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord." Another story is about a young student who failed in the nursing board examination. She was so devastated that she wanted to give up her studies and her future. Ah, but again she was prevailed by the Christian fellowship to go on until finally she was encouraged to shift to another career. There she started to blossom, to grow and develop. She became a manager in one of the banking institutions and when she looked back at her life, she could say, "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord." Do you know what this means, my friends? It means that we

should put our trust on the Christian conviction that the lives of those who love God are in the palm of His hands. Think about that. When we speak of *Divine Providence*, it means that even before we were born, God's providential love has already drawn a boundary of life for us. Within that boundary of life, He rules us, and all experiences that happen to us, whether good or painful, will turn out for the good of those who are within the boundary of His love. True enough, my friends, wherever you search in the Scripture, this is the promise that God has given us. For those who love the Lord He has prepared this boundary of life wherein they will live and discover a life that is really fulfilling.

What is the meaning of this blessed assurance that we can truly trust God to provide for us? I would like to suggest three things. First, we can be confident to try all the promises that God has given us in the Scripture. One promise is an invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." We find rest when we are near God and when we have established our fellowship with Him. Try it and you will discover that it is true. Another promise in the Scripture is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This means that ultimately only those things that are done in love will be forever fruitful and beneficial. There are people who said that before it was true that 'love begets love', but today it is no longer true. When you love somebody, he/she will take advantage of you. I do not know if this is correct. Consider me old-fashioned but I still believe that when you love, love begets love and in the end love fulfills everything. That is part of the promise of God. If we lived within the boundary of God's providential love then we can risk it. Try it and when we do it will come to be.

Second, when we try and test the promises of God and discover these are true, it gives us confidence to go to other

people and tell them about it. That, my friends, is the reason why we preach the Gospel. For as long as we live, our responsibility to proclaim the gospel remains as it was in the beginning. We do this because the Gospel is the truth. The weakness of our Christian witness today, however, is that we have lost the sense of promise and we have weakened in our emphasis of the importance of the Christian Gospel to other people. But I tell you that the basis of our trust is the Christian Gospel. If we were really confident that when people live within the boundary of God's providential love everything will turn out fine, then we can look at a sick person and say, "Even if you suffer now, in the love of Christ, everything will be fine." We can look at a dying person who might be hopeless and say, "Even if you are dying right now, in the hollow of His hand, life is still preserved." We can look at those broken-hearted people and tell them that the suffering in the present cannot compare with the glory that God promises to all those who love Him. Everything works together for good to them that love the Lord.

Let me give you a challenge. The challenge is that if we were so confident with this blessed assurance that God has given us, and that everything works together for good to them that love the Lord, then the Christian responsibility today is to build bridges that will connect people with each other. We know that our relationship with others is broken. What we need are people who will build bridges to connect people of another race, status, or social class with each other. Building bridges is what ought to be done in the human family. The human family cannot survive long if it is cut off from each other and its relationship is broken. This is what is happening in Bosnia, Serbia today. They are killing each other. When we hear the news of the suffering that is being endured by the victims of this war we ask, "Where are the people who were suppose to build

bridges?" We know that bridges are important to bind us again one to another because the relationship has been broken. It has been broken by distrust, hate and jealousy. The only people who can do the bridge-building today are people who live within the promise of God. That is our task.

Let me end my meditation by describing to you a beautiful picture of a two-year old son standing on the ledge, looking around while he is up there, not fearing anything because below him is his father saying, "It's ok. You can jump anytime." The boy, with great exhilaration and confidence that everything will turn out fine, releases his hold on the ledge and drops into the hands of his father. True enough the father catches him and great laughter followed. My friends, this is the same with the life of every Christian. God says "Stand on the highest point that you can reach in life and don't be afraid. Jump whenever you can. I'll be here to catch you in my hands." If we have this blessed assurance then everything will be fine. Amen.

CHRISTIAN LIVING

*(Delivered in preparation of the Diamond Jubilee
of Baptist Center Church)*

Hebrews 6:9-12

Something that is exciting needs to be kept or sustained. The same is true when we speak about the excitement of Christian Living. Oh, how we wish that the excitement of Christian living would always be there! Well, you know what I mean when I speak about the excitement of Christian living.

Let us refer to one instance in the Scripture when there was this tremendous excitement in the life of the Christians. You remember after the Pentecostal experience? The people gathered. They were so amazed with the kind of power that they had in them so that every word that they spoke meant so much to people who heard them. There were thousands of people who gathered around them. There were people who were drawn to because of the excitement of the Christian believers. They were so ecstatic about their Christian life that they were able to perform even miracles. The sick were brought before the apostles and they were healed. Even ordinary Christians were able to do that. If you read carefully Acts 4 and all the details about the early Christian life you will discover that they had forgotten about themselves. They had forgotten about their concern for daily living. They gathered together in the synagogue and in the temple. They worshipped together and studied the teachings of the apostles together; they celebrated the supper together. Oh, my friends, that's the kind of excited living that we need today.

Many of us have experienced something like that. You remember the time when you first accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and there seemed to be nothing that can stop you from attending worship services and evangelistic meetings. Wherever there were religious activities you were drawn, like ants being drawn to sugar. My friends, this is the kind of excited living we need today. The sad part about this, however, is that something like this does not stay forever and we are confronted with two things that are becoming very common in our experience. First of all, there is the falling away from faith or *apostasy*. There are people who have been in the faith but have fallen away from it. These are the people who have heard the word, shared the inheritance of the promise, shared the hope of the Christian faith, and experienced the excitement of Christian service but, something happened to them. This is common in our midst. Consider the many hundreds of people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in many evangelistic rallies that we have had. How many of these people are still in the church? This is the reason why when we discussed about our evangelistic rally this coming diamond jubilee celebration of our church, I suggested that our first target would be those who were once members of our church but are no longer around. They are out there in the community. They have fallen away. We'd like to find out what were the reasons for this.

One reason might be the hypocrisy that they had seen in a Christian church. That is one sin that we have to be concerned about in our Christian congregations, not only here in Baptist Center Church. Hypocrisy is present in the churches of Jesus Christ. Let us be aware of that danger. Hypocrisy means pretending that you have something that you actually don't have. It's hypocrisy for us to give testimony that we are saved when in fact our deeds say that we are not saved at all. That's

hypocrisy. When people see that, they question the kind of church that we have. This is very tragic. Remember the church is like a hospital. A hospital is not a place for healthy people. The church is not for the righteous but for the unrighteous seeking to be saved by the grace of God. So when you hear people say that there are many hypocrites in the church tell them that it is true and that is why you need people like them. There are many who would complain about a certain person in the church, but that is very human. We would like to go to these people and tell them that the center of our Christian faith is not the chairman of the church council or the board of trustees. The center of our faith is not the pastor, no matter how eloquent he preaches. The center of our faith is Jesus Christ, the risen Lord who comes to us even when we are not worthy of His presence. That is the reason why, in spite of human weaknesses in our different churches, the churches of Jesus Christ are still needed in every community all over the world. In spite of our human weaknesses the Lord has promised His presence to all those who have come to worship Him. This is the beauty of our Christian living.

The writer to the Hebrews addresses his epistle to this one important sector in our Christian community; those people who have fallen away from the faith. The apostates are those whose faith is no longer there. They were once enlightened, had tasted the heaven's gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and experienced the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age. These people had experienced all of these, but now they cannot recall this very important experience in their life. The writer to the Hebrews says, 'these are the people to whom repentance has become impossible.' Why? It is because they have disgraced our Lord. Friends, this is a warning because, in their loss, they are crucifying the Son of God all over

again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. By their deeds they have crucified Him once again. It is important to realize this and be aware that at any time of our life we can be involved in the second crucifixion of Jesus Christ, our Lord. You marvel and wonder at the thought that the second crucifixion of Jesus Christ is different from the first crucifixion. In the first crucifixion of Jesus Christ you were not there, but in the second crucifixion, you are there. Beware my friends. Beware of the danger of falling away.

Let us take a look at another problem. The problem is not only falling away from the faith but the drying up of our faith. Is that not, by the way, very true in our different congregations? I was in Bacolod last week preaching in one church which has a tremendous problem. The church has divided into two congregations. One congregation is the charismatic group. This congregation is very excited about the Christian faith. When they sing, they have drums, cymbals, guitars, organs, and they dance and clap their hands. Their excitement convinced other people to join their worship. People, today, are looking for something that is exciting. This is the reason, perhaps, why some of our congregations have adapted this kind of worship. But what about our traditional worship? I preached in the other congregation of that church that maintains their traditional worship. After the choir had rendered its number (it was a very good number) the congregation was very reserved. They did not dare at all clap their hands because it might be against tradition. They did not even smile. They were just seated there, silent and waiting. Something was dry in that congregation. So I told them, "At Baptist Center Church, we have a tradition and I don't mind bringing this to your church this day. Our tradition is that every time we have something very exciting, a reason for thanksgiving to the Lord, we clap our hands even though this is

not our traditional way. It is a spontaneous way of saying, "Thank you Lord for this very important experience. So now, why don't we clap our hands for our choir?" Friends, suddenly the ice was broken. Something alive came into that congregation. They all stood up and clapped their hands. They looked at each other and said, "Isn't this good?" I said, "I am not recommending, my friends, that we should always clap our hands when we worship, and dance as if there was no other way to go to heaven except through this." That is my only objection. I don't care what you do when you worship as long as you do not look at your brother and say, "Unless you do what I do, you cannot go to heaven" because that is judgmental. That is being self-righteous. Friends, this is one thing that we must try to understand. In our congregation, if you are happy, show it. Get people excited, but, please, let everything be in order, and respect the silence of others.

This excitement in the Christian faith is no longer present in some of us. What do we do when we are no longer excited about worship? What do we do when we are no longer excited during our prayer meeting and can no longer find the same kind of joy that we used to have in worship experiences and Christian service? Ah, the advice of the writer to the Hebrews is that when your faith is drying up, you continue your service of love for each other. Even though there is no excitement, just go on with your service of love for each other. You know why? He gives several reasons. The first reason, "God is not unjust. He will not forget your work and your love that you have shown for each other." This is important. If we just continue our service of love and our faithfulness even without excitement, God is not unjust that He will forget what we are doing. Someday He will remember us. Right now He remembers each one of us experiencing the drying up of Christian faith. Remember, in all

of these the children of God are sustained by God Himself. I have also experienced the ups and downs in my Christian life. There were times when I could hardly wait for the morning to come, when I would be secluded in my office, open the Bible and pray, and there would be that great excitement. But I also experienced the times when there is the drying up of the spirit and I would just force myself to open my Bible and read. I would force myself to pray. The Bible says, regardless of how you feel just continue serving the Lord in love and faith. He will take care of the rest. Why? Because God is not unjust that He will forget you. He remembers you in whatever situation of your life.

The second reminder is to continue to be diligent. Do not be lazy. Why? Because according to the writer to the Hebrews the moment you become lazy you become spiritually lethargic. The moment you are inactive you will experience spiritual drying up. This is also true in our physical life. When one part of your body is no longer in use, that part will die. That is why this advice is important. Regardless of your experience right now just continue serving the Lord in love and in faith because if you don't, you will be lethargic. Don't be lazy. Always remember that God is present in what you are doing.

The third suggestion is to imitate those who, through faith and patience, inherited what has been promised. Imitate. When the time comes when you can no longer bear this drying up, just remember those people who were faithful even unto death. Through these people God has demonstrated that if you are just faithful in your service you will be rewarded. God is faithful in fulfilling that. God comes to you in your different experiences and, awakens the spirit that is sleeping, providing you with the strength and excitement that you once knew.

I remember the story of a good friend of mine, Bishop Raterta of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. I invited him one time to Central Philippine University to be our Christian Emphasis Week speaker. At that time, he was on top of the ladder of leadership in the institutional life and organization of the UCCP. Just to accommodate our friendship he accepted my invitation, and for one week he preached. I knew that when he started to preach he was just forcing himself. It was as if he was using all over again a tool that he had forgotten. When he went back to Manila after that Christian Emphasis Week, he wrote me saying, "Johnny, I thank you for your friendship, but more than this, I thank you for the privilege of serving the Christian Emphasis Week congregation last week. I thank you because through this God has awakened once again the excitement that once brought me unto His feet." As he wrote that letter he was crying, praising God for, once again, he became an evangelist. It was during the Christian Emphasis Week that he re-experienced the miracle of people coming in, crying, confessing their sins and accepting Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. This is what I am saying. There may come a time in our lives when we experience the drying up of our spiritual life but God comes to us in some point of our experience and then injects in us the power of the Spirit. Haven't you experienced that also?

There were many of you who were dried up in this church until a problem came up about two years ago. It was a terrible problem that divided our congregation. It was through that circumstance that many of you, who were already out there in the periphery of Christian fellowship, started to come back in order to reinforce this congregation. Many of you confessed, "I thought I was so far away from God, but now praise Him that through this experience I have been called again." Many of you

have become active again in our church today. Many are now praying everyday, "Lord, do not allow us to be far away from you again." Friends, continue in your service regardless of anything because it is in your journey that God will fulfill His promise. God is not unjust that He will forget you. God will remember and once again bring life to you. Amen.

UNQUESTIONABLE VALUE

I Corinthians 11:23-26

Today many people are suffering for their faith. The suffering that people are now experiencing all over the world because of their faith is the same with the suffering that the early Christians suffered for their faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord. My friends, it is good for us to remember this. It is good for us to remember that when we stand for something, we need to suffer for it. Let us consider this morning one important thing that can happen when we experience suffering - time heals because it makes us forget. Time is therapeutic. Time makes us forget many embarrassing moments and painful experiences in our lives. Time makes us forget many disappointing failures that we had. If we would remember all the bad things that happened to our lives, what would become of us? I think that it will be very devastating. None of us will be able to look at ourselves at the mirror everyday. None of us will be able to look at each other straight in the eye because lurking behind each one of us is a horrible and terrifying experience of failure. I think time is something that we must be grateful for because it can heal. It can make us forget.

On the other hand, while time can make us forget bad things, it can also make us forget many good things in our lives. When that happens, that could also be very devastating and tragic. For example, none of us today can remember exactly how it was in 1986 when the EDSA Revolution erupted. I only remember that when it happened, many of us forgot ourselves, and danced on the streets in our pajamas. There was great rejoicing. Today we remember it in a different way. You see, when time carries us away from the original experience, and

when we are far from it, we forget many essential things about the experience. This is the tragedy when we forget.

This week, somewhere in Europe, there is an anniversary celebration. It is the 50th anniversary celebration of Europe that started in Normandy sometime in June 1945 or 1944. Friends, as I watch this celebration in Europe, I realize how important it is for us to remember. The celebration was so moving even when we saw the background of white crosses where people assembled. It was moving to see veterans of the war, people who survived the devastation of that war, coming once again to Europe to relive the experience and to remember. It was the president of the United States who put it this way. He said "To remember means to honor." It is very important but I would like to add something to that; To remember is not only to honor but also to renew our commitment. This is the reason why Paul wrote this letter. Take note of what he said in the first verse of our text, "...that which I receive I also deliver unto you." He simply means that nothing had been added to what he had received. There is nothing that would pollute the original Gospel that he had received. The same Gospel that he had received, he was now turning over to the early Christians without any deduction or addition; just pure and simple Gospel.

During that time it was very important for Paul to assure the Christians in Corinth that it was the original Gospel, undiminished and unquestionable in its value. The early Christian church was already living in the midst of pagan society at that time and naturally within it, new things were introduced into the Christian faith. As a result, many of them were bothered about the ethical life that they should live. They were concerned about what to expect from each one of them. They were worried that the Christian Gospel they were

preaching was infused with many new teachings. It was then that Paul wrote this and simply reminded them, "the same thing that I received I deliver unto you, the Christian Gospel." This implies that in remembering there should be renewal of our commitment to love. Paul proceeded by saying, "What I received I deliver unto you that on the night when Jesus Christ was betrayed, he took bread and gave thanks... and then after this he took the cup." All of these are symbolic of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. This is the heart of the Christian Gospel, according to St. Paul and every time we remember, there should be a renewal of our commitment to love each other in the same manner that Christ had loved us.

The background of this is very interesting because, according to Paul, even in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, there had already been some changes. The original Christians celebrated this supper by bringing their provision with them; the real supper. They would share their supper with those who did not have. The poor were welcome every time they would gather for the supper. Those who brought their supper with them would distribute these to the poor, the needy and, thus, cultivated a sense of caring for each other. That was the reason for sacrament. Sacrament is sharing of life and that is the original meaning of the supper. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, said, "But now I receive word that you are no longer celebrating the supper this way for many of you are bringing your own supper for your own sake and for your own need." They no longer remembered those who were in need. They had started to look after their own selves. They had become selfish, and that was a distortion of the sacred celebration of the supper. In other words, Paul said that to remember means to go back to the original purpose which was to love each other in the same way that God had loved them.

When we speak about God's love for us, it is measured in terms of the giving of one's life for the other. Outside of that measurement of love there is no true love. When you speak of love in terms of giving cards during Christmas that is not love unless the giving of that card is expressive of your life commitment to your friend. For true love is the giving of one's life for the other. "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friend," even for his enemy. That, my friends, is the reason why Paul says that "which I receive I now deliver unto you"; renew your commitment to love each other and to care for each other.

Secondly, when we remember we should renew our commitment to our faith. There has been a lot of pollution in our Christian faith. When you listen to the words of many people concerning the Christian Gospel or the Christian faith, you may not recognize it as faith anymore. There has been the drifting away from the essential meaning of our Christian faith. The early Christian church preached nothing but Christ who was crucified. When we speak of the essence of our Christian faith it simply means that God loves the world and the true expression of that love is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Promised One. It is only in Christ where salvation is attained. The true Gospel says this, "I am the Way the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me." Today there is pollution in the Christian faith, especially in the doctrine of salvation. Some people think that good works can save them. Some people think that intercessory prayers of saints and other people can save them. Some people think that it is only in the membership of one particular church that people can be saved. That is not Christianity. Christianity reminds us the simple thing: "I am the Way the Truth and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me". Friends, renewal of our

commitment to the Christian faith simply means, that we should proclaim the Gospel without any hesitation at all. In our Sunday School this morning where I attended the Senior Citizens class, there was a topic concerning the meaningfulness of our life. It has something to do with the question, 'what is a worthy life?' Our Sunday school material says that a worthy life is one that tells the Gospel. I would like to add that proclaiming the Gospel means presenting our lives in a way that it does not hinder the acceptance of people of the Christian Gospel. If they see in our lives something that is not at all consistent with everything that we say about the Christian Gospel, then our life has become a hindrance to the spreading of the Gospel. This is what Paul is saying, "that which I receive I now deliver unto you." Be consistent with the words that you speak. When you speak love, do love. When you speak forgiveness, do forgiveness.

Lastly my friends, when we speak of remembering, it pertains to our need to renew always our hope in Christ. According to the passage, "do this in remembrance of me", until I come. A Christian, therefore, is not shortsighted that he is concerned only with the present. A Christian is one who has his feet planted on the ground but his eyes are focused on a far distance, where there is the promise of the coming and fulfillment of his faith. That is the Christian who is unmovable or unshakable. He can change the world and in spite of the changes or circumstances in his life, remains faithful to the hope that awaits him.

My friends let me end this meditation by reflecting with you the importance of waiting for the fulfillment of our hope. While we wait for that fulfillment, Paul says do not forget to care for each other. We need to care for each other regardless of the color of skin, difference in temperament, and creed in

politics. We care for each other because we are in Christ and in Christ we are one. Let us be reminded of the song that says, "I don't care what church you belong to just as long on Calvary you stand. For tonight if your heart beats like my heart, you are my brother, oh, give me your hand." Amen.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Ezekiel 18: 1-13;20

(Cosmopolitan Evangelical Church, July 19, 1997)

A Chinese student who was assigned to be a roommate of an American student was trying to make a conversation with his new acquaintance. "Are you a Christian?" The Chinese student asked. Surprised by the question, the American student thought little about the question but politely answered. "Well, my parents are Christians. Of course I am a Christian." A little confused about the answer, the Chinese student said, "You know in China, we do not have of course Christians."

You may not have heard about "of course Christians," but certainly you have seen many of them. Of course Christians are those whose Christianity, like a name or a property, is handed down from one generation to the next generation as an inheritance. If the parents are Christians, of course, the children are taken for granted assumed as Christians. They go to the same church. They worship together. They support the program of the church. They are active participants in church fellowship parties, etc. All of this are forms of Christianity but they do not necessarily express the true spirit of Christianity which in Paul's language are virtues welling out from within such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal.5:22-23). This true spirit of Christianity made martyrs to declare their faith in Jesus Christ even when such confession would lead to certain death. That spirit of Christianity led thousands of missionaries to leave in comforts and security of their homes to go to foreign lands and suffer deprivations of all kinds, persecution, sickness and sometimes death, to advance the cause of the Kingdom of God. No wonder,

that Chinese student was confused when he heard the name " of course Christians" In China where he came from, during Cultural Revolution, the Christians were persecuted because of their Christian faith. In the midst of this persecution, he was one of those Chinese Christians who gave a personal account of his faith and suffered for it.

This is not to belittle the importance of the Christian influence of our parents. In this our church especially, we are blessed by the Christian influence of our parents. We now consider this as part of our heritage. We pray that God will enable us to bind this heritage and preserve it for the coming generation. But, let us remember that Christian influence is like a gift, it must be received, and owned, and made used of in order for its value to be realized. Christianity is not just a religion, which is defined by doctrine, ritual and observance of special days. It is a way of life that is formed by faith in God who revealed Himself in a very special and final way in Jesus Christ. This faith is personal because our God is a personal God who wants us to call Him Father because we are individually and personally His son and daughter. We are personally accountable to Him.

To be personally accountable to Him means to be responsible to Him for everything that we are and for everything that we have. Discover how it is from the perspective of the prophet Ezekiel. No longer will the children be accountable for the sins of their fathers. The often-quoted proverb was "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But this shared no longer be. Instead, "the soul who sin is the soul; who will die." The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will be the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against

him. (Ez.18:20) Each man and woman will be accountable to God for his or her life and for what they do with it. No longer will each person be blamed for the sins of his/her father. Neither will each person will be rewarded for the righteousness of his/her father. This is made clear by three instances in our text. Here is a man who does not worship the pagan gods who were worshipped in the mountain shrine. He does not eat of the food offered to idols. He does not covet his neighbor's wife. He does not take advantage of his fellow man, he does not engage in usury...(Ez.18:1-9). What can you say about this man? God's answer is, this man is righteous and he will live. The second instance is- Suppose this righteous man has a son. He is not just and righteous. He is violent. He worships the gods in the mountain shrine. He takes advantage of his fellowman. What can you say about him? God's answer is- this man is unjust and unrighteous. He shall die (Ez.18:10-13). Even though his father is righteous, the son will not share in the reward of his father's righteousness. Instead the son will be made to account for his unrighteousness.

In the third instance, this unrighteous son has a son who is righteous. Will he be condemned for the unrighteousness of his father? No, is the answer. He shall live. He shall not die for the unrighteousness of his father. Personal accountability means that a son cannot say, "of course I am righteous because my father is righteous." Neither he can say "of course, I am unrighteous because my father is unrighteous." This does not mean that the influences of the parents are not important in the lives of the children. They are important so much so that we can affirm almost without reservation to the principle that says, "like father like son." Because this is so, we, especially parents must be careful about what we pass on to our children.

We must not be concerned about the material heritage that we pass on to them for their security. It is our Christian conviction. That while material heritage is important to life, without the spiritual and moral under girding that comes from faith in God, its values becomes insignificant. Jesus said, "what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul." (Matt.16-26). Faith as a heritage is a very precious one. But, like a gift, it must be received, it must be owned, it must be used of in order for its value to be realized. A story is told of a sick man who had a good doctor who prescribed for him a medication, which was known to be effective. The patient died however. They found out that the patient died because instead of taking his medication, he hid it in his drawer.

Ezekiel speaks to us about a man who will live because he is righteous. (Ez.18:5-9). He has a son who will not live because he is unrighteous (Ez.18:10-13). A son does not become righteous because his father is righteous. The point is--each of us is personally accountable for our own righteousness or unrighteousness before God.

The righteousness that can make us live comes from faith in the true God. The righteous man does not worship the pagan gods in the mountain shrine (Ez.18:6). Worship is communion with God. In communion we present ourselves before God in order for our life to be made one with Him. This is symbolized in the Lord's Supper by our partaking of the elements, which are the symbol of His body and His blood. When we have done that, His life is made one with ours. In our text the righteous man is one who does not eat the food, which is offered to the gods of the mountain. This means that eating food offered to whatever god we have makes our life one with the life of our god. When in worship our life becomes one with God, we are committed to live a Godly life wherever we are. Worship is

always followed by commitment. Worship without our commitment to live a Godly life is empty, meaningless and without significance. Everything that are done in worship, singing of hymns, the reading of the Scripture, the preaching of the word, the singing of the choir, are meant to enhance the process of communion that leads to commitment. Is this what the Psalmist mean when he says, "Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps.139:23-24).

Personal accountability for our faith means just and righteous dealing with our fellowman (Ez.18:6-8). Communion with God necessarily must result in our just and righteous communion with others. Here we discover a very important character of biblical faith, which is the insistence that religion and morality must always go together. Faith is the root and morality is the fruit. "Faith without work is dead" (James 2:17). In the same manner Ezekiel says that a righteous and just man who worships God, does not defile his neighbor's wife, does not oppress... does not rob... does not lend at usury (Ez.18:6-8). In the words of Jesus Christ, religion without morality is hypocrisy. He pointed to the Pharisees as the example of this split between religion and morality. In other words, personal accountability to God means personal accountability to our fellowman.

Finally, personal accountability for our faith means daily working with God. Ezekiel says that the righteous and just man is one who "follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws" (Ez.18:9). This is what is meant by daily walking with God. In our day to day life we seek to follow and revere His laws because we know that they are leading us in the right path that leads to life. One who does this does not make a righteous and

moral decision in the basis of what is convenient or satisfactory to his selfish interest. Neither does he make his decision because it is pleasurable and rewarding to his immediate needs. He makes this decision based on what God's law demand regardless of the consequences to his personal welfare. This is not what it meant by faithfulness? Such faithfulness is one, which can be seen among God's Saints and Martyrs and faithful Servants. All these endured to the end and received their crown of life because they walked daily with the Lord.

Personal accountability for our faith means owning it and making use of it. A story is told of two farmers who were subsisting barely from what they could produce in their farm. They both were surprised because each of them received a check for P 10,000.00 from a rich man who was living on the other side of the mountain. One of the farmers could not believe that such a gift could be true and real. He kept his check but did not cash it. Hence, he did not derive any value from it. The other farmer received his check and said to himself--"What do I have to lose if I present this to the bank for its cash value." So, he went and cashed his check. He discovered that the check was good and he was able to receive the cash for it. The lesson is clear. The first farmer received his check. But, did not therefore realized its value. The other farmer held himself personally accountable for what he received by owning the check and making use of it by cashing it. He actualized the value of what he received.

Faith is a precious heritage that can be pass on to others. But in order to realize its value, the one who receives it must hold himself or herself personally accountable for it.

LIFE IN CHRIST

Romans 5:20-6:4

This morning I would like to draw your attention to a theological matter proposed to us by Paul. This theological matter resulted from a very important observation. Paul said, that "Once you were in sin" and by that he meant that once we were under the power of sin. It was because we were under the power of sin that grace was given to us. This grace freed us from the power of sin and that in our participation in the life of Jesus Christ we have experienced newness of life. Now that is a very important part of our Christian gospel. This statement of Paul can also be interpreted this way; because grace was given in the midst of our sinfulness, then in order for grace to abound we should continue to sin. Now is that not logical? Paul himself said that because we were in sin grace was given to us.

Many people during that time, thus, reversed it and said that in order for grace to abound we should continue to sin. Of course Paul was shocked when he heard this but I would like to point out two things regarding this matter. This interpretation was not only true during that time; this has been true in all generation in the world. People would look at sin as something ethical. We commit sin when we commit something that is not correct or right. Sin, however, is deeper than that. This is the reason why we speak about the *power of sin* instead of just *sin*. When we simply say, *sin*, it could be like telling a lie, cheating, doing corruption and the like. If you interpreted sin that way then sin could be considered ethical. Paul was saying, though, that we commit all of these things because we are under the power of sin. Sin is more than just doing what is not right. At that time when we were in our sinful nature we were slaves to

sin. When we were in our sinfulness there was no power in the world, nor any human capacity, that could free us from the power of sin. According to Paul, because we were under the power of sin, then we were in the power of death.

Let us meditate upon that. Today there are many people who still insist that in order for grace to abound we must continue to live in sin. Remember that when we talk about the power of sin, it means that it has the power to disguise itself so that one can commit it without feeling aggrieved or feeling the pang of conscience. There are some people who would say, "Commit any kind of sin that you want because as long as you can be forgiven there is no way that sin can overpower you." This is the reason why many people who are members of the Christian church can still get involved in corruption, kidnapping, rape and murder. The belief continues that no matter how much you sin, you can still be forgiven. This is a delinquent and juvenile mentality in many of the so-called Christians. It is just like the thinking of a young person who says, "Because my mother and father love me I can go on disobeying them for as long as I want." That is true to a certain extent. The love of our Father in heaven does not end. It continues to follow us regardless of what we do. If we thought that as long as we ask for forgiveness and God forgives us we can commit any kind of sin, we are wrong.

Grace is not cheap. Bonhoeffer was a theologian who talked about cheap grace. What does it mean? Cheap grace means forgiveness without repentance. It means salvation without discipleship, church membership without commitment and responsibility, and worship without service. Friends, I think many of us are living under the influence of cheap grace. It is not only in this church, but in all the churches in Christendom. Many Christians have a false sense of security because since

grace is given freely, then they can do whatever they want to do with it. That is cheap grace. Paul reminds us that Christianity is not like that. Christianity is not the result of cheap grace. Christianity means salvation with discipleship, forgiveness with repentance, worship with service, church membership with responsibility and commitment. Nothing less than that is acceptable before God. Paul is saying that when you accepted the grace of God and you were forgiven, there should have been a radical transformation in your life. This should be the result of your participation in the life of Jesus Christ.

As Christians today, we should be able to say something about *life in Christ*. What does that mean? If we have the *life in Christ* it means not only participation in His resurrection but also participation in His crucifixion. Here are some points to consider about life in Christ. First of all, according to Paul, *life in Christ* reminds us of the meaning of baptism. Baptism is important to the Baptists and I'd like to assure you that in the early days of the Christian church there was only one kind of baptism, and it was by immersion. You may ask, "Why immersion?" Let me remind you the meaning of immersion. It means to be in water; it signifies being buried with Christ. To rise out of the water means to participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and once you have done that then you are a person with a new life in Christ. It means that you are now dead to sin and sin has no power over you. Just as a dead body cannot feel the influence of anything that is alive, when you are dead to sin then you are no longer under the influence of sinful living. Paul says that once you are in Christ, you are expected to live this way.

Life in Christ also means that wherever we are, we reflect the life of Christ in and through us. When we are in a difficult situation and ask ourselves the question, 'What am I supposed

to do?' the actual question is, 'What would Christ expect me to do?' The answer is that Christ wants us to be loving to others. That is the challenge to every Christian today. We need to be loving because love is creative; it does not engage in backbiting, anger, cheating, and lying. When we are confronted with problems in our everyday life, there are times when we consider our personal sentiment and emotion to be overriding all other emotions. We put our self-respect, dignity and honor first, and when these are trampled upon we have a tendency to forget our Christianity.

Stop for a moment and ask yourself the question, "If Jesus Christ were in my place what would He do?" This is what it means about Christian discipleship. When somebody hits you on the left cheek give him your right cheek as well. When, somebody asks you to travel with him one mile carrying his load, travel with him two miles. That is discipleship. When you feel that you have been aggrieved by somebody and you have every reason not to forgive, remember Jesus Christ saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." That is salvation with discipleship. It is not easy to do! Paul said that on your human power alone you cannot do it. This is where grace comes in. Grace enables us to reflect the life of Christ in and through us. It is not dependent upon our human resources at all. It is dependent upon the Spirit of God that works in and through us. What is needed is for all Christians to submit themselves to this compelling power of the Holy Spirit in order for that power to be experienced by each one of us.

The next consideration when it comes to *life in Christ* is the hope that we can give to all people because we believe that the power of life in Christ is real. It is the hope that life can be changed. No matter how desperate your situation might be,

there is relief; there is salvation. I would like to reflect on the basis of two things.

First, was on my experience in India. It was a blessed experience. The situation in India was very depressing. The experience, however, was challenging and exciting because it was where the Gospel must be experienced by people. Consider, for example, the Indian belief of karma, or *bahalanato* us. This is a fatalistic concept that we Filipinos had adapted from the Indian people. I was informed by a good friend of mine who was a red blooded Baptist Christian that people there, even if given a chance to improve their lives, would refuse because they believe that their present life is the result of their karma. As long as they honor their karma, even though they will die in this life, they will be reborn into a better life. As long as they are in this life, however, they live that karma. In the concept of karma, there is no acceptance of change at all. This is why even if many people in India have the opportunity to change their lives they still refuse to be changed. That is the great challenge of the Christian mission in India today. I saw the poorest of the poor in India. I saw how they slept on sidewalks all through the night. I saw how they experienced poverty not only for one day but for all the days of their lives. I saw how they experienced sickness and endured it because of their poverty. Yet there is no inclination to free their selves from the power of poverty because of karma. This is one distinguishing difference between Hinduism and Christianity. In Christianity we preach that regardless of your situation, the grace of God can change it for the better. This is the precious Gospel that we preach. Think about the possibility of changing the lives of people who think that they do not have any more chance in life. As long as we can believe, that by the grace of God lives can be

changed, Christianity has something to offer. Christianity offers something that can make the difference.

