

Rooting Out Problems of Justice in the Country

The author James Baldwin once wrote, “If one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policeman, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected – those, precisely, who need the law’s protection most – and listen to their testimony.”

This is perhaps the same spirit that moved former President Ramon Magsaysay to say that “he who has less in life should have more in law.”

But lately, what has been happening to the state of justice in the Philippines?

Perhaps the deep-seated problems of justice in our country can be traced to our failure as a people, to stand up to corruption. Though we are a deeply religious country, and God’s command to “Love thy neighbor as thyself” is familiar to us, greed for material things is turning us into people whose preoccupation is to get rich at any cost. Rather than be frowned upon, politicians who are involved in misconduct and crooked deals are accepted by high society and even most sought after as “ninongs and ninangs” by the people who are the very “victims” of their corruption.

Sadly, the attitude of our people is to accept corruption as a part of life. There is no clearer demonstration of this than the fact that our people continue to vote into office and patronize dishonest, crooked politicians. Because of this phenomenon, trustworthy, ethical and truly God-fearing leaders continue to be a minority in our country’s political life, and devoid of support.

William Penn reminds us, “Justice is justly represented blind, because she sees no difference in the parties concerned. She has but one scale and weight, for rich and poor, great and small.” But this is not happening in the Philippines. Our corrupt leaders appoint and promote corrupt policemen, corrupt fiscals, corrupt judges and justices, who one way or another will be influenced by their “sponsors” to whom they are indebted -- may “*utang na loob*” --, rather than being concerned for what is right and fair, and what is in the interests of the majority of our people.

We should all take responsibility for the poor state of justice and governance in our country, even though we may not be directly involved. By our silence and inaction we enable the system of corruption to be maintained. In the large scheme of things, it could be said that the sin of omission is just as shameful and sinful as committing the crime itself.

The Psalmist says that, “Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right” (Psalm 106:3). So, if we are asking how we can improve our judicial system, we may as well start at the very root -- with each Filipino making a decision to do what is right. “*Tayo ang simula.*”

This editorial is written by former Bulacan Congressman Willie Villarama. Willie is ISACC’s Fellow on politics and governance.