

**Talk of Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle  
18<sup>th</sup> Manila Priory Chapter  
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I was asked to share about the Church in the Philippines. My first reaction to that is maybe you know more about that than I do. So (there is) no need for me to pretend that I have a full grasp of what is happening in the Philippines and since the Philippines is so vast also— you move from one barangay to another, the situation is different; you move from one island to another, the situation changes all the more. So I think it will be pretentious on my part to say this is the situation of the Church in the Philippines. And many of the challenges to the Church today have already been encountered by us, many years ago. The same issues are there, the same challenges. Of course the configuration – in a way, the packaging – of the challenges has changed. And so in a way, it is the same old question presented to us in a new form. So there is continuity, and also some discontinuity.

To be a bit more realistic, I just want to focus this afternoon on three points. Please do not take this as holistic. The three points are not even ordered according to priorities or according to some system, or mindset.

**1. Renewal of Culture**

The first point that I would like to share – this is both reality and an opportunity for service – evangelical service – is the renewal of culture, or what they call evangelization of culture.

When Bishop Claver died, we had a project that we were not able to complete. You know that he was an anthropologist. In one of our conversations, and this was eventually picked-up with conversation with many other people - and lately I was with another small group - and Fr. Albert Alejo, SJ of the Ehem! / Ehemplo Anti-corruption and the Education towards Integrity Movement - we realized that the questions of poverty, corruption, the illness of politics in the country, the abuse of human rights, social inequality, the degradation of women and the girl-child, the environmental degradation – that is causing a lot of lives... There seems to be a cultural component to all of these.

Of course the anthropologists, the social scientists, the politicians, the economics experts, they would have their analysis. But if we look at all these problems from a pastoral perspective, then we realize there is an element of culture in all of these. And when we talk of culture this is a domain where the Church could be more active. We cannot pretend to know all the legalities, and the niceties of the law, unless we are really experts in the law.

I have talked to the bishop of Marinduque, and he tells us stories of the devastation of the environment and human lives. And up to now, the disaster that came

with the Marcopper fiasco . The disaster has not been addressed. So I cannot give you the sophisticated analysis that you are giving me. But one thing I can tell you, human lives are affected. **Human lives are affected.** And this is where I think the Church is asked to open its eyes. Yes there are a lot of issues. Some of us are expert in those issues. But one area that as Church we are supposed to know because we are in contact with people in our different missions and ministries is **the culture.**

Religion, not just the Christian religion, but any religion and its practice could easily become “cultural”. And this is everywhere. Cultural in the sense that every religion presents a set of rituals and outward symbols. And just by looking at outward rituals and symbols, you can identify the religion. And these religions have somehow, influenced the shaping of the culture. That is why in Asia, you cannot engage in inter-religious dialogue without also engaging inter-cultural dialogue. Because religions and cultures have really been partners and influenced each other.

We accept that, the Santacruzian is a very Christian practice. But now-a-days, the Santacruzian is becoming a venue for couturiers and commercial models and body actors and actresses to display their beauty. We know how these things have started as expressions of the faith – the rituals, and everything that surrounds the rituals could be given a “purely” cultural bent.

We cannot avoid rituals, we cannot avoid symbols. Which culture does not have all these things? But at least in the area of religious symbols and practice, if these religious symbols and practice are detached from their originating story, or meaning, then, they start floating. And they become easy prey for people who want to hide behind religious symbols. They use religious symbols and the seemingly religious culture for other purposes.

Many anthropologists are saying that the previous description of culture as a set of symbols, rituals, ceremonies is not enough. We realize now that there is a hidden dimension of culture, which is probably the more powerful part of culture. More powerful than the rituals and ceremonies, and our symbols. And what is that? **The depth dimension.**

Culture is what makes us behave in a particular way. And what is scary about this, frightening about this is, this element of culture is hidden. Anthropologist even call this **second nature.** And if it is second nature, you do this in a rather reflexive manner. You just do it, you are not even aware that you are doing it but it dictates on you.

I'll just give you an example. When I was sent to the States, it was an awakening to me. The rituals, the symbols were different. But then I realized I still bore the Filipino culture deep down. Even in the absence of the rituals. One Filipino culture: *kalabit*. As Filipinos it is Second nature, to make “kalabit”. In the classroom, I did not hear correctly what the teacher was saying so I did it to my classmate. And this American (goes) “Hey! What are you doing?”

Yeah, what did I do? I could not even translate it into English. Find an English word. “*Kalabitize...Kalabitate*” It does not exist in the English language because it is not part of the English world or the Anglo world. It is not part of their culture.

