

Reflections on Collaboration with Filipino Colleagues

Tarris Rosell

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In conjunction with a visit to Central Philippine University in Iloilo, Panay Island, I was invited by Dean Lemuel Aquiña to give the second annual Genaro Diesto, Jr. Lecture at the College of Theology on June 23, 2009. The late Rev. Dr. Diesto was an alumnus of the College, and a pastoral colleague within the Asian American Baptist Caucus here in the States during years (1988-94) when Ruth and I were Co-ministers of Asian Outreach at Prairie Baptist Church.

The topic I was given for the Diesto Lecture, the focus of which is theological contextualization, was euthanasia. Given my topic and bioethics background, it was an event planned collaboratively with the CPU School of Medicine. I titled the talk, “Kevorkian and a King: Euthanasia Ethics,” providing a typology of euthanasia along with relevant case studies. These included the infamous Dr. Jack Kevorkian case, and two intriguing accounts of King Saul’s death by suicide and/or euthanasia in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1. The formal respondent to my lecture was a young, bright professor of medicine. Dr. Maria Carmen Salcedo’s comments were thoughtful and reflected her Catholic faith commitments. Several other CPU faculty, along with students, pastors, and laypersons, participated in lively discussions following both that morning lecture and another I was asked to give in the afternoon on embryonic stem cell research ethics.

Typhoon Feria interfered with travel plans the following day, so I had additional opportunity to address about fifty more CPU students comprising the first year medical school class, and their professors. Again, the dialogue on topics of bioethics and faith was delightfully engaging. It was tempting to thank God for the typhoon—except for its destruction elsewhere in the islands.

Early Thursday morning, June 25, we finally were able to cross the channel by ferry, and arrived at Bacolod City on the island of Negros. Our gracious hosts, Rev. Jack Francia and psychiatrist spouse Dr. Cheryl Francia, offered both warm hospitality and much helpful perspective on ministry in the Filipino context. Addressing, or surviving, widespread poverty is of high significance for what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in the Philippines. Nearly half the population subsists on US \$2 per day or less. Many Baptist pastors earn even less than the federal poverty level. Our traveling colleague from First Baptist of Olathe (and brother-in-law to Jack), Paul Wood, interviewed several pastors who agreed to come and meet us at the Bacolod church. Virtually all of them told heart-rending stories of personal or familial financial need related to medical or other crises.

Our final interviewees, Pastor Billy Reyes and his nurse spouse Janice, were particularly compelling. Billy taught math and science for many years, and then served as Academic Dean of the Convention Baptist Bible College in Bacolod City. Recently, the Reyes left their positions to begin an innovative ministry on a seven hectares (about 17 acres) rice farm. Billy calls what they do there “organic Christianity.” He and

Janice have leased one hectare to Intervarsity Christian Fellowship for training events about six weeks annually, and then the Reyes are free to use the conference center facilities on that plot for other events the rest of the year. Pastors are offered free retreat to Humayan Ministry. The only request is that guests pick up a hoe for an hour or so daily, contributing a bit of labor to the organic farm and intentional Christian community that is being established. Billy believes that one practical answer to pastoral poverty—a major problem for ministry in his region—is found in the land itself. “God has given us everything we need to live right here. We just need to use it properly.” The Reyes are in the process of building a “self-reliant house,” using a donated solar panel and local materials. They envision a school for village children, and are growing medicinal plants as known remedies for common illnesses. They live simply and joyfully. The admirable, attainable goal is ecological and economic sustainability while living with others in Christian community.

We hope to further the Reyes ministry, and learn from it, in part by co-hosting collaboratively a pastors training conference at Humayan Ministry in June 2010. A local committee of the Baptist Convention, the Bible colleges, and CPU will make the final arrangements for that conference and another in Iloilo. Paul and Morna Wood at First Baptist of Olathe are key leaders in all of this. Ruth and I are honored and grateful to represent Central Baptist Seminary and Prairie Baptist Church as partners with these faithful colleagues here and in the Philippines.