

## **Reimagining the Identity and Role of the Church in the Philippine Society Today**

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### **Abstract**

Since the election of the current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in June 2016, the political sphere in the country has been a tumultuous site of struggle between the church and the state. Under this atmosphere, many Filipinos ask why the church has to interfere in the political affairs of the state. Underlying to this question is the problem on the nature of the church-state relations in the Philippines. The Catholic Church is clear about its socio-political task to safeguard and to promote social justice in the light of its moral and theological vision for society. Since the inception of the Catholic Social Teachings, the church never fails to assert its socio-political responsibility in society. To further the political vision of the church for society, Paul Ricoeur's idea of 'charity', where the church and the state are both seen as institutional bodies that share the same foundation in the pursuit of the common good, and Edward Schillebeeckx's emphasis on the eschatological foundation of the political task of the church, are considered and explored. Moreover, in situations where the church finds cooperation with the state

difficult, it is beckoned to discerningly witness to its Christian faith. Judith Lieu's notion of the 'church of martyrs' provides a critical analysis of how a radical response to persecution shapes the Christian identity of the church. In this paper, I argue that a pertinent church espouses a humble yet discerning and critical attitude in the context of persecution while constantly finding ways to develop a more constructive relationship with the state.

**Keywords:** Church-State Relations; Charity; Eschatology;  
Church of Martyrs

## Introduction

After three-hundred and thirty-three years of Spanish colonization, Christianity has deeply entrenched in the Filipino culture. As a predominantly Catholic country, the church has gained a privileged position and voice that without its presence it is difficult to imagine what the Philippine society would be.<sup>1</sup> There is, however, an underlying confusion about what the separation of the church and the state entails. Art. 2, sec. 6 of the Philippine constitution accentuates the inviolability of the separation of the church and the state.<sup>2</sup> But this demarcation stands on an ambiguous ground. One reason for this ambiguity is evident in the preamble of the Philippine constitution wherein the Divine aid is implored in the discernment and implementation of the law.<sup>3</sup> Based on this account, we can conjecture that the principles behind the Philippine constitution are to some extent discerned through the

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<sup>1</sup> See Aloysius Perez Cartagenas, "Religio and Politics in the Philippines: The Public Role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Democratization of the Filipino Polity," in *Political Theology* 11:6 (2010): 847.

<sup>2</sup> See Philippine Government, *The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines*, 1987, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/> [accessed 7 Dec 2018].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

influence of the Christian imaginary and praxis. In relation to the first, another reason is that the influence of the church is quite ostensive in the Philippine socio-political sphere that it is hard to demarcate the line that separates itself with the affairs of state.<sup>4</sup> It is true that the church could not impose a decision on political matters but it can influence the dispositions and ways of thinking of those who are making the decisions. Despite this ambiguity, the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is clear about what the church-state separation means. For them, the separation does not deny “the rights of believers to practice their faith and act on their values in public life.”<sup>5</sup> It also “does not imply a division between belief and public actions, between moral principles and political choices.”<sup>6</sup> For them, the separation rather serves as a prohibition for the state to not to interfere with the matters of the church and not to have a privileged state religion.<sup>7</sup>

Under the Duterte administration, the issue on the church-state separation worryingly resurfaces. The relationship is upset anew and the division between the two institutions tends to sharpen further.<sup>8</sup> The debates concerning this matter have turned polemical. The tirades of condemnations from the government lead many Filipinos to question the credibility of the church and its leaders on matters of faith and morality and to examine why it meddles with the politics of the state. Under this atmosphere of

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<sup>4</sup> Raul Pangalangan, “Religion and the Secular State: National Report for the Philippines,” in *Religion and the Secular State: Interim Reports* (July 2015): 560-571.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism on Family and Life for the 2010 Elections*, 27 Dec 2009, <http://www.cbcpnews.com/?q=node/12037> [Accessed 8 Dec 2018]. See also Raul Pangalangan, “Religion and the Secular State: National Report for the Philippines,” in *Religion and the Secular State: Interim Reports* (July 2015): 561.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> President Rodrigo Roa Duterte was elected and took the office on June 30, 2016 as the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the Republic of the Philippines. ‘Duterte administration’ is a term that is used to refer to his office.