The second thing that I would like to bring to your imagination is something that I have reflected upon. Several Sundays ago, when we had our church council meeting we were given pudding for refreshment. I enjoyed it very much and savored every morsel. Out of curiosity, I asked how they made the pudding. They told me that it was made from the remains of the Christian bread last December. I asked, "What do you mean by that?" They said that all bread crumbs that were not eaten during the Christmas season were mixed, added with a little milk and baked. Amazing isn't it? Something that was already considered useless was still made useful. Pudding! This is what a recycled life means. Christian life is nothing but a recycled life. Christian lives were once useless but, by the grace of God, they were recycled and turned into some kind of 'pudding'. Oh, what a tasty dish it was! Friends, the hope is there. Thank God the power that recycles life is present in our midst. Let us continue to honor the Gospel that we preach because this Gospel brings us the hope of a new life in Christ. Amen.

WORKING OUT YOUR SALVATION

Philippians 2: 12-18

The greatest gift in the world is our salvation. The greatest need in the world today is to accept that gift of salvation, but the business of saving people is God's business which He does through people like us. This is a very important reminder especially when we think of the kind of world where we live. According to the Scripture, this world is a world of darkness because the deeds of people are evil. We see the faces of people who are living in darkness today even as they are presented to us on the screen of our television. These are people who are in pain, whose tears are flowing like rivers, whose cry for comfort is something that cannot be at all stopped. We see these faces in Bosnia and in Rwanda. I remember the Time magazine cover that featured this tremendous tragedy in Rwanda. The Time cover said that there are no more devils in hell because all of them are in Rwanda. Today, my friends, we do not only mention places like these that characterize the world in darkness because we know that even where we are, there is a certain kind of darkness. This is the reason why Paul reminds us of one important thing. He said, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." There is something very theological here that many of us red blooded Baptists cannot accept. Is it not a Baptists' belief that salvation is a gift of God? If it is a gift of God, then it is given to us for free. Therefore, why should we work out our salvation with fear and trembling? Another theological question is, 'Once you are saved, are you saved forever?' Many people debate on this question. There are people who would ask whether it is possible for you to backslide once you are saved and have been baptized. What if

you were in this situation and you met an accident and died, would you still be saved? On the other hand there are people who would say that salvation is the work of God and what God gives, He does not withdraw. God promised that He is going to save us for the Scripture is very clear that God does not want one soul to perish. Is it not true, then, that our salvation is all because of God's initiative and all we have to do is wait comfortably for it?

This is not what the text, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling' means. The words *work out* in Greek means 'to make complete that which is already there'. Paul is saying that salvation is very precious but even if you have it, you still do not have its fullness or completeness. It is something that develops in you, a process that comes to you everyday. It is so important, Paul says, not do anything in your life that will prevent this process from completing its work of salvation in each one of us. We have to be serious about it. For the sake of our salvation we do not dare do anything that will give us blame or spot when the day of accounting comes. Paul says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation." Don't do anything that will hinder the process of completion of your salvation. All of us admit that salvation is very important but how many of us are serious about it? Let me remind you that unless we become serious with God, we cannot expect God to be serious with us. This means that God is saying, "you better be serious with your salvation because this involves our relationship with each other and had cost me the life of my son, Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins because He offered His life for our salvation.

The great need today is salvation. The important question of people should be, "How can we be serious about it?" What does it mean to be serious about your salvation? In the light of this, remember that God is a consistent God in all His ways. If we were saved the love of God is with us, and this love is not at all consistent with hate and anger. When we speak about our salvation, we speak of the gift of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ taught us to be kind and gentle to each other. Gentleness, my friends, is not consistent with hostility and anger. Our salvation reminds us that God cares for us. The caring act of God is inconsistent with our lack of care and concern for others. Remember that being serious with God means being consistent with the nature of the love of God that is in us. Think about the person to whom Paul is talking when he says "You have not been very serious about your salvation. You have been saved but you are not serious with it. This is the reason why even though you have been saved you have not at all experienced its true meaning and significance." Thus, Paul reminds his audience to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. It is because, according to Paul, they are living in a perverse and crooked generation. That is a reality that we must also be serious with. Our world is in darkness; it is crooked and perverse.

I was told about an incident that happened on a street near our house. Three men started to drink and when they were very drunk they went to a house where a lonely married woman lived whose husband was not around. They went up and raped this woman. That is what we mean by perverse generation. You read in the newspaper about fathers raping their children, about the rich and influential people coming from Australia and America to the Philippines to entice young children to become prostitutes. This is a perverse generation.

Why should we be concerned about it? We should be concerned about it because this is our generation. Christian couples should be serious about it because you are not living in this generation alone, but also your children. This is the world where your children will grow up.

Lastly, Paul reminds us, "You shine as lights in the world." I remember one night when I was swimming in our pool with my grandchildren. It was quite dark because the clouds were blocking the moon and the stars. We were just wading there not moving so much because we could not see our way through. Then suddenly the cloud disappeared and we saw all the stars shining in the sky. It was very comforting, beautiful and reassuring. My friends, in a world like this, what can give comfort and assurance are people who shine like stars in the night. Paul says that you can only do that by holding fast to the word of life and extending this to the darkened world. "You shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." He said to the Philippians, "You are the fruit of my labor and for my labor to come to something it is important for you to see to it that what you have received from me you should also share with others. Extend to this world that is in the dark the word of light that is in Christ."

Let me remind you of one very important thing. We are always talking about transformation of life, but do you know, my friends, that you cannot transform life by merely teaching? The way to transform life is to model it. When I speak about this, I am reminded of one important concern of our parents in this church. They are not concerned about money that they can leave for their children. These parents are concerned about what they can give to their children that is enduring. These parents want their children to be nurtured in the word of God for they

know that it is by following the word of God that they can be established in life. However, it is not just by teaching them about the Bible that these children will follow. A more influencing effect is seeing their parents reading, studying and applying what they have learned from the Bible in their lives.

The daughter of one important and rich man in Iloilo City came to me one day. Her father passed away, greatly discouraged and disappointed. While that man was still around he opened up to me one time and said, "Dr. Gumban, I have worked all my life in order to provide for my children. Now I have several fishponds, trucks, cars, and a big house." Then he looked at me seriously and said, "Why is it that despite all these, there is a feeling of emptiness inside me?" I asked him, "What is the reason for this emptiness?" He said, "My children do not appreciate what I give them. They do not respect nor honor me." Some months later he passed away in a very isolated place here in the Philippines. His body was brought back to Iloilo and after the burial, this young daughter came to me and said, "Dr. Gumban if we could live our lives again as children to our father, there is only one thing we need to do. Instead of being indoctrinated about the importance of money, we would like to be taught the word of God." When I heard that I nearly cried. Oh, the many years that was wasted because of wrong indoctrination. I am reminded of one psychological book that says that when young people today appear not to be religious, it does not mean that by nature they are not. When young people today are spending their time in material pursuit it does not mean that they are materialistic. The materialism comes from their parents. If this materialism came from their parents, is it not possible that the right and true kind of spirituality can come also from their parents? Oh, if we can only assure them of that, their future will be bright.

Lastly, let us not forget this wonderful story of Robinson Crusoe. He was shipwrecked and found himself isolated in an island. He thought that he was alone and was becoming very discouraged as the days wore on. He was in despair, lonely and was reaching out for something that was meaningful. He asked the same question that many of us today, perhaps, are also asking. Where is God? Why has God deserted us? Then one day when Robinson Crusoe walked on the shore he discovered footprints, which led him to find Friday. This changed the life of Robinson Crusoe.

In our life, my friends, in this darkened world, is it not possible for us to wake up one day and discover in the midst of the darkness a string of light that reminds us that God is present with us? This string of light can come to this darkened world through nothing else except people like us. This is the great challenge. God, in working out His miracles among people, has chosen to work in and through people like us. Blessed be the God of our fathers. Amen.

LOVE IS SEEKING

Genesis 3:8-10

I don't know how you would read Genesis especially the creation story. Many people would read it as they would do a book of history. They would think the events that are recorded in the book of Genesis as events of the past. There is another way of reading Genesis and that is to read it as a religious book. The historical aspect is not as important as the religious aspect. In other words when we speak of the creation of man, especially the fall of man, we are not only talking about this as a past event that happened to Adam and Eve. The usual interpretation is that all of us came from Adam and Eve, and because they sinned, we, too, would do likewise. I propose another way of looking at it. It is to understand the fall of man as a present event. It is present because it happens to all of us.

The story of Adam and Eve is the story of the whole of mankind from the beginning of time to the end. This story reflects the many important things that happen to us in our pilgrimage in life. In this story, we learned that God created man and woman and put them in the Garden of Eden. What a beautiful place it must have been. Literally, everything was provided for. There was no worry about where to put your money, and being kidnapped or raped. There was no worry about cruelty of man against animals, and animals against mankind. It was a peaceful place! That is why it was called, paradise. At the center of paradise man and woman were placed. They could have everything, according to the story, except the fruit of the tree of knowledge. They were forbidden to eat this because if they did, they would be like gods and would be able to know what is right and wrong. One day while

Adam was asleep Eve was wandering around. Women are like that, so it seems. They're always wandering around because of curiosity, and that is fine. So Eve encountered the serpent that asked her "What are you doing?" Eve said, "I'm going around appreciating this beautiful place." The serpent invited her to partake of the forbidden fruit but she recalled they were not allowed to eat that fruit. Thus, she said, "No, that is a forbidden fruit." The serpent asked, "Why is this forbidden?" The woman said "God forbids this. We could eat everything here but not that." The serpent said, "Don't be afraid because there is nothing wrong with this. In fact when you partake of this, you will become like God." What a terrific, wonderful invitation! So Eve started to draw near the serpent, extended her hand toward the delicious-looking fruit, and when she got hold of It, she started eating. She was not only contented of eating alone, she woke up Adam and gave some to him, and he ate also. Thus, Adam was also tempted. The moment they partook of that forbidden fruit, something strange happened. This is the interesting thing because the promise that they would be like God came true. The evidence that they were no longer the same as before was that they immediately knew what was right and wrong.

The first realization began when they looked at themselves. This is what we call 'self-awareness'. According to the passage, they had the sense of being naked that when they heard God walking in the garden they hid themselves. When God started looking for them, asking, "Where are you?" they answered, "Here we are." God said, "Why are you hiding from me?" Adam said, "We are hiding from you because we are afraid that we are naked." God knew that something had happened. He knew that they had eaten the forbidden fruit.

What is happening now is the same with what happened during the time of Adam and Eve. One thing that man did not like is to be limited. Why did man rebel against God? It is because he did not want to be limited in his own humanity. He was tempted because he wanted to be like God. Rebellion against God is the refusal to accept the limitation set by God for human. We want to be something else. This is what we call *hubris* or *inordinate* pride. *Hubris* or *inordinate* pride is different from being proud of who you are, like for example, being a Filipino. It is good for women to say, "We are proud to be women" and for men, likewise, to say, "We are proud to be men." This is not inordinate pride. Inordinate pride is longing to be something that does not belong to your nature. Man wanted to be God. He was not created to be like God. He was overcome by his inordinate pride that refuses to be limited. Now, my friends, there is nothing wrong with the desire to explore life and the world. We encourage ourselves to analyze everything that we encounter in life as long as we stay within the limits of our humanity. When we go beyond the bounds of our humanity then we have rebelled against the will of God.

This coming January we are expecting to host an important seminar at Central Philippine University on Christian/ethical subjects like euthanasia, homosexuality, and others related to biomedical advances in science. Do you know that today science can make it possible that by about 2020 there will be a new human race? It will be a race different from the *homo sapiens*; a race that is superior. Science can make that possible. It is possible for science to clone mankind so that all of us will look alike. Oh, I dread the thought that someday that would come true. Can you ever imagine yourself getting married to somebody who looks like you? Or, sleep with somebody who looks like you? My goodness! That would be

very confusing. Thank the Lord that He has created each one of us distinct from the other. The variety of difference in the human species is something that we must cherish. Mankind today, however, is attempting to do the very thing that God Himself alone is privileged to do. That is to change, for example, the human race. More than that, because of our wisdom and technology many things that were forbidden then are now being done. Please don't get me wrong. Science and technology have given mankind so much advantage. I just hope, my friends, that the blessing of science and technology will benefit not only the rich and the people who can afford it, but every one of us. If it would only benefit a few, science and technology would not be blessing but a curse. Do you know that this is one reason why it has become very expensive to get sick and to be confined in the hospital? It entails treatment using modern machines that can cost you plenty of money. My friends, this has caused us problems and complications. Mankind has continued this because it has become part of our very nature to refuse any kind of limitation, including the limitation that God has imposed upon us. That is why, in the presence of God, we say, "We do not want to be what you created us. We want to be more than that." This is the reason the serpent succeeded when it said, "Don't be afraid to partake of the forbidden fruit because if you do, you will be like God."

Friends, the story of Genesis is very interesting. It is the story of beauty and the beast. According to our text when Adam looked at himself he discovered that he was naked, and he became fearful. Aside from fear, he was stricken with guilt. Oh, my friends, the pain of guilt is terrible, but God who is seeking us in love can make our pain of guilt His instrument for reaching out to us. The real conversion of a person can happen only when he has reached the limit of his life. It is when he has

experienced the pain of guilt in the presence of God that he comes out. In spite of the fact that he runs away when God seeks and calls him, "Where are you?" man comes out of his hiding because of guilt. Even though fearful, he cannot at all endure the pain of his guilt, thus, he presents himself to God because he knows that it is only in God that he can find redemption.

Let us leave Genesis and go to the story of The Prodigal Son. The story of the Prodigal Son tells us the same thing, but in a very intense way. Do you know why he is called prodigal in the story? Some say it was because he demanded his inheritance from his father. But when he asked for his share of the inheritance, he had the right to do that. Others say that he was a prodigal because he squandered his money on women, but some would say that it was his choice to do that. It was his money. Why, then, was he called a prodigal? The answer is because when he said, "Let me have my share of my inheritance" he was actually saying, "From now on consider me no longer your son and I will no longer consider you also my father." He is a prodigal because he declared a separation from his father. To be a sinner also means to be a prodigal because it means to declare our separation from God. It is saying, "I will no longer consider you my Creator, but from now on I am creating myself. More than that, I have the power to even create a god for myself." That is the modern way of being a prodigal. We have not only declared our separation from God but we have said, "We do not want to be limited." We would like to exhaust all our God-given potential in order for us to create our own god; one that we can control; summon anytime; perform miracles for us; and would look at us as his master. A prodigal inverts the order of creation.

The God who seeks us says you cannot live that way. If you have to live, you have to honor the original design from which you are created. Oh, my friends, there is no other way. When we present ourselves before God, we find God seeking us and putting us in the rightful place. God tells us that He limits our humanity not to destroy us, but to fulfill us. That is one thing that we have not yet realized about the love of God. Love is seeking because it is trying to fulfill. When God wants to fulfill us, He fulfills us as human beings. In Theology, we believe that salvation is not for us to become like God. In the strictest sense of the orthodox faith, to be saved means to be restored to our full humanity, from where we have fallen because we have rebelled against God. God is seeking us in order to restore and fulfill us. Brothers and sisters in Christ, God is asking us today, "Where are you?" I hope that in the midst of our fear and pain of guilt, we would have the grace to come out of our hiding and say, "Here we are."

CROSSES OF FAILURE

John 21:15-17

My friend who was very experienced in the pastoral ministry was asked what he had learned in his long years of service. Strangely enough he said, "I have learned to spend a moment of silence everytime a person passes me by." When he was asked why he answered, "I have learned in my pastoral ministry that a person who passes you by might be carrying a cross. A person who carries a cross deserves our silence. You do not laugh at a person who carries a cross." There are many crosses that we carry. Let us focus our attention on one cross that is very common to all of us. It is the cross of failure. It is very common to us because all of us have experienced failure in our life. There are many people who have learned to live with their failures even though they are cramped up by it. There are people who could not live with their failures so they commit suicide. This morning we would like to find out if there is a way out of this.

The question that we would like to raise is, "Is there life after we fail?" For our consideration let me draw your attention to two pictures. The first picture is about six people in the news published about three weeks ago in one of our daily papers. It was a picture of the newly convicted kidnappers. They were sentenced to life imprisonment. When I saw that picture something struck me because one of them was a former police officer here in Iloilo City. As I looked at his picture, written on his face were the marks of education, culture, training and even discipline. I asked myself, "What happened to the ideals of this man? What happened to the great hopes and dreams that he must have had in his life?" When you are in that situation, is

there a way out of it? Many of us would look at that picture and say, "Thank God I am not in the place of that man." How terrible it is but, my friends, in many ways we find ourselves in the same shoes with that man. We, too, carry the cross of failures.

The second picture that I'd like to draw in your mind is found in our text from the gospel according to St. John 21: 15-17. It is a picture of a group of disciples met by Jesus Christ after He was resurrected from the dead. Remember how they gathered in Galilee and how Jesus Christ followed them there. After the meal which Jesus Christ partook with them, they must have all experienced a new source of hope, a new meaning of life after that frightful crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Peter was also in that group. Peter was an outspoken person, confident about himself, but at that time Peter did not feel confident at all. He must have remembered that several days ago he denied his Lord In spite of his strong assurance that he would never leave his Lord. The events that preceded that, however, proved the weakness of Peter. On this occasion after they had dined together and the rest of the disciples must have gone to different locations, Jesus Christ approached Peter. Peter looking down, still feeling guilty about what he did was asked by Jesus, "Peter, do you love me more than this?" I tell you, my friends, this is one of the most traumatic and yet most tender experiences ever recorded in the Scripture. Picture Jesus Christ approaching Peter with love and tenderness, and Peter, still unable to raise his eyes to Jesus Christ, answers, "Yes Lord. You know I love you." That was not the end of it. The second question came. "Peter, are you sure that you really love me?" Peter must have started to recall how he had failed Jesus Christ. He was starting to realize what Jesus Christ was trying to show him. I think Peter understood that Jesus was preparing him for something really painful and yet

unavoidable. When he replied, "You know that I am your friend", Jesus Christ said, "Feed My sheep." The first time Jesus Christ asked the question He said, "Feed My lambs." The second time, He said, "Feed My sheep." Peter must have remembered that earlier in the ministry of Jesus Christ he referred to himself as the Shepherd of the sheep. Peter must have thought this, "How can I share this tremendous task of feeding the sheep when I have failed?" The third question came, which if interpreted from the original, means something like this, "Peter, can you even love me?" It was then that Peter started to quiver. His response could mean this, "Lord, You know who I am; you know what I am; you know I am weak; you know I had denied you. Please forgive me. You know I had depended upon myself. Please forgive me." It was then that Jesus Christ said, ""Feed My sheep."

Let us put all these things together and be reminded of several important points to be considered to answer the question, "Is there life after failure?" First, let us remember that God's love does not fail us even though our love for Him fails. When we look at Peter in the light of this, you will remember that there was a time, early in his life, when he defended his relationship with Jesus Christ on the basis of 'self-generated' strength, inspiration and hope. It was never something that came outside of him. It was something that he initiated. Peter loved God on the basis of what he could offer to God, not knowing that even before he could do so, God's love had already reached out to him. This is one thing that Peter failed to actualize in his life. He did not realize that he was sustained not by his own effort but by the effort and love of God. How many of us fail in our commitment to Jesus Christ because we think of our Christianity as something that we initiate? We think of our faithfulness in terms of what we can do in order to please Him

not remembering what the Scripture says, "By your own righteousness you cannot please God. It is through the righteousness of Jesus Christ that one can become acceptable before God." Remember that nothing we can do, outside of our faith in Jesus Christ, can please God. This is the clear message that we receive from Hebrews, "Only good works done out of faith." We can please God only by and through our personal relationship with Him. Peter did not realize this. Since the very beginning when Peter had responded to the call of Jesus Christ, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men", he had always been doing it according to his own initiative, according to his own will. When Jesus Christ told them that He was going away, it was Peter who said, "No, I will never allow that to happen to you. If something will happen to you, I will die for you." Still, it was on the basis of his initiative. Jesus Christ must have appreciated that but He knew how limited it was.

The second lesson from this text is that there is an effort, on the part of Jesus Christ, to introduce us to our true selves. What we see everyday and show before our friends and the public is not our true selves. We remember the story of a little girl who, during Halloween, dressed herself in a monstrous costume trying to scare people as part of the celebration. When the old people pretended to be scared, the little girl started to comfort them by saying, "Don't be afraid of me. I am just a little girl." Now is that not true of all of us? We appear like strong and mighty giants in our daily lives but are actually weaklings. When Jesus Christ asked Peter, "Do you really love me?" he was actually telling Peter that his love must not come from the surface. It must come from the true self deep within him. It is when we understand and be reconciled with this truth that we can come out again as new persons.

The third point is the moment Jesus Christ was able to introduce Peter to his true self by pounding on him repeatedly the same question, "Do you really love me?" Peter discovered his true self. When Peter had done this, Jesus Christ offered him the most wonderful thing one could ever receive, especially someone who has experienced failure. Jesus Christ offered the blessing of forgiveness and restitution. He said, "Peter, in spite of your failure, come, feed my sheep." This is what God offers to us when we come to Him asking for His forgiveness. Forgiveness is not to be taken for granted. Many people have taken that for granted and have lived their lives undeserving of it. Forgiveness, in order to be real, must be based upon the feeling of true remorse. It is followed by our turning away from the original things which have given us pain and failure. The wonderful thing about the offer of Jesus Christ is that He does not only forgive, but He also provides the means by which we can begin anew. "Feed my sheep."

Lastly, Jesus Christ always provides those who allow Him to love them in His own way with a viable self-esteem. It is very important in our life. We cannot live without self-esteem. Peter could not have conquered himself without his self-esteem restored. Jesus Christ restored Peter's self-esteem when He commanded him to shepherd His sheep. It was a wonderful privilege. It is the same privilege given to all of us who have experienced failure.

In conclusion, let me draw to you another picture. Some of you may have watched the necrological service of the late Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the United States. Some of you younger folks here were not yet born when 'The Watergate Scandal', happened. It was that tragic incident that forced the 37th president of the United States to resign in ignominy and shame. From that time on nobody would ever look at Richard

Nixon as a man with pride and honor. Without our knowing, it was after the 'Watergate' that Nixon started to become a servant of his country. Out of his own personal initiative he opened the door of diplomacy to China, which had been closed for many years. It was Richard Nixon who provided the opportunity to open relationship with Russia once again. It was because of his efforts, after his 'Watergate' downfall, that he became known as 'The man of peace'. During the necrological service, a moving eulogy was said in his honor, "Richard Nixon was one man who did not allow his failure to defeat him." I was deeply touched with those words and even as I thought about the meaning of those words in relation to the life of Richard Nixon, I thought about Peter and how he did not allow his failure to defeat him. More than that, I thought about the loving grace of God that reaches out to each of us, especially when we fail, and shows the way out and assures us that after failure there is still life. Friends, that is the message of Peter for us, but more than this, it is a reminder of God's untiring initiative towards us. Amen.

MOVING ON

Job 17:6-9

My friends, our subject matter today is 'Moving on'. The intention is to learn how to encourage people living in difficult situations, like sudden death of a loved one, to move on with the future. It's not just a matter of moving on, however. Anybody can do that. The important question to Christians today is how to move on. As Christians there is one imperative when it comes to moving on; we must not only move on as people who live a life as if it were just an accident without any meaning, but as righteous people. This is what it meant to become a Christian. Paul says that being in Christ means that we hope that someday we will be like Him.

Christians are people who are on a journey, on a pilgrimage. Everyday we are tested by life's realities but we go on because out of these experiences the image of Jesus in each of us can be created and refined. This is the beauty of our Christian pilgrimage. We do not blindly aim for the future. We have a goal. We have an objective and we continue in spite of what happens to us. This reminds us of what Job says in our Scripture text, "Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways and those with clean hands will grow stronger." Some of us will ask, "What is the significance of this?" It is significant because this was said by a man who was in the midst of suffering, and he was not just suffering for the sake of suffering. Why must a man, like Job, suffer? According to the Scripture, Job was a righteous man. He was upright in the presence of God. He was perfect.

Consider the background of this story. Job insisted to his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar that he was righteous. His three friends came to visit him at the time when he was in great pain. Can you imagine Job at this time? He was a man who was perfect, rich and influential. He was the leader of his community. He was well loved by his friends and the members of his family. One day, without his knowing, there was in the court of heaven an agreement to test a man like him because he was perfect. It was Satan who presented himself and said, "If I would test your servant Job who is right now perfect before you, he would certainly depart from you and reject you because of suffering." The Lord said, "Ok. You can have your way. You can test him. It is not according to my will to make him suffer but I will allow it to prove to you that this man will remain righteous."

The story of Job tells us he was deprived of the members of his family and his property. Furthermore, his body was filled with painful boils that made him look very horrendous and terrible. Can you imagine a person with painful boils all over his body? He could not lie down flat on his back to rest nor lie flat on his stomach. He could not do anything except stood still. He was half-naked when his friends visited him. His friends looked at him and said, "You say you are perfect but because of your condition now, we say you are a sinner. Confess your sin." Why did they say this? It was the belief during that time that when a man suffers, it's because of his sin. Sin, therefore, is punishable. When you have any kind of pain or suffering that is indicative of your sinfulness. This was the view of the people and because of this they could not at all understand why Job, who was said to be perfect and upright before God, would terribly suffer. As far as his friends were concerned, there was only one explanation regarding his righteousness - Job was

telling a lie. Thus, his friends insisted on him to confess before God. "Confess your sins. There's no way that you can hide your unrighteousness. Look at yourself. You are suffering."

Don't we feel that way sometimes? When we suffer, don't we feel that God has departed from us? When we suffer don't we feel that we are suffering because we have committed sin? Are we not convinced that we suffer because God is punishing us? Many people believe that. Are they correct? Job says, "God has made me a byword to everyone. My eyes have grown dim because of grief; my thoughts are in shadow. The righteous people are spitting at my face. And I have caused even those who are righteous to be tempted to depart from their righteous life simply because righteousness does not bring us goodness, then why should they be righteous." Is not that the logic of many people today? I'm telling you simply this; righteousness or goodness is not a problem today if we can just prove accurately that it pays to be good. Don't you know that if it paid, indeed, to be good you didn't have to tell people to be good? They would be good because it pays to be good. If it paid to be good, then the very opposite would be also true. It does not pay to be bad, and because it does not pay to be bad, people will not be bad. Take a look at our situation today. Unrighteousness reigns around us. People want to have their own way, and most of the time, their way is evil. We ask why. The simple answer is that people have come to believe that it pays to be unrighteous. You see people like that in the government, don't you? People can talk to you about nice things and being honest, but in the dark corners of Malacañang, transactions are being made not known to the public; transactions that are based upon evil motives of politicians. I'm not saying that all politicians are like that. Praise God for some

who still maintain righteousness in their political life. My friends, this is the current situation.

Let us discover the beauty of the position of Job. In spite of all his sufferings he says, "The righteous will hold to their ways and those with clean hands will grow stronger." What a beautiful testimony! If this was said by somebody who was at the peak of popularity; had several properties, great wealth and well-being, people will not believe that. Ah, but this was said by somebody who was in the midst of suffering. So while his friends could look at him and despise him, I tell you that the righteousness of Job could not be taken for granted. You may disagree with Job but if in the midst of his suffering he could still believe this, indeed, there is something about being righteous beyond human understanding. Let me bring you to these two important reminders. One is that as Christians we do not at all aspire to be righteous because it pays to be righteous. No, this is not so. We aspire to be righteous because we have committed ourselves to Jesus Christ who tells us that we must live righteously regardless of what happens to us. Let sickness come. Let pain and suffering come. If we are committed to Jesus Christ, it means that even though we suffer, we shall not depart from His ways of righteousness.

The second reminder is more beautiful. When we really stick to our guns in living righteously, God, in His mercy and providence will prove to us that in the end it pays to be righteous. As long as we can believe that God reigns all over the world, we cannot believe that evil will ultimately triumph. Only God who is righteous will ultimately triumph. Even though presently we may suffer, in the end it is righteousness that will triumph. It is inspiring, my friends, to consider the lives of the martyrs who were persecuted for their faith. In spite of the persecution and the presence of lions which would devour

them, these people stood for their faith and for righteousness. Unknown to other people, there was, in their vision, another reality; the reality of God in heaven where the righteous reign and the unrighteous suffer. In the end it is righteousness that will win. Where does this put us? This is a very important question. If in the end righteousness would triumph, right now it pays to be on the right side. Look around us. Wherever we are, we face issues that would make us choose between what is right and wrong, black and white, and evil and righteousness. The question is where do we stand? I tell you, if righteousness in the end would triumph, it is important for us right now to commit ourselves to what is right. Let us move on to the future, but not without any sense of purpose. Let us move on as people of God whose purpose is to reflect in our lives the righteousness of Christ. Amen

EVERYTHING IS AGAINST ME!

Genesis 42:36

What do you do when things do not seem to go your way? This is a very familiar question to many of us because, I am sure, many of us have experienced this situation. We expect something that is good but does not materialize. For example, some may have prayed that they will pass the board examination or the bar examination but have not succeeded. Moreover, we also experience adversity. It can come in the form of sickness, accident, or the loss of something that we really treasure. Adversity, however, sometimes comes our way, one after the other. We can stand one adversity, but what they say is true; when trouble comes, they come in bundles. So what do you do when a series of these things come your way? We can understand and sympathize with Jacob when he said in our text, "everything is against me." One translation says, "God has turned against me." Friends, here is a man who has experienced a series of adversity. First there was the loss of his son, then the famine, the loss of another son and the prospect of losing another. Jacob could have said, "This is too much for me to bear." Finally, he relented and the story ended with the reconciliation of the whole family. Joseph had, in fact, wanted badly to bring all his brothers and father to Egypt.

This is a wonderful story. Remember, though, that the center of the story is Jacob's statement, "Everything is against me." How many of us are in the same shoes with Jacob right now? How many of us can look back to our life and see a series of adversity and say, "I am like Jacob. Everything is against me. Nothing is going my way. God is against me." If you were in that situation how would you react? I suggest two common

reactions to this situation. First is resignation. We react to a series of adversity in our life by resigning from everything. In other words, a person who responds to adversity this way stands in quick sand. He does not move forward although he knows that he is sinking every second. That's resignation. Resignation is related to self-pity, "Oh poor me. Of all people in the world, I am the most miserable. Fortune has turned its back on me. Even God no longer loves me." There is another dimension of resignation which was expressed by Peter, John and James when they were still fishermen. Imagine them fishing in the shores of Galilee. That was what they were doing everyday. When it came to brilliant ambitions and great visions to pursue, they had already resigned from that. They had already contented themselves with their daily task of surviving, and that meant fishing. Beyond fishing there was no vision and a sense of adventure anymore, and nothing glorious to reach. Now is that not where we are? Beyond our preoccupation with our daily survival, there is nothing more - no glorious vision for our country, no glorious adventure to pursue. That is, by the way, part of a state of resignation.

There is another response, and that is rebellion. When things do not go your way, the other reaction is rebellion. I am not saying that rebellion is completely bad. Rebellion is change, one that is needed. It is working for change in order to make things better. That's the good kind of rebellion. But there is another kind of rebellion that is destructive. It is the kind of rebelliousness that comes to people who feel that everything has gone against them so that they say, "If I go down everybody must go down. If I will be destroyed, everybody or everything must be destroyed. If I have to suffer misfortune then everybody must suffer misfortune." This is true in many cases today. I remember this 'watch your car racket' in the city. Boys

in the street would gather when you park your beautiful car, approach you and say, "We will watch your car." If you say, "No" they would walk around and scratch the paint on your car. That is the kind of rebellion I am talking about. "If I could not be as good as you are, then I would share my misfortune with you." Many of the world's problems come from this kind of rebellion. "If I am going to suffer, all of us must suffer." Sometimes I believe that this is the reason for our crab mentality in our country. If all of us must suffer or if some of us must suffer, then all of us must suffer. If we suffer together, at least there is comfort in company. My friends, is this all we can do? Should we respond to adversity by resigning? Or, should we respond by rebellion?

I suggest another way, and that is to rejoice. According to the Scripture, "... in this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." Remember that in the story of Jacob, he felt that everything was against him. Adversity has a way of blinding one's eyes so that one could no longer see beyond himself. This is why many people would resort to resignation. Others would resort to rebellion. Jacob also thought everything was against him, but out there beyond himself, God was doing His part. God was really working out His will for him. The truth is God was not against him, but for him. Out of that great adversity was the reconciliation of his family. Out of that experience, he discovered himself standing in the presence of a lost son who at that time was the great governor of Egypt. The adversity wrought for the family of Jacob the will of God so that out of this came the nation of Israel.

When we look beyond ourselves and can see nothing but of clouds of adversity, remember God has His way of working His will for us. God is not against us, but for us. In the midst of

adversity what should we do then? This is the Christian advice; *do not stop; go on*. In the midst of adversity keep on going, knowing that even when you do not see your way, as long as you are following God something good will soon happen to you. We all need this advice. If we have to give only one advice to many of our people who are in a state of discouragement, this is it; do not stop, do not sink. Keep on going. People who stop or quit do not realize that the answer to their problem is only one step away. There are many people who stop prematurely. They refuse to take that last step, and so they never reach their goal. When you feel like quitting, just go on, one step at a time. You can be sure that the Lord is ahead of you.

What is your response to adversity? Not resignation, not rebellion, but rejoicing. Rejoice because you know that when you commit your life to the hand of God, this God has proven His self-superior over all the powers in this world. "In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." This is the truth. The Bible is true when it says, "All things work together for good to them who love the Lord." Great is our God for He walks beside us, ahead of us, and even behind us. Amen

THE SECOND TOUCH

Mark 8:22-26

Let us take note of one thing about our text. Of the four gospel writers in our scripture, only Mark recorded this healing ministry of Jesus Christ. It is only in Mark where the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida is recorded. We do not know the reason for the omission of this important story in the other gospels. We would like to credit Mark for this account because he has made it clear to us that there is something about healing that should not to be taken for granted. Whereas some healings of Jesus brought instant and complete result, the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida happened gradually. This is why I chose the title, "The Second Touch" for this sermon. I am alluding to its importance in our Christian ministry.

Let us backtrack a little and try to understand the story. The text says that one day they were in Bethsaida, and they brought to Jesus Christ a man who was born blind, as some people believed. Blindness was one of the scourges of life in the eastern society. This is the reason why blindness is usually underscored in the Scriptures as one of the many things that Jesus was concerned about. The healing of this blind man, therefore, became part of the important ministry of Jesus Christ. When they brought this man to Him, Jesus Christ put spittle in his eyes. Then, he asked the blind man, "Can you see?" The blind man was truthful when he said, "Yes, I can see. I see people walking like trees." In other words the healing was not yet complete. Jesus Christ touched him again and it was then that he saw clearly. He saw clearly only after the second touch.

