

Written by Bobby Reyes

Tuesday, 03 February 2009 04:24 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 February 2009 05:10

So much have been written about how Overseas-Filipino Catholics and Christians have energized their aging parishes or churches in their new domiciles. Especially in the United States where there is an acute shortage of priests and nuns, Filipino men and women of the cloth have made tremendous contributions and impact even in the day-to-day affairs of their respective churches. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the United States has found new strength in Filipino voices for its choirs, lay ministers and deacons for its parishes and even foot soldiers and officers for its lay organizations such as the Knights of Columbus—not counting the employment of hundreds of Filipino priests and nuns. There is now a Filipino bishop in the American RCC. The highest-ranking Asian prelate of the American Episcopal Church is a Filipino monsignor.

But there is the need to “reinvent” the Filipino Catholic, nay, Christian world. In fact the reinvention should apply to all of the religions that have taken roots in the Filipino homeland and in the hearts and minds of the Filipino citizens and Overseas Filipinos. Why? It is not enough for the religious Filipinos and the country’s men of the cloth to try to save only their countrymen’s souls for the next life. They must also try to save the homeland from its status as a living hell—thanks to President Manuel L. Quezon who said that he preferred “a government run like hell by Filipinos to a government run like heaven by Americans.” President Quezon did not know how hellish it would be in the homeland. The law-abiding Filipinos must demand that their respective churches should be part of the solutions for the homeland’s socioeconomic ailments, instead of often being part of the problem.

The first suggested step is to create linkages between congregations in the homeland to the parishes or churches, synagogues or mosques where there are Overseas-Filipino parishioners, members or worshipers. Why? A spiritual version of the secular “sister city” or “sister town” may be the most-logical first step in the proposed “reinvention” of any church or religion in the Philippines.

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On Oct. 9, 2006, this writer presented a formal proposal about a “Sister Parish” initiative to His Eminence, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, the patriarch of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) in California. I addressed the letter to the attention the Most Rev. Bishop Oscar Solis. I submitted another original of the letter through the Rev. Monsignor Michael F. Killeen, the pastor emeritus of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Rowland Heights, California. I presented the formal letter to Bishop Solis at the Philippine Consulate General where on that autumn day in 2006, there was a reception for the visiting Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales. And I provided a copy of my proposal to the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) through His Eminence, Cardinal Rosales.

But like Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her Cabinet officials and almost all Filipino government functionaries, the ADLA and the CBCP did not bother to answer my formal proposal and letters. A copy of the said proposal is reproduced in this article.

My friends and I have wondered why the Filipino and American RCC dignitaries never bothered to reply to the said proposal. Perhaps they do not want to deal with me as the grandson-in-law of Don Belong de los Reyes, the founder of the Philippine Independent Church (PIC). Poet-pundit Fred Burce Bunao opines that the RCC may not want to have a dialogue with a writer who has been writing critical essays about the need for reforms in the RCC, especially when he has called the-then Bishop Jesus Varela of the Diocese of Sorsogon as the “modern-day version of Fray Damaso.” Mr. Bunao adds that writing satires about Filipino priests did not help either, especially since I have written so many times that “in the 1970s I started calling myself a Christian, instead of a Catholic.” And perhaps my advocacy of restoring civil divorce in the Philippines has made me a marked man among the CBCP members. Perhaps the RCC prelates hated what I wrote in these articles, [The Case of Juan Luna Is an Argument for Legalizing Divorce in RP](#) and [Divorce \(sic\) in RP Is Only for the Rich, the Famous and the Influential](#)

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The second step is to create an online religious community, i.e., Online Catholic Community, Online Episcopal Community, Online Filipino-Muslim Community, Online Iglesia-ni-Kristo Community, Online PIC Community, Online Filipino-Mormon Community, etceteras, etc. This next step may also be the solution to saving a Filipino-inspired chapel in New York City, as discussed in these articles,

[Lessons that Filipino Christians Can Learn from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles](#)

[New York's Filipino-American Catholics Appeal to Save the Chapel of San Lorenzo Ruiz](#)

We shall discuss more of the suggested steps in “reinventing” the Filipino churches and religions in Part II of this series.

(To be continued . . .)