persecution, how the church locates and redefines itself today is crucial for its existence and relevance in Philippine society. This paper argues that the church must espouse a humble yet discerning and critical attitude in the context of persecution and persist in finding ways to develop a more constructive relationship with the state. I posit that through such attitude and response, the church crucially redefines its identity, role, and significance in society. I will elaborate on this in two parts. In the first part, I will envisage a more productive relationship between the church and the state in the light of Ricoeur's idea of 'charity'. In this section, I will portray the current tensive relation between the church and the state. Then, I will discuss Ricoeur's phenomenological and theological analysis of the institution as a probable embodiment of charity in history. In the second part, I will envision an organic ecclesiology that is shaped by its response to those who are 'suffering' and by its witness to faith amidst persecutions. In this section, Lieu's imaginary of the Church of martyrs and Schillebeeckx's eschatology serve as important resources to reimagine a renewed ecclesiology that befits and charts the path that the church in the Philippines could pursue.

### **Tensive Church-State Relation**

Since the election of president Duterte, the church-state relation in the Philippines turns into a heated topic of debate. What brings the issue to the spotlight are the exchanges of condemnations between these two institutional bodies that are intent at discrediting each other's credibility. While the tension between the church and the state turns polemical, several authors offer an interesting insight into the status of church-state relations and how the populist president exercises his political power.

Prior to Duterte's election to the presidency, several church people are vocal against the way he exercises his political power and conducts himself in speech. Because of the unpredictable, rough, and dictatorial manner by which he

runs his office, he becomes a subject of criticism from the church, media, and human rights advocates. As the president takes his office in June 2016, several scholars ask what kind of leader is he. Karl Gaspar, in “An Attempt at Dissecting the Presidency of Rody Roa Duterte-A Very Personal View,” problematizes the kind of leader the president is and how it would affect the entire nation by dissecting the latter’s leadership style. He uses the three particular lenses to scrutinize the president: “the indigenous governance style of the *datus* (chieftains) of the *Lumad* (indigenous) communities; the transformational model; and that of Plato’s philosopher-king model.”<sup>9</sup> Based on his examination, Gaspar asserts that Duterte’s style of governing veers away from the three ideals of leadership styles. Instead, the president is slowly turning himself into a dictator that weakens his own political authority. Gaspar then asks whether the massive support of the majority of the Filipino citizens will remain massive when the president’s promises that they thought would realize are all put at stake with the kind of leadership Duterte exhibits. Gaspar is apprehensive as he muses about where the future of the country rests under a ruler who tends to become tyrannical.<sup>10</sup> One of the renowned Filipino journalists, Randy David, is quite emphatic in his criticism against the president’s way of governing. The unconventional and audacious manner with which Duterte runs the country leads him to conclude that the president’s methodological use of the “coercive power of the state in order to intimidate dissenters, critics, skeptics, deviants, and non-cooperative individuals” is a soft form of authoritarianism.<sup>11</sup> These two authors share the idea that the president has authoritarian tendencies.

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Gaspar, “An Attempt at Dissecting the Presidency of Rody Roa Duterte-A Very Personal View”, in *SES Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4:3 (2018): 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Randy David. “The Duterte Method,” in *Inquirer.net*. <http://opinion.inquirer.net/112636/the-duterte-method> [Accessed 20 Dec. 2018].

