UNDERSTANDING FILIPINO VALUES, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES FOR THEIR BASIC CHRISTIAN DIMENSION.

FAMILY - THE PRIMARY LOCUS

For Filipinos, the family is their most important reference group, the core of their alliance system, where they find security, strength, and support. Loyalty to family and kin, family solidarity and togetherness, concern for the family welfare and honor, rank high in their priority.

To understand Filipinos, their motivational and behavioral pattern, it is important to recognize characteristic features of the Filipino family, parental values and child rearing practices, which influence their personality.

The Filipino family is still predominantly traditional. As such it is closely knit, personalistic and a protective unit. Strong ties of loyalty bind Filipinos to their groups and their familial "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude) lasts throughout life. The wide obligation network for kinship that expands with every marriage form the support system of Filipinos and their protection in any crisis. Their interdependence among familial relationships is a major characteristic of Filipino society.

In general, Filipinos still appreciate personal values, show high esteem of personal dignity, express consideration for the feeling of others and have the capacity for self-sacrifice specifically if it is a sacrifice for the family. In the midst of poverty, serious social and environmental difficulties, the Filipino family is still religious and God centered, showing a remarkable adaptability and strength anchored in the basic faith and trust in God's mercy and providence witnessed in the sowing and reaping of harvests inspite of the frequent typhoons and damages to crops nearly every cycle of the year.

With the Filipino family there is hierarchy of authority. Formal authority resides in the Father but decision making is shared with the mother who also holds the purse-strings. The eldest in the family, whether a boy or a girl, has the greatest authority next to the parents and is charged with the responsibility of caring for the younger ones. In most cases the youngest one is perceived as the eternal baby who needs caring and has the most if not all privileges. Respect for the elders remains a strong value; family solidarity is stressed - brothers and sisters are close to one another and interdependence among them is encouraged.

Filipino families noted for their child-centeredness tend to be large, averaging five or six children who are looked upon as blessings. Since most Filipino children grow up in a small house with many others, including other adults besides their parents, they are seldom alone. Hence quite early Filipino children learn to look to others to meet their needs, to submit to the will of others, to be grateful and to control their feelings of hostility - in short, to maintain smooth personal relationships.

This characteristic of Filipino family life can be used positively to develop the Christian attitude towards fellow being as a real neighbor, extending the personalism within the family to the Christ-centered openness to the neighbor, community, and stranger.
FILIPINO VALUE SYSTEM AND CATECHESIS

Within the Philippine cultural values are found great potentials for growth as well as limitations to development and to the formation of mature Christians. If the positive aspects of traditional values can be identified, accentuated and reinforced they can be made more fully Christian and thus can become a vital force in an effective catechesis.

The Filipino shares with other traditional peasant societies the stress on the value of the person, on the intuitively-felt level more than the logically rationalized. This personalism can become the basis of genuine human and Christian commitment to others, to authentic freedom of men and women in society, if it is truly a personalism for the person as a person, not for the person because of his/her social status. Filipino personalism attaches great importance to closeness of reciprocal ties, loyalty to persons, family, and kinship obligation and smoothness of interpersonal relations. Conflicts are avoided rather than resolved, loyalty to authority on one’s groups, and attitude of resignation, are valued more than autonomy, systematic planning, scientific experimentation and self-reliance.

For Filipinos, social acceptance is a primary value and they soon develop the art of "pakikisama" (getting along with others), the use of euphemistic language, "I will try" instead of a no and of a go-between or a third party to mediate delicate situations. The desires to please and to conform need to be balanced by stressing on the value of personal sincerity and authenticity. To develop a genuine "pakikisama," there is a need to learn openness, willingness to listen, and to cooperate in effective teamwork for the common projects.

The Filipino "amor-propio", (their self-respect, self-esteem, and pride) makes them highly sensitive to personal affront, real or imagined. Linked with amor propio is "hiya" which is a feeling of shame, embarrassment and shyness, a kind of anxiety or fear or being left exposed, unaccepted. To be "walang hiya" (someone with no sense of shame), is a serious charge against any Filipino. However, the confidence that comes from the discovery of one's own uniqueness and creative powers, if grounded on the Christian truths of creation, redemption, and the Spirit's indwelling, can help to overcome the over sensitiveness of amor propio and inspire an out-going generous service of others. This can also help overcome the inhibitions and limitations of "hiya". "Hiya's" refined sense of propriety and decency can be grounded not only on society's sanction against pride, but more profoundly on genuine Christian humility, modesty, and moral sense.

Another deep value orientation in the Filipino is that of "Utang na loob" (a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid). Such a debt is established when one does a favor to another that entails some sacrifice on the part of the giver, or which the receiver perceives as an answer to a great need at a particular time. Like one's sense of shame, this sense of gratitude is a measure of the personhood, for to be ungrateful is to be shameless. This natural quality of "utang na loob" reflects deep gratitude, thoughtfulness and appreciation for the kindness received, and a willingness to help when needed. As such it can be a major factor in developing a Christian's fulfillment of the second greatest commandment - loving one another - as well as building up an authentic Christian community of loyalty and commitment. Surely the recognition of our salvation as "utang Na loob" from Almighty God, a debt that can never be repaid, could be the source of a distinctly Filipino spirituality as well as the ground of a genuine Christian compassion and mercy.