My friends, we are reminded by this passage of a certain sickness that is plaguing our life today. I am referring to the

spiritual sickness that we see in our society everyday. The other day, I read in a newspaper a report about something that really scared me and made me mad. If you had read this article, you would respond in the same way that I did. This article reported that there was a man who was hit by a running bus somewhere in Manila. Witnesses saw this man fell but was not yet dead. The bus stopped and backtracked, but instead of saving the man, it rode over him again until he was dead. When it was investigated, it was confirmed by many other previous incidents not reported in the paper that this was true. It seemed to point to one thing that, in terms of compensation, it is cheaper to kill a person than to make him live. According to some people, if that man was brought to the hospital, his hospitalization alone would cost more than twenty thousand pesos. If this person, however, would die as a result of that accident, the most that would be paid would be for his funeral expense. That would be about ten to twelve thousand pesos only. This is one of the many expressions of spiritual sickness in our society. It is a sickness that distorts our concept of life, human relationship and makes us feel that we can live by ourselves without God.

This is the kind of sickness that Jesus Christ came for. According to the Bible, Jesus Christ healed many ailments. He healed the lame, the sick and brought light to the blind. All of these healing miracles were meant to symbolize the importance of our participation in the new reality which He brought. This new reality is represented by the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ would heal the blind, but this was not the whole of it. This was just a symbol. It pointed to the presence of the power which is intended by God for the healing of our whole life.

Let us therefore consider the healing of our life. When we speak about our healing we turn to Scriptures for this. The

Scriptures remind us of the power of the Gospel unto salvation. We are reminded of the transforming power of the Gospel and this is our serious responsibility and task. We are reminded that when we preach the Gospel there will be transformation of life and healing of our spiritual sickness. The question is, "Where is the evidence of healing and transformation in our lives?" Every year we look forward to the great crusades that are held in the key cities of different countries. In these evangelistic crusades, thousands of people would accept the Lord Jesus Christ, but after that, the big question is whether they were living the newness of life which they had received. I think all of us would say, no. Even in our church, there are many of us who have been baptized (it means being Christians for twenty or thirty years) but when it comes to the evidence of healing in our lives there, seems to be none. Don't you wonder why after going to church every Sunday, you go home without feeling any sense of change and inspiration? I think this is a common experience. Some of us would say, "Blame it on the pastor because he gave a lousy sermon; blame it on the church because of the many hypocrites who are in the church; blame it on something else." This spiritual sickness lingers on. What does this mean?

Our text this morning indicates the reason for this. Many of us have experienced only the first touch of healing. We needed the second touch and it was never given to us. We came out from healing with sights, knowledge, true reasons and wisdom. When it comes to our relationship with other people, however, we still look at them as trees walking. What does this mean? It means that when we speak about knowledge, it is never transforming unless that it is interpreted in the way we live. The way we live must be experienced in terms of our relationship with each other. In our spiritual healing, we need not only the first touch of Christ but the second touch as well.

When it comes to the ministry of second touch, this belongs to all of us. Let us enumerate the possible forms of this ministry.

First, is the *enabling ministry*. It is empowering each of us to be involved in this ministry. Let us not withhold words of encouragement which we deserve from each other. When we do, we would be withholding the ministry of the second touch. I remember one time when I felt so low in the office because of many things that did not come true. My expectations were not met. Some projects did not at all come out as expected. I felt very low. There were some students who were experiencing crises in their lives and there seemed to be no answer to all of these crises. Then I received an envelope with a little card from somebody whom I took for granted. Simply written on that card was, "I am praying for you today." Those simple words lifted me up. Those simple words represented the enabling ministry, which we call the ministry of the second touch. Whenever you have time, go to the hospital and find out what happens to people whom you visit when you get inside the room, hold their hands and say, "I am praying for you." There you will experience the miracle of the second touch. God will use you to enable these people to experience healing in their lives. Enabling ministry is the ministry of the church. It is the ministry of our respective families. There is a need for these two institutions to work together so that in our enabling ministry we will not fail our children.

One concern that I have is the teaching of values. We teach a particular value system in the church, but our children experience different set of values in their homes. Is this not confusing our children? Maybe this is the reason why many of our children are not attending our church services because they see the inconsistency in the lives of their parents. Just this week I met a student who was confused because he grew up in a

Christian family and yet he did not see any consistency in the life of his parents. Let us provide each other this enabling ministry and let us be consistent in our moral values. I appeal that the values that we learn in our Sunday school and in our church must be honored and practiced by all of us in our respective families. I appeal that this must be held seriously by all of us, parents, if we are concerned with the lives of our children. There ought to be an enabling ministry between these two institutions.

Another form of ministry is the *ministry of restoration*. This means the readiness to forgive. Some of us may be living miserable lives and we become judgmental when we assess the lives of other people. Without the readiness to forgive, the ministry of restoration will not be possible. I know the human aspect when it comes to this. We remember the sins of other people and we do not provide them the possibility of forgiveness. This adds to the burden that they carry. Restoration is what we need. This means we do not want to restore only those people who are no longer worshiping in our church. We want to restore also those who are living and staying in the periphery of our Christian fellowship. These are the people who are meant to live in the center of life. The ministry of restoration is the ministry of the second touch.

Lastly, I speak about the *ministry of transformation*. This ministry of transformation is not our ministry. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of transformation means to be more open than before to the Holy Spirit's working in each one of us. Let us be ready to follow where the Spirit leads. There are many of us who pray, "Send us Thy Spirit to guide us." I had a Roman Catholic friend who approached me one time and said, "Johnny do you believe in ecumenical movement set forth by the Roman Catholic Church?" I said, "Yes. I believe in the

ecumenical movement." He tried to be technical with me and said, "Johnny I want you to consider this; what if the Holy Spirit leads you to become a Roman Catholic? Would you become a Roman Catholic?" I said, "Yes. I will be a Roman Catholic." He said, "That's it.". Then I said, "That's not the whole of it. What if the Holy Spirit will lead you to become Protestant? Would you become a Protestant?" He said, "No." There is something inconsistent here. When we pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us, let us be ready to accept where He leads us. Many of us pray, "Lord, do Thy will", but when the Lord shows us His will, we refuse to do it. This is the burden that we bear and the reason why even though we have received healing but still we see things in a hazy way.

The ministry of transformation allows us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who works in all of us. Let us remember what Paul says, "Apollo planted the seed. I may have watered the seed but only God brings the increase." The ministry of this church does not depend upon us. It depends upon God, only if we are open to the working of God. I offer to you this challenge - be a part of the ministry of the second touch. All of us are called to do so. Amen.

TOGETHER WE BUILD

Ephesians 4:7-13

Let us talk about two important Christian convictions. The first conviction is that every moment God is building His kingdom in the midst of people. This means it is important for us to understand what God is to us. He is not a god who is a tyrant; who sits up there on his throne, too detached from the day to day affairs of man; so unconcerned about our life because he has set the world into motion in the very beginning and has left it forever in order for the world to take care of itself through the so-called blind forces of life. That is not the kind of god that we worship. Our God is not detached from us. Our God, as the Old Testament says, is the Creator God. The word creator is an active word. It is never something that is past. It does not say that God created the world and then after that has departed from His world. God continues to create. He is, therefore, an active God in the midst of human history. This is a very good picture of our God.

Let us also be reminded that the God we worship is mindful of us. Remember what the psalmist said, "What is man that thou art mindful of him; for the son of man that thou visitest him." This God cares for us individually and personally. Let us also not forget that the New Testament teaches us that God is our *Father God*. He is a *father* because he is very close to us, cares for us and is involved in all of our daily living. This is the God whom we worship. Sometimes we do not see this or have this conviction, especially, when our eyes are filled with the horrifying pictures of dead people who are victims of war. How can there be a God in our midst when something like this happens? Sometimes we do not have the strong conviction that

God is close to us when we see scenes of suffering, people dying unnecessarily. I tell you, however, it is a good Christian conviction to believe that in spite of everything our God is the God who builds. He builds His kingdom here in our midst.

The second important Christian conviction is the belief that in the great task of building the kingdom of God here on earth, God has chosen to do this through people like us who are ordinary and weak, and easily disturbed by the circumstances we experience in life. Sometimes we ask why. Why is it that God has not chosen the wise people of this world, the strong and the powerful to do this? I tell you that it is within the wisdom of God to tell us later. When He uses people like us, we can assume it is because ordinary people like us are always there; in the marketplace, in school and in the workplaces. I also think when God has chosen people like us, He wanted us to know that even in the little things that happen to us, He is present and is interested in us. This brings us to one very important point - the kingdom of God being built here in our midst is not something that is only theoretical. This is not something invisible or belongs to the fantasy of people who call themselves Christians. This is something real because it involves people like you and me. The kingdom of God is being built in our midst, wherever we are everyday and every moment of our lives.

This brings us to one important focus for consideration, and that is the relationship of the kingdom of God with the church. The kingdom of God may seem to be only imaginary, but if the kingdom of God is understood as that which is being expressed by the life of the church, then it is something tangible or concrete. It is something that is clothed in flesh and blood and can be touched. Let us make this clear, the church is not the kingdom of God, for if it is the kingdom of God, how come there are many sinners in the church? How come there are

many hypocrites and backsliders in the church? This is something that we cannot deny. What we are saying, however, is that the church was established for the purpose of giving expression to the kingdom of God. That is the business of the church and of every Christian as well. What does the kingdom of God mean? It does not refer to pillars, walls, pavements and doors that we have to construct. The kingdom of God is the reign of God in the lives of people who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior. It refers to the business of living and following the will of God. That is the kingdom of God. Wherever the reign of God is acknowledged, the kingdom of God is present. When we acknowledge the reign of God in our lives, whether we are in church or in the marketplace, the kingdom of God is present there. There are many misconceptions about the church, however, that must be corrected. We can accept the fact that the church is an organization, and that she has become an institution, but the main purpose of the church is to manifest in the life of the people the will of God. However we understand the church, as long as we are reminded to be true to her purpose, she will continue to make the kingdom of God relevant to us.

Let us take a look at our passage, and focus our attention to the church as it is defined by Paul in Ephesians 4: 7 - 13. First it says that the church is the body of Christ that exists in fellowship with her Lord. Fellowship is not just being related; it means the sharing of life. In a fellowship, the life of one person flows into the life of the other. Paul says there is one God and Father of us all, who is above and through all and in all, but grace was given to each of us according to the terms of our Christian fellowship. There is a word that is usually associated with marriage. The word is compatibility. You marry somebody because he/she is compatible with you. Compatibility is an

important criterion in marriage. When we speak of fellowship, as the sharing of life, we think of a patient who is receiving blood transfusion. Blood transfusion is very important. Without it, certainly there would be no life for one who badly needs it. Blood means life, so that when somebody needs blood transfusion the life of one person goes into the other. Any medical doctor will tell you that it is not just a matter of transferring blood from one person to another. It has got to be tested whether the donor's blood is compatible with that of the recipient because if it were not, then it would only be useless. So it is important, therefore, that the recipient and the donor must be compatible. In our relation with God, there is no compatibility. God is a glorious and perfect God and we are sinners. We are, therefore, not compatible. What makes us compatible is only the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of our text. Through Jesus Christ, compatibility has been made possible for us so that the life of God becomes our life, and we live in fellowship with each other. This is a tremendous privilege that we share together in the church. All of us must grow in our fellowship with God. This fellowship between the believer and God is not real if that fellowship did not exist with his fellowmen.

The Scriptures tell us that our relationship with God is closely related to our relationship with each other. How can we be compatible with each other if we move in different levels? In terms of our economic status, for example, one belongs to one level and the other belongs to another. In terms of our social acceptability, one belongs to a particular social group and the other belongs to the other. What can make us compatible with each other then? It is only through the grace of God. When it comes to the need of God's grace, regardless of what we are, we

all begin at the lowest level of our life - the level of need and all of us are in need of the grace of God.

The second point in our passage says that after we have received the grace of God all of us are given gifts. There were those who received the gift of apostleship; there were those who received the gift to become disciples, pastors, preachers, evangelists and prophets. Does this mean they are the only privileged few in the church? No, for as long as we are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord we also are recipients of God's gifts. All believers have gifts from God all for the purpose, according to the Scripture, of equipping the saints. The word *equip* is important. In Greek it means *catartismos*, which is used in surgery. When a surgeon fixes a broken limb that is *catartismos*. *Catartismos* is also used in politics. When there are two opposing factions so that the government cannot move as it should, then they should be reconciled; that is also *catartismos*. The meaning of *equip* means to restore all things into their original condition of efficiency so that they will be able to render the purpose for which they were created. That is *catartismos*. The same is the intention of the Christian fellowship: that we would be able to equip each other so that all of us would be restored to our original condition of usefulness and serve the purpose for which our life was created. Where does this *catartismos* exist? It exists in the church and as the church seeks to express the presence of the kingdom of God in her, she fulfills her task.

What is the purpose of equipping the church for the ministry? According to St. Paul, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ until all attain to the unity of faith, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The purpose of being in the church is for all of us to mature into the fullness of

Christ. We are not talking about images or appearances, but the way of life that we live. Remember what Jesus Christ said, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. And anyone who does this lives according to the will of God, my Father and lives according to my will." When we live according to this commandment then we attain the fullness of Christ.

Friends, let me remind you of this wonderful story of Florence Nightingale. During the Crimean War, when the field of battle was flowing with blood and the cry of pain was heard night and day, Florence Nightingale would take up a lamp at night and walk the field of suffering, visiting the wounded soldiers who were not cared for. Every time she would stop by and cleanse the wound of a soldier, she restored life to the broken body of that person. Finally one soldier who received the care and concern looked at Florence Nightingale and said, "You are the Christ to me." Do you know what that means? We become the Christ to others when we sincerely show our concern for them. Concern is not just touching the body of somebody, but also to be interested in that person. According to Dr. Schumacher, the one who touches our lives has been meant to receive a blessing from it. When this happens, then certainly we have attained a measure of the fullness of Christ in us. This is how we build. The Christian church is not here to destroy, but to build. Let us build not structures made of concrete, but let us build the life of man. Let us build the spirit of man that they may be equipped and restored in their original condition of efficiency that they, too, might render service to God. Amen.

ABUNDANT LIVING

Luke 9:12.17

I had the privilege of welcoming a friend to Iloilo City for a lecture. He is a Jewish Theologian. When I met him at the airport, he was looking around instead of looking at me. I was there ready to welcome him but he ignored me. His attention was focused somewhere else. Finally his gaze met mine. He embraced me but instead of saying, "How are you?" he looked at me and said, "Johnny, do you realize that you are living In the midst of paradise?" I did not understand what he meant. I asked, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look around you. You live in a very fertile country. Where I come from," he said, "in Palestine, we're living in the midst of deserts." Here is something very paradoxical; something that should bother us. Truly we are living in a very rich country but many of our people are living in poverty. Everyday these people are looking for abundant life. Is it not true that many of our countrymen are no longer satisfied in staying in our country because there is no abundant living here? This is the very reason for the immigration abroad. Many of our young people would choose to become domestic helpers in other countries in order to earn dollars and provide abundant living not only for themselves but for their families here in the Philippines. The question is, "What sort of abundant living are we looking for?"

Today we are able to speak about abundant living because Jesus Christ promised it. He said in John 10:10, "I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." Jesus Christ was responding to the very need that we are expressing today. Our need for abundant living is not only among us. It is not only particular, but universal. All of us

cannot truthfully say that we have abundant life. We may have abundant living in terms of material things, but emotionally, we may not have abundant living. We may have abundant living in terms of our career or profession but in other aspects of our life we do not have it. Let us take a look at ourselves right now. There are many of us here who require fullness in their emotional life. Some might be worried about their girlfriends or boyfriends; their wives who are in Saudi Arabia or in other places; and their children seeking employment in other cities or in other lands. This is an expression of a lack in life in each one of us. Thus, we can truly say that all of us are looking for abundant life. Many of us would go to one place in search of abundant life because one place is different from another. It can be a place where the soil is fertile, everything is beautiful and the people are friendly. All of these are factors that can contribute to what we call abundant living. In our search for abundant living, we are looking for a situation outside of ourselves. Abundant living depends, to a certain measure, on what we can find in our environment, such as food, security, and safety. All of these are conditions of abundant living.

Jesus Christ recognized this in his ministry. He spoke to people who were sick, told them they need abundant living, and he came to heal them. He spoke to people who were hungry, told them they need abundant living, and he came to give them food. He spoke to people who were lonely, ostracized and weak, and he told them he came to preach the Gospel that they may have abundant living. That day in Bethsaida, Jesus Christ encountered the same need from a multitude of people, some 5,000 of them gathered around Him. Before the 5,000 people arrived, Jesus Christ was preoccupied with a very important concern. According to our text, the 12 disciples who were sent out for the first time to do mission work, came back to

give Him the report of their missionary work. Naturally, Jesus Christ was excited about this and that is why He brought them to one solitary place in Bethsaida to have some kind of a retreat; to listen to the news from His disciples. It was in the midst of this great expectation of the result of their ministry that the multitude of people came toward them, 5,000 of them. These people would change the agenda of the day.

Likewise, there are times in our life when something would suddenly change because of necessity, and so we feel frustrated. I, too, feel frustrated when this happens. When my activities in the ministry would be so hectic, I would look forward to the time when I could be alone with my family, play with my grandchildren, or just relax without telephone calls. Just when I would do that, suddenly there would be a knock on the door with people saying "We have a crisis; we have an emergency. We need you." That would change the agenda. Isn't that frustrating? Have you not experienced that? Interestingly, the text says that when Jesus Christ was informed about the multitude of people who were coming towards them, to change their agenda of the day, "...and He welcomed them." That is strange. He welcomed them. He forgot about the retreat and His conference with His disciples. He faced the multitude of people, taught them the gospel and healed their diseases. It was the constant preoccupation on the part of Jesus Christ.

When nighttime came, His disciples told Jesus Christ, "Send these people away so that each of them could find supper and lodging for the night because we are in the midst of a desert. There is no way that we can take care for these people." Strangely, without being anxious about the situation, Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "They are hungry? Feed them." Feed them! My friends, if I were one of the 12 disciples I would be flabbergasted. The disciples of Jesus Christ were so

astonished with this command of Jesus Christ, "Feed them." They said, "How can we do that? Take a look at these people, five thousand of them. Do you know that one supper for 5,000 people would require eight months of wages?" Jesus Christ said, "What do you have?" In John 6 it is recorded that a little boy came forward and offered five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish which the disciples offered to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ took the five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish and said, "Let the multitude sit down, fifty in a group." He took the bread, raised it up to heaven and said, "Thank you Lord for this." A miracle happened. The five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish were multiplied after the thanksgiving prayer of Jesus Christ and 5,000 people were fed. There were even 12 baskets full of leftovers.

Let us backtrack a little and find out the meaning of abundant living in so far as Jesus Christ is concerned. We have mentioned that as far as we are concerned, abundant life is that which we can find outside ourselves. It is something provided by our environment. In this particular instance, Jesus Christ added a little dimension to our definition of abundant living. For Jesus Christ, that which is outside is dependent upon that which is inside. Abundant living does not come primarily from the outside. Abundant living is from within. There are three components of abundant living. First of all, abundant living wells from within and is shown in our compassion for people. In the first part of our text we find Jesus Christ welcoming the multitude in spite of the fact that the multitude had changed His agenda for the day. He welcomed them. Everytime Jesus Christ looked at people like us there wells up in Him compassion for us. Do you remember in Matthew 9 where it says that when Jesus saw the crowd, he called His disciples and said, "Look at the harvest for it is ready for harvesting." That

was one occasion when His heart was filled again with compassion even as He looked at the multitude He said to His disciples, "Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send His laborer for the harvest." That, my friends, is the vision of our Lord - compassion for others. Oh, how we need that in our world today. I say that with great fervor because we do not see compassion in Rwanda; in Haiti; in Serbia, Bosnia; and here in the Philippines where, a few days ago, there was a massacre in Mindanao. Friends, this is all over the world. I do not know what has happened to humanity. When God created the whole creation, He looked at His creation and said, "It is good." When He created man, He looked at man and said, "It is good."

Today that original goodness is gone. When we meet our fellow Filipino, for instance, our anxiety rises up because we do not trust him. This is very unfortunate. I've been traveling abroad many times and I tell you that when I land in Singapore, my anxiety does not rise up. When I land at the Manila International Airport and I see all these military people with their big guns, these people dressed in *barong tagalog* walking around and waiting to get some money as a form of bribe, these taxi drivers waiting to charge you exorbitant fare from Manila International Airport to anywhere else, my anxiety rises. I look at the Filipino race and say where does our redemption lie? Where can we discover once again goodness in our life? Jesus Christ came to provide us abundant living and that means He came to provide us once again the opportunity to be good by, first of all, being compassionate to others. Abundant life means a life that wells up with compassion for others. I hope that we will be able to express that compassion in our relationship with each other. I hope that in this church we will no longer live like strangers to each other. I hope that everytime we worship and go out of the church after the service, we will take time to look

at each other, renew our acquaintance with each other, and find new friends for each other. This would be an expression of compassion. Why? You may not know if the one you would approach some time tonight after the worship service, and to whom you would extend the hand of friendship and words of encouragement might be a lonely person. As you express words of compassion to this person, there can be a change and this can be a beginning.

Another aspect of abundant living according to Jesus Christ is a life that wells up with care for others. Here is the mystery in our text. There are two different interpretations of this miracle. The first interpretation maintains that there were only five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish. When Jesus Christ prayed, our Heavenly Father really multiplied them right before the eyes of the people so that there was abundant food for all. That is traditionally our interpretation. Listen to this other interpretation. There was a lad and an emergency. When the boy heard about the emergency, that 5,000 people did not have anything to eat he came forward and offered his five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish. That was his provision. Jesus Christ accepted these, prayed for and distributed these among the people. The miracle, my friends, is that when the people who were there saw what the boy did, their hearts were touched and the provisions that they were keeping for themselves started to come out. They started to share what they had with others. This is a very logical explanation of that miracle. The miracle is not about the five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish that were multiplied. It is, rather, the miracle of sharing. I tell you, the moment we learn how to share, a miracle happens. Abundant life is given and is experienced.

Take a look here in our country. We have tremendous resources but why is it that many people are living in poverty?

You ask an agriculturist, a sociologist, a political scientist, an expert and they will tell you that the problem is not our lack of resources, but distribution. Imagine that we are sitting around a long table. The food is coming from one end and is supposed to be passed to all the people seated around this table. The food, however, does not get passed; it just stops at one person. That is the reason why there is poverty in the lives of other people seated around this table. The problem is lack of distribution of God's resources. This is because we have not learned to care for each other. The miracle mentioned in our text is actually the miracle of sharing. When we have learned to share there will be abundant living.

Lastly, abundant life wells up with great confidence not only for today but also for tomorrow. Jesus Christ would tell his disciples to look beyond, for out there is the fulfillment of the promise. The kingdom of God is coming, and the fullness of life will come in God's own time. If we have confidence in this, then we can truly live abundantly now. Amen.

CHRISTIANITY: A WAY OF LIFE

Luke 19:1-10

A theologian came up with this observation. Christianity is not a religion because in religion, it is man searching God, but in Christianity it is God searching for man. If you put it that way, I would agree because when we speak of religion we think of all these religious tradition and rituals that we observe in order to approach God. It seems to me that when we think of man searching for God, we refer to a kind of approach that is effective. This is true among all the religions of the world. One religion will say that their way is more effective than the ways of other religion. Is that not what we are saying? Basically, religion is about man searching for God. In Christianity, however, it is not man searching for God, but God, in Jesus Christ, searching for man. This brings into focus the significance of our text that is very familiar to many of us. It is the story of Zacchaeus whom we think only as a man short of stature. This is how the Scripture describes this man. 'Zacchaeus was a wee little man', sing the little children because he became famous for his stature. Nonetheless, there are other unique things about the story of Zacchaeus.

One thing that stands out in the story is the initiative of this man when he heard that Jesus was coming to their village. His stature is one of the obstacles of Zacchaeus but if you dig deeper, there is something else there. Zacchaeus was the chief of the publicans, the chief of the bureau of internal revenue. He was a Jew but he was working for the Romans, collecting taxes for the Roman government. In many instances he was unforgiving and inconsiderate. He was small of stature but he was defended by the might of Rome. The presence of soldiers

around him gave him the freedom to do whatever he wanted to do. One can surmise that because he was deeply involved in the work of the BIR during that time, his source of income did not only come from his salary. There were probably many 'under the table' deals and the people knew about this.

One day when he heard about the coming of Jesus Christ, out of his excitement, he forgot his bodyguards and went out into the crowd. The crowd saw Zacchaeus and maybe thought it was time to really show how they felt about him. As Zacchaeus was moving with the crowd, perhaps, one of them would pinch him, one would shove and another one would pound Zacchaeus on the head. Zacchaeus was just plainly helpless. If you were in the crowd, would you not have done the same thing? I think many of us would. Zacchaeus, however, was smarter than the rest of them. He maybe thought he would have nothing to do with that kind of unruly crowd. He set out in a different direction and looked for something else. Then he saw a sycamore tree. When I was in China about five years ago, I saw a row of sycamore trees lining the streets of Shanghai. I observed one characteristic of the sycamore tree. One thing that is very unique about this tree is that it would grow to a certain height but the branches would spread out on top that it would become flat. You can sit comfortably on the top of this tree. Let us focus our attention on the sycamore tree. When Jesus Christ passed by He saw Zacchaeus on the sycamore tree. He said, "Zacchaeus come down for today I will dine with you."

Let us take a look at the significance of this text. We started off by saying that Christianity is not a religion because in religion it is man searching for God. In Christianity, it is God searching for man. Christianity is not religion, but a way of life. It is a way of life that is set forth, dictated and defined by man's encounter with God. From that encounter a personal

relationship is developed that would characterize the Christian life. Therefore, I am more comfortable in defining Christianity as a way of life, and not as a religion. A religion is man's way to God but, Christianity is God's way to man. Therefore when we live as Christians, our life does not depend upon our will but upon the God who has sought us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is the theme of our meditation this afternoon. I would like to call your attention to three things that belong to this theme.

First, our God who encounters us is not a distant figure. He has drawn near us in a personal way. This is one of the greatest principles that came out of the Protestant reformation; God encounters man in a personal way. Therefore, our salvation does not depend upon the mediation of an institution or of any person. Our salvation is personal because God has become personal with us. That is one of the most important tenets of the Protestant faith. We honor that principle because truly God encounters us in a very personal way. Let me share with you my experience to show an illustration. When I was a young man I was not behind in many things. I was in politics early in life. I excelled in the academics and many people believed that I could have been many other things aside from being a pastor. My friends, there was one event in my life that I'll never forget. One day while I was attending a youth camp, there was this American missionary. He looked at me from out of the crowd. He identified me and he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Johnny I think God is calling you." That moment really stuck in my mind and every time I think of Zacchaeus, I think about God encountering us through people, who tell us the same thing that the American missionary told me, "I think God needs you." This is a certain kind of ministry that is taken for granted here in this church, and of which many of us may think and feel does not belong to us. This is the ministry of encouraging young

people, and God can use you and work through you because today God wants people who are committed to Him. I tell you the ministry is a very challenging calling. There are many young people today who are supposed to be in the ministry but are not in it simply because people, like us, neglect this ministry of touching, of putting our hand on their shoulder and say, "God is calling you in the ministry." Right now as you sit where you are, can you think of one of your friends who can be in the ministry, but is not because we have neglected extending to them the encountering presence of God? Jesus Christ, when He passed by the sycamore tree, stopped and looked at Zacchaeus. In that gaze of Jesus Christ there was that encountering presence of God when He said, "Zacchaeus come down."

The second important theme is expectation. To the people during that day, the least of all who can be encountered by God would be Zacchaeus because he was nothing but the chief of sinners. Human expectation, however, is different from divine expectation. We are confident that God's expectation always transcends ours. There are situations in life where we expect God but God is not present. There are also situations when we do not expect God to be present and suddenly we discover that He is there. Who would expect God to be present in the provincial jail of Iloilo? When you go there to testify and work with these people, who would expect that God would be among criminals? But when you open the bible to them, counsel them, preach to them, and testify or witness to them, you could sense all their defenses going down. This is when you see them just as they are in the presence of God. Similarly, the people expected God to bypass Zacchaeus but Jesus Christ stopped by and extended to Zacchaeus the invitation that all those people really needed.

Thirdly, it was not only the encountering presence of God and the expectation of the divine that transcends the expectations of people who are present in the story, but also the call. It is the call of God for us to move from where we are. Christianity is a dynamic lifestyle because it is characterized by man stepping forward as a response to God's call. Jesus Christ never tells us to stay where we are. He always tells us "Come follow me and you will be what you ought to be." There is something necessary so that movement can happen. Jesus Christ tells Zacchaeus, "come down from the sycamore tree." What does this mean? We may not be aware of it, but many of us are sitting on our sycamore tree. Our sycamore tree can be political power, our profession, our bank savings or our popularity. Jesus Christ says, "When you come to me I do not need your popularity, bank savings, political power or profession; when you come to me I need you just as you are." In short He says, "You cannot follow me unless, first of all, you climb down from your sycamore tree." It is only then that you can be as you are. The hymn is really true, 'Just as I am without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me.' Christianity is not a religion because if it was then, it was man's way to God and we can use our popularity, wealth, bank savings, or profession, or whatever sycamore tree we have, to persuade God to look upon us. God is different. He talks to us, calls us and transforms us only on this basis, just as you are. I invite you to come just as you are. Come down from whatever sycamore tree you have. Shed off your bondage point and level with Jesus. He comes to us personally and it is where all of us must begin. Amen.

BUILDING AGAINST THE WIND

I Corinthians 3:10-16

I don't know if you have observed this but every time we see children or young people with exemplary characteristic and talent similar with that of their parents we would always say that it is in their blood. Like father like son.

It has been my privilege to be the chairman of the Student Organization Committee at Central Philippine University and for years I had the privilege of supervising the CPUR election. One time there was a candidate for president who exhibited a certain unusual political genius. He was able to overcome opposition and present issues clearly and convincingly. Somebody remarked, "Like father like son." I asked, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "It's in the blood. Do you know that his grandfather was a congressman, his father is a mayor and his mother is a judge?" He enumerated other outstanding qualities of the parents of the student politician. This observation means that we are what we are because we are determined by many things, especially things that are within. We are what we are, to a certain extent, because of the genes that we have inherited from our parents, the training that we have received from them and the result of our environment. It is true that there are many things about us that are the result of our environment. On the other hand, there are also other people who would say life is what we make it. It means that we become what we are because of what we do with our lives. In other words, "Life is what we make it." The question therefore is whether we are pre-determined people or people who determine what we want to be? The answer is neither of these but all of these. Our whole life is the result of

genes inherited from our parents, our environment, and our personal initiative. Most of all, a large part of our life is determined by a certain mysterious force, which in the Christian tradition we call *God*, but, outside of the Christian tradition we call *fate* or *chance*. That is why we sing "*que sera sera, whatever will be will be*". All of these are very important to what we call development.

Development is something that must concern us. What are the factors that are important for human development? Many people would say that external factors are very important for our development. If there would be development in our society it must come as a result of structural change. Many progressive thinkers in our society today would say we need to change the structure of our society. Today, we are even talking about changing the constitution hoping that we will have a better set up in our government. On the other hand, there are people who would maintain that before you can change society you must change the individuals in that society. This concept has been traditionally held by the Christian faith. When people come to me and ask, "What do you think of this proposal to change the constitution?" I would say that whether we have a parliamentary or presidential form of government, in the long run, what determines the outcome is the kind of people that we have. If we are going to have a clean society, for example, we better focus on transforming the individuals who would be concerned about cleanliness in their own personal life. You cannot have a clean society if the individuals live like pigs. Our mayor would say, "Clean and green Iloilo City." You can only do this when people are given the right kind of training so that they can develop clean habits as part of their essential nature. To attain a society that is orderly, peaceful and good you must have individuals who are really concerned about peace, caring

for each other and living with each other. There is no other way. Change the individual and you change the society.

The focus of our consideration this morning is how to change the individual if that was the essential thing. Paul has an answer. He said introduce the individual to Jesus Christ and he will be changed. This is what we mean by personal evangelism. This is the basis of our Christian mission. Jesus Christ can change the perspective or outlook of our life. Many of us may say that Paul lived in the past and his solution to problems today is simplistic and no longer relevant. It does not work anymore. If we introduce Jesus Christ to every individual, how does that solve our problem with urban squatting, graft and corruption in our government, and vandalism in Iloilo? How does that change the way of thinking of people? What has Jesus Christ got to do with urban squatters, slums, poverty, and dishonesty? Ah, but Paul will not give up on us. Paul would say that we need to preach the Gospel. When we preach the Gospel, we preach Jesus Christ. We ask, "Have we not done that for the last two thousand years? Look at our society. It is just as bad as before." Paul still would not give up on us. He would say that the problem with us is that we have not really preached Christ as we should have done and taught the people about Jesus Christ as we ought to do. Paul would remind us that if people were truly introduced to Jesus Christ their lives would be transformed. Take a look at his life; he was once a persecutor of the Gospel and thought that he would have all the great rewards of heaven by his activities. He was introduced to Jesus Christ and then his experience with Jesus Christ changed his perspective. He was no longer a persecutor but a preacher of the Gospel. Paul's experience reminds us of another example, the story of John Newton, a slave trader. He made his wealth by selling people as slaves from Africa in America. He made a

fortune out of this. When John Newton encountered Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior there was such a transformation in his life. This transformation inspired him to compose a hymn, which has become the favorite of many people today all over the world, 'Amazing Grace'. Friends, there is something mysterious here; something not easily explained but true. When people encounter Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, things change.