The administration's "war on drugs," which has led to the violent spate of killings, is another crucial subject of criticism. In the article, "The Spectacle of Violence in Duterte's "War on Drugs", Danilo Reyes, analyzes Duterte's "War on Drugs" in the light of various philosophical perspectives on the politics of the body vis-à-vis the spectacle of violence in Philippine society. Under the current administration, drug users and drug dealers are criminalized and humiliated to the extent that they are being regarded as inhuman. By imposing this category on the users and dealers, the administration's intent at violently disposing of them is easily carried on. This negative ideologization legitimizes violence as a means of achieving safety and protection for the ordinary law-abiding Filipino citizens. Through this violent campaign, the body is utilized to convey political messages. At the same time, it provides criteria for political decisions concerning "whose life has and does not have a value."<sup>12</sup> The violent spate of killings that has led to the demise of more than six thousand lives ensues from either police operations or vigilante-style killings. Since the president assumed his office, data shows the upsurge in the number of violent deaths. Most of the victims belong to the lower-class in society. Most of them are poor. The politicization of the lives of the victims and the legitimization of violence have even gained massive support from the masses for its promise of security and protection.<sup>13</sup> But this promise stands on the contentious ground. There is something wrong with the logic of battling violence with violence when alternatives are open. Interestingly, these eventualities even lead to the idolization of the president and to his popularity particularly for the unconventional manner in which he conducts himself and exercises his authority. This is partly because of the frustrations of many Filipinos on the ineffectiveness of the

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<sup>12</sup> Danilo Andres Reyes, "The Spectacle of Violence in Duterte's "War on Drugs", in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35:3 (2016): 111-115.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-137.

past administrations to deter crimes and foster real economic growth.

Under the atmosphere of violence and human rights violations, Maboloc's call for a radical renewal of the church deserves attention. In "The 'Church of the Poor' in our time," Maboloc calls for the resurgence of a church that champions the hopes and dreams of the poor of the nation. During the Marcos dictatorial regime, the church, with its theology of struggle, safeguarded human life and liberty. Today, the church is reawakened to witness to its faith in the socio-political sphere. Through its preferential option for the poor and promise of salvation, the "Church must act as a liberator of the people." The salvation of the people is not ahistorical and detached from the here and now. It must materialize as the poor's concrete liberation from hunger, homelessness, displacement, and exclusion from society. In addition, we can also emphasize the need of the poor for liberation from violence and human rights violations. The church must suffer with the poor even to the extent of "fighting institutional injustices that are caused by oppressive policies and political action."<sup>14</sup> The new evangelization is not empty rhetoric but praxis-oriented that has significant impacts on the transformation of the society. The current situation calls for a church that identifies itself with the poor and "shepherds them toward political freedom."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Maboloc argues,

"the Church of the Poor must "condemn the self-righteous, the arrogant and those who oppress the powerless. This involves courage and conviction and of course, the will to question those in power

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<sup>14</sup> Ryan Maboloc, "The 'Church of the Poor' in Our Times," in *PAMISULU: Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 6:1 (2018): 1-16. See also Ryan Maboloc, "The 'Church of the Poor' in Our Times," *Manila Times* (16 Dec 2018). [https://www.manilatimes.net/the-church-of-the-poor-in-our-time/483412/?fbclid=IwAR13BZ4\\_b9fSsv-JWsQXgF8ftLBHRJAdZttNdfcr7Q5t8ugT-49CwayAsZ8](https://www.manilatimes.net/the-church-of-the-poor-in-our-time/483412/?fbclid=IwAR13BZ4_b9fSsv-JWsQXgF8ftLBHRJAdZttNdfcr7Q5t8ugT-49CwayAsZ8) [Accessed 18 Dec 2018].

