

SONA 2014 - A MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A Reflection by Sr. Maureen Catabian, RGS - July 28, 2014

SONA (State of the Nation Address) 2014 in the eyes of a missiologist . . . or why after listening to the SONA in Congress which lasted 91 minutes with 85 claps, I had a crisis in faith. Deep in my heart there was pain and sadness. An accomplishment report was delivered, how the administration achieved its goals while interspersed with applauses from the joint Congress. It is not a real or genuine State of the Nation Address, in my opinion. Knowing the context of where my sadness was springing from , I asked myself : “Do we really believe in the same God? Are we worshipping the same God? A God who came so that we may have life- life in its fullness?” If we have faith in the same God, why do we have a different perspective? A different way of looking at what is happening in Philippine society?

We were asked in Missiology class to watch the SONA of PNOY with missiological eyes, to listen with a “missiological heart”. Maybe this was the reason why I felt that deep pain and suffering within me. As accomplishments were being enumerated while faces of Cabinet members were flashed onscreen- with hesitant grins and smiles, as if gestures affirming what they have done, I was actually resisting and struggling inside. Of course, I would not deny those concrete statistics as evidences of accomplishments with corresponding budgets which came from the DAP used for the sake of the welfare of the Filipinos? Or maybe I could not deny the seemingly sincere efforts and good done by our public servants delivering the much needed basic services to our people for their mere survival. I cannot dispute that. But governance is not only about “personal sincerity”. It is about governing social systems and structures and policies and programs which are supposed to work and serve the people and not work against them. It should work for All , for every “Juan and Juana” and not just for a select few statistics.

Last Sunday, the Philippines reached its 100M mark of official state population with baby Chonalyn from Metro Manila born in Fabella hospital. A gasping child, fragile offspring of a household helper- is there assurance for a full of life for her for this kind of government? I am just curious, how much percentage of this 100 million Filipinos actually benefit from the accomplishments of this government? 2%? 5%? 7%? I just wonder, why a majority of Filipinos say that the growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of our economy does not trickle down to those who are in the margins? Or is it really meant only for those in the centers? What is wrong with the existing economic systems and structures in place? Not even the sincerity and genuine goodness of politicians and government officials could muster enough impact for those “reforms” supposedly.

These questions about my faith in a “God of Fullness of Life” and how it translates to actions to become systems and structures working for the people’s welfare- has summoned me to expand my vistas and critically understand the present Philippine socio-economic context. Such context from all indications is never separate or isolated form the bigger and wider global economic context and geopolitics. I saw in the report card of the government, the acronym of APEC and the year 2015 and the Philippines hosting this economic summit. I suspect and this brings the enlightened answer to

my questions- could be the root of all evil- the rule of Mammon. It could be the evil depriving each Filipino of truly experiencing the fullness of life promised by God of our Christian faith. And zeroing in on this APEC 2015, I was enlightened about the current situation of why this country has been chronically mired in grinding dehumanizing poverty.

Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) Summit in 2015 hosted by the Philippines – the only Catholic majority nation in Asia and one of the poorest in the region with a population hitting the 100 million mark. How does APEC 2015 implicate for the future and development of this Third World country? Is the Pnoy administration a hero or a villain? Our missiological mind asks. One cannot give a categorical answer. Maybe, here are better (bitter) questions to ask : “for whom really is the PNOY government working? Who are its real bosses? What sort of Philippine brand of democracy is this? working for just an elite few? One can just glean answers from his KEY programs, from some key thoughts like - FOREIGN INVESTMENTS, Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT), Public-Private Partnerships(PPP), Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Philippine Development Plan (2011-2016), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Exclusive Growth, DAP, Higher Credit ratings for what? Toyota Motor, Phils., “No Strike” policy, Infrastructure for Tourism, longer roads? More Flights to Europe and the West- who are coming in and going there often anyway? Foreign investors’ confidence, World Economic Forum, APEC Summit in 2015, P2.606 Trillion Budget – Sino ba talaga ang BOSS in Pnoy? Saan ba nakapuwesto ang gobyernong ito? Reforms for whom? Whose trust is being lost? Who needs it for what?

Who is really dying for the Filipino people? Is it only the Aquino family and their yellow supporters? Who are genuinely loving this country worth dying, living and struggling for? What about those ordinary masses of Filipinos who toil daily? OFWs? Farmers and Fisherfolks who give us food on the table? Employees who work and overwork themselves? Unsung heroes who sacrifice their lives to gain freedom and liberation for this country? Is this elite democracy working for all? Are these “Foreign Investments” dying for the Filipino nation? Or it is enslaving us? Is it mammon they serve and not God? In the midst of all these contradictions in society, where does the fullness of God reign? As I ponder on all these happenings, I realize the stark contrast. Inside and outside the halls of Congress with “well-dressed” leaders and their spouses as I imagine the “ indecent and dilapidating” homes or even “homeless” millions of ordinary surviving and struggling Filipinos and our families. Urban poor who decided to do business as usual than risk their stomachs for the SONA. To this kind of government working to preserve itself, I ask “do we really believe in and worship the same God? I know there is only ONE God who came that we may have LIFE, and have it to the FULL and to this God I have committed myself to serve and to serve a struggling people.

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"MISSION as the "key to ministry" and that "a Church that does not go out of itself, sooner or later, sickens from the stale air of closed rooms."
CARDINAL TAGLE