

Like dove and serpent

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Brief Summary

The article depicts the life of an imprisoned priest, Edicio de la Torre, while he was involved with a Christian movement for national liberation in the Philippines under the regime of autocratic leader, President Ferdinand Marcos. His passion for human rights work continued even after he was released from prison that set him off to leave the priesthood.

The Priest has made public his idealism through the interview with the representatives from Mennonite Central Committee; Earl Martin, Dave Schrock-Shenk, and Brenda Stoltzfus. The disclosure of his experience, ideas and outlook in life was impelled by three guide questions that encouraged him to freely express his position in some circumstantial events involving the helpless victims suffering from the ruthless governance.

When he was asked the first question on how did he survive being imprisoned for nine years, and how did his faith help him, he humbly affirmed that it was his faith that helped him survive. But, he further elucidate that it was his perseverance in living that encourages him to stay focus in order to help the people that seek his assistance even he is in prison. He has accordingly, extended inspirational or counsel or even technical advices to the people that worth him the living. He remained steadfast being part of the movement, even he is in prison.

The second question being asked to the priest is about the need for reconciliation in Philippine society and what is necessary for reconciliation considering that Marcos has fallen. The priest answered citing that reconciliation is quite a problem. Accordingly, it is difficult to handle

reconciliation that demands justice. It might be easy for the oppressor or for the human rights violators to ask forgiveness, but for the victims, it's not just simply to "forgive and forget," it's a challenge to find the divine grace to forgive. He cited that if a military man is asking for forgiveness from the family of the people he killed, then, he has to be genuinely repentant and initiate restitution and offer penance. With that, just reconciliation could be attained assuring or safeguarding mental, human and Christian values, and acknowledging realities of human wickedness and deceitfulness.

The priest calls it as biblical politics which reflects simplicity of heart, like a dove, and assessing the deviousness and intricate ways of human mind, like a serpent. Accordingly, it is the problem of any movement to be both simple and forgiving and at the same time politically clever and cautious to live within a historical world. The priest further stated that something should happen in the Philippines where reconciliation with justice will be realized, just like what Gandhi of India has proposed for a repentant Indian who set fire a Muslim house and roasted the people there, to raise a Muslim orphaned baby. This has to be done on an individual basis, but for those who are in the movement, it is not easy to do it and it is also hard on the social and political level. Genuine reconciliation is accordingly, hard to attain with so many victimized people grieving family members who suffered cruelty.

The third question on what reflections could the priest would offer on liberation and the movement for democracy in the Philippines after spending nine years in prison and much work in the movement, was accordingly hard for him. He expressed regret for being with the complicated situation that

requires one to be modest and less dogmatic. The priest thought that liberation was just simply witnessing that the sinful world had been redeemed and that God has promised the kingdom. But, it is accordingly, more than that, everyone should contribute something and should work together to create a better world, a better earth. It requires full commitment of oneself using resources, skills, strengths and even weaknesses to claim a part of historical moment where each one could recollect and reaffirm commitments.

Finally, the priest did not see anymore himself in traditional or institutional ministry. He has change his vocation, he has see more meaning and the need to be with the people's movement as a fulfilling task to be part of historical and popular movement toward the coming of the kingdom.

Reflection and Relevance to Today's Society

God has given everyone the right to chose what is good and what is bad. Hence, we have to respect the decision of the priest (Edicio de la Torre), in choosing to join the movement and deny his priesthood for the sake of helping the struggle of the many Filipino people who are victims of injustice, social and political oppression, and economic deprivation. Being radical with the movement is the best way for him to help the people than working in traditional institution, in which he implies that it is not enough to evangelize and witness the word of God, but to actually release the people from the bandage of persecution manipulated by oppressors.

On the other hand, there had been so many Filipino priests like Fr. Edicio de la Torre, who had changed their vocation (as priest) and joined liberation

movements. But their struggle for better future and better world is in vain, some have died along the way. However, this does not stop the struggle, instead, encourages the movement to go on.

Conclusion

Societal problems are manipulation of the forces in the dark. Everyone should be aware that the power of darkness wants dominion over the whole world. The problems in the Philippines, whether social, political, economic and even religious are likewise the kind of problems presently faced by the whole world. Solving these problems and healing wounds could be done by addressing the root causes of the problem in a wise and humble way, not using force or rebellious act. As what God has promised; blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God, and blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill. Lastly, God said that, blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.