The first important implication is that in Jesus Christ our perspective of the whole reality is changed. When people view human beings outside of the perspective of Jesus Christ the tendency is for them to exploit others. This explains why many people are using prostitutes. When you look at a woman from the perspective of Jesus Christ then you look at her as made in the image of God and you dare not at all exploit her. When you look at creation you do not only see trees that you can cut down and sell illegally but you see them as part of our life. God has provided for us trees, animals, all living and other created things so that there will be an ecosystem that is self-perpetuating and self liberating. If you destroy one aspect of God's creation then you will have an imbalanced ecosystem which will be detrimental to the well-being of people. What does this mean to us? It means that when you are introduced to Jesus Christ, He comes to us as the living incarnation of God thus, you can never take for granted the presence of God. We do not live our lives as if we were just alone. In the midst of human life there is the living presence of God to whom all of us are accountable. This is the reason why you cannot raise your children without teaching them that there is God in our midst, and that without God life is meaningless. Jesus Christ comes from God to remind us that our life has a divine design and it is only when you live according to this design that you will be

able to experience meaning and fulfillment. This divine design is sometimes taken for granted because many people would like to live according to their own free will and what they think is good for them. The trouble is it lacks the absolute standard of what is good for everybody. What is good for one may not be good for others. This results always to discontentment, and tension between and among us. It is about time we bring God back to our own awareness because with God we can believe that our life, regardless of our race, has the same standard. We have the same absolute to aspire for.

When you live according to God's design and something goes wrong in your lives, something within the design that can resolve it also. You cannot use something outside of this design in order to solve it. I think of Filipino ingenuity. Yamaha has been producing motorcycles that can accommodate only two people. When these Yamaha motorcycles came here to the Philippines, the Japanese engineers were amazed that their motorcycles can carry 16 people here. When this vehicle gets broken Filipinos rely on their ingenuity. Instead of ordering spare parts from Japan they use simple things like hairpins to fix it. Temporarily it would work, but not for long. Why? It is because the hairpin does not belong to its original design. The same is true when it comes to our lives. When you do not have hair, human ingenuity has come up with wig and toupee. Artificial substitute is what we have today. When you do not have a hand you go and get an artificial hand. Our modern life is made easy by artificial substitutes as a result of human ingenuity. We rely so much upon this that we have forgotten about God and the original design of our lives. We have to understand one important thing, that if there was something wrong in our life, or society or family, the spare parts and the solution to that problem do not come from man but from God.

Thus, Paul says, "I lay the foundation and that foundation is Jesus Christ; no one else can lay any other foundation aside from this. Everything that we do must be built upon this foundation alone, and will be judged accordingly. Your deeds can be gold, silver, precious stones or wood or straw or hay but what you do will be tested by fire and only fire will prove that which will remain." Paul further says, only that which remains is that which belongs to the design of God.

The question is, how do we do this? The answer is simple; through Christian education. This is why we have Christian Education programs in our church. Christian education, however, must not be in the church alone or begin in the church. Christian education must begin in our homes. How wonderful it is to remember the time when we were brought up by our parents according to the word of God, and being told the stories of the Bible night and day. We thought that was only for entertainment but we did not know that our parents were already laying the foundation against the winds of time. Oh, the winds of time and change have come, and together with it are strange teachings that are misleading our people today. How unfortunate it would be for our children to grow without that strong foundation. I suggest, therefore, that even as we think of Christian education let us think of our respective families. It means more time for our children, more time to develop ourselves as parents and to become pastors to our children. It requires more time to nurture them according to the word of God so that they can experience Christian discipline. When we do this we lay the foundation for the building of lives that are strong against the winds of time. *Longenus*, the Greek literary critic is remembered by what he said to his students, "When you write, ask yourselves this question. 'What would Homer and Demosthenes do if they were the ones writing this?' What

would Homer and Demosthenes do if they listen to your work?" In the same manner, all of us must be reminded that in the final analysis when we approach the throne of God for judgment the important question that will be asked of us is, "How much of your life was lived according to the teachings of Jesus Christ?" The same question will be asked of our children, and if we are concerned about their future we better lay the foundation against the winds of time now. Amen.

EASTER!

John 20:1-18

Our text tells of Mary Magdalene going to the garden tomb where her Lord was buried immediately after he was crucified. According to the Scriptures, she went there to finish the burial ritual for the Lord which was not completed that Friday afternoon. When she got there she discovered a very strange thing: the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Instead, the linen that was wrapped around the body of Jesus was unraveled but there was no body to be found. She was very troubled about this and she went out running back to the disciples. The first disciples that she encountered were Peter and John and she told them about what she saw. Peter and John went to the garden tomb to see, and according to the story, Peter being older than the other disciple was slower in running. The other disciple arrived there first and when he looked into the tomb, he saw the same thing that was reported to them by Mary Magdalene. Then Peter went in there and saw the same thing also.

According to the report of John, he and Peter did not stay there. Instead they believed what they saw and went back to their homes. It was Mary who went inside the tomb and discovered something else. According to John there were two people there, both of them were dressed in something bright. These were the two angels who asked her, "Woman, *why* are you weeping?" Mary said, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Then Mary turned around and there was a third figure who asked her the same question. Mary, thinking that he was the gardener, said, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you

have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Her Lord was not only crucified but now, even his dead body was taken away. She pleaded with the gardener and cried. "Mary!" The voice who called her made her realize that there was something unusual. It was then that Mary turned around and said, "Rabboni!" which means Teacher.

There are three points that we would like to understand here. First, Mary was not able to recognize her Lord because of her tears. She was crying. Is this not true to each one of us? Sorrow can blind us from looking at and seeing reality. There are many of us who have been embittered to be able to see the reality of everything. Tears can blind us. Let us take a look at ourselves. Are there tears that blind us in our lives? Many of us can testify that tears are not only brought about by physical suffering, but also by emotional loneliness and spiritual sickness. Many people today have their own tears that they cannot see rightly the presence of the resurrected Lord.

The second point has something to do with how the so-called gardener called Mary that brought her into recollection. There was something familiar and personal in how the voice called her and made her recall many personal moments that she had with her Lord. It was possible that Mary, upon hearing her name said recalled the time when she was an outcast; when nobody came for her; when society rejected her because she was an evil person. Remember what the Scriptures said about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman who had seven evil spirits in her. Nobody came for her. When she heard Jesus Christ preached, she was deeply touched that nothing could stop her from going to Jesus and offer the precious perfume in the alabaster flask and pour it over His head. She shed her tears on the feet of Jesus Christ and wiped the wet feet of Jesus with her hair. What did Mary discover at that time? She discovered in the voice of Jesus

Christ the voice of love and care; the voice that could not at all reject the vilest of sinners. It was the sound of the voice that melted the heart of Mary and made her realize that, standing before her, was not a mere gardener; it was her Lord who was crucified but was raised to life again.

The third significant thing mentioned is that when Mary saw Jesus Christ she went to Him but He said to her, "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended unto My Father." This statement is contrary to the ones Jesus made to his disciples reported in John 10: 27, Luke 24:39, and Matthew 28:9. In these three occasions Jesus Christ did not prevent His disciples from touching Him but in this particular occasion Jesus did not want Mary to touch Him. There are many ways of interpreting this but one way is to look at the original Aramaic version which is translated to the word 'hold' rather than 'touch' or 'cling'. "Do not hold me, but instead go now to my disciples and tell them the important news about what you have seen." The resurrected presence of Jesus Christ is a free presence. It cannot be held back by any devotion that we might have to Him. Jesus Christ did not resurrect from the dead so that He become the object of our devotion, and for us to keep Him to ourselves. Jesus Christ told Mary Magdalene not to hold him but instead to go and declare what she had seen; declaring about his resurrection is more important than bowing your head in his presence and adoring him.

Friends, this brings an important consideration for us- religion is not just a private affair. Today there is a question whether religion is a private or a public matter. This is a difficult issue, especially in democratic countries where there is the principle of separation of church and state. We Baptists believe sincerely in the principle of the separation of church and state. It means that when it comes to religion and faith no

government should coerce the conscience of any man or woman to accept the religion being promoted by the government. This is where the principle of separation of church and state lies.

Unfortunately, today this principle is interpreted as religion being private, thus, cannot be made public. This is where the weakness of that interpretation lies; many of us have been led to believe that religion should be a private matter, should be kept to ourselves and must not be made public. The result of this is the collapse of morality in many nations today. Let us not forget that morality is more important than legality. There are times when what is legal is not moral at all. What Jesus Christ was saying after his resurrection is this, "Now that you have experienced my resurrected presence, go and tell." Separation of church and state is correct but it does not mean that the government is in one realm and the church is in another. We believe that both are under the realms of God. Even in the church Christian witness is needed, how much more in the government? Our Christian perspective maintains that what is legal is formulated to express the essence of what we believe to be morally right. What is morally right is that which is addressed and expressed by the Scripture. What does that mean? It means that religion is private but when it comes to Christian witness, it must not be private only but must be made public. So, what are we doing about it today? Often when we see corruption in government, we say that is their business not ours. In so far as Jesus Christ is concerned, He says that we must go and preach! Declare to the world what is right and wrong. The resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds us now that it is imperative for all Christians to make public witness the meaning of the resurrected presence of Christ in their private and public life.

Furthermore, while it is important for us to have personal witness for the transformation of human life and society, what is crucial is the personal encounter of Jesus Christ with each one of us. This is the meaning of the resurrection. Because Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead then He can encounter each one of us in moments we least expect it to happen. Let us then be careful with every moment of our lives and how we live it. Offer it as an occasion where God might encounter and then transform us. There are many people who cannot be convinced by correct doctrine. These so-called atheists, cynics or intellectuals of modern times may consider the simple message of the Gospel as foolish and but strangely, sometimes it can melt their hearts. I remember Roger Arienda, an activist whose fiery tongue caused him to be imprisoned during the Marcos regime. To him, there was no God but while he was in prison, when he started to read the Gospel his heart melted. What does that mean? We should not take for granted the importance of our personal testimony but when it comes to the transformation of the life of man and society, we are not responsible for it. Only the resurrected Lord can do that.

Lastly, my friends, Jesus Christ said, "Go! Tell my disciples." What does that mean? There can be no future for our world according to the will of God without the preaching of the Gospel. This is the simple path of the Christian church today. It exists to declare the simple Gospel. We are convinced as Christians that the future of the world according to God's design depends upon how the Gospel is preached. The final question is this: Since Christ has resurrected from the dead, what do you do with the Good News? Will you keep it to yourself so that the Good News becomes your property alone or will you publicly declare it so that others might live? I hope that the latter is our alternative. Amen.

MISSIONARY COOPERATION: It's me

(Delivered during an Asian Christian Convention in Japan)

On behalf of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines, I extend to you, members of the National Council of Churches of Japan our deep gratitude for taking the initiative of holding this consultation. Our presence here is an expression of our oneness with you in your concern for the church and her mission especially at a time in our history when "giving an account of the hope that is in us" is very much needed.

The call for missionary cooperation is not new. There were many instances in the past when this call was sounded and responded to. For our generation, it is timely, if not overdue. There is mission today, but it is generally understood as mission of churches. The emphasis is not in one mission but in the separateness of the churches. This separateness is the scandal of Christianity. More than this, it develops contempt in its message which is foreign and different from the original mission of the church as the body of Jesus Christ. For our purpose, we understand missionary cooperation as an interdenominational endeavor of Christian churches to unite themselves for the purpose of implementing the Great Commission of their one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to the end that the claim of God for reconciliation of man unto Himself for man's salvation can be actualized. This call for unity of purpose is more than just an irenic call. It is a serious proposition because it is urgently needed, and it is challenging because of its great demand. Following this line of thought, we will seek to understand missionary cooperation from the Biblical and historical perspective; how it is being expressed in the context of

the Philippine situation; and finally, the need to explore new directions in implementing it in a wider context.

MISSION COOPERATION IN HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The world has changed and is changing, and so has the church. The plurality that exists in Christendom in terms of denominational and sectarian distinctions cannot be denied. The historic development of our Christian division is well known for we live by it and for it. In short, the scandal of our division is due to this: that in the name of God we divide the body of Jesus Christ. In clear anticipation of this, our Lord prayed, "Holy Father preserve in Your name those whom You have given me, so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11). While our division was anticipated, our unity was also demanded. Those who were called were called for a mission. The fulfillment of that mission was the basis of the demand for unity; for how can a house stand if it is divided in itself? The unity of the church is shown in the fact that she is the body of Christ. The body is one but it has many parts. Each part has a separate function. In terms of its structure and function it exhibits diversity. Its unity is found in the fact that it has one head. It is in the head where all the separated parts with their separate functions are united. It is from the head where each part functions not for its own good alone but for the good of the whole body. This analogy is an eloquent support of all ecumenical endeavors of Christian churches. Unity in diversity. We have to accept the reality of our diversity in doctrine, policy and practice. Our unity is not in these things as the unity of the body is not in its parts. Our unity is in Jesus Christ who is the Lord and Head of the church. It is in this that we can declare

"One Lord, one Faith, one Mission". What draws us together in unity is the love of God for all mankind which we have seen and experienced in Jesus Christ. It is this experience of God's love that enables us to love one another, even those "who are outside of the fold."

The essence of the Christian mission is the proclamation of the gospel. It was the priority of this concern over doctrine and practice that was preserved by the New Testament church. Acts 11 records the disunity of the apostles in terms of doctrine and practice. Should the Gospel be preached to the Gentiles? The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem did not think so and there was dispute among them, which was directed at Peter who ate with the Gentiles. The defense of Peter was based upon his vision where he was invited to eat any kind of creature that was shown to him, for nothing that God has created should be considered unclean. After the meaning of this vision was understood, that the Gospel was for all, the congregation in Jerusalem rejoiced and glorified God. When mission becomes the priority concern of the church, God's blessing is poured upon her and the community where it is found. This is the reason for the being of the church. The church without mission is impossibility. When the church has no mission she ceases to be a church. *Brunner was* right when he wrote, "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." What we discover in the history of the Christian church is that there are high and low tides in mission. In the high tides of mission we find churches uniting in all areas of mission endeavors such as educational, medical and social, all pursued with undisguised evangelistic motivation and enthusiasm. The low tides of mission are characterized by division, disunity and schism within the church. In Protestant Christianity, this started from the Reformation period in the 16th century until the 18th century.

Characteristic of this development was the establishment of denominational and sectarian distinctive in doctrine, policy and practice. Each church organization did not only develop separately but often times developed with indifferences and hostility towards other church organizations. It was in the second half of the 18th century when the tide of mission changed from low tide to high tide. This was started by a series of spiritual renewal which came from the Evangelical Revival, the *Wesleys*, *Whitefield*, *Finney*, *Moody* and *Drummond*. From this came two significant developments that began in the 19th century and went through the first half of the 20th century. One was the movement for Christian mission which produced missionaries like *William Carey*, *Alexander Duff*, *Adoniram Judson*, to name only a few. The other development was the movement for Christian unity.

Time will not allow us to describe the whole missionary movements during this period but suffice it to say that the beginning of the missionary movement for church unity was in 1795. In that year some members of the church of England, church of Scotland, English Independent and Methodist bodies joined forces, not as official representatives of their respective churches, to form the London Missionary Society. In the following year, Presbyterians, Baptists and Reformed churches joined to form the New York Missionary Society for work among the Indians. Following this was the organization of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Bible Society. All these were concrete manifestations of Christian missionary cooperation. It is interesting to note that in the *Chronology of Christian unity from 1795-1960* compiled by William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library in New York, there were 546 events of major importance in the advance of Christian cooperation and church union. Of these, 351, almost 2/3, took

place in connection with Christian mission and the younger churches. In terms of Christian unity, out of 360 incidents nearly 5/6 occurred in the mission field. We cannot fail to conclude that missionary work in the mission fields brings with it awareness in the participants that Christian unity is not only convenient but also necessary. If it must be effective for the glory of God, it must be united. If not, failure was the only alternative result.

MISSION COOPERATION IN PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

In political terms, the Philippines is categorized as a developing country. This suggests that it is not yet fully developed. It is a country that is seeking to actualize her potential. It has a great potential for development in its social, economic and political life for it is endowed by God with rich natural resources in all its 7100 islands and with 50 million people gifted with good disposition, creativeness and resourcefulness. All these could suggest that its process of development would be easy and its future would be bright and promising. The contrary, however, is true. The reason for this can be found in its history. The Philippines has a colonial history that spans the length and breadth of nearly five centuries. The Philippines became part of the civilized world in 1521 when the country was discovered by a Spanish explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, who claimed it for Spain and Christianity. From 1521 to the present, the history of the Philippines has been a history of colonialism. Even though it declared its independence in 1898 and was granted the same by the United States of America in 1946, foreign control of its political and economic life has continued even to the present. Three foreign countries planted their flags on Philippine soil at three different periods in its history. Spain occupied it for 377 years from 1521

to 1898. It was ceded by Spain to the Americans in 1898 in the Treaty of Paris. The American rule continued until 1946. This was interrupted briefly in 1942 when the Japanese came and occupied it until 1945.

In this colonial history we can derive understanding of the being and mission of the church. The church has a distinctive nature as the Servant of the Lord but when she loses this distinctiveness, she becomes ineffective in her mission. Roman Catholic Christianity was introduced in the country when Spain began its rule. Throughout this Spanish colonial regime, the sword and the cross were one. The close relationship of the church with the Spanish government made her a participant in colonialism. Exploitation of natural resources of the country made both the church and government the beneficiaries. Both were responsible for the suppression of the rights of the natives for development through education. Private education was established but this was the option for the rich and privileged few. The separation of the people between the rich and the poor is still present today and this great scandal of our society began from this colonial period. Certainly, the Christianizing work of the church was pursued by the Spanish Missionaries. Through the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* (his region his religion) majority of the Filipinos became Christians. The kind of Christianity, which was established among the people, was nominal in nature. Today, 86% of the people are Roman Catholic. This entitles the country to be called the only Christian nation in the Orient. However, it is also one of the most corrupt and graft ridden countries in the world. Nominal Christianity does not create conviction of faith.

The Christian influence, which is expected from the Christian majority, does not have a very significant impact upon the religious, social and political life of the people. Former Senator *Jovito Salonga* once said, "the mission of the church today is to Christianize the Christians." When the church exists in partnership and dependence upon secular authority, she loses her being and her servant hood. We can see, in the context of the Philippine history that in the Christian church unity in diversity is not only possible but also necessary.

Christian plurality started in the Philippines with the introduction of Protestantism. Protestant mission was started with the coming of the Americans in 1898. Missionaries from the main Protestant denominations in the United States of America came not only with the Christian gospel but also with their denominational distinctive. Denominational and sectarian distinctive are products of history. They must be accepted and respected. Today, the total denominational and sectarian churches are undetermined. They are categorized as Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Independent. The Ecumenical and Evangelicals have each formed their separate national union. Both have a separate basis for unity. The Evangelicals are members of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches while the Ecumenical are members of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. Church union in both instances could come about only through the realization that unity is not through conformity in doctrine. Christian unity is oneness in Jesus Christ.

We shall use the NCCP as an illustration of this unity. Missionary cooperation began in the Philippines in 1901 when the main Protestant denominations (Presbyterians, United Brethren, Methodists and Baptists) joined together to form the Evangelical union. The Congregationalists and the Disciples

joined the Union later on. This Evangelical Union made a Comity agreement that identified the mission areas of each participating body, clearly to avoid competition in their mission work. In 1930, the Philippine Federation of Evangelical Churches was formed by almost the same church bodies with a few additions. The name of this organization was changed to the Philippine Federation of Christian Churches in the Philippines. The original members were seven church denominations (UCCP, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Philippine Independent Church, IEMELIF, and Unida de Cristo). Some of these member denominations were the result of the union of churches, such as the UCCP, IEMELIF, and the Unida de Cristo.

There are, today, 10 member churches/ denominations in the NCCP excluding some church organizations which are associate members. The NCCP is an ecumenical organization of churches/denominations that accepts Jesus Christ as God and Savior. They unite for the purpose of implementing the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in all its implications to human life. Through fellowship, they seek to learn from each other and foster understanding among each other. They meet for periodic consultation in seeking effective ways of reaching their common goals. The NCCP meets in a General Convention every two years. This is a Convention of the representatives of all member churches/denominations. Between conventions, the Executive council, made up of the heads of member churches/denominations, governs the policy implementation of the organization. Programs are developed and implemented by the different commissions and committees upon approval by the Executive Council. The Executive Council is headed by the chairman and assisted by two vice chairmen. The Executive Council has a Secretary and Treasurer who are paid personnel

of the organizations. All the officers of the council are elected by the General Convention. The mission programs of the NCCP include works among the tribal minorities, students, workers and farmers. It has involvement in medical, educational, industrial and political concerns. The latest concern, which is political involvement, is very challenging because of the present situation that demands it. In many instances within the recent past, the NCCP had involvements in protest movements wherein oppression of the people and suppression of their basic human rights were the issues.

We can see in the Philippine context that the mission of the church has a demand for holistic approach to human needs and that it is through mission cooperation where the limited resources of the churches can be combined for effective impact upon the situations. Furthermore, a church that exists in isolation has a limited response to situations of crisis. The Philippines has experienced many crises, most commonly the crisis of war. Never before has she experienced this which came as a result of the authoritarian regime. It was a form of dictatorship that, eventhough not foreign, allowed foreign control of the economic life of the country. It began in 1971 when Martial Law was declared. Through militarization, the democratic and republican form of government, which was based in the 1935 constitution, was changed to a one-man rule. The 1972 constitution did not provide a check and balance of power. The Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers of the government were centered on one man. The beginning of this regime showed good promise. Many of the people took it as a viable alternative to the growing restlessness which was present in the 1960's. Land Reform was implemented but its weakness is shown by the fact that the communist movement, which fought for land reform after the World War II, is still active today. The

developments have been cosmetic improvements because they have not at all changed the poor condition of the masses. Furthermore, foreign investors did not inject resources into the country. Instead, they siphoned resources out of the country. In the meantime, the national indebtedness of the country reached a staggering high of \$23B. It was not going down but only going up. In the name of national security, protests were suppressed and access to correct information about government programs was not available because of press censorship. Indeed, it was a time of confrontation and it was heightened by the Aquino assassination on August 21, 1983.

During such time of confrontation, where should the church be? The principle of the separation of the church and state invoked by both the church and the government reflected in the verse that says, "Render unto Cesar the things that are of Cesar and unto God the things that are God's" is interpreted as a nonintervention by the church. It should be understood, however, that even Cesar is under God. God is not only in the church; He is also in the government. This means that He does not only judge the church, He also judges governments. Both the state and the church are ordained by God, therefore, they are servants of God. It is through servanthood that they should actualize their vocation. When the state has forgotten its servanthood, it should be the duty of the church to exercise prophetic responsibility towards the state. This time of crisis is a time of confrontation. This is not only true in the Philippines, but also everywhere in the world. In history, crisis situations have pulled the churches together for cooperative endeavor. The crisis of our time should lead us to find new levels of cooperation in order to fulfill our servanthood under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

A VIEW ON MISSION COOPERATION

In the light of our present situation, which is characterized by crisis of all nature, mission cooperation among Christian Churches in national, regional, and international level is a necessity. There is now mission cooperation existing in all these levels. Yet, more should be sought for the purpose of united witness of our Christian faith. This is necessary because the Christian population, especially in Asia, is a minority population and their resources are limited. It is only when they unite for a common purpose that the full impact of their presence and work can have a significant effect. Mission cooperation is understood as a joint endeavor of Christians who unite to implement their servanthood under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and attain their common mission goals. This implies the following:

It must clearly understand the Theological base that will be the rallying point of cooperation. This can be stated in a Christ-centric faith declaration for general acceptance.

Mission cooperation must be holistic in its approach to human needs. While its entry point to human situation is religious, it must be concerned also with other aspects of life such as social, economic and political.

Mission cooperation must offer equal opportunity for participation among the members. This equality must not be in terms of economic resources alone. Resources for mission cooperation are varied. The lack of one in the body can mean the presence of another kind in the same body. This joint endeavor calls for the pulling together of all resources available in the participating group.

It must have an organic structure for effective implementation of its goals. This organic structure must be the servant body of

all the member organizations. Its work must be consultative and coordinative in nature. Our consultation right now can be the foreshadow of a consultative organization for mission cooperation in Asia, in general, and between Japan and the Philippines, in particular.

What can be envisioned is the organization of the Association of Missiologists in Asia. This will provide a forum for the meeting of church historians, theologians and missionaries who are commissioned by the national unions of Churches to study together and critically analyze mission situations in Asia. Today, Asia has a special importance in mission because of its vast population, varieties of culture and religion, and its need for economic development. The outcome of this consultation can guide different national unions how to effectively use resources in situations of need. Through this organization, assessment of the different religious, social, political and economic issues that are present in Asia, such as militarization and economic exploitation, can be done so that a united Christian response can be made. Surely, there are Theological and logistic problems that are involved, but they are not insurmountable.

CONCLUSION

Missionary cooperation as a joint endeavor for mission is an expression of unity among Christians. This unity is invented by man because it is God-given in Jesus Christ. When the servanthood of all Christians under the Lordship of Jesus Christ takes priority over diversity in doctrine, policy and practice, the implementation of the Great Commission is strengthened. In the light of the Philippine experience in mission, unity in diversity is not only possible but also necessary. This unity in Jesus Christ

enables the Christian churches, which are involved in mission cooperation, to respond effectively to situations of needs. Such an experience indicates the direction towards wider mission cooperation such as a regional one in Asia. It is in this area where God's call for unity is a challenge to the national church union of the region. Such mission cooperation, when attained, will enable us all to declare joyfully in our joint endeavor, "One Lord, one Faith, one Mission."

LONGING FOR EGYPT

Numbers 14:1-4

Brothers and sisters in Christ let us remember missed opportunities. This may characterize our life today. Many of us can readily admit that if we did not like our present life, it is because of missed opportunities that came our way but we did not utilize. Even if our life were good, there are times when we would think that it could have been better had we made use of the opportunities that came our way. I think we are all convinced that if we had used the opportunities that had come to us, our life today could have been better; not only our individual life, but also the life in our society.

Let us consider this truth not only in our life as Filipinos but also in the life of Israel. In our text this morning, we see the Israelites at the bank of the Promised Land but there was a longing for them to go back to Egypt. "Let us go back to Egypt. Let us choose another leader." They were already near the Promised Land because God had done great things for them to fulfill His promise to their father Abraham. The Promised Land was given to them and in many occasions God had revealed to them the reality of this promise by showing them all the saving acts in their history. God liberated them from their Egyptian bondage. They should have remembered that at one time when they were about to perish because the Egyptians were ready to kill them as they fled from Egypt, God parted the Red Sea for them. That was a miracle! They should not have forgotten that. They should have not forgotten also that when they were thirsting and hungering in the wilderness God provided them the manna and the quail. When they got lost God provided them a pillar of cloud to guide them. When they were about to

enter the Promised Land Moses sent his spies to survey the place. Out of the 12 spies who went, 10 of them reported that, certainly this land was flowing with milk and honey but they were apprehensive to possess this land promised to them by God because it was inhabited by strong tribes of people like the *Hittites* and the *Amorites*, and the *Amalekites* who were the sons of *Annak*. These were giants and they were like grasshoppers. They said, "It is impossible to take these people." They spread the news and the people became scared. "Why did you bring us to this land? Get us back to Egypt."

The longing for Egypt showed a sad part in the history of the Israelites. They had forgotten the promise of God, that instead of possessing the Promised Land, they wanted to go back to Egypt. There are many reasons for this longing to go back to Egypt especially on the part of Israel. The first reason is fear. "Oh there are giants there and we look like grasshoppers to them. We will indeed perish and our children will become slaves. Let us go back to Egypt while we can." This fear to pursue the promise can be present in all of us when we face something new. Anything that is new is attractive; it is good but it may carry the burden of letting go that which we hold dear in the past, and then being propelled into strange new situations that we may have no control of. As a result, there is the longing to go back. The same longing is expressed also in our songs sung in our churches? *'Give me that old time religion; give me that old time religion. It was good enough for Moses, it was good enough for Abraham, it was good enough for our forefathers, it's good enough for me'* Truly, old time religion gives us a sense of security because we are treading in areas that are familiar to us. Religion, as a matter of fact, is mysterious and does not exhaust itself in only one instance. It continues to challenge us so that we may make use of new things in our religious life and be

ready to forsake the old and grab hold of that which unfolds before us. In our society, including the Ilonggo society, we hear of people from one religious group say, "*Kay amoiningakonnatawhan, amo man iniangakonpanginmatyan*" (Because I was born into this, then I will also die in this.), even if that religion was no longer relevant to them. Religious irrelevance draws a feeling of meaninglessness. As a result, we depend upon that which is traditional. Keeping the tradition gives us a false sense of security even though the religion or faith that we have unfolds itself before us almost everyday and challenges us to accept the new things that come. Fear of something new causes us to miss our opportunities.

The second reason for the Israelites' longing to go back to Egypt was simply because they have forgotten how tragic it was for them to be in slavery. Slavery is something to be rejected or to be despised, and yet how we forget easily. We have been enslaved by too many things in the past and we have forgotten our situation or condition during that time. We have become so neglectful and careless that we have been tempted to go back to our previous enslavement. Is this not true of the EDSA Revolution in our country? We remember how exciting it was then because it offered new opportunities for our country. When the EDSA Revolution was taking place I prayed, "Let it be dear Lord that our children will never forget the significance of this moment." Slavery, however, comes back to us because we would rather be secured in our slavery than enjoy the freedom of responsibility. This is the sickness of mankind, of everybody. We affirm our slavery by saying, "Yes we are slaves!" The Israelites, too, would rather go back to Egypt where, at least, there would always be three meals a day. They could always count on meat in their meals and despite the hardship, as long as they could eat, it would be okay. Likewise, we also forget

that when God calls us into the Promised Land He gives us something better if we turned our back on the full security offered by our slavery and take hold the responsibility that our freedom requires. Freedom is precious! It is, however, not easy to live with because there are always responsibilities that go with it. Thus, my friends, there is always a longing to go back to the old way of living.

The third reason is simply because there is no commitment on our part to pay the price of what we want to have. For example, there is a longing in us to have good families. The price of having a good family is a life of Christian discipline where we have to adhere to the fruit of the Spirit: love, patience, kindness, long suffering, and unselfishness. When it comes to moral things like these we take it for granted because we prefer a life of ease. Then when we look at the members of our respective families, and realize that our children have grown up without any sense of values, we ask, "What has happened?" We have missed the opportunity that was offered to us to pay the price of commitment for change. It is not easy to be good parents but if you love your children you cannot help but be good parents. Good parents should be models of good values, such as the fruit of the Spirit, to your children. We all want to have a good community but we do not want to pay the price for it.

Last Friday we had a march for a 'Clean and Green Iloilo'. That was a very noble cause. The Officer-in-charge of CPU, Atty. Juanito Acanto, in spite of his awkward walk, was there marching ahead of the contingent of Central Philippine University. I told my students in the College of Theology, "Let's join this march because if we do not support this today we will not have any authority at all to preach the importance of the balance and preservation of the integrity of creation." We were

there along with many people. Deep down in my heart I was praying, "Lord, let this good initiative carry on! Let it not be superficial, or a *palabas* only. Let it not be something that will die eventually." Even while I was praying I had a certain kind of fear and uncertainty that something like this will be wasted again, especially when we heard one government official said that what we need is the cooperation of our people. Mentally I was responding. Our people are ready to cooperate with something that is good! What is important is the strict implementation of the law that governs us. Without that strict implementation of the law on cleanliness and the preservation of our environment it will be very difficult to depend upon the self-discipline of our people. We would like to have a clean and green community but, are we willing to pay the price for it? Usually the price is integrity.

In any kind of profession today, many are selling out merely for the sake of security. Let's take a look at our OCW. Many of them are very noble and we thank God for their endeavor to provide security for their respective family. I know, however, that some of them are selling out their virtues and honor so they can have more money. You remember the story of one actress whose life story was published in our newspaper the other day? She wanted to have popularity and fame, and according to her she was sexually exploited by her director and producers. Why is it easy for many of us to surrender to things like these today? Take a look at our judges and fiscals. Is it not true that just and righteous decisions are sometimes forgotten and neglected in consideration of certain material gifts? I'm not only talking about politicians but about judges. Even the Bible talks about prophets who refuse to declare the judgment of God upon the community of Israel merely because they wanted to please the rulers of the day. Name any kind of profession and

there is always the neglect of discipline and the need for integrity. Is this not, by the way, one way of 'longing to go back to Egypt'?

Fourthly, there is that 'longing to go back to Egypt' because we fail to realize that God is no longer in Egypt! God is already in the Promised Land waiting for us. When God showed Himself in the incarnation of Jesus Christ He manifested His will to be a part of His creation. He is present in His creation working His way through it in order to bring old things to become new. In other words, to 'long for Egypt' means to continue living according to the old ways and to forget the challenge of living according to the new way. Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world" and the Bible reminds us that "if we walk in the light as He is in the light then we have fellowship with one another". That is one requirement, my friends, which we cannot neglect. To walk in the light means to follow God who leads us into the Promised Land. For us, 'longing to go back to Egypt' means to live a life without God. God is no longer in Egypt. God is already present in the Promised Land. There is only one way for us and that is to go forward to reach the Promised Land because God is present there. Let us not long for Egypt anymore. As long as God is with us, and God gives us the strength and courage, let us pursue the Promised Land. Amen.

THE SECRET TO VICTORIOUS LIVING

Romans 7: 21-25

Everyone wants war to end. Those of us who have experienced the tragedy of the Second World War do not want to experience such tragedy again. For parents who have gone through that experience, this prayer is not unfamiliar at all, 'God spare our children and our children's children from this tragedy of war.' This is the prayer of people who are experiencing war right now in other parts of the world. We see the war-torn bodies of people in Bosnia and see questions written on their faces, 'Why are these things happening to us?' Strangely, no one wants war but we cannot help ourselves from being drawn into war. We cannot understand the reason for this but, our text tells us the key to understanding why such things happen.

Paul is saying in our text that what happens outside depends on what happens inside. To put it simply, there is war outside because there is war within each one of us. Many of us can affirm this because we have experienced what Paul experienced even though we cannot explain it. He describes a civil war within himself; "I am torn between two forces. That which I want to do, I do not do but that which I do not want to do, I do." Who can explain this? He proceeds by saying, "Oh wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of death?" This feeling of Paul is very familiar to many of us in the sense that it is true in many occasions. There are things that we would like to avoid and yet we cannot at all understand why we keep on doing them. This is not a new phenomenon. Seneca was once quoted, "We have the sense of helplessness when it comes to things that are necessary in life." In other words, when it comes to the very important things in life we have the sense of

powerlessness. Remember also the Roman poet Ovid who said, "I see the better things in life and I approve all of them and yet I follow the worst." What is the explanation for this?

