

Part Five of [A People Caught in Its Own Dung](#) Series by Ado Paglinawan

Gravitating to Felino Palafox's penchant spirit for what is principled and righteous can have its own vicious side effects.

When I exposed that it was Cory Aquino who dropped the ball on the Parañaque Spillway project, even some of my erstwhile bosom friends scampered to dig dirt and grime to shoot me as the messenger since they cannot demolish the fact that was my message.

One was a former Secretary of Agrarian Reform who was forced by public opinion to resign during the late President Aquino's term after a flurry of corruption charges came out against him in the newspapers following a land scandal in 1989. I never believed he had any wrongdoing. In fact three years after, the Sandiganbayan found him not guilty. But because his wife was Cory's closest secretary (in fact until her death a few months ago), the man did not have a choice but to give up his Cabinet post.

Another was a congressman who was elected for only one term. He won in the first post-Marcos congressional elections in Quezon City because he bore the Aquino name but he was not in anyway related to the martyred senator. At least in their email exchanges that I was quick to uncover, they were colluding to look for skeletons in my closet, asking the help of another Cory Cabinet member, this one a former Secretary of Environment who caught the ire of the military for his leftist leanings, one of the causes of the numerous coup attempts against President Aquino.

The reason? All three are part of a group called "NoyPI". They are "yellows" who are now competing for Noynoy Aquino's attention in his 2010 presidential campaign. I can only surmise that they panicked as Cory Aquino's faux pas or blunder in dropping the Parañaque Spillway could shave points off their candidate's electability or survey ratings.

I have to make it, therefore, clear at this point – this series is not being motivated by the 2010 elections but by public safety and common good. I am doing this series because of national interest. These people who are rooting for Noynoy but who are as dubious as Mike Arroyo's special-operations group, are doing him damage big-time. If Senator Aquino does not know it yet, he should flush his inner ranks of traditional politicians who are only circling the carcass of the Gloria Arroyo's government, betting to be part of his bandwagon.

On the contrary, set against today's caricature of the Philippines drowning in endemic corruption, incompetent governance and destructive polemics, Felino Palafox is easily the gust of fresh air, an explosive revival of the Filipino, who was once illustrious in character possessing old-fashioned everyday Judeo-Christian values.

In fact he could now be a revolutionary movement just by being himself.

{xtypo_quote} God gave us 7,000 islands with 400 rivers but almost 200 of them are already (ecologically) dead. So I hope this is really a wake-up call. It is not an act of God but our fault as a nation. – Felino Palafox {/xtypo_quote}

When asked by *Manila Bulletin's* section on Students and Campuses, what influenced him to blow the whistle that the destruction brought about by Typhoon Ondoy was not an act of God but humans, without blinking he blurted out "Telling the truth is very important."

And then he shared that most of his values were formed during his youth when he was in the seminary where if you broke the rules but nobody caught you, you come out in public and confess to it "even if they ask you to kneel down while everybody else was having their lunch."

“If you speak the truth, God will be with you,” added Palafox.

The engineer cum urban planner par excellence said that “One of the lessons that I never forget is that if I were to die today, rather write our eulogy, we should write about the legacy that we want to leave behind. From the seminary to Harvard, I have always been taught to speak the truth, even when I get death threats or libel cases.”

Palafox is definitely for the birds, given our present corrupt politicians and governors. It took a really gargantuan revenge of Mother Nature to bring him back to our consciousness to speak on the mount of the hundreds who lost their lives and hundred of thousands more who lost all their properties following the wrath of Typhoon Ondoy.

He brought us back to relive Daniel Burnham when most of us only knew the American as the person after whom a park and lagoon in Baguio City have been named after.

Burnham was brought by our American governors to the Philippines and commissioned to plan our central city of Manila
and our summer capital of
Baguio
, after he designed

Chicago

,
Washington
, DC, and other great cities in the world.

Those who have traveled to Chicago will see parallels of Dewey (or what is now Roxas) Boulevard with the lakeshore highway in the windy city. Those who visit Washington

,
DC
, will see the layout of what was once Luneta, between our Independence Grandstand and Taft Avenue with the monument of our national hero Jose Rizal in the middle, to be a small replica of the national mall from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol with the Washington obelisk in the middle.

Palafox narrated that the great American architect told our government that early that if there were any city in the world that Manila should take inspiration from, it should be Paris and Venice, comparing the Pasig River with Paris' Seine River and the esteros of Manila with the canals of Venice.

World-famous Architect Daniel Burnham was brought by American colonial governors to the Philippines and commissioned to plan the capital city of Manila and our summer capital of Baguio, after he designed Chicago, Washington, DC, and other great cities in the world.

“We were doing alright until we became independent (as) we started implementing the wrong models of urban planning,” he said.

“Under Burham”, Palafox continues, “There was more space, there was city movement using the waterways. (But) what did we do after we became a Republic? We turned away from (his) recommendation and our planning model became Hollywood and Los Angeles (that) were not designed for pedestrians.

“The education of our Filipino architects and planners was more on the Los Angeles-type . . . but if you go to any school in the world (like) I went to Harvard and my daughter to Oxford – they will tell you
Los Angeles
(
California
) has the worst planning!”