You can change the rituals, but that part of us, because it is non-reflexive, it makes us behave in a particular way

It is laughable. But when they say corruption is now in the culture; when they say now, cheating is part of the culture, being wasteful is now part of the culture; when they say disregard for the safety of others - specially of the children - is now part of the culture, being unmindful of the resources and nature’s devastation is part of the culture, we get disturbed. It is tantamount to saying, “**It is second nature now.**”

If it is second nature to make kalabit, are we ready to accept that it is second nature now for Filipinos to cheat? Second nature now to step on other people’s dignity? That’s scary. That’s frightening.

Fr. (Albert) Alejo said something that really struck me. He said, “In the Church we should recognize that culture has already been touched by this. And if the problems have become cultural then the approach should also be cultural”. Sometimes, our approach is purely legal: proposed new laws. But how can the legal world adequately address something that is cultural? So we should do something that is pointedly culture. And maybe this is where the Church could enter.

## **Media and Culture**

The business world and the media know this. They know that the battleground is cultural. Jollibee and McDonald’s spend millions of pesos consulting with experts on Philippine culture and the evolving mindset of their youth in order to touch them at this core (of culture) so that their advertising could make a dent.

How about us, do we factor in this depth, this so-called subconscious which is the battleground now? Who can take over that part of the Filipino? Maybe in more religious circles, we can call it **conscience**. Among the anthropologists, they call it the **subconscious of culture**.

I think it is simplistic also to say “*let us now remove all the rituals and the symbols and just concentrate on the heart.*” But I think that is simplistic because one way of getting into the heart is also through powerful symbols and rituals. We have learned from Churches that have eliminated the symbols and the rituals in order to get the pure essence of the faith and their experiment has failed.

My proposal is this: from the world of Asia – one potent way of entering this deep level of culture or influencing it is through **narrative** – *compelling stories*. Stories that witness to the values behind the rituals and the symbols, stories that will touch people’s interiority, stories that will disturb their interiority. They are disturbed without

even knowing that they are being disturbed. That their old world, their inner world, where their old mentality and old world views have comfortably been set up and are slowly being changed.

But without the constant telling of the narrative, the symbols might lose their power to effect change within. Just looking at myself: Why do the bishops wear rings? Why do you sisters have rings? If the covenant – love as the foundational story is gone, then this ring becomes a piece of jewelry. And I tell you... Episcopal rings.....can really be pieces of jewelry detached from the inner meaning.

For the Church to be able to touch that level of culture where decisions are made, where people struggle with values, where discernment happens, then we need to supply people with tools. So then their discernment, their purification from within could be facilitated. We could be guides to prayer as we tell the narrative. We could be guides to contemplation. We could be guides to discernment. We can be guides to the never-ending need for purification. We could be guides to true education - the education of the conscience, the education of the interior life, the nobility of the human spirit.

### **Changing of Culture**

*Sabi ko nga sa mga pari, “Kapag yung plaza ninyo, kasi ang plaza, the traditional plaza, is a sacred space. From the road, you know you are moving towards sacred space. Ngayon, yung sacred space naging parking lot. **You have changed the culture.** And then you have converted this vast area for car owners kasi naging parking lot. That’s another cultural communication: That this space gives preference to car owners, rather than the ambulatory church goers who want a change of space.*

This is a rich area of reflection. This might be difficult, but let us just say this presents to us opportunities. Opportunities for pastoral response and maybe this is where the Church is being asked to get involved. And addressing that, we will not bracket off the issues of poverty, injustice and truth. In fact we are addressing all of those, especially those problems have already infiltrated our culture.

## **2. New Evangelization for the Transmission of Faith**

I pick up from the theme of the Synod of Bishops that will happen in October to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Vatican II. Declared a Year of Faith starting October 11 until next year’s Christ the King. The Synod of Bishops will focus on the New Evangelization for the transmission of the Faith. While my reading seems to be focused on the whole of Europe or the European concern, still it can be a concern for us , for Asia and in the Philippines. This is a constant question of parents and grandparents. **How do we pass on the faith to the next generation?**

And this has generated a view of the youth, even the youth of the Philippines, that they are not anymore interested in the faith. They are interested in other things but not the faith. But I don’t think so. I have a Sunday show about the Word of God , and we

accept questions about the faith. Most of the sources of the questions are from the youth, the young people. Basic questions: Why do we have to make the sign of the cross? When I pray, can I just start praying without making the sign of the cross? *Parang you want to dismiss them*, but on second thought, “*Oo nga, bakit nga ba? Ano nga ba ibig sabihin n’yan?*” Why? And it’s Trinitarian. So it leads you to think twice, and young people are interested.

*Pero bakit ganoon?* Why do they need to go to Facebook or the internet to ask these questions. Where are their parents, where are their grandparents? Where are the teachers, where are the catechists?