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

who act with a sense of impunity in their abusive ways. The Church cannot be neutral when amid a call to action to save the hungry or to protect the innocent. To evade such a responsibility bespeaks of a lack of moral courage. To deliver the weak evil bears all the weight carried by the faith.”<sup>16</sup>

Amidst several criticisms coming from different sectors in the society, the president is particularly vocal against the misconducts and abuses within the church. His tactics of shaming characterized his response to those who criticize and disagree with him. Several occasions depict his critical and vindictive stance against the church. Let us mention a few. In the previous year, Sr. Patricia Fox, an Australian missionary sister, was subjected to deportation because she was indicted to support the communist cause after criticizing the president. In another occasion, the president accuses the Catholics of believing in a ‘stupid God’ because he could not rationalize how a perfect God could allow malice in His creation.<sup>17</sup> In another instance, he scorns biblical writers and considers the Bible irrelevant since it is archaic and obsolete.<sup>18</sup> More so, violence is reflected even in the president’s speech. In many instances, he intimidates several church leaders with death if they are found guilty of drugs and corruption. In this vein, Amado Picardal, a Roman Catholic priest, asserts that “the threat of violence is meant to intimidate the leaders of the Church, to instill fear in their hearts so that they will remain silent and will not be a threat

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Kristine Phillips, “Duterte’s drug war killed thousands, and Filipinos still loved him. Then he called God ‘stupid,” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/19/dutertes-drug-war-killed-thousands-and-filipinos-still-loved-him-then-he-called-god-stupid/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.9e81fb8b1602](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/19/dutertes-drug-war-killed-thousands-and-filipinos-still-loved-him-then-he-called-god-stupid/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9e81fb8b1602) [Accessed 8 Dec 2018].

<sup>18</sup> CNN Philippines Staff, “Duterte mocks bible’s writers,” (6 Dec 2018) [http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/12/06/duterte-bible-catholic-church.html?fbclid=IwAR2tTOKMRjO-2fD7kA7Wpt563TtGHfKtFYQ6oxPUmknEBF8X7-fRwas2-\\_0](http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/12/06/duterte-bible-catholic-church.html?fbclid=IwAR2tTOKMRjO-2fD7kA7Wpt563TtGHfKtFYQ6oxPUmknEBF8X7-fRwas2-_0) [Accessed 12 Dec 2018].



to his authoritarian rule.” Noting that “dialogue with someone who intends to destroy the Church is futile,” he calls for a well-discerned resistance against violence and human rights violations.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the religious leaders in the country claim that the government will silence those who are critical of the current political administration.<sup>20</sup> Given these accounts, it is difficult to imagine a healthy church-state relation. But never impossible.

In the middle of the critical and vindictive confrontation between the church and the state, the loyalties of the Filipino citizens are divided. Disunion even lingers within the church and among its leaders. The strained relationship between the church and the state certainly damages their respective credibility. But we can be warier about how one institution tacitly legitimizes its interest and power through the ruin of the other. Under this tense atmosphere, the identity, significance, and legitimacy of the respective institutional bodies evidently rest on the fate of the other. In this case, there is a mutual co-dependency between the two in their identity-construction. It is a kind that stands on an adverse valuation of each other. This status quo entices us to discern for better ways to reconstruct the relationship between the church and the state. In pursuit of a more productive relationship between the church and the state, the next section discusses the common good as the shared foundational ground of the two institutional bodies. The promotion of the common good allows for a relationship between the church and the state that is characterized by a blend of critical confrontation, mutual discernment, and humble dialogue.

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<sup>19</sup> Joe Torres, “Philippine religious leaders claim govt moves to silence Church,” (April 16, 2018) <https://www.ucanews.com/news/philippine-religious-leaders-claim-govt-moves-to-silence-church/82158> [accessed 7 Dec 2018].

<sup>20</sup> Marie Christia Ramos, “Priest: The time for appeasing Duterte is over,” *Inquirer.net* Dec. 06, 2018. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1060699/priest-the-time-for-appeasing-duterte-is-over#ixzz5YuoN8C1X> [accessed 7 Dec 2018].