Palafox told the story of meeting the mayor of Los Angeles who admitted to him that the city was a sixty-year old “mistake,” so he sent his planners to
New York

,
Paris

,
Singapore

and

Tokyo

to “unlearn” their mistake.

Written by Ado Paglinawan

Sunday, 25 October 2009 14:02 - Last Updated Sunday, 01 November 2009 14:29

He told the Hizzoner "Mr. Mayor, I have a bigger problem in my country. We copied all your mistakes and our government leaders do not even know it. At least here, you are aware of it!"

Indeed as early as the mid-seventies, the directions of growth of Metro Manila were already identified. "Westward reclamation, eastward to Marikina, northward towards Bulacan and southward to Parañaque, Alabang and Canlubang."

The whistleblower explained "If you do a topographical analysis, from Manila Bay its elevation zero then as you further inland towards Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (Manila's beltway equivalent), the elevation goes 30 meters above sea (Manila Bay) level. Then it drops to the Marikina Valley floor about five kilometers wide (serving like a basin), then it goes to (after) 10 kilometers more up to 300 meters in elevation, and then (another) 50 kilometers to the Pacific Ocean (it goes up)."

But what happened, he said, "Illegal or legal logging, deforestation... (so) the water from the (eastward) mountains could not be stopped as they brought with them mud that silted Marikina and

Pasig
Rivers
, all the esteros (small canals) and
Laguna
Lake
.”

Felino Palafox, the urban planner, warns that the great flood “will happen again, it can be worse, unless we act now. There is no turning back, global warming AKA climate change will happen. At a minimum, the seawater will go higher by one meter. Another study says that the sea level will rise six meters or 20 feet.”

A gain he referred to the 1977 Metroplan “The proposal was to protect Manila from flooding by diverting the floodwaters from the mountains to the Manggahan Floodway towards
Laguna
Lake
. More importantly, there was supposed to be a Parañaque Spillway, a canal to flush out the excess water.”

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The logic behind the deluge was simple – Pasig, Marikina and San Juan rivers from Laguna Lake

towards

Manila

Bay

were already clogged, and the Parañaque Spillway was not constructed at all. Naturally, the flood was all over the place. Worse, there was no control whatsoever in sewerage, garbage collection and river dredging, and development was just allowed by various government agencies to go its own way with regulation going more for compromise and graft, rather than public safety and well-being.

For instance Palafox said that if they had already known that the floodline was 17 meters, and land development had to pass through 32 signatories, why did they allow builders to go only as high as nine meters when common sense dictates building a lot taller? Frankly, I find this by and large as criminal and if not outright murderous.

All this notwithstanding, he still concludes that the problem could be fixed.

“Definitely”, Palafox said, “I was urban planner for Dubai that had only 72 kilometers of natural waterfront, so rural Dubai reclaimed

the islands. More than half of

Netherlands

is reclaimed (so why are they not flooding?) Did you know that one half of Hong Kong

is underwater?” meaning below sea level.

He said during the time of the Spanish friars, no church altar was flooded. We can also learn from our indigenous people called the Badjaos in the Zamboanga province of Western Mindanao who live above the sea by building their houses on stilts.

It is only a matter of political will, funding and attitude, he continued on saying “we remove the mud from the rivers, take them to Manila Bay and create islands there where we can develop for recreational and industrial purposes, maybe even a port or housing for the poor. But urban-planning wise and architecturally, it can be done.

“This will involve a package of measures including building dikes and covering the Sierra Madres mountains with trees and we (should) do the Parañaque Spillway.”

Palafox noted that the great flood following Typhoon Ondoy has given us a golden opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past and revive good proposals onto the 21st century.

The urban planner warned that the great flood “will happen again, it can be worse, unless we act now. No more turning back. We now have global warming and climate change happening and (some) are saying, at a minimum the seawater will go higher by one meter. Another estimate tells us, six meters or 20 feet.

“What an irony! We are a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol and we are one of the 43 countries that will be most affected by global warming and climate change.”

Palafox bemoaned that the Philippines has third largest waterfront in the world. Dubai, Saudi Arabia and other countries create artificial waterfronts. But what do Filipinos do with their waterfronts and natural harbors? They treat them like garbage dumps.

“God gave us 7,000 islands with 400 rivers but almost 200 of them are already dead. So I hope this is really a wake-up call. It is not an act of God but our fault as a nation.

“I am speaking up because God and the helpless squatters are being blamed. God does not any defending, but it is not just the squatters.

“It is a sin of omission by all of us.”

(To be continued . . .)

E ditor's Note: To read the earlier articles in this series, please click on these hyperlinks:

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[A People Caught in Its Own Dung \(Part II\)](#)

[Metro Manila Chairman Killed Flood-warning System](#) (Part III)

[Restoring Rhyme and Reason Back to Metro Manila](#) (Part IV)

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[Palafox's Tell All: Typhoon-caused Deaths and Destruction Were Not God's Acts but Were Results of Criminal Negligence \(Part V\)](#)

[Tony Abaya Calls Cory Aquino's Ring Dike Ridiculous and Presents Alternatives \(Part VI\) # #](#)
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