There was a mini-version of the World Youth Day to coincide with the one of Madrid which was held at the Ateneo. It was, in a way, hastily organized and put together, but 13,000 young people flocked to the Ateneo campus. I was asked to give the catechesis at 11:30 in the evening. *Kasi sinasabayan nila yung ibo-broadcast yung address of the Holy Father*. But before me there were singers, actors, actresses, they were all jumping. I was able to give my catechesis 1:30 am. I told myself, “Who will listen to my catechesis at 1:30? They’ve lost all their energy singing, dancing, jumping up and down...and with all the celebrities *sigawan ng sigawan yung mga youth*” But I underestimated the youth. At 1:30am they were alert. And after 45 minutes I opened the floor for them to raise questions *sabi namin baka 5 lang ang kaya kasi delayed na delayed na*. Hundreds of hands were raised. They were quite disappointed that not everyone was given the chance to ask their questions.

So there is interest among the youth. But they are not the only ones, too, that should receive the transmission of the faith - even adults, politician, church people, those in the military, those in the financial world. But we have to ask important questions. The first question that we ask is: **when we talk about the transmission of the faith, what do we transmit?** In the past, transmission of the faith meant transmission of formulae. Example: How many Gods are there? One. How many persons? Three. How many natures in Jesus? Two. *Ipapa-memorize pa yan*: One Divine nature, two processions, three persons, four relations, five notions. Very good Catholic!

In the past, the transmission of the faith was through formulae, and that swung to the humanitarian, charitable acts - social projects, human development. And that’s okay. But now we realize especially in Europe, many people say “We will just do good acts. We don’t need to worship. We will just do good to the poor. And we don’t need baptism, we don’t need sacraments”.

But now we realize **the transmission of faith means making God known and inviting people to a living relationship with God** - the personal God, Trinity of Love.

In one gathering I had with the Catechists, all the catechists were there, all the students were there, and I asked one girl and I said, “*Ikaw, ano natutunan mo?*” And she grabs the microphone and goes, “Quiet! Quiet! Quiet!”

(That is) Catechism...Transmission of faith (for you) and I believe some educators still espouse that philosophy. “As long as you are quiet in my class, you can sleep, and I’m okay. *Magagalit ako* if you snore. But you may sleep, but be quiet”.

Transmission of knowledge, transmission of faith. Now people are longing for that – **relationship**. The transmission of faith has a living relationship with the living God. But this has weakened because we have stressed so much, first content, then the ethical dimension but this living relationship, *parang nanghina yon*. That search has diverted into so many dangerous areas.

You know more than I do. You deal with issues of trafficking in human persons, etc. I was shocked to hear in one forum that for some young people, specially for children who grew up without the presence of parents or the nuclear family, there is a real thirst for a living relationship and they are ripe for the transmission of faith – a God who will be with them – Emmanuel.

Among young people, when you hear them talk about **bonding**, it is not just about going to a café and drink coffee. Very often, they mean sex. It is time for bonding. It is time for sex. And do you know when they stop? How do they choose a partner? **A partner who is willing to have sex with me without any emotional attachment**. The moment emotional attachment sets in, that is the signal to stop having sex with you. *Parang reversed, no? Dati*, the pre-requisite is the love, the commitment, marriage, and then you have it. *Ngayon*, that is the signal that you have to end it. So you can just have it, do it, without any commitment.

But that tells us that there is a deeper hunger there. So I say, okay that is disturbing, but maybe that is **the inner soul** of this horrendous thing. **We long for a relationship. And isn’t that the faith that we also need to transmit?** A God who has entered our sorrows, our joys, our hopes, who can journey with us. Can that be the quality of faith that we transmit?

So we ask another question. How do we transmit this? In the past, this was done in the homes. *Ngayon naman kasi, absentee parents, kaya during the world meeting of families – ano yung kanta?* “Father, Mothers, Brother, Sister... home”. *Sabi ko sa composer, hindi na ngayon ganyan. Yung iba, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt... home. o kaya, yaya, tio, tia..home*. In the past, that was the way to transmit the faith – live with your family. Or be close to the Church community. Or in the Parochial school, or in the Church-run school. But now, if you hold a class for the transmission of the faith, *bale wala*.

But you know, again, I underestimated the youth. One of the most attended activity for the youth is the **Taize prayer**. When you open the path for them to silence, when they could just cry, when they could just behold the cross of Christ, and in the darkness of the church with the flickering lights, they could be who they are. My... I was surprised. **They are looking for milieu where they could be who they are**. Because the world forces us, not just the youth, even the not so young anymore, we are

being forced to conform to their standards. *Nakaka-awa ang mga bata* and because of their need to belong, they are forced into things.