The Jews were also familiar with and had an explanation for this. The Jews would use two words, *yetserhatub*, and *yetserhara*. This refers to our two natures, the lower nature and the higher nature that are warring against each other. The Jews also believed that with knowledge and understanding we could overcome the conflict. This is the reason why it was important for them to devote time in the study of the law because it is the Word of God. The more they were preoccupied with the study of the law the more power they had to be free from the lower nature. The Jews further believed that this conflict could be overcome through means within their power; obedience to the law. They could have the sense of righteousness through the rituals they performed, *e.g.* giving alms to the beggars or the poor, doing justice, offering sacrifices in the temple. Put all these things together and you would be free from your lower nature.

This is where Paul disagrees. He goes further than this. Paul says, "Nothing that we can do can be called righteousness, in terms of our condition before God." Paul is saying that sin is not ethical, but spiritual. Man is not a sinner because he does sinful things. Rather, he does sinful things because he is a sinner. There is something within us that is foreign to our nature and influences even our way of doing things. It corrupts our human nature so that the things that we want to do we cannot do but the things that we should not do, we do. This is the conflict that Paul is referring to and it is centered on what he means by sin. Many of us have a very obscure understanding of sin. To clarify the meaning of sin, Paul simply states that it is nothing but self-centeredness. When put this way, we can understand why there is a conflict within us. Sin is rebellion

against God. It is departing away from God. When we depart from God we focus our attention only on ourselves. What is wrong with this? Are we not all self-centered? A person who does not have self-centeredness is not a human being at all. What is wrong with self-centeredness is that it draws a narrow and small picture of our self. This picture is centered on the flesh and its cravings so that we measure the totality of our life on the basis of what can satisfy us. For example, we measure the wholeness of our life in terms of the number of years that we live in the flesh. We measure success in terms of what we can put on to cover our flesh. We measure pleasure in terms of the passion that we can satisfy; the passion and lust of the flesh. Paul is saying that self-centeredness is wrong because it narrows down our perspective of our self. There is more to self than just the flesh, or the body. That is why Paul says that when you live according to the flesh, you will discover that in the end you have attained nothing.

All of us are familiar with Alexander the Great. He was only twenty-three years old when he conquered the 'whole world'. Interestingly, it was said that when he had conquered the world, Alexander the Great cried simply because there was no more to conquer. The sense of greatness was replaced by a sense of meaninglessness and nothingness. This feeling of nothingness comes when one discovers that what he considers to be the most important in life is nothing at all in the long run. Alexander thought that conquering kingdoms would be the most that he could do in life, but only to discover later that there was no more kingdom to conquer. There was nothing else for him to do and when he summed up all his achievements, there was nothing in it. This is why self-centeredness, in this sense, is wrong because it gives us a wrong perspective of life. Life is more than eighty years of living; more than what we can give to

our body for cover and satisfaction. Life is more than that. When Jesus Christ encountered people during His earthly ministry He challenged them, "Come follow me." In effect Jesus was saying, "Don't stay where you are. There is a world for you to possess, a reality greater than you can ever perceive. Follow me and you will have this world." This was the challenge of Jesus Christ. How can we ever attain this world? The answer is to have an alternative to self-centeredness and if you follow carefully the Bible, the alternative to self-centeredness is God-centeredness. God-centeredness means to focus our life on the concerns of the Spirit. This is important because the concern of the Spirit is inclusive. It includes our concern for the body but more than this, our spiritual concern that draws us to the true perspective of the reality of life. Life's reality includes the neighbor, not only you; not only the earth, but also the heaven. Life's reality means to behold your self always in the presence of God. No perspective of life's reality, therefore, can ever come when our life is focused only on the self. When our life is focused on God then everything becomes broad and exciting.

You remember the time when Jesus Christ was confronted by the question, "What is the greatest thing in life?" The answer of Jesus Christ is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6. He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy being and thou shalt love thy neighbor as you love yourself." The wholeness of life includes God, the neighbor and oneself. When you interpret life in terms of yourself alone, excluding the neighbor and God, then you miss a very important part of the meaning of life.

So here we have the conflict between self-centeredness and God-centeredness and when you consider the distance between the two, it is just immense. There is no way of bridging it, according to Nicodemus. It was Nicodemus who went to see

Jesus Christ at night and asked, "Tell me, you are the Master, you are the Rabbi; how can we bridge this gap between self-centeredness and God-centeredness?" Jesus Christ said, "Nicodemus, you are the master of the law, how come you do not understand this?" Nicodemus said, "Frankly, I do not understand this." Jesus Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This took Nicodemus by surprise and he asked, "How can an old man like me be born again?" Nicodemus was still thinking in the old way. There is no bridge to connect self-centeredness and God-centeredness. Jesus Christ said to Nicodemus that there is a way and the way is for one to be born again in the Spirit. It is by being born in the Spirit that the gap between self-centeredness and God-centeredness is bridged.

Let us proceed in our analysis of this and understand what this means. How can we bridge the immense gap between self-centeredness and God-centeredness? Jesus Christ said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Paul in Romans 7 admits at first, "Oh wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of death?" and then ends up with this triumphant discovery, "Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Have you ever wondered why, traditionally, the Christian church would define Jesus Christ's personhood as very God and very man? It is not that He is made of two substances. We describe Jesus Christ as very God and very man because in His one person the bridge between the flesh and the spirit has been established. A connection has been made between man and God. It is only in Jesus Christ in which humanity can be truly experienced and it is only in Him that we can truly be proud of our humanity. It is only in Jesus Christ that flesh can be understood not as something bad, but something that it is good. Without Jesus

Christ, the flesh is the center and focus of our defeat. When we look at life from the perspective of Jesus Christ, we see the relationship between heaven and earth; God and man; and spirit and the flesh. The moment we realize this connection, we attain a certain measure of assurance in the way we live.

The lesson that we can learn here is, that outer transformation or the transformation of our world depends upon inner transformation. There is no transformation of the world without the transformation in each one of us. I agree with Dr. Schumacher when he said, "No nation can be better than the men and women who make it. No national policy can rise above the standard of every individual person in a given nation." As individuals in our respective societies, the greatest contribution that we can give to our nation is our faith and integrity. This reminds, us, parents that when it comes to our children, the great task of parenthood is still laid on the doorstep of character building. If you invest your lifetime service to your children in building up their bodies but not their spirit and character, you will find out that they will not go very far. When we invest our time in building up character and in instilling faith in God in our children, we will find out that our young children will become the pillars of our nation. The secret of victorious living is in Christ and the wonderful thing about it is that the secret has been revealed and given to us. In Christ we have the victory; in Christ we can go through life's circumstances and still be confident, because in Christ there is our hope. Amen.

JOYOUS LIVING

Luke 6:43-45

It has been observed, and I am confident that all of us can agree, that when we relate to each other, most of the time, we wear a mask. We do not relate to each other with our true or authentic self but, rather we present ourselves to other people with masks. There are various kinds of masks. There is a 'professional mask' and we can see this among our politicians. They present themselves professionally in order for them to be elected. That is the mask. It is important for us to go deeper behind the mask in order to find out whether these people can really serve our people. Pastors and priests are also wearing professional masks. There are times when pastors are forced to smile because they are ministers of God and they are not expected to get angry. Some pastors complained to me one time during our Pastors' conference, saying, "Why is it that we are not allowed to get angry?" I said, "Who said so?" "Our people expect that." People expect pastors to always be joyful, smiling, and free from anger and hostility. That is not true. Pastors and priests do get angry, and when you see us smile, most of the time, that smile is part of a mask. That is a professional mask. There are other people who wear 'social masks'. We see this when we attend a convention or a party. We can be very friendly but the moment we step out of the party place we become total strangers again to each other. The mask is there in order to cover something.

We wear a mask because we want to cover our true self. We do not consider our true self good at all. It has an ugly or unpleasant side that can be destructive to other people. Jesus Christ recognized this. He saw the Pharisees and He said, "You

hypocrites!" The word 'hypocrite' comes from the word 'mask'. In olden times when people would stage a drama they would put on a mask. These people were called 'hypocrites' because they were playing the character represented by the mask and not their true selves. "You hypocrites!", Jesus Christ said to the Pharisees. "You do not do what you say or preach." Masks. How terrible it is for us to wear masks. There are times however, when we take off our masks. There are occasions when we present our true self to other people. For example, when we play a game or in any sport, in the heat of the competition our true self comes out, and cursing, hostile, ugly words also come pouring out from our lips. We show our true self to people whom we trust and are very close to us. In our respective home, there are things that we do there that we do not dare do outside of our family circle. It is where we shed off our mask and bare ourselves as we are. Sometimes, though, some members of our respective families are disturbed or bothered by it. Similarly, we show our true self also when we are with friends whom we trust. With them, we can speak words that are ugly, hurting, and destructive to other people. We wear masks because we cannot tolerate ourselves all the time.

There are other people who would resort to cosmetics. They wear make-up; they put on lipstick to make themselves presentable to other people. Cosmetics can make you look better than usual. I appreciate people who can wear makeup appropriately. There are times, however, that despite our makeup, our true self would show and we become ugly. Words come out of our mouths that we do not at all anticipate. Sigmund Freud was one of the first to recognize this. Have you ever experienced in your life saying something that you did not mean? Ah, that comes from within us. Psychologists are

discovering the importance of knowing ourselves. We have lived so long with our mask that many of us have forgotten our true self. The advice is, "To thine own selves be true". If you wore a mask that means you are not living according to your true nature. It is a very difficult situation when you try to put on a face and you cannot be spontaneous and natural. You always feel inhibited; you always feel that people are watching you and so you put on a pleasant façade even though inside you are different. Oh, how it curtails our true nature and how inhibited we become! The more inhibited we become the more we are deprived of joyous living.

What does it mean to be joyful in our life? To be joyful in life means to be true to our self. To Jesus Christ, joyous living means, being true to yourself. How can we live joyfully according to Jesus Christ? In our text Jesus Christ has a prescription for joyous living, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." In other words, my friends, for you to speak freely and to be true to yourself, see to it that you have a good heart. The first question, therefore, that we would like to answer is how is your heart? I am not suggesting that immediately after the worship service you go to your cardiologist and consult with him concerning your heart condition, even though that is also very important. Many of us have not seen our doctors for many years. I think it's about time we consult our doctor just to find out how good or how bad our heart is. In the Old and New Testament, the term *heart* does not mean the organic heart. The Hebrew people saw the heart as the center or the core of life. They believed that the totality of our life comes from the core, from the center. If the center, therefore, was evil then that which would come out from it would be evil, but if the center was good, then good would also come out of it. Jesus Christ said, "It is impossible for a bad tree to bear good

fruits and it is impossible for good fruits to come from a bad tree." His conclusion is simply, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The secret to joyous living is to have a good heart.

Jesus Christ prescribes three things for us to have a good heart. The first is for you to have a changed heart. Medically, we talk about heart transplant today. Spiritually, there is also a heart transplant. The kind of heart that we have, the core and nature of our life is fallen. Because it is fallen nature the core of our life radiates only our sinfulness. This is reflected even in our churches today when you hear people maligning others, brothers talking against brothers, and sisters against sisters. Gossip has become an important preoccupation for many people, not only outside the church but even within. It seems important for us to indulge in hurting people, in talking about them or in backbiting them. Well, if you ask Jesus Christ why are these things happening even in our churches he would say it is because your heart has not been changed. Have a changed heart, or change the nature of yourself. If we live without Christ and according to our fallen nature, then our life would be characterized by sinfulness. The first thing that we need to have a joyous life is for us to have a changed heart.

A story is told of a princess who had a unique way of entertaining herself. She had pet pig. I don't know why of all the animals in the world this princess picked a pig. As the princess of the kingdom she had the resources to care very well for the pig. She would bathe the pig with fragrant perfume every morning. When she walked around the kingdom the pig, all sashed up with ribbons and smelled with the richest perfume that the kingdom could afford, would trail behind her. One day the princess was very disappointed because while they were walking in the garden, the pig saw a puddle of muddy water.

Immediately the pig, without thinking, jumped into the mud and got herself dirty. The princess was very discouraged and cried. A fairy appeared to her and asked, "Why are you crying?" The princess said, "I've been cleaning and beautifying my pig but now, she is dirty because she jumped into this puddle of mud." The fairy said, "I can help you." The fairy got her magic wand, touched the pig, and changed her heart to the heart of a goat. The next time the princess and the pig wandered in the garden and the pig saw the mud, she did not jump into it again. This was because the pig had a changed heart. The same is true with us, my friends. We can never expect good things out of a bad tree. In order for that tree to bear good fruit that tree must be changed. A changed heart is a secret of joyous living.

The second secret to joyous living is a cleansed heart. Not only must we have a changed heart but a cleansed heart as well. This refers to one important doctrine in our Christian faith, the Doctrine of Sanctification. This doctrine prescribes that the Christian life is a day to day preoccupation. It is a daily relationship with the Holy Spirit, and a daily cleansing when we cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit that cleanses us. It is true confession that can clean our hearts - sincerely confessing our sins before the Lord, knowing that He will readily forgive us through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The third solution to having a joyous living is not only to have a changed and cleansed heart, but also to have a strengthened heart; a strong heart. This refers to the heart that can stand up against temptation. Friends, let us be reminded that temptation is not the sin, but we need a lot of strength not to succumb to temptation. How do we strengthen ourselves? I recommend several things in order to do this:

1) I recommend that we strengthen ourselves by always being in the Christian fellowship where we get encouragement from each other. In the Christian fellowship, we care for each other; we care for the Christian nurture of each other.

2) I recommend worship. It is important for us to seek the presence of God together. We can seek the presence of God when we are alone but it is different when we seek the presence of God together. When we worship together, sing and hear the proclamation of the Word, and get out together with one united resolve to serve our Lord, that my friends, is an occasion of strengthening our hearts.

3) Through Christian witness. It is only when we take risks by going out and witnessing for Christ that we can discover how weak or how strong we are. It is interesting to know that a well-known cardiologist would recommend running as a solution to a weak heart. If you have a weak heart, a good way of strengthening it is by exercise. Walk around, run around, and exercise daily. The same is true when it comes to our Christian living. The way to exercise our Christian faith is to witness. How many of us have deprived ourselves of that opportunity? The moment you can witness for Christ there is the first pound of strength that is added unto your heart.

In conclusion, our heart is ours to own but having a changed heart is a gift from God. Remember the picture of Jesus Christ knocking at the door which symbolizes his knocking at the heart of each one of us. Look closely at that picture and you will discover that the key to that door is not in the outside but in the inside. This signifies that Jesus Christ can only knock at our door but the responsibility to open it belongs to each one of us. When asked, "How is your heart?" the answer, most often, is

that the heart is not good right now. Because the heart is not good I plead with you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that when you hear Him knocking right now, open it from the inside. Amen

FALLING ROCKS!

Ephesians 5:15-16

My family and I spent about two weeks of vacation in Manila and in Baguio. While we were driving up to Baguio I saw a road sign, 'Caution: falling rocks ahead'. It drew my attention to the real world because at that time, when we were going up to Baguio, I was just lost in the wonder and beauty of the place. I had almost forgotten how beautiful it is for us to stand on a mountain top, to feel the cool breeze of the mountain, to feel the difference that the solitude of nature can provide, to look around and see green trees that seem to be green forever, and to look at the never-ending horizon. The sign caught my attention. It reminds me that life is not all beauty and fantasy. We meet different situations in life and the sign drew me back to the real world and made me aware that accidents can happen; falling rocks can crush, debilitate and cripple you.

Let us draw lessons from these falling rocks because in life, there are also falling rocks. They may be events that happen to us unexpectedly and can harm or terminate us, like accidents. Just this week I was informed that the son of one of our pastors in Bacolod had an accident in the United States. They were just starting to establish their life and experience the American dream when suddenly this accident happened. The wife right now is in coma, the husband is half paralyzed, and it seems that all their dreams, in just a few seconds, started to crumble around them. This is what I call 'falling rocks'. Things like these can happen. Another example of a 'falling rock' is experienced by somebody who is going through some changes in his voice. He went to his doctor for a simple examination and the doctor looked at him seriously and said, "I would like you to have

some more tests done because I suspect that there is something there that must thoroughly examined ."After the examination results were out, the doctor looked at his patient and said, "I'm sorry to tell you but you have cancer."

This is another falling rock, isn't it? We are not only referring to big boulders that come to us like the examples I have mentioned, but to small rocks also that come to us, in dribbles or bunches. Troubles come like that. They seem to be like small rocks but their consequences are terrible. I can think of one person right now who, at one time, was foolish not to prepare for a very important examination in the university. As a result he failed a major examination and in his course. He was not able to get a degree, thus, when he applied for a job he was turned down. This may be called 'falling rocks' that are small and come in dribbles but are also very debilitating. Let us also consider the 'falling rocks' that we experience in the spiritual and moral aspects of our life. Sometimes unexpected hurting words can come from a friend or loved one and we suffer because of this. As a result, even our moods are affected and our relationship with other people as well. This can also be 'falling rocks'.

What do we do with these falling rocks? Paul has one advice for us. He said, "Walk circumspectly" or walk carefully. We speak of life as a journey wherein we find ourselves always moving from one point to another. Paul says when you do that, be aware; don't just move as if you were blind; don't just move as if everything were okay. Consider the possibility of falling rocks ahead of you. My experience in Baguio proved this is true. When I saw that sign I looked up and saw protruding rocks on the top of the mountain and I could just imagine that a little movement of the earth could loosen the foundation of these rocks and boulders and cause them to fall. You can be crushed

to death if these boulders fell on you. Life, my friends, is filled with falling rocks that can come to us disastrously. Thus, Paul says, "Walk circumspectly", or walk carefully.

I would like to raise three aspects of walking carefully. First, Paul mentions that when you walk carefully, walk wisely not foolishly. What does this mean? Foolishness, my friends, is not the result of not knowing things; it is not the result of the absence of knowledge. That is not foolishness. That is ignorance. Foolishness means knowing what is right and not doing it at all. It is one thing to know, it is another thing to do. Many tragic things in our society and in our government are caused by people who know what is right but refuse to do it. That seems to be the problem of many of us. Our problem is not lack of knowledge because we know many things. There is an explosion of knowledge around us today. Our problem, rather, is not doing what we know is right. What seems to be the reason for this? I can think of several reasons but right now let's concentrate on a few of these. One is that many of us would just like to test the limit. An example of this is our problem of AIDS today. AIDS is a plague that costs us thousands of lives all over the world and its number one cause is undisciplined sexual life. Despite this knowledge AIDS is still widespread. It only shows that even when we know something, yet we do not do it. Even when we know that undisciplined sexual life can lead to this disease, we still persist in doing it. It is the same with many of us who know that smoking is dangerous to our health but still continues with the habit. I remember a friend who went to his doctor and was informed that he had lung cancer as a result of smoking. He said, "I never knew that this could happen to me. I knew that smoking can cause cancer but I never expected that this would happen to me." We always like to test the limit. It is

foolish but that is part of our human nature. Paul says the reason for this is sin.

Sin is a force within us that corrupts our human nature, way of thinking and the use of the will. Paul says, "I know what to do and yet I do not do what I need to do, but what I do not need to do, I do. There is a civil war within me." That is sin and that is part of our human nature. This is the reason why we have falling rocks on us. Paul says then that we must walk circumspectly; do not be foolish; walk wisely. It is important for us to remember that to be strengthened in our will to do what is right we must begin while we are still young. Let us be grateful to God for our conscience. Somebody said, "Conscience is the property of everybody but the content of our conscience depends upon our training." Conscience is like internalized laws that are established by family nurture, especially the Christian nurture in our respective home. We must begin there. Moreover, it is important to be always sensitive to the call of our conscience so we can have a chance against falling rocks in our lives. When we have become so insensitive even to the call of our conscience we become victims of falling rocks in our lives.

The second reason why we are prone to 'falling rocks' is because we do not include God's will in our lives. In 'walking circumspectly' Paul suggests that we should prioritize God's will in our lives. Jesus Christ had the same thing in his mind when he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." When we seek the will of God daily we can avoid falling rocks when making choices in life. Putting God's will first preserves us. The psalmist reminds us, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." When we train ourselves to become sensitive and obedient to the will of God, we can be preserved from falling rocks in our lives.

Lastly, my friends, I recommend the importance of deepening our Christian faith. It is important to be reminded that faith makes a difference. When you visit sick people in the hospital you can see the difference that faith makes in the lives of those who have it. I know of patients who are in life threatening situations but they can still smile because they have faith. I know some people who have experienced crushing events in their lives yet they can still sing because of faith. Many of us can testify to that. Faith in God is important because we become aware that in the changing circumstances of life there is something steady and unchanging. God is steady as He relates to us. We can depend on His love, forgiveness, strength and sustenance; we can depend upon this God who is always present and near us. We can be unmoved because of our faith even when we are in the darkest place and situation in our lives.

Let me end with this story of an old woman who, for the first time in her life, took a flight to visit her children in another city. During the flight an unexpected storm occurred threatening the plane with a possible crash. While everyone was panicking, fearing for his or her life, the old woman seemed calm in the midst of chaos. When the plane finally landed she was asked why she remained composed during the fearful flight. She said that initially she was also afraid but when she looked out of the window of the plane, she saw a light beyond the dark cloud. As she focused her attention to that light she was no longer aware of the storm. That is the meaning of our faith in God. Things can be changing; there are circumstances that are unsettling but with God in our life, a streak of light maintains and steadies us in the midst of changing situations. Thus, walk circumspectly. In spite of the falling rocks that we may encounter in our lives, we can still move forward, carefully until we reach our goal. The goal that we see ahead of us is the

fulfillment of God's will in our lives. "See then, that you walk circumspectly not as fools but as wise redeeming the time because the days are evil." Amen.

JUST AS YOU ARE

Luke 19: 1-10

(Cosmopolitan Evangelical Church, July 27, 1997)

There is one common impression about God that we share with almost all people regardless of our creed, race and culture. Simply put, this impression is this-if you are good, God will bless you. This is supported by the notion that God is on the side of those who are good because God is good. Is this not the reason why religion of whatever kind it is, devises standards and rules of goodness to guide people in order for them to be worthy of God's blessings? Such rules of goodness prescribe the right way and the good way of worshipping God, of pleasing God through observances of special days, and, of even how and what to eat and drink. If one should ask, "why should I do all these prescribed practices?" the answer is-- this is the way to be good in order to be blessed by God.

The Pharisees and other religious and political leaders in Jesus' time had this impression. To be good you have to be with good people. When they saw Jesus Christ eating with sinners, they were shocked and they accused him. "You say you are good. But why are you with these no good people?" The answer of Jesus to this question brought a new understanding in people about God. "The Son of man came to seek and to save those who are lost." (Lk.19:10)

The story of Zaccheus is an illustration of what Jesus said. Here is a man who, based upon the standard of goodness of that day, can never be considered worthy of God's blessing.

He was a Jew and yet he collected taxes for the Romans. The word for this is collaborator. A collaborator is the one who betrays his people to the enemy. He was a man who became

very wealthy by cheating the poor. Here was a man who in spite of the fact that he committed wrong against his people, could not be persecuted because he was very influential. This is what we call today injustice in human government. The poor are accused and prosecuted and because they do not have the money to spend for their defense, they are convicted, sent to prison and even sometimes sentenced to death. The rich? Well, they go free not because they are innocent but they have the money to pay for their defense. Sometimes, even when some of them have already been convicted, they can still run for public office, and get elected. Zaccheus was like this. He is the symbol of what is not right and good, of something that is crooked and despicable in our human society.

In spite of all these, many people in our days especially would not mind being in the place of Zaccheus. He was wealthy. Is this not the supreme good of many people? They do not care about morality, about cultural values, about tradition, about religion--just as long as that they are wealthy? How about political power? Is this not of great value? It is, to many people. Attaining political power and position, even when they are supported by the money of gambling lords or of drug cartels, this does not matter. What matter is power.

But imagine Zaccheus inside his mansion, well-guarded by hundreds of Roman security guards, surrounded by all the conveniences of the time--what kind of person was he? Don't discount the possibility that he was lonely, that something was missing in his life. That something is what St. Augustine meant when he said, "Deep down in the heart of each of us there is a vacuum that only God can fill." The Psalmist said also something like this, "As the heart panteth after the water brook so panteth my soul after Thee O God" (Ps.42:1). This is a need that people usually keep to themselves because they think that

they can satisfy it with anything that gives them pleasure and excitement. "Maybe they are just tired and bored. Go on a vacation. See the world. Do something new" are just some of the advises that are given to satisfy me a feeling like this. But the need persists and in desperation one cries, "What is wrong with me. I've tried everything that money can buy. Why do I still feel desolate and wretched?"

Such was the feeling of Zaccheus so that, when one day, he heard that Jesus was coming, he ran ahead of the crowd, many of whom had good reason to break his bones or even to kill him because Zaccheus collected taxes from them beyond what was legally required. He took the risk and the man ahead of the crowd because he heard that Jesus healed the sick, restored the sight of the blind, and gave life to those who are dead. He must have said, "If all these are true, this Jesus has something that I do not have." Because Zaccheus was short of stature, he climbed up a sycamore tree and sat on its spreading branches, above the crowd, to see Jesus who was passing by. He must have been surprised when he saw Jesus stopped by and looked up to him and said, "Zaccheus come down from the sycamore tree. He invited Jesus into his house and became a new man.

In this story of Zaccheus we discover one important characteristic of Jesus. His concern is for all people and yet he deals with each of us personally. Dealing with the crowd would have achieved his task quickly and easily. In healing the sick, for example, he could have just raised his hand and say, "all of you who are sick, be healed." And all who are sick in one side would be healed. He could have gone from one crowd to the other doing this and heal those who needed healing. Many would have benefited from this just as well. But to Jesus the sick has a face. He has a name. He is one among many but he is

distinct and unique. To Jesus the sick is Juan who is lame. She is Maria who is blind. He is Pedro who has AIDS. He is Carlos who is an addict. The reason why he does this is that he is concerned with the totality of our life, not just with our presenting problem. He heals our presenting problem and then he says, "Go and sin no, more." Life is not whole until it is related to God. Man's relationship to God requires his personal response to God's initiative. Living one's life is not going with the crowd, deciding what the crowd decides and doing what the crowd does. It is not following the popular will. The crowd may say one thing. But Jesus looks at each of us individually and asks, "What about you? What do you say?"

We remember the story of the woman with a hemorrhage who approached Jesus from behind in a crowd just to touch the hem of his garment? When she was healed, Jesus required her to present herself even though his disciples noted correctly that in the crowd no one could be able to know who, particularly, touched him. The woman came forward when she realized that Jesus required her to present herself to him to be responsible personally for the power that healed her. She could not hide herself in the crowd after she was healed (Lk.8:43-48). Indeed, God is the God of the universe, but he deals with each of us individually as a father so that we can call him "*Abba-Father*," which means Tatay or Daddy and in return He calls us "My son," or "my daughter."

Consider another thing about how Jesus looks at our life. To him, in order for anyone of us to become what we ought to be in God, we must begin by accepting who we really are. To Zaccheus this means coming down from the sycamore tree. This is providing us a means of understanding what is required if genuine change is to be made possible in our life. The sycamore tree in this story stands for anything that we use to hold us up

so that we can appear better and superior than others. To some people, their Sycamore tree is the color of their skin, or the magic of a family name or their political connection. Still, to others, it maybe wealth, academic degrees, or fame. To Zaccheus his real Sycamore tree was his wealth, his political connection, and his position as chief tax collector. He needed all these to raise him up because he was, as noted in the story, short of statute. Physically, he was inferior to most people in his time. He was not good looking. It can be assumed that he was not charming or charismatic. There was nothing compelling about his personality. For all of these personal deficiencies, he needed something to prop him up. He needed a sycamore tree in order for him to be recognized and hopefully to be accepted. But, to Jesus Christ, the first requirement in order to be accepted by him is to come to him just as we are. We do not need to sit on our sycamore tree, whatever it is, in order to gain his acceptance and his favor! "Come," he says, "just as you are." No human goodness is good enough to compel God to accept us. Coming to him just as we are, means committing ourselves to him in a life-long relationship of trust and confidence. This is what is meant by faith. By faith we allow him to do his work in us so that his life becomes our life and in this fellowship with him, we become partakers of his righteousness, which alone is acceptable to God. By coming down from our sycamore tree Jesus wants us to begin just as we are by accepting our sinfulness and our need for God's forgiveness. It is only then that the cleansing by his spirit of our life can begin and we begin to become what we ought to be in God.

Finally, we discover in this story of Zaccheus that personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, changes our perspective about people and about things. The change of our perspective about people enables us to see them no longer

as thing to be exploited by us. They are no longer means to our own end. We begin to see ourselves in them as God sees them. They are people for whom Christ died. They are precious. We begin to see ourselves in them and we learn to care for them as we care for ourselves. Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ also changes our perspective concerning the precious things that we own. They no longer control us. Instead, we control them and make use of them to build life, regardless of whose life it is, and to restore broken relationships. Zaccheus, after his acceptance by Jesus Christ said, "Lord, here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lk.19:8). What a radical change of perspective Zaccheus had experienced concerning everything that he owned. Once, it was his overriding concern to own what was there to own. This he did by cheating other people. Instead of owning things, he allowed thing to own him even to the extent of depriving himself of moral decency in his relationship with others. He robbed especially the poor. But in Jesus he discovered how good it feels to be freed from selfishness and greed and to be what one ought to be in God and in our relationship with his fellowmen.

Let us not forget that what happened to Zaccheus has been repeated in the lives of many people in all generation. Lives are changed. The interesting thing about this is, the process of change continues to be the same. It begins with a personal address by Jesus Christ to us personally. It is followed by the call to come just as we are and then the result of what God can do for each of us takes place. It can take place now in you wherever and whoever you are.

BRINGING DOWN BARRIERS

Ephesians 2:11-22

There is a longing in me, which I am sure is shared by many of you, to live in a community of peace. It is a longing of all of us to be secured in our homes. This longing is real because there are many things that happen around us that should not be observed in civilized society at all. For example, we impose upon ourselves a curfew time because there is no peace and security. At Central Philippine University there is also a curfew and many of you who are students there know about this. At 10 p.m. all of the students should already be in their respective dormitories and apartments. I long for the day when we can walk on the streets of Iloilo the whole 24 hours and be not afraid of being mugged. We cannot have even simple things like these which we expect in civilized society. One important mark of our insecurity is the presence of fences that surround our homes - high walls, concrete walls, and all other kinds. Would it not be nice if one day we could find ourselves in an open field that is peaceful to wander and venture into without being afraid of some life-threatening incident? We are not so much insecure about natural forces as we are about human forces. That is very unfortunate.

Our text tells us that, consequently, because we would like to secure ourselves and we do not trust each other, we build barriers that separate us. Some sectors of human society would choose to live in a certain place and situation governed by a different standard of living. Sometimes the basis is the color of your skin, religion or your political affiliation. All of these, my friends, are barriers that separate us. In the very beginning when God created the world He did not at all create barriers

among all His creation. Something has happened to us that should have not happened. There is no one to be blamed but we, ourselves. We have lost the sense of direction in our lives and the universal basis for living together. We have constructed for ourselves artificial islands and barriers with which we can protect ourselves from others. Our text tells us, however, that when we do this we do not have the well-being of life because we are divided. When humanity is divided there is no strength, as one saying went. Everyday when you watch cable TV and hear the reports coming from CNN, your eyes are filled with horrible pictures of dead bodies piled on top of the other. In Rwanda, hundreds of people are being massacred by their fellow human being. Just this week I saw a pile of more than 250 bodies being placed on top of each other. Many of these were bodies of women and children. I look at all these and I say, "We have gone crazy. This is insanity. This is no longer humanity." The problem that we have today is where we can draw the source of our security and peace. Let us listen to an illustration stated in our text.

This situation that we are talking about is not new. This has always been with human society and even during the time when Paul wrote his epistle, there had been a barrier that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. This barrier made one superior over the other. The Jews would look down at the Gentiles as creatures no better than dogs. When a Gentile woman would give birth to a baby in the presence of Jewish people no one would care for her because they would rather see another Gentile baby dies than help the pregnant woman. It was a terrible situation. The story of enmity between the Gentiles and the Jews is not a strange and unfamiliar story to us. Even religion during that time did not promote unity, instead caused disunity. Consider the temple situation. Did you know that

during that time in the Jewish temple there were different barriers that separate one class of people from another? *Josephus* described the Jewish temple as having different divisions or levels, corresponding to the different sectors of society. The lowest level was for the Gentiles followed by the level for women. Next level was for the Jews, then for the priests, and the highest level was the holy of holies. Anyone belonging to one sector could not enter another level to which he did not belong. If he did that he would suffer the punishment of death. Remember, Paul was brought to trial because he brought a Gentile into the temple of the Jews. Paul believed that in Jesus Christ the barrier between the Gentiles and the Jews no longer existed. He was persecuted for this. He affirmed, however, that, "One thing we must understand and accept that even as it was in the Old Testament so it is now, God had chosen the Jews to be His chosen people." In other words, Paul had the conviction that only the Jews were the chosen people who were supposed to be the channel of God's blessing for all people. However, they considered that as a privilege rather than a responsibility. This wonderful reminder comes to us beginning with verse 11: "Therefore remember that formerly you are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision. Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise; without hope and without promise but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."

What can we learn from this passage? How can we tear down the barriers that we built to secure us but have in effect disunited us? Paul's answer is in Jesus Christ. He says, first of all, that Jesus Christ has called those who were once far away to come near to God. What does this mean? To be far away means

to be a stranger in a foreign country, to live without importance and recognition. Paul said to the Gentiles that they were once strangers and foreigners but now there is a change in their status. Christ has drawn them nearer to Him. They are no longer living in the periphery of God's attention but are now at the center of God's attention. There is a change in their status.