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* Editor's Note: To read some of the articles written by Bobby Reyes about Filipino priests and churches, please click on these hyperlinks:

[Isabelo de los Reyes: Founder of the Philippine Labor Movement \(Among Other Titles\)](#)

[Filipino Bishop Follows MabuhayRadio Editorial and "Excommunicates" the President](#)

[The First Couple Must Stop Bullying Critics, Including Bishops Critical of the Arroyo Regime](#)

[Why Not All Filipino Catholics Are Christians](#)

[Post Script to the Editorial, Why Not All Filipino Catholics Are Christians](#)

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* And here are some of the satirical pieces that Bobby Reyes wrote about the Filipino men of the cloth:

[Why Did St. Peter's Chicken Cross the Road?](#)

[First Gentleman Revives "Religion-based Diet Evolution" as New-Year's Resolution](#)

[The Philippines: A Country of Contradictions \(As Updated\)](#)

[Débate between Erap and the CBCP \(Part I of "Erap and the Bishops"\)](#)

[Part II of Erap and the Bishops](#)

[Erap and the Bishops \(Part III\)](#)

[Parable of the Retired Rector's Cup o' Kapeng Barako](#)

[The Parable of the Praying Parrots](#)

[Parable of the Born-Again Bartender](#)

[The Parable of the Mercedes-Benz](#)

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Bobby M. Reyes

Founder and Chairman Emeritus

Media Breakfast Club

c/o The Filipino-American Community of Los Angeles (FACLA)

1740 West Temple St., Los Angeles, CA 90026

Tel.: (626) 825-0628 * E-mail: mediabcla@aol.com

October 9, 2006

His Eminence

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony

Archdiocese of Los Angeles

California

Attention the Most Rev. Bishop Oscar Solis

Through the Rev. Monsignor Michael F. Killeen

Pastor Emeritus, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church

Rowland Heights, California

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Copy Furnished: The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines

Through His Eminence Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales

Your Eminence:

We wish to propose the setting up of a “Sister Parish” relationship by and between the Catholic congregations in the United States and in the Philippines. Perhaps we can start the “Sister Parish” concept in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the neighboring dioceses, as Southern California has the biggest concentration of Filipino workers and immigrants outside of the Philippines.

Monsignor Killeen actually started in the 1990s the forerunner of a “Sister Parish” relationship with several parishes in the Diocese of Albay (Legazpi City), Philippines, although he did not formally call the involved Philippine congregations as “sister parishes” of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, where I belong. Part of the mission that Monsignor Killeen undertook was to support poor Filipino seminarians in the Bicol Region (where Albay Province is located). Perhaps we need only to fine tune the experience of Monsignor Killeen, so as to make it formally a viable “Sister Parish” movement.

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There are several advantages that can benefit the participating Philippine and American parishes. Aside from having exchange of students and athletes (such as Little League baseball players) that can promote the concept of globalization in education and culture, the Philippine parishes may be able to supply qualified and pre-screened students for American seminaries. In short, the Philippine parishes may be able to supply the acute needs for priests and nuns in the United States, if the American congregations are willing to finance – even partially – the proposed arrangement and the Filipino-American Catholic communities shouldering the rest of the needed resources. There are tens of thousands of bright Filipino Catholic youth that will take the chance of getting higher education in American seminaries and convents. We will just hope that eventually God will choose them to be among His good servants and shepherds. The Philippine parishes, which also lack priests, may also be benefited by limiting the service of these American-educated Filipino priests to five years in the United States, followed by five years in their home parishes in the Philippines and then back to this country for another five-year stint.

On our part, we are willing to help raise the necessary funds by doing fundraising activities on a year-round basis. One of the best ways to raise the needed funds and promote at the same time the “Sister Parish” concept is to hold an annual competition of Filipino-American church choirs. One suitable venue is the Dodgers Stadium, where we revived the “Filipino-American Community Night” on July 24, 2006, in a regular game between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the San Diego Padres. We can make representation with the Dodgers organization about making available their world-famous stadium.

Please let us know if the Archdiocese of Los Angeles may like to spearhead this “Sister Parish” movement, so that Filipino and Filipino-American lay leaders may be able to properly organize it.

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Thank you for the attention and may God continue to bless you, the clergy, the religious orders and organizations.

Very respectfully yours,

Bobby M. Reyes

* Editor's Notes: To read how Bobby Reyes organized the unprecedented Filipino community nights at the Dodgers Stadium, please click on these links:

[Dodger Stadium Photos taken during the Filipino-American Community Night held on July 24, 2006](#)

[Consul General Aragon Makes History at the Fil-Am Day at Dodgers Stadium \(Now With Photo\)](#)

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