## Church and State as Institutional Bodies

### *Church-state relation viewed in the light of the common good*

Sociological and philosophical theories of organizations suggest that institutions are organic organizational bodies through which human beings knit themselves together under a particular platform and an agreed constitution in order to serve and promote the common good.<sup>21</sup> This implies that any human organization is founded on a principle and an intention that defines its significance and orients its affairs. Since this principle is concretized within contingent and shifting circumstances, institutional bodies have fluid identities. This identity is not only determined by its constitution. It is also constantly shaped by the way institutions engages and responds to their historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Despite their fluctuating identities, the common good remains as the ultimate criterion by which the relevance and credibility of institutions are weighed and adjudicated. As institutional bodies are historically conditioned, their perception of the common good abstruse and indefinite. Any approach to conceptualized the common good is heuristic in nature. In this sense, it must be continually and consensually discerned. Thus, if one institutional body cannot fully apprehend the

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<sup>21</sup> There are several theories about human institutions. Although thinkers and sociologists may not share a common ground, they all share in the idea that institutions serve the purposes of the common good. For further inquiries on the grounds of societal and political institutions, see Jonathan Turner, *The Institutional Order: Economy, Kinship, Religion, Polity, Law, and Education in Evolutionary and Comparative Perspective* (University of Michigan: Longman, 1997); see also Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of the Society* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 28; 61; see also Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); see also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (England: Prometheus Books, 1988); see also John Locke, *Two Treatises of the Government* (London: Whitmore and Fenn, 1821); see also John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

common good, this means such an institution needs to cooperate and discern with other institutional bodies.

The common good, as the foundational principle of institutional bodies, is crucial to note in the analysis of the church-state relationship. The idea of the common good implies that both the church and the state share a common goal. They are instituted to serve the needs of the people. This suggests that they are not founded for self-preservation but for a specific cause that further the common good. Part of the dynamics of the pursuit of the common good is conflict. But this does not have to be violent. Both institutions can function as a critic of each other principally on how they respectively actualize the common good. Viewed in this way, the struggle between the church and the state becomes a necessary component in their own refinement and growth. The tension between them is a constant call for their respective on-going renewal. In the following section, we will think with Ricoeur as to how the common good is realized through charity.

#### *Church and state as embodiments of charity*

Ricoeur's hermeneutic on the theology of charity provides a crucial platform for understanding the importance as well as the defects of institutional bodies. Institutional bodies, for him, are one of the ways in which charity is embodied and expressed in the concrete historical arena. Charity, as a response to those who are suffering, functions as the concrete expression of the common good through genuine service and justice.<sup>22</sup>

According to Ricoeur, charity has two faces: *neighbor* and *socius*. The *neighbor* is a response that is immediate, voluntary, unique, and undefinable way. Whereas, the *socius*

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur notes an institutional body is one of the expressions of charity in history. For him charity, materialized concretely in service as well as in the promotion of justice, is the common foundation and intention of institutional bodies. See Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, ed. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 98-109.

is a mediated, functional and impersonal response. The *neighbor-response* has its own flaws. It can be discriminatory and fleeting because of its personal and subjective dimension. It can be tainted with hypocrisy and exhibitionism especially when narcissistic interest tags along the act. Since it is very personal, this response is largely dependent on individual capacities. The *socius-response* balances the *neighbor-response* and sees to it that the discerned human values are magnified, purified, and preserved. However, the *socius-response*, which is mediated through the institutional bodies, are also susceptible to the inherent defects of an institution. Institutions may be complicit to promoting objectification by overemphasizing functionality over human dignity. Such overemphasis can lead to inhuman and alienating practices within the institution. It also can encourage anonymity and fragmentation within its structural composition. Since the institution is hierarchical, it can permit the abuse of power within its structures.<sup>23</sup> But these institutional defects can be constantly checked if the power within the system is viewed in the different light. The power of an institution is a product of negotiation and consensus. It is not inherent. The true power of an institution lies in the service that it extends to those whom it supposed to serve.

Both of the immediate and the mediated responses to those who are suffering complement as well as check and balance each other. Here, Ricoeur succeeds in highlighting the importance of institutions as entities that promote, magnify, and preserve human values. But these institutions also have to factor-in how individual agencies negotiate and redefine the determinations of these human values as well as the structures and constitutions of organizations.

