

## On “Poletiesmo” and Filipino Christianity

I am able to identify with the raging emotions of a fellow visual artist. We often rely on gut and gumption more than reason. On the other hand, as a Christian, I was deeply hurt by the screaming images of the “*Kulo*” Exhibit at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, particularly the piece of Mideo Cruz entitled “Poletiesmo,” which reeked with toilet language.

It is not surprising that many people responded with anger and hatred at this blatant disrespect of people’s sensibilities by Cruz’ works. But hatred is not the appropriate response of a believer who desires to follow the example of Christ.

Instead, let us reason and examine the controversial work that played the role of a virtual “devil’s advocate” in grabbing our attention. In truth, a sober and careful analysis of Mideo Cruz’ work may reveal a number of significant questions for us.

“Is the Philippines really a Christian nation, or just a hollow form of it?”

If we look at the corruption and disarray in our communities, we are miles behind Singapore—a nation that does not carry the Christian name. We would be shamed by Vietnam, a communist country, with regard to peace and order. Compared to our neighboring countries in the ASEAN region, we lag desperately behind in development.

Do we really deserve the title, “the only Christian nation in the Far East?”

Father Jaime Bulatao’s rigorous research has revealed the “split-level” nature of Filipino Christianity. He illustrated this through several funny anecdotes, one of which goes this way. There was a *martiniko* bird that immediately prayed the “Hail, Mary” when one of its claws was pulled. But once, two nuns tried to pull both claws. The bird was provoked into retorting, “*Putres kayo! Mahuhulog ako!*” — or, to translate, “Damn you! I will fall!”.

Filipino Christianity is dichotomized: There is Religion, and there is Faith. Many Filipinos claim to have faith but are devoid of its spirit. The average Filipino Christian is a devoted worshipper. Conscience and superstition prod him to ask constantly for provision and forgiveness. But all sensitivity and virtue are relegated to the cloisters of the church and to times of crisis. In the daily affairs of life and in the marketplace, greed and cunning, expedience and situational ethics dominate behavior.

These words of the late Cardinal Sin seem out of line, “*I will freely receive wealth from the Devil if it will help the poor.*” Among the evangelicals or the born-again, there were some who rejoiced over the good news that former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo received salvation—, “nag-accept na!”— only to subside in confusion and pain when consecutive issues of corruption were brought against the Arroyo government and the fraud and the conspiracy of the 2004 and 2007 elections were exposed.

On President PNoy’s birthday last February, the nation was shocked to hear that Secretary Angelo Reyes had ended his life in order to spare his family from collateral damage.

In contrast, the perverse habits of men are quietly opposed by the Spirit of God and the righteous workings of the government He has established on this earth. The events these past few weeks seem to lead us to the reign of truth and justice. The disadvantaged Koko Pimentel stood his ground. Pressed against the wall, Miguel Zubiri resigned at the last minute and disclaimed complicity by claiming he was merely a victim of a corrupt system.

May we embrace the will of God with passion and authenticity, walking his path with zeal and reverence. Instead of responding with hatred and violence to works like those by Mideo Cruz, let us submit to the wisdom of Scripture, when it admonishes believers:

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1 Peter 3:15-16)

*This editorial was adapted from the original article entitled “Ang Pa-KULO sa CCP” written by Maestro Fred Liongoren. Fred is ISACC’s Fellow on Arts and Culture.*