



RH BILL: THE ANALOGY, THE IRONY

Dickson P. Pagente
Class of 2006, Central Mindanao University
BSE English

The proposed Reproductive Health Bill which is simply abbreviated as “RH Bill” has aroused the attention of many skeptics all over the Philippine archipelago. While others are skeptical, the bill has also gained sympathy from considerable number of supporters who undoubtedly believe on its provisions. Conflict arose between these two warring sides thus causing the explosion of a very big controversy. The RH Bill was proposed by its principal author Rep. Edcel C. Lagman of Albay who is strongly opposed by the intimidating unified forces of the church – the bishops, the priests, the nuns and other so called “pro-life groups.” However, is the bill worth the skeptical questioning? Is it something fearful? Let us examine what the bill covers first before we make any prejudgment. According to its proponents, the bill provides information and access to natural and modern family planning. It promotes breastfeeding and even prevents abortion. It addresses to violence against women and provides reproductive health education for the youth of appropriate ages. These provisions are clearly discussed on the complete copy of the proposed bill. With these provisions, the church and other “pro-life groups” completely believe just the opposite instead. They maintained that the proposed RH Bill is “anti-life.” That it will somehow spawn a culture of promiscuity and abortion rather. From these grounds, let’s delve into the analogy and irony of the issue.

What is the analogy of it? First, the RH Bill has been akin to a boxing match between the raging church and the equally powerful state. Both sides have been throwing solid combination of punches against each other leaving the Filipino masses knocked down instead. Moreover, this bill is like the destructive earthquake that hit Fukushima, Japan that left nothing other than disorder, chaos and divisiveness among men. With the emergence of this controversy, the Filipino esprit de corps has once become divided. Divided by the disparity of moral precepts; torn down by conflicting ideologies. Shall we wait for another Pacquiao’s fight to make us united again as one nation?

What’s the irony of it? First, the church, though legally separated from the state as mandated by Article 2, Section VI of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, still exerts substantial influence on politics and public opinion. This practice has been rooted from the Spanish-era “friarocracy” in which no rule should be obeyed other than a “friar rule.” In fact, President Aquino was even threatened by the CBCP to be excommunicated the moment he approves the bill. Is this a Christ-like attitude? I don’t think so. Furthermore, Catholic authorities and other “pro-life” groups persistently opposed the passage of the bill while majority of Catholic church-goers are in favor of it as proven in different reliable surveys. Pulse Asia Survey on September 2008 showed that 71% of Filipinos are in favor of the passage of the bill. In fact, 76% of them are Catholics. In addition, ABS-CBN concluded on their survey on November 2010 that 7 out 10 Filipinos are in favor of the RH Bill. Now, if the majority has already spoken; if we believe on “vox populi, vox dei” – that the voice of the people is the voice of God, shall we still hesitate to give the best interests for our people?

On the verge of these contradicting ideologies between the church and the state, there are still voices left unheard – the masses. Though the majority of them favored the passage of the RH Bill as shown on reliable surveys, it does not reconcile both ends. The lawmakers and the clergies still continue to squabble instead.

To put an end to this controversy, the state with the support of the church should initiate a plebiscite to come up with an impartial decision whether the RH Bill should be approved or not. It might costs a lot but it’s the only way to end the fight. No need to excommunicate anybody. All we need is a collective consensus from the masses. After all, the supreme power of the land should supposedly emanate from the voice of its people, neither from the state nor from the church alone. We did a bloodless People Power Revolution in 1986. Why not make a peaceful referendum today. Hopefully, this makes sense.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is an analogy? How it differs from irony?
2. What is your stand on the RH Bill controversy? Defend your answer.
3. What do you mean by “friarocracy”? Elaborate your answer.
4. Comment on the statement, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.”
5. Should the church be ideally and legally separated from the state? Defend your answer.