Secondly, Paul says that Jesus Christ did not only bring the barriers down, and call people who were far to be drawn near to God, but He is also our peace. What does this mean? When two people disagree and cannot at all come to terms with each other the only basis for getting back together is for them to find a third person they both love. This third person the two parties both love becomes their peace. That is what Jesus Christ had done for us. He brought peace between us and God. Paul reminds us that once we were far away from God and we could not draw near to God because there is nothing in us that could make us acceptable to God. When Christ, the Lamb of God, had come His sacrifice had justified us to God. Thus Paul says that Christ is our peace. I remember an American missionary, James Long, who loved to be in the rural areas and with our people in the mountain areas. I heard a story about James Long that whenever he visited the people in the mountains and arrived there late at night, he would sleep in the veranda of their *nipa* hut because he did not want to bother them or wake them up. Early in the morning when people woke up they would find James Long sleeping in the veranda of their houses. He was that kind of missionary. One time there were two families fighting and were trying to kill each other. At the height of the feud when they were already drawing their bolos, ready to attack each other, James Long suddenly came out of the bushes and placed himself right at the middle of the feuding families. He knew these people. The two families just stared at the

missionary, and instead of attacking each other they dropped their *bolos*. This is what Jesus Christ did for us. He is our peace because He had put Himself at the center of the relationship of enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles; between us and God. The same can happen in our life.

When Christ becomes our peace He creates in us a new being. This is Paul's third point. "Now you are no longer Gentiles; now you are no longer Jews but we are new creation in Christ and this has become the basis of our unity with each other." It is wonderful that something like this can happen. I remember how Filipinos would joke about the Chinese, "I thought it's a human being; it's only a Chinese." This was racial prejudice. I long for the day when we will no longer look at each other as Filipinos or Chinese or Japanese but as new creation in Christ, regardless of the color of our skin, and be able to relate with and learn from each other as a means for peace. To sum up, these are the three things that Jesus Christ did for us: He called us from afar; He is our peace; and He created in all of us a new being which was to be the basis of our unity. As a result of this, what can happen and what can be expected? First of all, we can expect that because of Christ we can now live in unity. Only in Him can we live in unity, have peace, and trust each other.

Secondly, we can expect that now we have access to God and it is no longer through religion, or any means of intercession made by man. We now have direct access to God because Jesus Christ has cleared the way. It is only right for us to believe firmly in the Protestant principle which was espoused by the Reformers of the 16th century: direct personal access to God. This is the blessed heritage that we have received from the Reformers and must be honored with our lives.

Lastly, according to Paul we now have a purpose in life. He reminds us that Jesus Christ has made all of us materials for the building up of a new temple, which the Lord alone is building. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, the chief cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of our Christian fellowship. All of us, regardless of the color of our skin, have been brought together and now are being welded into unity of one building, one edifice. The purpose is so that God may dwell in us. When the world will ask, "Where is God?" the only answer is that He is in the fellowship of believers. When the people at war will ask where they can find peace in God, the answer is in the fellowship of the believers of Christ. Such a dire need is being experienced by the world today. Where can we find the answer? I dare say that God has chosen to reveal His answer in and through the church of Jesus Christ. It is very important, therefore, for us to be serious about our Christian faith and to establish our life on the foundation who is Jesus Christ our Lord. This, my friends, is the reason why Christ came. He came to bring the barriers down. Let there be peace in the world but let it begin with us. Amen.

CARING FOR OUR FUTURE

(In celebration of Mother's Day)

Mark 10: 13-16

Our text tells of one occasion when children were brought to Jesus Christ but were prevented by the disciples. 'He has no time for these little ones. He has more important things to do' were probably what came through the minds of the disciples. In spite of that Jesus Christ said, "Hinder them not to come to me for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." It is beautiful for us to know that despite the immense responsibility in His ministry, Jesus spent time to gather all these children unto Him and bless them. Let us not forget another aspect in this text, "and they brought children before Him." We presume that the word "they" means mothers because these are Jewish people and to them the children were the primary responsibility of mothers. In the Jewish culture and tradition the mothers, not only fathers, were given a blessed position in relation to their children. Let us be reminded of Proverbs 1:8-9 that says, "My son, remember the instruction of your father and the teaching of your mother. They shall be garland that will crown your head and chain that will adorn your neck." In the Jewish tradition it was the role of the mother to stay close to the children day and night, nurturing them according to the wisdom of the law. This responsibility is also seen among Filipino mothers.

In the light of this, let us take a look at the changing role of mothers or women in our society. The women and the wives in our respective families are now living differently from what was expected of them years ago. In the past mothers were supposed to stay at home to care for the children regardless of what happens. Today some mothers are usually not in the home because they also seek for self-fulfillment, in terms of education,

profession or career, and financial stability. The accepted, respectable concept today is equality of men and women, including equality in the family. I am not against that; we are not against that. Women must be given their rightful place in our society and in the home, and the privilege or chance to actualize their God-given potential. It is their right to find employment to support their families. If they wanted to go to school they should be encouraged. All of these are rights of women. Let us not forget, however, that the top priority and responsibility in the home and family is the nurture of our children.

Personally, my friends, I do not care what standard of living you have or the relationship that you have in your respective families; whether it is the mother who is the breadwinner of the family and the father stays at home. These are common today. But whatever happens in your other involvement, the priority of rearing and nurturing children in the faith and in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Christian stewardship should be the highest in our respective families. When we speak of caring for the future, we can do it now through good parenthood in our respective families, especially by the mothers whose serious responsibility is to nurture their children in the faith. This is what Jesus Christ meant when He said, "Hinder them not from coming unto me." Faith is personal relationship. The primary task of every parent is to see to it that children are introduced to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Furthermore, we 'hinder them not' if there was consistency in what we do and. Children today rebel when they do not see consistency in the lives of their parents; when they hear their parents say one thing, but do another thing. This is the best way of making rebels out of them and hindering them in coming to Jesus Christ. A friend of mine told

me that there was a time when he had difficulty praying the Lord's Prayer. For a long time, after he was baptized, he could not pray The Lord's Prayer because when he prayed it, there would be a clash of forces working in him. Whenever he thought of God as "Our Father" he remembers his father who was a drunkard. This was the reason why it was difficult for him, at first, to pray The Lord's prayer. Sigmund Freud said that the first and lasting impression that we have about the character of God depends upon the character of the authority figure in our respective family. When we think of God as loving and we have fathers who are judgmental and critical, it makes it very difficult for us, children, to believe in a loving God. Friends, hinder them not from coming unto God. Remember that these two things always go together. The Scripture says "Children obey your parents in the Lord" and in another instance it reminds us parents, "Fathers, do not make your children angry." This is what is expected of a Christian family.

Children should not be nurtured only in the faith but also in Christian values. The Scripture says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What does this mean? Jesus Christ said, "Unless you become like one of these you cannot enter the kingdom of God." When Jesus said that He was thinking of the characteristic and virtues we can see among our children. Children are trusting people. They trust their parents and their elders as well. George McDonald one time said, "The greatest compliment I had was when I was in a supermarket and a little boy came to me and asked me to tie his shoelaces." That little boy approached a stranger because he trusted everybody. This is a virtue that we have lost today. Outside of ourselves we cannot trust others. Unless we learn to trust each other we can never experience the kingdom of God in our midst.

The second important virtue is humility. Little children are not interested in prominence, prestige, wealth or power. They just like to be with people, work and play with them according to certain rules. Children do not look at themselves and say, "I am higher and stronger than you are." There are some bullies but generally children consider themselves equal with each other. Humility is a very important virtue.

The third virtue that must have been in the mind of Jesus Christ when He said, "for theirs is the kingdom of God" is obedience. There are children who are disobedient but generally they respect good authority. When they recognize good authority, they like to obey because when they do they can be safe and secured. Then there is the virtue of short memory. Children have short memory. They forget being angry very readily. They are not like some old people who can bear a grudge for as long as the bamboo lives, so to speak. I have heard that when a Muslim in Mindanao has a grudge against someone, he will plant a bamboo tree and as long as that tree lives, his grudge remains. Little children may have grudges but they forget these immediately. Jesus Christ points to one important thing in our relationship and our well being. The Bible says, "Let not the sun go down on your anger and your hatred. But seek reconciliation as early as you can." Little children fight and have arguments but in less than five minutes they are friends again. This is the virtue we can learn from children. Jesus Christ said, "Unless you become like one of these you cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Lastly, if we care for the future, mothers and fathers must instruct the children concerning stewardship of God's creation. I appreciate parents who would remind their little children not to litter or throw their waste paper on the ground. The ground that you walk on is the ground of God. I appreciate parents who

teach their children about cleanliness and about not writing on the walls because it would make the walls dirty. I appreciate parents who teach their children not to shoot at birds because they are creatures of God; not to cut down trees indiscriminately because trees contribute to the promotion and preservation of the balance of nature; and not to pollute the waters in our rivers and streams. I appreciate parents who teach their children to appreciate the blessings of God through the food that they eat by saying a prayer of thanksgiving before eating. All these we call stewardship of God's creation. When we look at the future and imagine it to be a beautiful world to live in, this depends upon what parents do to their children now. We are not helpless when it comes to the future. Shall we put the future on chance, luck and fortune? No! There is a big responsibility that we can exercise and this must begin in the home by parents, especially mothers. Today is a blessed day to honor the mothers of our respective families. While we honor them let us also pray for them because their responsibility is tremendous. Amen.

BASIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Lecture ca. 1999

The Reformation can be said to be a reminder to the Church to return to the Scripture as the sole basis of authority for the life and work of the church. Before the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church used the Scripture and Tradition to be of equal of authority. Tradition was understood to be Tradition I and Tradition II. By Tradition I, the church insisted that the Scripture should be interpreted according to a traditional way, which was observed since the beginning of her history. By Tradition II, it means that there are traditional teachings which are not included in all the books of the Bible but nevertheless have been handed down through time which are of equal importance with all things that are written in the books of the Bible. The Reformers, on the other hand believed that everything that was included in the Bible are sufficient for doctrine and the guidance of the Christian life. The Roman Catholic furthermore, approved the inclusion of the Apocryphal Books during the Council of Trent in 1545.

Based upon the Scripture alone, the Reformers defended the doctrine of justification by faith alone based upon Romans 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:8-9. The Roman Catholic Church maintained that man's work of righteousness is necessary in order for him to be justified by God. This doctrinal position is derived from the concept of *via Moderna*, which says that there is a covenant between God and man. This Covenant provides that God will save man if man will do his best to deserve the salvation that God gives him. The Reformers insisted that because of man's fall into sin, there is nothing in man's nature that can enable him to do any work of righteousness to deserve

God's salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith alone and it means that salvation is an undeserved favor given to man through Jesus Christ. It also means that in Jesus Christ all, who are saved have direct access to God. This is why the reformers maintained the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers. The priesthood of every believer is the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. The believer shares in this priesthood only because they are in Jesus Christ. Through Christ therefore, the believer's direct access to God is made possible.

By direct access it means that salvation, through the mediation of saints or by a church or by anything, is no longer necessary. This became the basis for the rejection of indulgence, the use of relics, and pilgrimages are no longer necessary for salvation.

The Reformers accepted only two sacraments. These are Baptism and Eucharist or Lord's Supper. The Roman Catholic, on the other hand, accepted seven sacraments as approved by the Council of Trent. It must also be remembered that these seven sacraments are based upon the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, which was deemed to be an inaccurate translation of the Greek text of the Bible.

The Historic Baptist Distinctives

There are many theories concerning the origin of the Baptists. Some believe that the Baptist origin is traceable to John the Baptist. Others contend that they came from the Anabaptist movement, while others would trace its origin to the Non-conformist Movement in England in the 17th Century. The Non-Conformist movement in England was a protest against the situation wherein the church was an establishment of the state. This was true with the Anglican church. The Non-conformist

movement wanted to have a church free from state control. The congregational church was a part of this movement. John Smyth was a pastor of this separatist church in Gainsborough. When threatened by the harsh policies of James I, who was the King of England, he and his congregation went to the Netherlands sometimes in 1606, seeking religious freedom there. While there, they established ties with the Dutch Anabaptist Mennonites. Convinced that the only true baptism was believers' baptism, he baptized himself (this was why he was called Se-Baptist) and caused his congregation to do the same. A lay leader of his congregation, Thomas Helwys questioned the validity of Smyth's baptism, because he baptized himself. A part of the congregation followed Thomas Helwys. He published his own confession and shortly thereafter went back to England with his congregation. In 1611, in Spitalfield, a place just outside London, a Baptist church was established. This was a General Baptist Church. It was called General because they believed that God's grace is general and broad covering all people. This is called Arminian Theology. Later, in about 1633 another church was established in another place under the leadership of John Spilsbury. It was the first Particular Baptist Congregation. It was called the Particular Baptist Church. Particular because of its belief that God's salvation is only for people who believe. This is a Calvinistic Theology. The Baptist influence that came to the New World (America) was of the Particular Baptist (Calvinistic) orientation.

In the U.S.A. the Baptist orientation, which insists on religious liberty, was espoused by William Roger who, after he was banished from the New England colony, surfaced in what is now Providence, Rhode Island. He established a community which championed the principle of religious liberty. In the U.S.A. the Baptists were one of the most numerous of all

religious movements until they were divided in 1845 over the issue of slavery. It was in that year when the Southern Baptist formed its own convention. In the North, the American Baptist Convention was formed and was responsible for sending missionaries to the Philippines. These missionaries, beginning with Dr. Eric Lund, with the help of a Filipino convert, Braulio Manikan, established their mission station in Iloilo in 1900. With the coming of other Baptist Missionaries, churches were established, the first of which was the Jaro Evangelical Church. In 1905 the Mission established the Jaro Industrial School, the precursor of the present Central Philippine University. Together with the establishment of this school, a Bible School was established. This became later the College of Theology, a Baptist seminary of higher learning. The Baptist work later on spread all over the Western Visayas, and established hospitals, student centers, dormitories and churches. In 1935, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, Inc. was organized to serve as the mission arm of the Filipino Baptist Churches.

As Baptists, what do they believe in? Aside from the basic Christian faith that Baptists believed in, they are known for their historic Baptist distinctive. They are historic, because the Baptists were the ones who defended these principles in their historical development. Today, these distinctive are shared by other denominations. These are:

I. *The authority of the Scripture as the sole norm for faith and conduct.* This means that when it comes to our faith in God, the Bible is the faithful witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Allowing the Scripture to convey its own meaning, we understand the true meaning of our faith in God especially the truth about our salvation. The Scripture provides principles,

upon which the conduct of Christian living can be based. Tradition is respected as long as it is not contrary to the Scripture and as long as it embraces the meaning of the Scripture. The Bible is believed to be the Word of God because it is believed that through it God reveals His will as it is supremely shown in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Baptists believe that in the Bible, salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

II. *Baptists believe in the Priesthood of all believers.* This means that believers in Christ share in His priesthood. In Christ, believers have direct access to God who is their Father by virtue of their adoption as children of God. God's grace in Jesus Christ is sufficient for man's salvation. Belief in grace as conferred by the church or by the saints in order for us to be justified is denied. This principle of the priesthood of all believers restores the importance of the laity in the church. All believers are people of God. This includes the pastors, ministers, and priests. All who believe are people of God who have different gifts, but they are all servants of God.

III. *Baptists believe that God has ordained two ordinances to be administered in the church.* These are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism as an ordinance is the symbol of the believers' participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the reason why Baptists believe that the meaningful symbol of participation in the death of Jesus Christ is immersion in the water. Participation in His resurrection is symbolized by the believers rising from water. Baptists believe that since baptism is an expression of faith in Jesus Christ, only believers are to be baptized. The presence of God in baptism is a reality that is beyond human description.

The other Ordinance is the Lord's Supper. It is a commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ and as an expectation of His coming again. The elements are taken as symbols. The bread is the symbol of His body, which was broken for us. The cup is the symbol of His blood, which was shed for the remission of sin.

The commemoration must be done with great reverence. Believers are reminded to enter into this celebration only after serious self-examination. If this is taken unworthy sin against the body and blood of Jesus Christ is committed.

Why ordinance and not sacrament? An ordinance is ordained by God to be celebrated. A sacrament is believed to be a means of conveying the grace of God. Baptists believe that God's grace is conveyed to man only through Jesus Christ. Such grace is sufficient for man's salvation.

IV. *Liberty of Conscience.* Thomas Helwys declared that a king has authority over his subjects in temporal matter. But he has no authority over the conscience of his subjects. In matters of faith human conscience is free to express man's relationship to God. In matters of religion, especially in worship, man's right to observe this must be kept inviolate. When it comes to religion, religious freedom means that man is accountable to God alone.

V. *Authority of the Local Church.* Because of religious freedom, a local church has authority to govern her own life according to what is deemed proper by the whole congregation. The Baptist polity (or church government) is congregational. The authority resides in the congregation. But, the right of the congregation to govern itself should be done under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In other words, the congregation can

do anything if it is consistent with the will of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Local authority should not be observed as a license for anarchy and evil. Local autonomy of the church does not mean for the church to be isolated by itself because Baptists believe that the church is by nature associational. This means, that it seeks to associate and work with other movements of kindred spirit.

VI. *Separation of Church and the State*. This is one principle that the Anabaptist Movement during the Reformation insisted on because Luther, Calvin and Zwingli opted to link their churches with state authorities. Separation here means basically separation of function. The state is ordained to provide physical well-being to its people. The church on the other hand is mandated to meet the spiritual needs of the people. By separation it means that the church cannot and must not determine for the state what the state is mandated to do for its people. In the same manner, the state must not determine for the church what the church is mandated by God to do for the spiritual well-being of the people. But, when it comes to concerns that would enable each to fulfill its respective functions, both are mutually related to each other. Baptists are encouraged to participate responsibly in the life of the larger community according to the dictates of their conscience.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURE

Lecture ca. 1999

The Bible, which in our Judeo-Christian tradition means the Old and the New Testament, is a faithful witness to God's special revelation in Jesus Christ, attested to by the Holy Spirit in the life and work of the church (Heb. 1:1; 2Tim 3:16-17; 2Pet. 1:20-21). Although the books of the Bible were written by men, we call them the written word of God because the writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit so that through their words God had chosen to reveal His will for man's life and salvation as personally revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament

It took many years for the whole Bible to be put together. There were many religious writings, but only those which underwent the process of Canonization were included in the Bible. The process of canonization of the Old Testament began in 621 A.D with the discovery of Deuteronomy. The final listing of the 39 books was completed at the Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. These 39 books are Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. These are divided into three sections: the Law or the Torah; the Prophets or the Nebii'm; and the Writings or the Kethubim.

The Law consists of the first five books of the Old Testament. These are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It was believed that these first five books, known as the Pentateuch were all written by Moses. Later study reveals that these were written by many editors, who are designated by letters, such as J, E, H, P and D, which stands for Deuteronomy.

By the year 400 B.C. the Law was considered in Israel as Scriptures.

The Prophets have two sections. The first section is the Former Prophets, which include historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The second section is the Latter Prophets, which include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets. The word minor does not mean that they were inferior. This simply means that these books of the twelve minor prophets are shorter than other prophetic books. The prophets are considered the mouthpieces of God, because what they uttered were the words of God. This is why their messages were usually introduced by "*Thus spake the Lord*". It should be noted that according to Jewish convictions all these prophetic inspiration had closed with Malachi and that since about 450 B.C. the divine voice was silent (William Barclay, *The Making of the Bible*, p.32).

The Writings include the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentation, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Daniel. These books came to be regarded as sacred Scripture by popular acceptance than by official decision. They were called as a whole the *Hagiographa*. They are divided into the *Major Writings* (Psalms, Job, and Proverbs), the *Minor Writings* (Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentation), and the *Latter Writings* (Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles).

One very significant development was the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. This was done by 70 scholars under the auspices of Ptolemy, the second Philadelphus who was King of Egypt from 285-246 B.C. This Greek translation is known as the *Septuagint*. Because of this many Greek speaking people were able to read the Old Testament. Another significant event was the destruction of the

Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. With the destruction of the Temple, the Scriptures became the center of unity for the Jews. They became known as the people of the book.

The Making of the New Testament

During the early ministry of Jesus Christ, no one was there to record his teachings and the accounts of His daily ministry. After His resurrection, everything about Him existed in oral tradition. This was in the form of recital or stories, which were repeatedly told especially during their worship gathering.

The recital tells about the birth, the life, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and the coming again of Jesus. What they mean by the Scriptures at this early stage was the Old Testament. With the expected death of the apostles, the need to put in writing what existed as oral tradition became obvious. The apostles put in writing their recollection of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Other leaders wrote letters to instruct and encourage the churches. In John 20:30, we have a hint, that many letters and materials were written. The process of selecting which of these many writings was to be included as Canon of the New Testament became important. We know that the gospel of Mark written in about 60 A.D was the earliest gospel to be written. By the year 367 A.D. Athanasius was able to mention in his Easter Letter all the 27 books that were included in the New Testament. So it took about 307 years to complete the Canon of the New Testament. Before a book became canonical, it had to be written; it had to be widely read; it had to be accepted as useful to life and doctrine; it had to make its way into the public worship of the church; it had to win acceptance not simply locally but throughout the whole church; and finally, it had to be officially approved by the voice

and decision of the church (Barclay, *The Making of the Bible*, p.64-65). Because of the importance of the Apostles, books written by an apostle or influenced by anyone of them were immediately accepted as canon. The four Gospels were the earliest to be accepted as canon because of this requirement. The Gospel of Mark was accepted because it was believed to be influenced by Peter. The Gospel of Luke was believed to be influenced by Paul. All the four Gospels made use of one source concerning the sayings of Jesus. This one source is known as “Q” which represents the German word “*quelle*”, which means “source”. This no longer exists today.

The Latin Vulgate, the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, was constituted according to these requirements for canonicity. These are tradition, authority and decision of councils. Since there were different versions of the Vulgate, in 1226, some Paris theologians engaged in a joint speculative venture resulting in the Paris version of the Vulgate text. As part of the Reformation Movement, Erasmus discovered the fifteenth-century notes on the Greek text of the New Testament written by Lorenzo Valla. With this, Erasmus was able to write the first Greek New Testament, the *NovumInstrumentumOmne*. Comparing this Greek New Testament version with the Latin Vulgate, it was discovered that a number of major New Testament texts in the Latin Vulgate could not be justified.

The early church had considered the *Lord’s Supper* and *Baptism* as *dominical*, which means authorized by Christ. In the Medieval times Peter Lumbard wrote Four Books of the Sentences where seven sacraments are mentioned. These are the Eucharist, Baptism, Penance, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination and Extreme Unction. Erasmus based these on the Latin Vulgate mistranslation of the Greek text discovered

(Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought, An Introduction*, p. 56-57). For example, Medieval theology justified the inclusion of Matrimony in the list of Sacraments. In the Vulgate translation marriage is mentioned as *sacramentum* (Ephesians 5:31-32) Erasmus and Valla pointed out that the Greek word *mysterion* simply means the “mystery” and not “sacrament” as in the Latin Vulgate. Again in the Latin Vulgate, Matt. 4:17 does not mean, “do penance for the kingdom of God is at hand.” In the Greek text, it says “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” In other words what the Vulgate suggests to be an outward practice which is penance, according to Erasmus, refers to an inward psychological attitude - that of being repentant (McGrath, p. 56).

Another observation has to do with Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Vulgate’s translation of Gabriel’s word to Mary (Luke 1:28) as “one who is full of grace” (*gratia plena*) suggests the image of a reservoir full of liquid grace which can be given to those who are in need of grace. Erasmus and Valla pointed out that the Greek text simply means, “ *favored one*” or “*one who has found favor*”. This means that reverence for Mary is based upon an erroneous translation in the Latin Vulgate. As a result of these observations by Erasmus and Valla, there was a general loss of confidence in the reliability of the Vulgate.

We have come to understand the Bible as the sole authority for faith and Christian morality. The Bible is the only authority that we have when it comes to God’s revelation of His will for the salvation of man and the world in Jesus Christ. This divine plan for the salvation of man and the world began from the beginning of creation to its fulfillment in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. What the Bible says about this faith is authoritative. When it comes to its authority in Christian morality, the Bible is the norm in so far as it provides the

principle that undergirds all Christian conduct. As principle it does not provide specific moral practices to be followed. This principle is embodied in what Jesus advocated as the greatest law. "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God...thy neighbor as thy self*" (Matt. 22:37-40). The practice of this principle can be shaped by culture and by specific situation. Based upon this we can say that not everything that was practiced in the Bible needs to be followed literally in other times. But the principle remains as a mandate to be applied in all situations.

The Bible is not to be interpreted literally only because God's message in it is conveyed in poetry, myth, legends, prophecies, parables, among others. To understand its message therefore, we need to follow certain *Hermeneutical* (interpretation) principles.

Among these are:

Study of the context. This means taking into consideration all things that go with the text, the background, including practices, culture, tradition, and when the text was spoken. How was it understood during that time? What was the message that it tried to convey to that particular situation? After all these have been considered, we ask, what is its message for us today considering our own specific situation? Studying the scripture by allowing it to speak its message is exegesis. But improving our own interpretation of a scripture passage to what we want it to mean is eisegesis. We must adopt the method of exegesis instead of eisegesis.

The authority of the Scripture must be related to the authority of the tradition. If the scripture is the basis of authority, does this mean that tradition has no importance to us? The Roman Catholic position considers Scripture and

tradition to be equal in authority and importance. The Protestant position maintains that Scripture is the sole authority. This implies that tradition can be considered important only when it is justified by the Scripture, or when it does not contradict the Scripture.

The authority of the Scripture as the sole norm for faith and conduct. This means that when it comes to our faith in God, the Bible is the faithful witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Allowing the Scripture to convey its own meaning, we understand the true meaning of our faith in God especially the truth about our salvation. The Scripture provides principles, upon which the conduct of Christian living can be based. Tradition is respected as long as it is not contrary to the Scripture and as long as it embraces the meaning of the Scripture. The Bible is believed to be the Word of God because it is believed that through it God reveals His will as it is supremely shown in His Son Jesus Christ. In the Bible, the Baptists believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

I have been very eager to address this matter that you raised. Many people are very concerned about the question as to who has the correct Bible. This concern is based upon our (Christian) universal acknowledgement that the Bible is important. It is a faithful human witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ who revealed to us God's plan, will and action, to redeem man from sin whose "wages is death" (Roman 6:23) and to give them salvation through Jesus Christ. It is therefore a religious book. What it says should not be measured by what science would accept as true. Truth, especially concerning man's salvation, is more than what science and human wisdom prescribe.

The Bible is composed of the Old Testament and the New Testament. During the time of Jesus, the word scripture was used to refer to the Old Testament. These were all written in Hebrew. From 90 AD to about 118 AD, the Jewish Rabbis who were in Jamnia decided to accept 24 books to be part of the canon of the Old Testament. The word *canon*, literally means in Greek, a reed or stalk. It came to mean measuring rod. The process of canonization measured the value of many religious texts. Those texts that met the requirements were included in the Scriptures. Those texts that did not meet those requirements were excluded. The process of canonization took thousand years. It is generally agreed that by 400 BC, the Jews had accepted as canon, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Two hundred years later, the prophetic books were recognized as canonical. These were Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Micah, Amos, etc.). A century before that other Sacred Writings were accepted as canon, such as: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Five Rolls (Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. Near the end of the first century, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, a group of 70 Jewish scholars discussed the Old Testament canon and officially accepted 24 Old Testament books. These are the books that are in the Old Testament. These were translated into Greeks. This translation is known as the Septuagint, meaning 70 because of the 70 Jewish scholars who translated these. The Greek translation is longer than the Hebrew text. Therefore, they divided some books into two parts, for example, Kings, Chronicles, Samuel, Ezra-Nehemiah and the twelve minor prophets. The 24 Hebrew Bible became 39 books in the Greek translation. To this Septuagint, other writings were included

like Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, and additions to Daniel and Esther. This Septuagint with the added books were translated to Latin and became the Vulgate which is the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church as decreed by the Council of Trent in 1563. These added books are also called apocryphal books and were not used by many churches because they were considered extra-canonical which means not properly meeting the requirements of the true canon.

During the time of the Reformation, Luther and the other Reformers, decided to go back to the original 24 Hebrew books by excluding the apocryphal books. This is why the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible became the Roman Catholic Bible and the other versions without the apocryphal books became the versions used by the Protestants. It should be noted that the original text of the Bible is no longer in existence. What we have today is the translation from the original text. In 1945, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has shed light into the manuscripts. This, on the whole, confirms in a very substantial way the message from the original manuscripts. The discovery of these old texts also provided us a good understanding of the meaning of important terms used in the Scripture. They were applied in the translation of the Bible in later versions like the Revised Standard Version, the NIV, and others. The King James Version, which was published in 1611, does not reflect this new understanding.

When it comes to the New Testament, there is not much difference between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Bible in the process of canonization. They all have 27 books. They differ only in the translation of certain terms.

So, which version is correct? Personally, I maintain that the translation of the Bible, (whether Duoay Version, King

James Version, Revised Standard Version, etc.), should be judged on the basis of how clearly they convey the message of God's salvation. The Holy Spirit works in His own way by making use of anything in order to convince, convict and convert any man. It is not correct for any man to maintain that God uses only the King James Version or the Duoay Version. God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. After saying this, when it comes to understanding clearly God's message to man it is recommended that comparing different translations would be very helpful. In doing this we apply the principle of hermeneutics. This principle requires that we try to understand the original meaning of a word or passage as it was used during the time when it was spoken or used. This means a good knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. Then we try to understand the situation which it referred to when it was first used. This requires understanding of the culture, the tradition and the political and social environment at that time. This was why the movement known as Humanism has an important contribution towards the understanding of the biblical basis of our doctrines. Humanists like Erasmus insisted on going back to the original sources. As a result many things in the Latin translation of the Scripture were found to be incorrect. The same is true when it comes to the King James Version. After understanding the original meaning and intention of the text, we try to understand its implication to our present life. On the whole, what this means is that studying the Scripture requires openness of mind to free oneself of bigotry, sincerity in the search for truth and humility in order to free oneself of self-righteousness. The object of our search of the truth is not to develop a perfect theology or philosophy. The object is to find the way of salvation in Jesus Christ and to live one's life in a meaningful, personal relationship with God.

THE EMERGING THEOLOGY

*(A lecture delivered a week after the assassination
of Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr., 1983)*

“He always had the nature of God but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own freewill he gave us all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a man and appeared in human likeness. He humbled and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—His death on the cross. For this reason God raised Him...”Philippians 2:6ff

Introduction

The topic, *The Emerging Theology*, describes correctly the theological situation in Asia. It implies a historical period when it was not. It implies that in the present, it is coming to be. It implies a future when it will be. We will discuss these periods from the perspective of Asia in general and of the Philippines in particular.

Theology is man’s way of talking about God. In the Christian perspective, it is our way of talking about God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ as testified faithfully in the Scriptures. Talking about God should not imply that God is a static object of thought. He is not a concept or an idea. He is an active God who is known by us through His acts in history. His action in Jesus Christ was a unique, special and fulfilling in whom and through whom all God’s acts in history are to be

understood. God in Jesus Christ has a universal implication and understanding this universal implication takes place in particular situations. This is important for us to understand in Asia. What does this universal God mean to us in Asia? What does He mean to us in the Philippines? Asian theology, and we must venture to say, Philippine theology, is emerging because we are asking this question.

I. Our Theological Captivity

This does not mean that before, God was not present in Asia. Nor does it mean that we did not ask the question about God. He was present in Asia and we asked the question. But we asked this question through colored eyeglasses made in the West. It showed us a God of “spacious mountain, of amber waves of green, of purple mountains, majestic above the frothed plain...” Because we saw this God through western colored glasses, we also lived by and for this God as we planted rice paddies in Asia, and in the Philippines – “bent from morn to the set of sun cannot sit and cannot stand cannot rest for a little while”. One wonders when he does this, where are the spacious and purple mountains, crowned white with snow, when all around him are bamboo groves and coconut trees. He would see mountains not crowned white with snow, but bold and denuded mountains deprived of their trees by loggers whose only idea of green is the color green of US dollars. We readily see the absence of the point of connection between the God who sees through the western colored glasses and the actual situation where we find ourselves. The theology that is relevant to us is a theology that can let us see the point of connection between the God who acts and the particular historical situation in which we live.

The history of Christianity in Asia shows us the reason for the absence of this point of connection. The Christian faith, which originated in the East, came to us from the West. Foreign Christian missionaries came to the Asian shores as early as the 16th century. In the particular case of the Philippines, Spanish missionaries came to our country in 1521, just at the time when the Lutheran Reformation was breaking out in Germany. It was only at the turn of the century that Protestant missionaries came after Spain ceded the Philippines to the Americans as provided for in the Treaty of Paris.

The Missionaries who came to Christianize the natives and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ were representatives of the many denominations which sent them from abroad. With the Christian gospel came also denominationalism and sectarianism. Christian worship and practices were defined according to the denominational and sectarian outlook of the western missionaries. Even though there were efforts to translate the Scriptures to the local dialects, theological interpretation of the Scriptures was denominationally doctrinal. There were serious efforts on the part of the missionaries to train native pastors and priests to help them participate in the total work of the mission. But even here, what was propagated was western theology and any effort to contextualize was almost absent. D.T. Niles was correct in describing the state of Christianity in Asia when he said "Christianity in Asia is like a potted plant which has been transported from the west and has never taken root in Asian soil." Prof. Hideo Ohke of Japan once pleaded, "Deliver Japanese Theology from Germanic Captivity." John Billie declared that Theological ideas are created in the continent (Europe), corrected in Great Britain, and corrupted in America". One might add "and crammed down the throat of Asian."

These sentiments show clearly the captivity of Asian mind by Western ideas. They show the need for the development of indigenous Christianity with a theology that takes seriously the Asian situation. The essence of Christian theology, even though universal, needs to be addressed to particular situations in order for its meaning and demand to be understood and lived meaningfully.

