

A Land of Producers

Although we speak of wanting to help our neighbour in significant ways, Christian communities are often at a loss as to how this can be done, outside of usual acts of charity. Let us offer a few suggestions.

For one, we can encourage group or social enterprise. We stand to gain from becoming a land of cooperatives. Though the cultivation of cooperatives involves many nuances and is a known challenge, there are existing models. In Spain, at the instigation of a clergyman, the Mondragon Coop was begun with a cooperative factory, a cooperative bank, and cooperative school. Christian congregations here can work to start cooperatives or businesses in their communities. Our Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) already has the "one town, one product" program. In the same fashion, Christian communities can champion the production and trade of a particular native product.

The concept here is production. Unless our nation becomes a land of producers, we will continue to remain dependent on imports of even the most basic items. For instance, 98% of our milk comes from Australia and New Zealand. To turn the tables, Christian communities can be equipped to start cooperatives for goat raising or carabao raising.

For the rural poor, there should be new programs for wealth creation. The "poorest of the poor", our agricultural workers and farmers, must be helped to rise out of their abject poverty. They can double or triple their yield with the use of organic or natural fertilizers. For ample incentive, Christians can work towards raising the price of their rice and other food products at a rate higher than those of the rice cartels. The aim is to regain our self-sufficiency in rice production, to decrease our importation of rice from countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. We can even aim to export rice once again.

But we can still go further than this in helping our rice farmers. We can encourage them to produce brown, instead of white rice. White rice has been leached of 90% of the vitamins and minerals of palay. In volume, every cup of brown rice is equivalent to two cups of white rice. The shift to brown rice will not only lower the cost of rice, but will make Filipinos one of the healthiest peoples on earth. This shift will take massive re-education. It will also require a ready market. Our Christian communities can mobilize to become marketers of brown rice.

In order to rehabilitate our present economic system, it is necessary to think out of the box. The truth is that our Lord has given us endless ways of harnessing our energies together as Christians to help those in need and demonstrate stewardship within our communities.

This editorial is written by Dr. David Lim. He is a Fellow of ISACC and the current president of ASDECS.