In line with Ricoeur's insight, the church and the state are considered as institutional bodies of charity in history. But this is not readily given. Institutions have to actualize charity in their constant discernment and pursuit of the common good. As highlighted, institutional bodies have

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

inherent defects that must be constantly checked, corrected, and balanced by individual agents and the beneficiaries of their service particularly to those who are suffering. If an institution does not alleviate the suffering that it intends to address but endorses it instead, we can always be wary about the credibility and worth of such an institutional body. In this line, the 'suffering-other' confronts and criticizes these institutional bodies as their inherent corrective apparatus. The suffering-other is a force of resistance to the abuse of power. It is the conscience of the institution that bothers it whenever it drifts away from serving and bringing justice to the suffering.<sup>24</sup> How these institutional bodies respond to the suffering-other can either lead to their progress or ruin since the latter legitimizes why they exist in the first place. Our hope is that despite the critical confrontation between the church and the state, these institutional bodies may not digress from the real and pressing concerns of the suffering-other.

### **Reimagining the Ecclesiological Landscape in the Philippines**

It is quite ideal to see the church and state cooperating for the common good. But this is not always the case. In the Philippines today, the church is on a hot-seat. The government's ill-treatment of the church escalates the division between the church and the state. The church is probed as to under what justification does it meddle with the socio-political affairs of the state. In what follows, we explore for the justification and ponder how the church's response to the condemnations reshape its identity and role in Philippine society.

#### *A political church beyond human politics*

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault claims that "where there is power, there is resistance." See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95-96.

The Catholic church is clear on the competence of the church to speak about socio-political matters. This credibility is based on its moral and theological visions for the society that is discerned through the wisdom in the scriptures and its faith in Jesus Christ. Social teachings and theological discourses further develop and substantiate this authority.<sup>25</sup> It is not surprising that since the inception of the social encyclicals, the Church becomes more engaged in the socio-political affairs of the civil society. *Gaudium et Spes (GS)*, for instance, emphasizes that the church seeks solidarity with the world because its prophetic task is directed towards the transformation of the world.<sup>26</sup> Concomitantly, the church's liberational ministry is intended to protect human dignity, promote human rights, foster the unity of society, and provide a sense of meaning to all areas of societal life.<sup>27</sup> In the same wavelength, Schillebeeckx argues that the Christian message of salvation concerns the human person as a whole whether in the aspect of private or public life.<sup>28</sup> This connotes the idea that the church is not a private and other-worldly entity that has no historical significance. In contrast, the church is a historical entity that has a concrete redemptive function in the society but that which is anchored in an eschatological orientation.

The concern for the suffering other and the commitment for the better future of the world is also part of the church's agenda as it is of the state. But the politics of the church is not rooted in the human political imaginary. For Schillebeeckx, although the church "adopted herself to the structures of society around her, she retains her autonomous and critical distance."<sup>29</sup> In other words, the politics of the

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<sup>25</sup> See Arnel Lagarejos, *Separation of Church and State: A Catholic Standpoint* (Philippines: Reyes Publishing, Inc., 2015), 46-65.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Gadium et Spes*, no.1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx, vol. 3, God the Future of Man*, eds. Ted Mark Schoof and Carl Sterkens (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 85-100.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 187.

church is anchored in the eschatological expectation of the realization of the Kingdom of God. For Schillebeeckx, the Christian expectation of the Kingdom of God is shaping itself in history both through the divine grace and human efforts. This allows Christians to be involved through a genuine and Gospel-inspired commitment in the realities of the world of politics. This commitment is founded on a specific Church mandate to proclaim and promote the salvation of the concrete human person. Consequently, the Church can engage the state that is not simply one of a “teaching Church” to a “listening world,” but an exchange, a dialogue, where contributions are made from both sides and both sides listen to each other.<sup>30</sup> This calls them for a mutual discernment as to how to promote the common good since they are both forces that have the power to significantly influence the course of history.