II. The Struggle for Theological Emancipation

What is an indigenous theology for Asians? What is its essence? What is its form by which it can be identified in its own unique way? Whatever answers we will have to these questions, one certain thing is that Asian theology should take seriously into consideration the Asian situation. This should not mean that the Asian situation should determine the content of the theology being conceived. If this were the case, it would mean ultimately changing the essence of the Christian faith. This cannot and must not be done. In Christian theology we have to reckon with the essence of it, which is already given and as such, cannot be changed. That essence has to do with God who revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus who is the Christ for the purpose of reconciling the world unto Him. Theology does not put human initiative prior to divine initiative. The human task in theology is only a response to the prior action of God. This being the case we can assume that this God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ is present in all theological systems whether that system is European, American, or Asian. But in so far as its form of structure is concerned Christian theology in Europe or Asia should be expected to exhibit a difference. Somebody said that if Christianity had only one form, it would be a boring religion.

It is with the view of taking the Asian situation seriously that the word *contextualization* is being used by Asian theologians today. By contextualization we mean *that capacity to respond to the gospel within the framework of our situation*. There are three things that are implied in this definition. *Capacity* means the need to develop autonomous responsibility for the Christian faith which we have embraced. It means owning the faith personally and existentially. *Gospel* means the good news about God's action in Jesus Christ to reconcile the whole creation unto him. The gospel is unchangeable. It is something that is given. Hence, it cannot be fabricated or transformed in its essence. Asian Theology or Asian Christianity does not have a new gospel other than that which we find in the Scriptures. This gospel is the same for all, whether American, European or Oriental. Whatever we do, it must always be subjected to the demand of this gospel which has a once and for all significance to all Christians. Our *response* to this gospel must be within the framework of our situation as Asians and as Filipinos. We do not live in a historical vacuum. We have our own existential situations, which in many ways are unique from that of other people.

In the *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the TEF 1970-1977*, contextualization is further clarified:

"Contextualization is not simply a fad or a catch-word but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the word. What does this term imply? It means all that is implied in the familiar term 'indigenization' and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of Third World contexts.

Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the gospel in terms of a traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology and struggle for human justice, which characterizes the historical movement of nations in the Third World". (Bromly, England: TEF, 1972, pp. 19-20).

The analysis of these Asian situations which constitute our 'framework', is given the name *The Asian Critical Principle* which mentions seven historical situations prevailing in Asia.

Plurality and diversity in races, people, cultures, social institutions, religions, ideologies, etc. characterize this region. Most of these countries in this region have a colonial experience.

Most of the countries in this region are now in the process of national building, development and modernization. They want to modernize through the use of science and technology. They want to develop and achieve economic growth, social justice and self-reliance.

The people of this region want to achieve authentic self-identity and cultural integrity in the context of modern world.

Asia is the home of some of the world's living and renascent religions and these religions have shaped both the culture and consciousness of the vast majority in Asia.

Asian people are in search of a form of social order beyond the current alternatives. There is an apparent resort to authoritarian forms of government as an emergency measure. The Christian is a minority in the vast Asian complex.

These are descriptions of situations where the people of Asia live. They offer as framework upon which we can understand the particular conditions of the region's peoples. At

this point, we can reflect upon the particular situations in our country, the Philippines. We are a suffering people. We live in captivity in the very country of our birth. We are captives of man-made forces both of our own making and that of others. These forces are the very reasons for the frustrations that we have as a people. We know that our country has the resources that can make our life better. And yet, what we rightly deserve is manipulated out of our reach by those, who because of their resources and technology are able to deprive us of our own material heritage. Because of these frustrations, our people have developed a fatalistic attitude towards life. Like a carabao we have borne our burden well and have learned to adjust to it. More than this, many of our people have become apathetic to possibilities of renewal and reformation. We have individually become ingrown and our sole concern is for self-preservation. Our hope is like a dying ember. If nothing was done about it, that hope would die. A people without hope are a people without a future. Must we let it die?

III. *The Emerging Theology*

In a situation like ours, the question we ask is determinative of the action that will be taken. One question which is often asked is, *How do we respond to our individual and national situations?* The humanistic answer is simple and practical. We must all strive to promote the well-being of man. We must provide our people with good education and environment. We must strive to secure for each other the basic necessities of life.

This approach while good in its social concern is lacking the depth of understanding concerning the nature of man. While it implies that man will have his well-being when

security is good, it does not consider the other aspect of the fact that whatever security we will have depends in large measure upon the kind of people that live in it. There is a need to transform individually human values. The humanistic approach in the early part of the 20th century was found to be lacking in depth in making this possible.

The ideological answer is loud and persuasive. Most of the ills in our economic, social and political life are attributed to a defective capitalistic system, whose philosophy of free enterprise encourages freedom in the use of our resources. In a situation where the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak are pitted against each other, free enterprise becomes exploitation where the rich and the strong become richer and stronger, and the poor and the weak become poorer and weaker. The simple solution is to change the system. This is where socialism becomes an alternative. But a word of caution is necessary. Socialism has its own evils too. We must observe carefully the socialistic experiments in other countries like those in Eastern Europe and Sri Lanka. While a system is helpful in serving the will of the people, we must remember that the success of any given system depends upon the kind of people that support it.

The importance of changing the lives of people has a theological dimension. It is our acknowledgment of this that makes the emergence of Asian theology a great necessity. Theologically, we must not only ask *how do we respond to situations prevailing in our country*. Instead we must ask *how do we respond to the gospel in our particular situation*. The first question leads us to express our concern along the horizontal dimensions of our life. The second question shows the need to establish our concern on the vertical dimension of life. It is important that this priority is established. But it does not stop

there. It proceeds to define our horizontal concern on the basis of our first priority. Interpreted in terms of our individual and social life, it has to do with how we relate to each other. There is no brotherhood of man without the fatherhood of God. In the words of I John 4:7-12: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.'

What then is this emerging theology? Liberation is becoming a familiar word. Those who define our situation to be oppressive find justification in naming the emerging theology as Liberation Theology or Theology of Liberation. In Philippine Context this term is not original, neither is it new. Liberation Theology originated in Latin America where oppressive situations had justified its emergence. It presents God who is partial to the oppressed because they are weak and powerless. God is the God of Liberation whose work in history is for the liberation of the weak and the dispossessed. It has three components, which describe its methodology and purpose.

Conscientization. This calls for the development of awareness of man as he is and as he ought to be. Oppressed people have an inadequate sense of their human potential and worth. Their roles in life have been defined for them by an oppressive group or system. They view themselves as "things" or as means who serve the ends of others. They do not feel free to define for themselves their own destiny. Conscientization

describes the process of making them “conscious”, that they are free and deciding persons who are aware of those forces and systems that oppress them.

Liberation Theology has a “*This worldly view*” salvation. It resists the view of relegating salvation to a future life beyond history and beyond that which is historically now. God desires liberation of all levels of life – physical, social and spiritual. The kingdom of God is the reign of justice, equality and peace.

Liberation Theology refers to theology as “Praxis”. Praxis means the resistance to assign truth in the intellectual level removed from practical concern. To say that truth is “praxis” is to say that there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents. Knowledge is in action itself. Participation in the historical events is the only process that can transform the world. Jose Niguez-Bonino in *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* says that action is itself the truth. Truth is at the level of history, not in the realm of ideas. Reflection on Praxis, on human significant action, can only be authentic when it is done from within, in the vicinity of the strategic and tactical plane of human action. (p. 72).

At this point we must ask to what extent is Liberation Theology responding to the full content of the Christian Gospel. In responding to the situation, does it not change to a certain extent, the essence of the Christian kerygma? The emerging Asian theology must consider these questions seriously in order for it not to be an Asian theology for its own sake, but for it to be a Christian theology for the sake of Asia and the world.

Let me point out the implications of this emerging theology upon our individual and corporate life as people of God in Asia.

The emerging theology should not be the responsibility of classroom theologians alone. It must come from any individual Christian as he/she seeks to live and express the gospel in his/her particular situations. It means that our people should be provided with the opportunities and the means to study the scripture, the tradition and creeds of the Christian Church and whatever setting that is possible.

The emerging theology must be ecumenical. It must show that there can be unity among Christians in the midst of diversity in tradition and worship.

It must have a strong missiological emphasis based upon the conviction that God is the Lord of history and that it is His will to bring all human conditions into conformity with His will.

These points will be given more consideration in the second lecture when we consider the subject – Towards a Filipino Theology.

CONTEXTUAL FILIPINO THEOLOGY: TOWARDS A FILIPINO THEOLOGY

*(A lecture delivered a week after the assassination
of Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr., 1983)*

There is something theologically stirring in Philippine Christianity today. Two things can be said about this theological stirring. For one thing, it is exciting. For another, it is painful. Perhaps an analogy is needed to make clear what we mean by excitement and pain. The logical situation in the Philippines reminds us of a woman in labor pain. It is exciting because something (a baby) is stirring in her womb and is expected to emerge soon. With this emergence is the rapid and almost unbearable pain that goes with it. There are things that we do not know about this emerging theology. It does not have a proper name yet. All the words that we are using like, Filipino, Asian, and Contextual are descriptive words. They do not designate an existing systematic theology which is comprehensive, consistent, and coherent. Continuing with the analogy, we do not even know if it's going to be a boy or a girl, normal or abnormal, brown or mestizo, light or heavy. We do not know if it will have the features of Juan de la Cruz or Uncle Sam. At this point, the analogy can stop. But we still would like to ask one further question. Who's responsible for it?

If it was going to be a Filipino Theology, we must take responsibility for it. It must be the result of our response to the Gospel within the framework of our situation as Filipinos. In the light of this requirement, Filipino Christians are taking responsibility for the Filipino Theology which is emerging. They are aware of that *Asian Critical Principle*, which provides them

with the understanding of the historical situations, which are common among Asian countries. Dr. Emerito Nakpil suggests four requirements for Contextual Theology in Asia. We must state these in the light of our Filipino situation.

It must be situational. Our response to the gospel must take seriously the situations that are incumbent in our life as Filipinos.

Hermeneutical. This calls for the interpretation of the Scripture and the Christian traditions and creeds in the thought form of our people.

Missiological. This considers the question, how do we express our obedience to the mandate of the Gospel in our Christian mission as Filipinos?

Educational. There is a need to contextualize the content and form of the educational curriculum and programs of our Christian institutions especially the Church and seminary.

Dr. Levi Oracion and Dr. Fely Carino are talking about Incarnational Theology as that which can make clear the reign of God in history and how this reign can be understood in His acts of liberation and reconciliation. On the Roman Catholic side, Leonardo Mercado in his book, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, is identified elements in our Filipino culture, mores and folkways, which can be meeting points for addressing the gospel to our people.

In all these welcome attempts towards a Filipino Theology, an important reminder is necessary. The Christian Gospel is universal and unchanging. It speaks about what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, our Filipino situation is particular and changing. We must not make particular that which is universal. To do this will mean for us a new gospel, a new revelation and maybe a new God other than He who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Furthermore,

Contextual Theology should not mean “nativistic” theology or esoteric theology, which is a theology by Filipinos and for Filipinos alone. In theology the universal and the particular are present. The content is universal, but the form is particular. The late Paul Devanandan of India pointed to this distinction in saying that the task of Christian Theology in Asia is not to work out a Christian expression of say, Hinduism or Buddhism but to effect an Asian expression of Christianity. We seek neither to Hinduize Christianity nor to Christianize Hinduism. Our goal is not a Christian expression of Hinduism but an Indian expression of Christianity. In other words, theology’s responsibility is not so much to restate Asian traditions in terms of Asian faith as to restate the Christian faith in terms of Asian tradition. (Douglas, “Introduction”, *What Asian Christians Are Thinking*).

Contextual theology, as the word context implies (which means *with the text*) takes seriously the Gospel (kerygma) and the historical situation in which response to the gospel is made.

Towards a Filipino Theology

What is this kerygma and what is this historical Filipino situation? Simply stated, the kerygma is God in Jesus Christ effecting our salvation in the midst of our painful situation. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Him.” (2 Cor. 5:19). This defines the kerygma in its essence. The early Christians in the New Testament proclaimed this gospel which is centered in Jesus Christ. This Jesus who is the Christ, was born, was crucified and was dead, and was resurrected from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). We will talk about this gospel contextually from three theological perspectives – contradiction, convergence and consummation.

1) Contradiction. The God situation and man situation are in contradiction. The contradiction is not original but consequential. In the original it was "in the beginning God", not man. He created man in His image. In the consequential it is "in the beginning man". He creates God in his own image. In the original where we find God as the beginning and creator of man in His image, we find man as he ought to be. He was made for relationship with God as a creature to his creator. It is in this relationship where man is to find the meaning of his being and life. In the words of the Psalmist, "He was made lower than the angels and has crowned him with glory and honor." (Ps. 8:4). In the consequential, we find man as he ought not to be. As seen in the story of the fall, we find man 'missing the mark'. This is the meaning of sin. He has lost his sense of origin, destiny and meaning. In the original, even though man was not created perfect, he was given the potentiality to become what he ought to be. Paul says, "that we might become unto him, the image of the invisible God." Sin, whether individual or social, should be understood as that which prevents the actualization of man's potential to become his self as he ought to be in Christ Jesus. This is why anything done individually or socially that prevents the actualization of man's potential as a creature of God is sin. Greed which is the reason for depriving others of what is due for their well-being is a sin because it prevents the actualization of the potential of those who are poverty stricken. Suppression and oppression are sins when they prevent the rightful expression of freedom for man's self-determination. Exploitation is a sin because it prevents man from attaining his dignity and rights, which are necessary in order for him to be human. One look at our Filipino situation reveals that we are not what we ought to be. Our country is beautiful, gifted with

rich natural resources. Our 7,000 emerald isles are surrounded by a body of water which is teeming with many kinds of marine life.

The verdant mountains and our fertile plains offer numberless opportunities to our people for productive and abundant living. More than this, our people are gifted with a happy disposition, creativity and resourcefulness.

We are a people who live in captivity in our own country. We have a colonial past with a span of four centuries beginning in 1521. According to Prof. Kosuke Koyama, there are four Filipinos in each Filipino that you meet today. There's the Filipino before 1521. There's another Filipino between 1521 and 1898 when the Americans came. Next is the Filipino from 1898 to 1946 which includes the Japanese occupation. Lastly, there's another Filipino between 1946 to the present. This colonial past has engendered in us a colonial mentality. This is characterized first of all by our *dependence* upon foreign support and/or control. The cash crops that we produce are sold at a price not determined by us but determined by others. Even the huge sums of money that we borrow are earmarked to buy agricultural and industrial commodities from countries where we borrowed the money. This doubles our indebtedness and adds some more because we do not have the resources and the technology to support our own development. We will always be "developing", perhaps.

There is no dignity in our people. Where there is poverty there is no dignity. About a year ago, a P1,000.00 monthly income was cited as the poverty line. An existence below that income line would mean to be in poverty. At that time about 60% of our people were living below the poverty line. Foreign investors are invited into our country to invest and the sales pitch is that labor is cheap in our country. Where labor is cheap,

profit is assured. Applying this to daily life means keeping the wage at its minimum while the cost of living is rising. Our government technocrats were happy to announce that last year the income of our government from the revenues derived from the earnings of Filipinos abroad was \$600 million. What we did not see in this figure was the discontentment of many Filipinos in staying in their homeland and the indignities they suffer as third class residents of a foreign country. If marriage could bring our women abroad, all they needed was a letter of marriage assurance from unknown foreigners. Most of them, about 80% according to newspaper reports, end up sexually abused with the promise of marriage unfulfilled.

Those of us who do not have the opportunity to go abroad, they lack the power for self-determination. This sense of powerlessness among our people defines the fatalistic attitude that they have towards the political and economic condition of our country. This *bahalana* attitude makes our people contented with just getting by each day. The future bears no hope. The present has only a simple demand – to adjust to whatever situation that may occur.

But there are among us, who because of their anger and frustration, are taking the bull by the horns. They cannot accept the fact that they should live in ignorance and deprivation while only about 5% of our people are controlling 90% of our country's total resources. If the present capitalistic system could not change the lot of our people, then it must be changed. Furthermore they see in the present regime a systematic suppression of the rights of people, in the name of national security, when in fact what it is trying to secure is the security of those who are in power. National security and all the instruments that it employs, such as Presidential Commitment Order (PCO) and Preventive Detention Action (PDA), are

expressive not of our stability but of our instability. What it is saying is “Don’t rock the boat.” It implies that the boat is sinking because it has developed many leaks.

The litany of our painful situation as a people in captivity can go on because they are many. But is changing the present system the best alternative? While the system is important, there is something that is prior to it—the people. Instead of changing the system, change the people. Any system of government is only as good or bad as its people. Situations are not what they ought to be because people, individually, are not what they ought to be. Man is only man as he ought to be when he is related to God. The God-man contradiction must be overcome.

2) The Convergence. Convergence is the point where two lines that travel in opposite directions meet. It is the point of convergence where the contradiction between what is and what ought to be is resolved. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Him.” (2Cor. 5:19) Change in man and in his situation must be understood in the light of God’s initiative, which is prior to human initiative. Man cannot change himself to become what he ought to be. Only God can for he is the creator and man is His creation.

God in Christ means that God was incarnated or made flesh in him. Flesh is the substance of our existence. Understandably the church Fathers and theologians of the 4th century defined their Christology in terms of the *vere Deo vere homo* of Jesus Christ substantially. God and man as two substances were made one in Jesus Christ. Today that interpretation persists and is the reason for the theological debate on how was God as substance made one with human flesh, as another substance. This approach must answer the question, how God is substance when He is Spirit. If God was

substance, how can the different substances be made one, indistinguishable and equal at the same time separate and distinct? Solutions to this theological problem have led some to think of Jesus as more than man and less than God or the combination of both which makes him a third being.

I suggest that a functional approach had more existential meaning for us than the substantial one. Jesus was very God and very man because he represented God to man as he is for us and at the same time he represented man to God as man is a fallen creation.

Flesh is the form of existence in which the world is experienced. In the incarnation God is seen to participate in all of our human experience. Joy and pain, hope and despair, acceptance and rejection, abundance and deprivation are known through the flesh. In Jesus Christ, God's participation in human existence and His acceptance of it is also complete. God for us and man for God is the meaning of Jesus Christ as very God and very man.

In the incarnation the presence of God in human history is both personal and social, particular and universal. He is for me, He is for others, not chronologically in the sense that he is for me first and then he is for others later. He is for me and for others simultaneously. But when it comes to our acceptance of him it takes place in our particular situation. God is for all becomes abstract and meaningless unless it is understood first in a personal and particular way as God for me.

The reason why Christianity in the Philippines is lacking the vitality and power to transform the political and social life of the Filipinos is because it is lacking in the personal aspect. According to the survey 86% of our people are Roman Catholic and about more than 10% are Protestants and Independents representing many denominations and sects. The rest belongs to

non-Christian religions such as Islam, and others. According to the principle of *eiusregio cuius religio* (His region his religion) when a leader of a given community was baptized into the Christian religion, all the members of that community were designated as converts to the religion embraced by their leader. It is easy to see that what is propagated here was nominal Christianity. There was no personal commitment to God who is Christ. Personal commitment means living by the demands of God as it is known in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul meant when he said "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). The God for me becomes the Christ in me lived by me in the flesh as Christ was in the flesh.

The social and universal meaning of the incarnation can be seen in this, that the Christ who is in me is the same as the Christ who is in others. This establishes the basis for human relationship. Christian life means a "responsive" life to the Christ who is in me and to the Christ who is in others. *God, the other, the I* are the three components in the total dimension of Christian relationship. Accordingly the greatest commandment of all is "Thou shall love the Lord thy *God*... and *thy neighbor* as *thyself*".

In the incarnation we see God's presence in Christ as a redeeming presence. It redeems us from our self-centered existence. Self-centered existence is a distorted existence. It establishes the self as the center of the world where others are viewed as means to its end and not ends in themselves. In relation to God, self-centered existence creates God according to man's image. It is in this existence where man's contradiction to God is seen.

The redeeming presence of God is first a judgment on man's self-centeredness. It is a judgment not to destroy man but to transform his existence where self-centeredness is replaced

by God-centeredness. Love defined as *agape* is that which wills the good of others by removing anything in their lives that prevent the actualization of their potential to be as they ought to be in Jesus Christ.

This has significant implications in the life of the Filipino family, the Church and the larger community. Christ in me will lead me to seek a relationship with others on the basis of the Christ who is in them. It is through this that I can view others not as means to my own end but as ends in themselves.

A Filipino Theology must be concerned with the family. We first get in touch with human situation through our family. The human contradictions that we talked about can be experienced in its destructiveness in the family. It is important therefore that personal response to the Gospel must first be lived in the family. A Filipino Theology must define the basis of family relationship beyond that of providing only the material well-being of its members. The educational element of this theology must promote the inculcation of spiritual and moral values among its members.

The meaning of incarnation, which is Christ in me seeking the Christ in others, must be illustrated in the life and mission of the church. Human contradictions are present in the church. We see in her life the propagation of traditional division and disunity, which characterized the churches in the west. We see in her a holy place where many numbers of her congregations are welcomed and others are not. We see in her pride, when by her ways, she declares that her church gate is the only gate to heaven. We see in her disobedience when she does her mission according to the congregation's convenience even though it falls short of the mandate of the Great Commission. A Filipino Theology, which takes seriously the meaning of the incarnation, must provide Filipino Christians

the understanding of our Christian unity, which goes beyond our denominational and sectarian loyalty. There can be Christian unity without conformity. There are differences in doctrine but only one God. While doctrine divides us, only love can unite us. The essence of the Christian gospel is not doctrine. It is personal love. The church as a *koinonia*, is a community of believers where life communion is expressed in its deepest level. It must express in her life the presence of the kingdom of God where righteousness, justice and freedom reign. Only then can the church be in the larger community of people.

Filipino Theology, which is incarnated, must define for Filipino Christian how in flesh they can respond to the gospel they live in the larger community. We live and find our livelihood in the community of people. In the larger community standards of life are different from those which we know as members of Christian community. To establish a separate community apart from the larger community is contrary to the meaning of our mission as the people of God. Christ in me seeking the Christ in others should define our involvement in the larger community. This means that we should seek to understand and to participate in what Christ is doing in the life of the people.

How is Christ present in the larger community? It means how he is present in the public places, in the business establishment, in market places, in the highways and byways of life, and in the government.

Our country is like a volcano, which is about to explode. The pressure is building up inside because of economic inequality, injustice and suppression of freedom and human rights. These are distortions in Filipino life, which prevent the process of actualization in order that we might become what we ought to be. In the incarnation, we see God in Jesus Christ

participating fully in distorted human existence not in approval of it. In fact, it is because of divine disapproval of these distortions that "God became flesh and dwelt among us" in order to remove them so as to effect His claim upon his own.

His presence in our history is not limited in the sense that He is present in some and not in others. He is present in all because His claim is for all. But we see his presence more clearly among the poor, the oppressed, the prisoner, and the sick because of their suffering. It is in suffering where we perceive clearly our human contradiction against God. Ketamori in his book, *The Theology of the Pain of God*, speaks of Himself when His divine disapproval of our human condition meets with his acceptance of us. It is in His pain that we perceive the essence of God.

The presence of Christ in the poor and the oppressed is a redeeming presence. It seeks to redeem them from the historical forces that prevent the actualization of their potential as creatures of God. It is this presence of Christ in others that defines our Christian responsibility, because it calls us to participate in what Christ is doing among these people for their redemption. I am using the word *redeem* instead of *liberate* because it implies the claim of God for ownership on the object of redemption. Man should live for God and not for himself as implied by the word *liberate*. Also, *redeem* is theological, while *liberate* is political. "He who has done this unto the least of these my brethren has done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). The redeeming act of God is not only a spiritual act, which is directed towards the redemption of man's spirit from the bondage of the flesh. Redemption, which is salvation, means the redemption of the total man from all that prevent the actualization of his physical, social and spiritual well-being. It is therefore a process that leads to a state of fulfillment, hence, it is both *now* and *hereafter*.

Redemption is not only the poor and the oppressed who are the object of Christ's redeeming work. The purpose of redemption is all-inclusive. They include the rich, the strong and the oppressor. They too are living in human contradiction. They need to be redeemed from their self-centered existence. They are blinded by their power and self-confidence and they define life according to the meaning that they give to it. They see people as means to their selfish ends and not end in themselves. In spite of this, "they too", as said by Jesus of Zaccheus, "are heirs of the promise".

The purpose of human government must be defined according to the redemptive plan of God. It is constituted and ordained by God to actualize the potential of any man and woman within its sovereignty so that they would become what they ought to be. It is on the basis of this function that we owe allegiance to it. A government must be supported or opposed on the basis of whether it undertakes or neglects this God-given purpose. Any government must be judged on the basis of whether it is sensitive and responsive to the aspirations of its people to become what they ought to be.

Our country is a developing country. We are in the process of transforming our way of life from feudalism to industrialism. Accordingly, we must modernize through science and technology. What was manipulated as a system of government which can make this possible is the authoritarian system. This system demands that we trust our leader. We must trust the leadership of our government to understand truthfully the needs of our people. It must be a leadership that enjoys the trust and confidence of its constituency. It must be a leadership that can unite the people and rally them to support its program. What we see in our country today is not what we expected. There are many people in our midst who do not think that the

leadership is sensitive and responsive to their needs. The middle class is not responding to the call of our leadership for support and participation in its program. Our country is not united but divided, not geographically but politically and ideologically.

Our leadership is experiencing a crisis of credibility. This crisis exists because the leadership's description of our life is different from what we experience everyday. It describes development in terms of what it has built but it does not say about the many empty stomachs among our people. It describes the peace and order situation as normal even after the foremost opposition leader of our country was gunned down at the Manila International Airport in broad daylight. It speaks of freedom when many of our people are languishing in jails without due process.

Our people are crying for freedom and justice but their cries are not heard. They are not heard because they cry in silence. This is the cry of protest, which they are keeping to themselves because protest of this kind is subversive and therefore deserving of punishment by this authoritarian regime.

Only the Christ in us can let us hear this cry in silence of the oppressed and the fearful because the Christ in them is the same as the Christ in us. We are committed to be involved in this situation because that is what it meant to have Christ in us seeking the Christ which is in others to remove everything that prevents the actualization of their potential for total well-being. Strategy must indeed be developed to put this to effect. Whatever strategy we employ, it should be the result of our response not only to the situation but also to the gospel in a given situation.

3) Consummation. Consummation is a state of fulfillment. It suggests a process that leads to that state. The gospel of Jesus Christ describes the action of God in history as a process, which is consummated in the future. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Him. This process refers to the reconciling act of God.

Filipino Theology must consider the action of God in history. In spite of the distortions of human existence in history, a Christian finds meaning in it because God acts in it. This is the assurance that what ought to be will be. This hope is not based on the possibilities of what man can do but in the actuality of what God has already done in Jesus Christ. The early Christian church saw this hope in Jesus Christ through the show window of the resurrection. This Jesus, they declared, who lived among us was a man of great deeds, he was crucified and he died. But God raised him up from the dead and declared him Lord of all. He is coming again.

Three things are implied in the Christian gospel. These are 1) meaning in history; 2) hope within history; and 3) fulfillment in and outside of history.

History is made up of events but not isolated events. They are meaningful events because they are related to each other. We talked about Philippine history in terms of a series of single events leading to the other culminating in the existence of the country, the Philippines. The same is true with other histories. Meaningful events need not be big in order to be meaningful and significant. Most of the time these events are single and isolated ones but they have a stimulating influence on the other events and together they develop a vitality which becomes identifiable.

History therefore can be seen as a movement, which leads to a certain end. Materialistic determinism sees this

movement in history as a blind force, which had the point of resolution within history itself. This blind force is caused by the conflict of opposite elements in human society. It is this conflict that moves history to its utopian end.

The Christian view of meaning in history is different in the sense that while others see a blind force in it, Christians see in it a determining force which is not blind but vital and personal. In the incarnation we see God in Jesus Christ present and acting in our history. This action of "God in history is redemptive because it draws together the separated; God in Jesus Christ *reconciling* the world unto Himself".

Separation of man from God and man from man renders history to be meaningless. History as it appears now is meaningless because man is separated from his fellowman in his social, political, economic and religious life. The events which come from individual life become isolated events, therefore meaningless.

Separation is also the reason for powerlessness. There is no vitality and power when man is separated from his fellow man. This separation is not geographic in the sense that man live alone in time and space. Indeed, he lives in the superficial and his dealing with others is for accommodation and convenience. He uses others as he allows himself to be used by others. In a relationship like this, the worth of the individual is measured on the basis of this material value. But appreciation of his own true worth as he is, "crowned with glory and honor", is absent. He becomes a face in a crowd with no individuality of his own and no dignity for which he could be respected and honored.

God overcomes this separation. The Christ in me seeking the Christ in others is the meaning of the act of reconciliation. It establishes the priority of the vertical over the horizontal. The

reconciliation of man with God is primary. The reconciliation of man with man becomes the consequence of this primary act. In the words of John "we love because he first loved us."

It is in this state of reconciliation where life's true meaning is known and power is experienced. It is only in Jesus Christ where we can see this state of life to have been fulfilled. In our individual cases, the process of fulfillment is present but its fulfillment is yet to be. This is why even in the life of Christians and in the existence of the church we see many evidences of separation and distortions. But in the midst of these distortions, a creative process is presented which is transforming the old to become new.

The Christian community lives in hope. They do not live in a vacuum. They live in the midst of distortions yet they believe that what God has done in Jesus Christ, has the consequence of finality. In him all the separation has been reconciled and all distortions of human life have been overcome. For them, hope is both present and future. In the present, hope is present in the process of becoming what we ought to be. In the future it is being freed from all distortions of human life.

The Christian community is an activist community. People with hope are not apathetic. They live a vital life. It is a community with a mission. The Christ in them makes them always search the Christ in others, participating in the work of Christ of actualizing the God-given potentials in others. They participate in the removal of everything that hinders their actualization. They are not stationary. They are always on the move. They find themselves in the government, in schools, in hospitals, in public markets, always responding to the call of Christ who is in others. They do this not according to their convenience but according to their calling. To paraphrase D.T.

Niles, they are like beggars telling other beggars where the food is. In their life with others they serve as catalyst to unite those who are separated and isolated. They turn the powerlessness of the separated and isolated into powerful living. This is why Christians who live their hope are always a threat to any oppressive government or system.

The Christian community lives in *proleptic anticipation*, a term used by Dr. Hans Schwarz in his book *On the Way to the Future*. This means living now in anticipation of what is to come. Christians take history seriously. They do not live in one isolated segment of time. They see in the past a promise, in the present, hope, and in the future a fulfillment. They see the present as important because of its demand on them to make a decision now. The Christian response to present situations is made on the basis of the reality, which they perceive in the future. They see this reality in Jesus Christ who to them is future made present now.

THE CONVENTION OF PHILIPPINE BAPTIST CHURCHES STATEMENT CONCERNING THE PRESENT NATIONAL CRISIS

We view the current crisis which is prevailing in our country with great concern. The wind of dissent, violence and rebellion is over our land. The August 21 assassination of former Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr. had unleashed the forces of discontentment and protest among the many segments of our society.

These protest demonstrations and movements which we are experiencing in our midst are sounding out the clamor of our people for the establishment of a just system of government which provides freedom and equality for all. There are many of our people who feel the need for the restoration of their freedoms which were guaranteed by the 1935 Constitution and which were taken away from them since the imposition of Martial Law in 1972.

Ours is the crisis of confidence over how the affairs of our government are being managed. We are alarmed by our national indebtedness of \$25 billion to foreign banks in consequence of which we are losing control of the management of our economy and politics. The progress which is expected as a result of infusion of these borrowed funds is superficial because it has not improved the economic status of the majority of our people. Furthermore, while many are impoverished, a few elite have become unjustifiably wealthy. The credibility of our national leadership is badly eroded because the meaningful reforms in our government which were promised by the New

Society have not abated the proliferation of graft and corruption in our political and social life. Instead, we are seeing the worsening of situations which the new system of government is seeking to eliminate.

The present crisis has polarized our people between the oppressor and the oppressed, the rich and the poor, the pro-government and the anti-government. The polarization of our people is made more intense by proponents of ideological systems who purportedly are championing the cause of the people. We are, as a nation, divided. We are aware of the forces that are agitating for change. Some of these forces are constructive. Some are destructive. There are those among our people who are working for reform, for the reconciliation of the separated elements in our society through means that are non-violent. There are those who are for revolution, for the dismantling of the present system to be replaced by another system. To attain this end, armed confrontation, when necessary, should be resorted to. As Baptists, who are members of the Christian Church, we are for meaningful and constructive change in our society. We believe that it is our God-given right and responsibility to participate in the development of a system of life and government where justice reigns supreme and where responsible exercise of freedom is respected and protected. We believe that it is the just due of every person to live in dignity with equal opportunity to actualize his/her well-being. We affirm our solidarity with those who are poor, oppressed and powerless and we plead their cause and struggle with them for their liberation.

We reject armed violence as a means to attain creative change in our society. Armed violence and confrontation against the power that be is not a Christian alternative. Violence breeds violence. What violence establishes, violence will

destroy. The Christian gospel and faith do not provide any motivation that will justify violence as a means for creative change in our society. Those who are tempted to resort to this means must be aware that in the experiences of other people, violence is usually motivated by “suppressed aggression, envy, vengeance, lack of readiness to suffer or impatience that springs from unbelief...” (*Victory over Violence*, p. 91.).

Theological Basis

Our participation for creative change is not ideologically but theologically inspired. Our inspiration is our God who in His Son Jesus Christ had chosen to incarnate Himself in human history. In Jesus Christ, he identified Himself with the sick, the poor, the oppressed and the imprisoned in order to set them at liberty. He affirmed the membership of His disciples in the political and spiritual communities. “Render unto Caesar the things that are of Caesar, and unto God the things that are of God” (Matthew 22:21). But loyalty to the spiritual community which is the Kingdom of God should be prior to their loyalty to the political community. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31). In the same manner, Jesus Christ did not deny his membership in his family. But when it came to priority, He put the priority of the Kingdom of God over that of His family. Whether in the family or in the bigger social community, His mission was to “do the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mark 3:33-35). In Jesus Christ the presence of the Kingdom of God was seen in the midst of people as a creative force which was overcoming the ambiguities of life. As it was, so it is, the Kingdom of God has come in the midst of people. We partially perceive it in the midst of the ambiguities of our

history. But in God's own time and through His initiative alone, the Kingdom of God will be fully revealed to us.