FILIPINO RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM

Filipinos relate to God primarily as Lord-Creator the source and giver of life to all that exists. God is the Bathala to whom we pray for continual giving and dispensing of mercy, forgiveness, blessings, nourishment, peace etc. God is a great provider whose will is a real factor in the lives of Filipino Catholics, and there is a
basic optimism that despite all their sufferings and hardships, God's plan will work out for the best.

This basic adherence to an Almighty and Supreme Being can form the rock-bottom basis for all catechetical work. It facilitates in bringing forth the specifically Christian truth of creation and the Triune God. This is particularly helpful because of the 'deep-seated belief in the supernatural and in all kinds of spirits among Filipinos. The Spirit who was promised by Jesus, to give new life to his disciples, is thus very appealing.' (CFC G. 44)

Veneration of the dead or a more Christian relationship with the dead is very strong to the Filipinos so it is not surprising if the value given to celebration and hospitality by giving food is carried over to the respect given to the dead most specially on days or anniversaries attributed to them. In this sense the ground, or Mother Earth is very important because she gives birth to man or woman and receives them back at the end.

The most characteristic aspect of Filipino popular religiosity - as well as Hispanic Christianity is devotion to saints. This fits well into the Filipinos' natural attraction for the concrete as well as for mediators. The saints as God's friends and our intercessors and models are concrete, individual persons who can be pictured and prayed to.

The Christ of Filipino folk Catholicism is predominantly the Christ Child of Christmas, the Sto. Niño and the suffering Christ of the passion. Relationship to the child Jesus or the adult Christ is basically based on relationship among members of the Filipino family. A child for instance is the joy and hope of every family - the Child Jesus is the hope and joy of the Christian family. The Sto. Niño who is a child is treated like a child - given candies and coins as offerings. According to an old story, the southern part of the Philippine experienced a terrible drought and nothing could be done to help the people. They brought the image of Sto. Niño to the middle of the sea where people prayed for help and the rain. Frustrated, they threatened to leave the image if prayers were not answered. The “Child” who did not want to be left alone much less drown in the ocean brought rain and eventually rich harvest. In thanksgiving, the people continue to thank him with music and dance.

Much the same remarks can be made of the traditional Filipino devotion to Mary, the patroness of the country, which is grounded in Filipino society's esteem and respect for women, specially mothers - itself a cultural trait fostered and deepened by the Christian faith. Thus we see the important role played by Mary in two important Christian events: the Christmas custom of "Panuluyan" - the search for the inn, and the Holy Week processions specially "Salubong" - Easter meeting of Mary and the risen Christ. It may not be biblically accurate but the Filipino will never understand how Christ could have died on the cross, ressurrected on the third day - immediately present himself to friends and not to his mother. It would be more Filipino to say that after resurrection it would not be possible for Christ, a dutiful and loving son, not to meet his mother first.

THE FILIPINO CHURCH

The Filipino Church has been a mission church for 400 years, in all these years, the church took care of the people - 83% of whom are Catholic and 70% living below the poverty line. Missionaries supported the parishes, started schools and included in their care the material, nutritional, social needs of the people. The church started nutrition centers, income generating programs, leadership training programs, skill formation centers, nursery and even recreational centers. Today, European church still supports 45% of church projects in the country.

People do not register in the parishes. Priests visit parishioners at home or are available most of the time in the parish and usually have full time workers responsible for the care of the parishioners. Most Dioceses have conducted parish census for a complete parish profile through social investigation or other scientific community organizing processes. The Filipino church is
Having her best to implement Basic Ecclesial Community programs in all the Dioceses as promulgated by the recently concluded Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II). A stance taken to embrace the option for the poor and giving witness to its role as a servant church.

As immigrants they want to express loneliness and homesickness in familiar traditional spirituality and do not find accessibility to them in the parishes, so they tend to form themselves as a group and continue their devotions or traditions independent of the parish. Filipinos may attend masses and participate in the novenas, but others get the impression that they act as guests, rather than members of the parish.

The parishes want the Filipinos to actively participate, this is indicated in the expectation from every member of the community, but Filipinos tend to say in response: “We have not been asked!” And this is something the American Church does not know about many of the Asian communities... they need to be invited to take leadership positions since they will be hesitant to volunteer, because doing so could be taken as being too forward, something frowned upon in the Filipino culture. The Filipino community can share a wealth of resources as they are a people loyal to Mother Church and willing to help once they feel needed and understood.

An Important note...

To the Filipinos of this community - allow yourselves time to adapt at your own pace, understand yourselves as a people with unique culture and heritage. Be proud and identify in the wealth of your roots and bring them forth as an offering of gifts to the community. God so loved us like any of His children that He addressed the Good News in our own uniqueness and concrete situation as communicated through Filipino pattern of thought, history, culture and experience.

To the rest of us in the community - the "Missions" have come across to America - the church has to make room for their presence. Language barriers and cultural traditions call for a learning process on the part of the immigrant and the receiving community. AND WE ALL NEED TO DO OUR PART!

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