We cannot deny the fact that the church, like the state, is a powerful institution. Based on its history, the church has been corrupted by too much power too on many occasions. Pope Francis’ insights on the humble and responsible use of power are worth noting. In a very judicious way, the pope asserts that:

“the more powerful you are, the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don’t your power will ruin you, and you will ruin the other. If you do not connect power with humility and tenderness, you will hurt yourself and others. The future of humankind is not exclusively in the hands of politicians, of great leaders, of big companies. Yes, they hold an enormous responsibility. But the future is, most of all, in the hands of those people who recognize the other as “you” and themselves as part of an “us.” How wonderful it would be if the growth of scientific

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<sup>30</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Words of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 85-92.

and technological innovation would come along with more equality and social inclusion. How wonderful would it be, while we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters orbiting around us.”<sup>31</sup>

Pope Francis’ invitation to be humble and responsible in the exercise of power is not only directed to the state but also to the church. Thinking with him, we can infer that the font of the power of institutions does not lie on itself on its leaders. The power of institutions rests on those to whom it serves. It resides on the worker, the ordinary people, the faceless, the victims of violence and injustices, etc. In short, institutional power resides in the faces of the suffering-other. This is so because power comes with responsibility. Responsibility to the suffering-other impels institutions to transcend its abuse of power and impersonal bureaucratic tendencies. Responsibility orients institutions to service and justice. This would mean that the power of an institution is concretized and legitimized by the service that it affords for the least and the suffering. Therefore, the church and the state, as institutional bodies, “bears an infinite obligation” to the suffering-other.<sup>32</sup> Following Francis, we avow that the legitimacy of the power of an institution rests on how it effectuates genuine transformation and welfare in society.

### *Towards becoming a church of martyrs*

When cooperation between the church and the state is too ideal to achieve, we question how the church position itself in relation to the state that is antagonistic to its undertakings. In situations where the church has no other alternative but

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, “Pope Francis Talk About Power and Humility at Surprise Ted Talk,” Time (April 26, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL5wOlilFQQ> [Accessed 8 Dec 2018].

<sup>32</sup> Marc Cohen, “The movement from ethics to social relationships for Levinas, and why decency obscures obligation,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79:2 (2016): 89.



to stand on its faith, CCC states that the church is called to witness the faith.<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, witnessing for the faith is one of the foundations of Christianity. Theologian Judith Lieu contends that martyrdom, as an ultimate form of witnessing, is crucial in the identity-formation of Christianity. Lieu highlights the special roles that believers of Jesus Christ, particularly the martyrs, played in the identity-formation of faith in the early centuries after its inception. For her, “martyrdom and identity are in many ways cross-referential terms,” that is, “to be willing to die for a cause is to acknowledge that it is determinative of one’s being.”<sup>34</sup> Noting that it was the experience of persecution that led to the development of the church, martyrdom is paradoxically one of the crucial and original elements in the construction of the Christian identity.<sup>35</sup> This identity is not empty grandiloquence. Instead, it is concretized in praxis that is anchored in the faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, the act of martyrdom is both confessional and articulations. Through the act of martyrdom, Christian identity becomes the ultimate option while denying other possibilities.

If in times of persecution “Christianity gains its true identity,” the Philippine church is radically called to locate itself and create spaces of constructive resistance to a government that is antagonistic to its affairs.<sup>36</sup> Doing so is tantamount to renegotiating and reconstructing its identity in society. Certainly, the identity of the church relies on how it witnesses to its faith. To witness to the faith means to discern and concretize charity. The witness of faith is actualized through the praxis of the love of neighbor. Such practice is particularly oriented to those who are suffering. In

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<sup>33</sup> CCC highlights that “the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd. ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), [2473].