How do we transmit the faith? I was really surprised that this is one area where the youth would really come to us. **Pools of silence. Pools of nakedness before God.**

### **Media, the New Culture**

But there is one area too, the media, which we, the Church, have not yet tapped. When we say media, the means of social communications, we are approaching media not just as means of communicating. **The media themselves constitute a new culture.** It is a new culture that is powerfully changing tastes, the second nature of Filipinos. It is a culture of how to transmit ideas, how to behave, how to be who I am. And they use powerful images, compelling messages, catchy tunes. They present idols, and in no time they have changed minds and hearts.

If I say mass on Sunday in a regular church, I can only reach this number of people. But because of this (new media) and the new culture it has generated, then your reach is immense. One OFW said, “Your show, The Word Exposed (which they view via YouTube) takes us back home. *Yung mga kwento nyo sa show*, we can resonate”.

Wow! We need to tap this, especially in urban settings. The noise is just unbelievable. After so many years in Tagaytay where you can still hear the crickets, and only 3 weeks in Manila, *na puro* fire trucks, the never-ending karaoke... I think young people are not the only ones longing for **silence**. The inner space where they could be heard and they could listen. The media apostolate would also give them the space, or maybe we can even give God the space to complete his work. The media is very powerful in touching the minds and hearts, in shaping culture.

We complain of the quality of media that we have, but we have not done much to enter into that. I have been in the media apostolate for almost 6 years now, by accident *na naman. Hindi naman pala ganoon ka-hirap*. We don't need a bible scholar. We just need someone who will make the Word of God alive. But I have no regrets. Please tap it.

We want to invite the religious to be part of the team of TV Maria. *Yung iba naman sa inyo*, star quality. Silence, media, and then the joy and hope in Christ, especially for the youth. **They (the youth) are attracted when they know someone has found something good. Really good news. That gives them hope and energy.**

I will illustrate this with a story again.

Every summer there is this diocesan youth camp. What are these youth thinking of when they ask me to sing, when they ask for my autograph? Do they see me as a bishop? *Baka naman* I am giving them the wrong signal. But you know the answer came

a year later. In the same youth camp, one boy approached me and said, “My t-shirt that you signed, I still keep it, I have not washed it. Every night, I fold it neatly and put it under my pillow. I have not seen my father in years”. His father is an OFW. “With that t-shirt, I feel close to a family. I feel close to the Church, and I know I have a father”.

Even that simple signing of a t-shirt can be a transmission of faith. My! The surprises and opportunities for such a transmission.

These are what I see about the Filipino youth. And even if oftentimes this is presented as a problem - the absence of parents, the breakdown of the family, it can be an opportunity for the transmission of faith. The hunger for relationship, the hunger for parents, the hunger for home could be an initiation in faith.

### 3. The Care for Persons

Finally, Care of Persons.

As we strive to purify our institutions and structures in the Philippines - and that has to be pursued relentlessly – we should not forget the care of persons. Part of my learning as a bishop for ten years is that we should not forget the personal care, the care of individual persons. Even if we have cleaned up a bit our institutions, and have restructured some things, individual persons still need caring, and even cure, healing.

I am reminded of Pope Benedict XVI’s words. I have not had the time to copy the exact words, but he said **“Even if all the demands of justice would have been met, and all of our institutions observe the laws of justice, people will still long for love.”**

In the midst of violence specially in the homes, when you look at the effects of greed, and you look at the despair spreading around, the number of young people killing themselves... (You start to think) *Simple lang siguro,, walang makausap, walang matakbuhan*. They need their stories to be told. And they are looking for light , looking for a caring presence.

And when we look at how the Church started, it was through this **human contract**. The first letter of John, **“what we have seen, what we have heard, what we have touched about the Word of Life, we in turn pass on to you so that you may have communion with us and you may have joy so that your joy may be complete”**. The Church started that way. Someone who had a living experience of the Word of Life passing it on to friends, personal encounters.

So (among) the personal encounter we have – those people might just be looking for someone before making those drastic decisions. I recently met a former parishioner when I was a young priest in Mendez, and she said, every time she sees me, she is reminded of how her family was saved. “It was Christmas eve, and my parents were about to separate. And the bishop came to our house and he just listened. And our

family was saved.” *Alam n’yo po, nakalimutan ko na iyon.* She has her own family now, and I am sure she will treasure her own family.

This is the quiet way of being Church. Doing this you will not land on the front pages but **in the end, that is what makes people whole.** And that makes them hopeful and survivors in their own ways.

*So dagdagan nyo na lang po itong tatlong points.* I am sure *mas mayaman pa ang mangyayari sa in yong pagninilay.*

We keep you in prayer. *At yung mga nasa Priory, magkita-kita tayo. Isang araw, susugod na lang po ako doon, makiki-kape....kahit walang appointment.*

Maraming salamat po. Merry Christmas Happy new year to you!