We are committed to give faithful obedience to God's mission of reconciliation. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). We understand Christian Mission to be the mission of reconciliation. Reconciliation is basically a divine initiative. It is for the purpose of overcoming the state of alienation which exists between God and man. Sin is separation from God. We believe that man's reconciliation with God is the prerequisite to a genuine reconciliation of man to his fellowman. The basic need of man regardless of his status or condition is to be reconciled to God.

Mission and Crisis

Our Christian mission is directed to all people – the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless. We align ourselves with people not on the basis of their political, social and economic status but on the basis of their need to be reconciled to God and to their fellowman. It is not our mission to agitate one group of people against another no matter how just the cause might be. Ours is to plead the just cause of one to the other and to help discover a new basis for relationship where understanding and harmony are attained by all who are concerned. We are also aware that in order for genuine reconciliation to take place the causes of separation must be removed. As it is with God, so it is with man, reconciliation requires judgment and rejection of sin or that which alienates in order for it to be real and enduring.

To participate in what God is doing in history means for us to be involved in our historical life in all of its totality. In this

specific instance it means participating actively in the political affairs of our government. We are citizens of our country and at the same time members of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Our membership in both institutions is separate and yet not contradictory.

Church-State Relation

During this period of great political upheaval in our national life, the relation between the church with the state has become confused and strained. There are different expressions of concern from the church – about the state. The state has responded to many of these concerns with suspicion and aggravation. In many occasions, representatives of the civil government have made it known that the church's concerns for the state are tantamount to intervention and are contrary to the principle of the separation of church and state. We understand our own expressions of concern for the state as that which are intended to preserve and honor the true meaning of the relationship between the church and the state.

We hold firmly to the historic Baptist principle of the separation of church and state. This principle is intended to secure religious freedom for all. By this it meant that the state should not pass laws establishing a religion or laws favoring one religion over others. We believe that God created man for a life of relationship with Him and has endowed man with dignity and freedom so that he can worship his Creator according to the dictates of his conscience.

The relation between the church and state is that of independence and interdependence. Independence because as institutions one should be free from the interference of the other in the management of its institutional affairs. Their

interdependent relationship lies in the fact that both are ordained by God to minister to and for the well-being of the people. Both are servants of God. The state is concerned with the temporal, while the church, the spiritual, well-being of the people. But since in man the temporal and the spiritual are two aspects of the whole man, the operation of one concern becomes interrelated with the other.

Neither of the two institutions should exist in complete disregard of the other. Sociologically, the church is a community within the bigger community which is the state. The concern of one necessarily is involved in the concern of the other. The state needs spiritual and moral ministry of the church and the church needs the political ministry of the state for the well-being of the people. It is on their mutual ministry for the well-being of the people where their diving ordination lies and it is for this that they are both held accountable before God. The principle of separation preserves the partnership between the church and the state while they remain distinct from each other. It is in their distinctiveness where one partner can truly render a ministry which is unique and special according to its nature. A religion which is controlled by the state is a poor religion. On the other hand, politics which is controlled by the church is poor politics.

In the exercise of their servanthood, when one partner becomes unfaithful or forgetful of its God-given task, it is the responsibility of the other to be the conscience of the one in order to call it back to its servanthood. The church exercises this responsibility to the state through its prophetic ministry. It is the prophetic ministry of the church to give exhortation and judgment on all kinds of unrighteousness that are prevailing. It is intended to raise up the fallen, to give direction to the lost and to strengthen those who are weak.

Our prophetic ministry must be freed from motivations which are foreign to our Christian faith. Enlightened by the Word of God, our judgment of the human situation must be based on our desire for truth, justice and goodness. We must remember that in judging we are also judged by God and man.

In the final analysis, our prophetic ministry to the government is by nature a self-criticism. For a while we are members of the church, we are also citizens of our government. A government is only as good or as bad as its people. Ours is a representative form of government. A duly constituted government is government where sovereignty resides on the people. The people govern themselves indirectly through their elected representatives. We own the responsibility to create a system of government which reflects the sovereign will of the people. A leadership which violates this principle does not deserve the cooperation of the people. Hence, it will not endure.

We believe that it is our moral and spiritual obligation to our people to enlighten them about their God-given rights as well as their responsibility as citizens of our government. It is over conviction that only an enlighten people whose dependence is upon God and whose exercise of conscience is nurtured in freedom and responsibility can provide a creative and meaningful change in our government. Our Christian mission is relevant to our people because we believe that Jesus Christ is the source of true enlightenment and that His gospel has implications and imperatives which cover all of life.

Inspite of the present crisis in our nation life, we are optimistic about the future of our country. Our loyalty for it and our hope for its good future are not dependent upon the nature and character of its leadership. Leadership is transitory. The people are abiding. As long as there are people in our country, God will work out His will among them for He is in the midst of

them. The blessing of God for our country is available to us if we, as a people are willing to follow His leading. "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I shall hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). We owe allegiance to our God and to our country. To God be the glory and to our people the hope of a great future.

(This statement was written by Dr. Johnny V. Gumban. It was discussed by the Faith and Order Committee of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches composed of Dr. Agustin A. Pulido, Dr. Agustin E. Masa, Prof. Rodolfo Acosta, Mrs. Josefina Ruiz, Dr. Moises Ponteras, Dr. Johnny V. Gumban, and Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr. and Atty. Angel Lobaton, Jr. as Ex-Officio Members. On May 11, 1984, the CPBC in its General Assembly approved it as its official statement.)

BAPTIST INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIETY

Christian involvement in the affairs of our society is not only necessary but mandated by our faith. Necessary because as Christians we are both members of the church and member of society. Also mandated because it is our membership in the church, which is the body of Christ, which provides us the reason and meaning for our involvement in society. Christ, who is Lord both of the church and society, has called us to reflect our faith in all the aspects of life in our society for the transformation of its life according to the will of God. We take seriously the command of our Lord to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” (Matt.5:13-14)

Our mission to transform society implies our recognition of its need for transformation. It is a fallen society composed of fallen men and women. Its fallenness is due to its denial of God’s will upon its life. Our recognition of its fallenness should not give us reason to feel superior and arrogant over it. For we are members of society and we share its fallenness. But while we are member of society, we are also members of the church. Our involvement in society must be with humility because we share its fallenness. But it must also be with love and hope because, by faith we have become partakers of the promise guaranteed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. The Gospel is not ours to keep but to share. By our involvement in society, we declare by word and deed the Gospel which is new life in Christ by grace through faith.

Our involvement in society must be an enlightened one. Discipleship is a day to day following of Christ whose presence we experience in His word and in the world where we live. Our

response to His presence both in the word and in the world constitutes what to us is enlightened involvement. Although the presence of Christ both in the word and in the world is freely given, our individual vision of the presence is blurred by our human concerns. Without diminishing the importance of our personal response to His Presence, there is a need for all of us to share together our individual visions in order for us to have a united expression of our discipleship.

Recognizing this need, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, considers it an expression of its servanthood to share its views on current issues in our society for the guidance of its member churches and our people.

National Sovereignty

Changing situations present new challenges. The EDSA Revolution of February 1986 significantly marked our nation's transition from an authoritarian to democratic form of government. A constitutional democracy was established by the great majority of our people with the ratification of the 1987 constitution. It is not a perfect constitution. Most of us voted with a critical yes when it was presented for ratification. But it has become the fundamental law of our nation. We must honor and defend it. Our government is not a perfect government. It is encumbered by economic bankruptcy resulting from the misrule of the past, political instability in the leadership, social ills and graft and corruption and disunity among the different sectors of our society. But, it is our government. It is our Christian responsibility to participate in constructive movements for change in order to transform it. Being a part of this government our work for transformation must be from within not from without, to construct instead of destroy and to

rebuild instead of to overthrow. We do not understand our relationship to our government as blind subservience to all that belongs to its system. In the light of our Christian faith, we protest against anything that is evil and unjust in order to change or remove it from our government. But we also must promote that which is good and just for the wellbeing of our people and country.

We believe that the preservation and strengthening of our national sovereignty is a responsibility which primarily belongs to the people. Our constitution provides that sovereignty resides on the people. The people entrust the power to govern upon those whom they have chosen to govern through the exercise of their suffrage. The leadership of our government is held accountable for the power entrusted unto them by the people. It is not only expected but required of our leaders that they must wield the power entrusted to them responsibly, by being sensitive to the needs of the people and, morally, by providing our people, with their life and deeds, the model of true servanthood.

This is of great importance that the constitutional provisions and processes which secure this for our people must be safeguarded. We support all efforts that protect the right of suffrage of our people, that preserves civilian authority over the military and the promulgation and strict enforcement of just laws so that justice will be for all and act only for the privileged few.

We believe in the right of the sovereign people to live in dignity with wellbeing. We support all efforts which are for just distribution of our country's resources and opportunities for self-support and actualization.

On Social Justice

Our country is rich in natural resources. But more than 70% of our people are living in poverty. This anomalous situation breeds discontentment among the vast majority of our people. The causes for this unjust situation are many. Their solutions are complicated and would require time before they can bring results. We support all efforts which are directed towards the attainment of social justice, economic recovery and stability and peace.

We recognize the sincere effort of our government to correct the unjust social and economic condition of our people. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program is one significant move of our government which seeks to remedy this situation. We support its general intention for social justice. But we are aware of the infirmities in many of its provisions especially on retention limit and just compensation. We urgently request our legislators, whose responsibility it is to legislate laws that would define the Agrarian program, to work out provisions for these controversial issues which will be just for all sectors of our society. The Agrarian program of our government must not only be distribution of land to the landless. It must provide the necessary capital and agricultural and managerial skills to our farmers. It must see to it that the land distribution scheme must not be confiscatory in nature. It must provide an acceptable provision on just compensation to landowners so that their loss of ownership will amount to their economic advantage. We believe that these will help make the Agrarian program of the government a good instrument for social justice.

On Economic Recovery

Economic recovery and stability is a priority concern of our government. Our economy was greatly devastated through the misrule of the past regime. We have a staggering foreign indebtedness of more than 27 billion dollars. The annual interest payment alone on this indebtedness represents about one half of our national budget. Even though the people did not directly and fully benefit from these foreign loans, our government must honor those that are legitimate. We support the move of our government to secure an agreement with the foreign lending bodies for the restructuring of these loans so that out fulfillment of their requirements will not unduly hamper our economic survival and recovery.

Under the present circumstances, it has become necessary for our government to invite foreign investments in our country. We support this program provided that it is based upon consideration of mutual benefit and respect for our laws. We are aware that foreign investment necessitates preservation of foreign interest. This becomes the root cause of foreign intervention. Foreign intervention takes place in order to preserve foreign interest.

We denounce foreign intervention by any country because it violates our national sovereignty. We do not equate our denunciation of foreign intervention with Anti-Americanism. Even though the U.S. presence is very evident in our country, we are aware also of the presence of other countries, such as Japan, China, Russia, European and Middle Eastern countries. Neither does our denunciation of foreign intervention mean our preference for isolationism. This is unrealistic and destructive of our wellbeing.

We believe that individually all nations have self-interest. This, we must accept and respect. We cannot deny also that in the light of our world reality, all nations exist interrelatedly. In many respects of this international relationship, the self-interest of one nation run counter to the self-interest of the other. We denounce the unjust imposition of the self-will of stronger nations upon the self-will of the weaker ones. It is our Christian responsibility to call upon all nations to promote international relationship on the basis of mutual interest and benefits according to the principle of justice in the interest of peace.

We believe in the capacity of our people and our leadership to forge this kind of an agreement with other nation. We endorse the program of our government which calls for foreign investment in our country to help rebuild our devastated economy. But our situation today must not be taken advantage of by other countries to forge opportunistic investment agreements with our country which are unjust to us. It is our responsibility as Christians to constantly make aware our leadership about the need to preserve national will and sovereignty.

In the final analysis, it is our conviction that the wellbeing and destiny of our nation does not depend upon the intervention or non-intervention of our countries in our government. It depends primarily on how united and responsible we are as a people in developing and making use of our own resources for the development of our nation.

On Muslin Rebellion, Law and Order and Communist Insurgency

The development of our nation requires the unity of our people who must have freedom and peace in their pursuit of

their livelihood. This is why the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao, the high rate of criminality and most of all, the insurgency problem posed by the New People's Army of the Communist Party of the Philippines are of great concern to us.

The Muslim rebellion is for the establishment of the autonomous region in Mindanao composed of 13 provinces under the independent political administration of the Muslim Filipinos, with their own armed forces, for the preservation of their own cultural and religious life. We respect our Muslim Filipinos desire for freedom and we must support efforts that would preserve their religious and cultural freedom according to that which is lawful and just. But, we oppose any claim for autonomy if by this, it means secession from our government. Secession implies dismemberment of our territorial entity. Furthermore, the granting of autonomy to any region, for the purpose of strengthening indigenous leadership, must fulfill just the constitutional provision which requires that the issue of autonomy be referred to the people in that given region for their decision in a plebiscite. We support the stand of the government on this matter.

The present rate of criminality is systemic of our poor economic condition, inefficient enforcement of law and order and moral decay among our people. By criminality we do not only mean violent crimes committed against person and property. We also mean by this, moral and social crimes such as graft and corruption in our society, prostitution, pornography, drug addiction and alcoholism and gambling. We support a total approach to the solutions of those problems which includes increasing the capability of our law enforcement agency so that it can enforce efficiently and strictly our laws, moral and spiritual education in the homes by families and by churches and by community action of the people in our society.

The insurgency problem in our country is of great concern to us. It is a real threat to our government. The communists, through the New People's Army, in their pursuit of their revolutionary goal, which is to overthrow the government, are violent and ruthless. The "Sparrow Units," their dreaded urban terrorists have already claimed the lives of many government officials and military personnel. The NPA's campaign against the government has claimed thousands of lives through violent confrontations with the military.

It is unfortunate that the peace negotiation of the Aquino government with the Communists did not succeed. It is obvious to us that to the communists' social justice cannot be realized under the present democratic system. To them, it can be attained only through the overthrow of our government. Our people have, in many occasions, consistently rejected the communists' alternative even though it is for genuine transformation.

The agenda for genuine transformation in our country is a concern which the communist insurgents do not have a monopoly of. It is the concern of the church, the government and our people. Lacking the support of the majority of our people, the communists have opted to pursue their goal through a subtle propaganda movement and violent confrontation. Its propaganda movement has infiltrated all sectors of our society, including the church. Those in the church, priests, nuns, pastors and lay people who are inclined towards a political theology, such as Liberation Theology, have shown great sympathy for, if not adherence to, the communist cause. We have noted the effort of these elements to politicize our churches and to interpret the missionary enterprise politically and ideologically. We have consistently, as Baptists, rejected these efforts.

We respect the right of the communists and their sympathizers to believe what they believe. But we reject their option for the establishment of a totalitarian government through violent confrontation.

On Vigilantes

The organization of vigilantes and other civilian action groups is a defensive response to the communists' impositions upon our civilian communities. It is common knowledge among our people that, to support the revolution, the communists have imposed illegal progressive taxation on the poor farmers, teachers, businessmen and other civilians in the rural and suburban areas. Failure on the part of these civilians to comply with these imposed requirements has resulted in their being kidnapped, tortured and killed by the NPA. Many of our people find the vigilante organizations to be necessary for their own survival. These had been excesses committed by the vigilantes. We do not condone these excesses especially when they are unlawful and are violative of human rights. We support the effort of our government to control these civilian movements to prevent them from committing aggressive and illegal acts but also to preserve their intention for self-defense. We believe in the rights of the civilians to defend themselves and their property through means that are lawful. On the whole, we believe that the government has the right and the responsibility to protect itself against anything that threatens its existence.

On Human Rights

We believe that it is the will of God that human life must have dignity and wellbeing. Any act which deprives man of his rights to actualize this will of God for his life is violative of his human rights. And, any act which preserves and promotes human rights is an act which is in accordance to the will of God. It is our Christian responsibility to preserve and promote these human rights for all people. It is also our Christian responsibility to condemn human rights violations wherever it is committed and whoever commits them. In a situation of conflict, a one-sided denunciation of human rights violation falls short of what we consider our Christian responsibility. Furthermore, it suggests that human rights are only provided as a means for advancing an ideology or a political cause. We reject this one-sided view on human rights. We condemn the human rights violations committed by the military, by the Civilian Home Defense Units and by the Vigilantes. We also condemn the human rights violations committed by the NPA as shown by their "killing fields" revealed by NPA surrenderees, their merciless torture and murder of civilians suspected by them as informers of the military, by their imposition of progressive taxation and forced recruitment of young people of rural families. We strongly disagree with those who claim these acts as justifiable because they are committed in the name of the revolution for the purpose of attaining genuine transformation.

The solution to the insurgency problem in our country is not only military. We support a total approach which includes social justice, moral and spiritual transformation, reform in our government and strict, efficient and just enforcement of law and order.

On Military Bases

The communist insurgency in our country brings to our awareness the ideological situation we are living in. Although the problem is internal, it is related to the international ideological conflict between two opposite political systems, the democratic-capitalistic systems. We are concerned about incessant reports of foreign interventions in our internal conflict. Foreign arms supply and military advisership are suspected to have become part of the internal conflict between the communists and the Muslim rebels on the one side and government on the other side. The government must endeavor through diplomatic means to prevent foreign intervention in the solution of our internal problems.

We address the issue of US Military bases in our country from this perspective. Is it for our security or is it for the preservation of foreign interest? We do not believe that our security is dependent upon their presence or absence. Considering that we are living in a nuclear age, the retention in or removal of US Military bases from our country will not free us from the deadly effects of Nuclear war should it occur. A nuclear free Philippines is not enough. A nuclear free world is what we aim for. If we must call for the removal of US Military bases in our country, we must also call for the removal of the Soviet bases in Cam Ranh Bay and of all bases in other places. Only an ideologically biased perspective will fall short of this requirement. If the US Military bases in our country are for preservation of foreign interest, then our government must decide to remove it or retain it on the bases of an agreement which will be mutually beneficial to both countries. We support the position of our government to retain the US Military bases in our country until the expiration of the Treaty of Agreement in

1991. The question on its retention or removal will be referred to our people for decision. In the meantime, we consider it our responsibility to educate our people on the subject by providing them all the information related to the subject so that they will be able to judge wisely and freely on what might be good for our country.

Implementation Program

As Christians we consider it our God given responsibility to be involved in the efforts of our government to rebuild our nation from the ruins of the past on the foundation of justice and peace in order to actualize the aspiration of our people for wellbeing in life as one nation under God.

This effort of our Convention to state its position on current issues is meant to provide our people and our constituency some guidance for their involvement in the affairs of our society. This is but final and absolute. We can revise our position in consideration of what is truthful and relevant to situations that may develop.

1. We urge that, upon approval of this document by our Convention leadership, this will be circulated to our churches and our fraternal organizations.
2. We urge that discussion of this document will be made in our church groups, Ministerial Conferences, Circuit, Kasapulanan and Convention Conferences.
3. All representatives of our Convention in local, national and international conferences must, in the discussion of issues herein mentioned, reflect the spirit of this document.

4. The Faith and Order Committee will continue to formulate positions on current issues which can be adopted by our Convention for the guidance of our churches.

(This statement was written by Dr. Johnny V. Gumban. It was approved by the Faith and Order Committee of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches composed of Chairman Dr. Johnny V. Gumban Dr. Agustin A. Pulido, Dr. Nycael Dais, Dr. Victor de la Cruz, and Rev. Ernesto Ungcho)

JOHNNY V. GUMBAN

(1935-2000)

If one knew only the parentage of Johnny and his life after 1960, one would think he was born a minister. He was the youngest child of Rev. and Mrs. Ramon M. Gumban. They were dedicated and very highly regarded workers in the Lord's vineyard, but the type of parents who probably would not have exerted much pressure on a son to enter the seminary, especially one who openly detested the fate of being a PK (pastor's kid). In fact, Rev. Gumban would probably have allowed Johnny to find his own niche if it had not been for a near fatal incident. An unruly boy at age three, Johnny had gone up to the third floor of Valentine Hall in Bacolod. There as his wont, he went beyond the limits of exploration generally done by normal three year olds. As usual in his zeal to discover new worlds, he overestimated his abilities and he fell from the third floor. The fall was so bad that he hovered over life and death. In his anguish, Rev. Gumban fell to his knees and dedicated Johnny to the Lord's work if He would extend his life. It was probably because he could not afford to see his father, whom he loved and respected despite his being responsible for Johnny's being a PK, fail to keep his word the late Johnny agree to try one year of theological studies in CPU after taking subjects toward A.B. English at West Negros College. Rev. Gumban's sales pitch alone would probably have fallen on deaf ears.

Johnny confided to his fellow Theology freshmen that he did not expect to stay long in theology because he knew theological studies would be boring. Such sentiment was not surprising coming from one who had a colorful high school life characterized by truancy, varied misdemeanors and even hard

drinking, probably in protest to being a PK. But it took only a few class sessions under Dr. Joseph T. Howard and other Theological professors at CPU to completely win him over to theological studies. But his refractory, wild teenage did serve a purpose. It was some kind of preparation for the work ahead — dealing with fellow students of various tempers and loyalties so that they would elect him president of the CPU Student Republic, giving counsel as Dean of the College of Theology to rebels with or without cause not only among the Theology students and faculty but also among the student leaders of organizations, with whom he had to deal as chairman of the Student Organization Committee. Because he had gone through the path of negativism, he was able to help resolve many difficult problem cases and serious conflict situations not only at the University but also in churches.

After doing outstanding work for the Bachelor of Theology, which he earned in 1960, he answered the call to be pastor of Ma-o Central Evangelical church. While pastoring there he was able to complete the course AB in English which he began at West Negros College while he was rebelling against theological training toward which his father guided him. This second degree qualified him to teach Argumentation and Debate in the Department of English, a subject which the CPU department head thought it was most adequately taught by him. From Ma-o, he went to Hartford Seminary Foundation where he obtained the B.D. in 1963 with a major in Systematic Theology, as a scholar of the World Council of Churches. While there, he worked as an associate pastor of the Elmwood Community Church in Elmwood, Connecticut from 1962-1963. Johnny spent school year 1963-64 at the Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, California for special studies in church history. Upon his return to the Philippines, he joined the faculty of the

CPU College of Theology, of which he became acting Dean from 1972 to 1974. To enhance his preparation for university teaching and administration, on the encouragement of his mentors, he returned to the States to pursue his doctorate at Andover-Newton Theological School in Boston.

At this time, he already had a daughter and two sons by Dr. Edna J. Gumban whom he married in 1966. When the scholarship committee learned that his family was with him, they told him that he was no longer entitled to financial assistance so Dr. Edna Jamandre-Gumban had to work to support the family and his studies. Fortunately, she quickly obtained work in the Boston Fernald State School for the mentally retarded, a position she reluctantly had to give up when Johnny decided to return to the Philippines after obtaining the D. Min. with major in Pastoral Care and Counseling in 1979. He insisted on returning if only to show the theological school authorities that he felt bound to serve the Philippine churches, even if they had withdrawn support for his doctoral studies. He also had to give up his position as associate pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in Arlington, Mass. where he served from 1977-1979. Although he helped train many pastors who now serve churches in the United States, Johnny felt that his proper place was the Philippines. The PK who thought he would be bored by theological studies was literally "addicted" to theological work in the Philippine vineyard.

Johnny resumed the Deanship in 1980, this time as full-fledged Dean and continued in this position until his retirement in May 2000. Concurrently with the Deanship, Johnny was asked to serve as senior minister of the CPU church from 1989 to 1991. When the duties of the university senior minister were extended in response to the needs of the expanding congregation and university relationships, the Church Council

decided to call a full-time senior pastor. So widely-known was Johnny as a preacher who delivered inspiring and edifying sermons, always within the time allotted for the sermon, that as soon as he was relieved of the university senior minister's duties, the Baptist Center Church in LaPaz lost no time in inviting him to be part-time senior minister. This position he held until 1996 when the University asked the Baptist Center Church to search for a full time senior minister since the development of the College of Theology soon required all of Dr. Gumban's time.

Later, when the Cosmopolitan Evangelical Church learned that he was due for retirement, they called him to serve as their minister. The leaders of the Cosmopolitan Church and Bacolod Bethany had difficulty agreeing on several church matters, but they agreed on the fact that they wanted Dr. Gumban to minister unto them. So as soon as he shook the CPU dust out of his boots when he reached retirement age, he started not only in ministering unto the two churches but also resolving conflicts that had arisen between the two churches. These efforts of reconciliation made Johnny's last days extremely busy, but he must have been fully gratified because he felt he was succeeding in bringing about reconciliation between the two churches. In fact, the choirs of the two churches joined in a musical number during the necrological service for him on September 2000. Serving these two Bacolod churches kept his days of retirement full, but Johnny's days had always been full, if not with teaching and preaching duties, with lectures, with weddings, funerals and baptisms, with what gave him the greatest joy — taking his apos (grandchildren) to and from school and playing with them. His calendar was often full because in addition to his involvement in local and national church and secular organizations, he responded to requests for

service and lectures outside the Philippines. Even the wee hours of the morning were spent on reading, for when theological books and whole libraries of his theologian friends were donated to CPU, he wanted to read them all so that he would keep abreast of developments in the field which he had thought would be boring.

Even when he was concurrently Dean of the College of Theology and senior pastor of the University Church and later of the Baptist Center Church, he served as coordinator of the Student Organizations Committee and adviser of the CPU Student Republic as well as on other university standing committees. He continued to supervise the Clinical Pastoral Education at the Iloilo Mission Hospital, a program which he initiated in 1980. In addition to his heavy teaching load in the College of Theology, especially during the years when younger teachers had gone abroad to work for advance degrees, Johnny taught graduate subjects leading to the Master of Divinity, a program which he helped set up and develop until it was fully accredited by ATESEA.

His local and national professional and personal involvements included service with the Clinical Pastoral Education Council of the Philippines of which he was vice-chairman in 1973-1974; with the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, of which he was president from 1981 to 1985; with the Provincial Peace and Order Council, 1992-1993; with the Board of Directors of the Capiz Emmanuel Hospital and also the Iloilo Mission Hospital, 1985 to the time of his death; with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, of which he was vice-chairman in 1981 and chairman from 1985-1987 and later as chairman of its Mass Media Commission and of its Christian Education Committee.

The organizations outside of the Philippines with which he was involved were: Association of Scholars in Church History, Missions and Ecumenics, of which he was president in 1969; Asian Baptist Fellowship of which he was a member of its General Council; Theological Committee of the Asian Baptist Federation of which he was chairman in 1988-1992; the General Council and the Theological Commission of the Baptist World Alliance; the Southeast Asia Graduate School of which he was a faculty member and later as Dean; and the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia.

The versatility and depth of Dr. Gumban are reflected in the many and varied topics covered by his lectures, sermons and papers. But what impressed his listeners most was his delivering these lectures and sermons without the aid of even outlines. In addition to the many lectures he delivered in connection with his professional chair in the College of Theology, he was in great demand as preacher in weddings, necrological services, inaugurations and other celebrations especially when the occasions were held at short notice, giving the speakers very little time to prepare. The organizers were always confident Johnny would deliver what was needed, even if he was given only two hours notice.

His papers have been published by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the Institute of Culture and Religion, by the Central Philippine University and in the Southeast Asia Journal of Theology.

When Dr. Johnny V. Gumban succumbed to a heart attack of September 19, 2000, not only Western Visayas and the Philippines but the whole Baptist world lost a great preacher, a committed servant of God, and an effective Christian teacher.

He is survived by his wife, Dr. Edna Jamandre-Gumban and by his children, Dr. Valerie May Gumban-Sia, Jed John Gumban and Dr. Jeffrey Eliseo Gumban.

Written by Elma S. Herradura(Former Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies at CPU)

A COLLECTION OF QUOTABLE QUOTES

From the lectures of Dr. Johnny V. Gumban, 1997-2000

(Notes of Pastor Francis Neil G. Jalando-on)

Conflict Situations

Choosing the 'bad' might be the best way than standing in the worst.

Relate to people not in the Christ in them but in the Christ within you.

In my heart, I cannot forgive but I must because I am a follower of Christ. Forgive the consequence but don't forget the fact in order to avoid the situation later.

The expectation that people could be objective is an illusion. Nobody could provide absolute objectiveness because all of us have subjective commitments.

Too often we go to a conflict situation with a complete agenda. This is the reason why when we are listening to other voices we are busy formulating a rebuttal.

Those who assume fool themselves into believing that they are mind readers. If you do not have facts – shut up.

Christian Ethics

Christian ethics has one starting point – the one God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

Any attempt to attain happiness is ethical. Anything that contributes to the attainment of the goal is ethical. Any hindrance is unethical.

Christian ethics strive to achieve what is 'loving' to your neighbor.

Respond to a situation on the basis of 'love thy neighbor' and on how you understand it in that certain situation.

In expressing our personal responsibility, we must take the risk – the risk to break established laws.

Use love in the light of the practical situation.

By nature man is self-centered, without the love of God we cannot love one another.

Life is curving into one's self.

The purpose of following the will of God is that others will know the will of God and the whole creation will live according to the will of God.

Don't put too much concern on 'earth to heaven' but on 'heaven to earth.'

Man's moral problem is less that of choosing the right means for the sake of attaining the right end than it is in doing rightly the actions that issues from his nature.

The fundamental problem of man is the problem of freedom.

Everything that exists depends upon God's act of creation because He created out of nothing.

God's reign is breaking in now and summoning men to live now in terms of God's coming to reign.

Blessed are the curious for they shall have adventures.

If you see justice in the future don't wait for it but bring it today.

End does not mean chronological end but the end of the false understanding of ourselves in history. The true understanding of one's self is to be free with possibilities of being.

Demand of the situation is God's demand.

The difficult enemy is that is the unknown. Learn, relate and understand your shadow.

Pastoral Care

We cannot or will not be able to cure but we can care.

Mutual concerns of Christian are for each other and to those in the world for whom Christ died.

When the pastor wakes up in the morning and drinks coffee, he must have a newspaper in his right hand and a Bible in his left hand.

Use your staff to bring back sheep that gone astray. Discipline is not there to destroy but the purpose is to restore.

Leadership means being behind and pushing people. Give the people the time to express their talent.

We do not go to God alone but we provide others to go to God.

You can best discover the talents of the people in informal occasions.

The greatest need of the people is to love and to be loved.

Unless you have the love of Christ in you it is burdensome to care for other people.

It is not enough for men to hear the gospel of peace but they want to see that gospel makes peace.

You can judge others if you're ready to submit yourself to the same standard you're judging that person.

You cannot help others if you cannot control yourself.

The intent of Christian counseling is enabling the counselee to work through his problem to a constructive course of action.

Counseling is removing the obstacle that blocks a person in fulfilling the 'pilgrimage.'

Nothing you do is not without reason. No such thing is accidental.

Open your channel that God may heal people through your faith.

Don't be afraid to laugh with people, to cry with them and talk to them. Remember, go to a situation with nothing - no prejudices or biases but only love for your neighbor.

Systematic Theology

The area of Heaven can be expanded in our temporal life.

God can be inside the Coke bottle if you need him there.

Unless God reveals himself, He cannot be known.

Aside from Jesus Christ, let us not neglect our mediation role – to make possible connections and to build bridges.

Always know the difference between the creator and creature. The moment we forget it, the problem will arise.

Do not change the scripture to satisfy your own point of view.

Interpret the Word for the world. Transform the world.

Man is distinct from woman but both are equal in God's eyes.

Don't make the Bible prescriptive that when a problem arises we just pick a verse and it's done. Don't make it a ready-made 'medicine.'

Jesus Christ is the model in actualizing man's potential.

Jesus is Yahweh's liberating act not only in sin but in social and political bondage.

Hell is not only a place but a condition of life where the evil powers lie supreme.

If God has given us freedom He will respect it. Risk is God's love to us.

Psychology of Religion

People who mistake religion as magic will come out doubting.

It is a sin for man to feel that he can control God.

Even though our prayers are sometimes not good but still God enjoys the communion.

Others would point out that religion comes from reason, others from feeling and to some the will. I say that true religion is the balance interaction of these three.

The need to be loved is just as great as the opportunity to love.

Birth is a traumatic experience. The beginning of life is a cry.

Do not hesitate to challenge young people in their idealistic side.

The way to break barriers is for participants to humble themselves.

Defend what is right but don't forget the other side. Do not side with one and antagonize the other.

Crisis is a dangerous opportunity; you are in a necessity of making a choice.

We should not allow people to purposely suffer but if it is needed for his growth then let it be.

Pastoral Ethics

Life is different from existence. Life is being alive with a purpose.

Life is sacred because it is a gift of God. When you accept this then your form of living will become a stewardship.

Life will come to an end. All of us are terminal cases.

A Pastor should not give false hope to a terminally ill person but provide him the assurance of the love of God and prepare him for dying.

The moment you are born you are destined to die. Life is traumatic. It begins with a cry and ends with a cry.

It is our pastoral ethics to see to it that the exercise of our ministry should be the building up of the Body of Christ. Everything that is below of that is unethical.

Go to a situation with nothing but love for your neighbor and then use your judgment after that.

The choice is not always between good or bad but sometimes between bad or worse.

Anything that has been habitually done that so much so that it has become enslaving and addicting must be get rid of.

When you cannot see the bottom of the water, it may not be deep but might be muddy.

Do not pretend to know everything because nobody knows everything.

Christianity must not say that it holds the absolute truth. It is a very narrow thinking. There are truths around us but we will see it in the will of God in the life of Jesus Christ.

Do not neglect sharing your faith to another person. It becomes meaningful to you when you do that.

Life is maintained in the interaction of the opposite. A miracle takes place when two opposite things meet.

You must have faith in your faith.

The more you secure yourself you become more insecure.

Anything that will enhance the cause of the kingdom of God – do it. But when it hinders – don't.

Understand that the sick is away from familiar surroundings and is in a new environment. The sick is away from a conducive atmosphere...away from family members, comfort of home. If the sick is lonely provide comfort, if fearful restore confidence, if uncertain provide certainty. When you go in there forget about his illness and concentrate on his needs.

Deny yourself for the sake of your people.

Traditions are not that very essential though important. It can be changed to suit (in the light of) the present situation.

Do not offer what you cannot deliver.

Stewardship means everything we touch belongs to God.