<sup>34</sup> Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?: Constructing Early Christianity*, eds. John Barclay, Joel Marcus and John Riches (London and NY: T&T Clark Ltd, 2002), 211.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

a society where violent deaths are rampant, Christian faith obliges its followers to take a stand. The faith stands for life, human dignity, and justice. In this way, it cannot but take the sides of the victims of violence and human rights violations. An essential part of witnessing is to resist the evil of unwarrantable violence. Resisting does not necessarily mean reacting without discernment and reason. Resistance can also mean active ways of battling the abuses of institutional power while intent at purifying the institution itself.

The Church definitely reshapes its identity and asserts its significance through its response and resistance to antagonistic powers. Despite being contextually conditioned, it needs to be emphasized that such an identity is eschatologically oriented. In this way, the identity of the church is a product of the dynamic dialectic between its eschatological vision and its historical reality. Michel de Certeau's mysticism, though spoken in a different context, may offer an interesting insight into the ever-evolving identity of the church. He states:

“He or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is not that; one cannot stay there nor be content with that. Desire creates an excess. Places are exceeded, passed, lost behind it. It makes one go further, elsewhere. It lives nowhere.”<sup>37</sup>

The Church in the Philippines is in a mystic wandering at the moment. As the church wanders, it is locating and finding itself through its witness of faith and resistance to evil. But this wandering is with no guarantee. The only guarantee the church has is the fact that its responses to its contextual realities, particularly in times of persecution, significantly shape its identity. The authenticity of this identity largely depends on how genuine its witness to

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<sup>37</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, ET: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 299.

faith is. For this reason, the church is compelled to discern before it responds to persecution and not to be impulsive in its decisions and actions. Every response the church makes affects the determinations of its identity. Moreover, the church's calling to witness to the faith is intensified when it is persecuted. Witnessing is expressed concretely. At times, these expressions silently done in the unknown gutters, sacred spaces, and humanitarian workplaces. It is done by individuals who refuse to live under the culture of violence. The church, as an institution and as the 'people of God', must continue to resist violence because it is what the constitution of the Christian faith is about. Rooted in Christ, the church is constantly called towards the path of the cross. A genuine church struggles with those who suffer from violence and human rights violations. In doing so, the church relives the memory of the cross as a symbol of resistance to violence and evil. The cross does not necessarily need words to expose the cruelty and malice of perpetrators of violence. The cross itself becomes the message. It is the face of conscience and confrontation. The Christian faith on the cross is neither reactionary, rowdy, and violent; nor, it is silent and passive. The cross is a representation of a nonviolent crusade for peace, human life and dignity, justice, and genuine social transformation. We fervently hope that despite being persecuted by an antagonistic political rule that the church will continue to witness to its faith and carry on its responsibility to human dignity and social justice.

## **Conclusion**

We begin our reflection on the ambiguity of the church-state relationship in the Philippines. The current upset relationship between these institutions causes division of civil society. In our effort to look for constructive ways to deal with the tension, Ricoeur's salient analysis of the institution in the light of the idea of charity affords us with an important key. Thinking with him, we regard institutions as probable embodiments of charity in history. The idea of charity provides the church and the state with a common

foundation and intention. Both of these institutions find their common linchpin in the promotion of the common good. Moreover, as institutional bodies that are historically and contextually conditioned, the church and the state have organic and fluid identities, which are shaped and legitimized by their engagements in the world. The power that is installed in them is meant to trickle down to the service that they correspondingly offer to the people particularly to those who are suffering. This suggests the idea that the suffering-other serves as the referent of the legitimacy of the power of an institution. The institution's failure to address and alleviate the suffering of the people is tantamount to discrediting its own power and significance. In this context, the church and the state could mutually discern and critically confront each other under the platform of dialogue to guarantee that they both advance the welfare of society. But if mutual cooperation between these two institutions is difficult and the church finds itself persecuted by the state because of its firm stand for human dignity and social justice, the church is compelled by its circumstances to steadfastly witness to the Christian faith even to the point of the cross. The Christian character of the church is built on the wounded Christ who suffers on the cross to reveal the malice of violence. The church becomes a church of martyrs every time it witnesses to the suffering of Christ.

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