

For The POC/ May 2015

**Religion and Relevance:
The Irish vote and the Pinoy non-pride
By Libay Linsangan Cantor**

Ireland just became a huge LGBTQ-friendly Catholic nation, thanks largely to the recent vote they had to approve same-sex marriage for queer couples. And the Philippines should sit up and take notice of this -- and perhaps get a clue and, hopefully, a future cue.

As the only predominantly Catholic nation in Southeast Asia, the country has that tough enough status to contend with, more so being pitted against Asian neighbors from time to time, on the basis of queer inclusivity and queer permissiveness. Religion is one of the basis or factors in assessing the comparisons, as people say that non-Catholic countries seem to be more open towards LGBTQs like Buddhist Thailand and Vietnam. Not to say that their queer nationals don't encounter bigoted treatment (because some still do, and I don't think bigotry will go out of fashion anyway in any society) but I guess it's the general outlook towards LGBTQ presence that we envy there in more permissive states.

Is it our religion that's bringing us down, then? People are quick to say yes to this, since they say that Roman Catholicism has age-old dogma that Catholics needs to practice in order to be recognized by the church. However, there seems to be some disconnect regarding the purpose of the church. Are parishioners really entering the house of God only to be recognized as its members? Whatever happened to relevance?

People always cite their faith and its relevance to their lives. Got a raise? Thank God. Emerged from an accident unscathed? Praise the Lord. Child passed the school entrance exams? Thanks be to God. Lost cellphone found? God keeps a watchful eye. Unexpected job promotion? God delivers in mysterious ways.

See how we always seem to drag God into many of our quotidian concerns? If God is that accessible to us in our daily lives, then the church that propagates His mission of goodness should also be that accessible to us. And with this access, that means being open to all kinds of followers that God Almighty has -- not just the heterosexual ones.

So to ban queer Catholics from accessing what's rightfully ours in the eyes of God - - namely our so-called God-given rights as a citizen of a nation and a member of the Church -- is like warping the hand of God into a hammer that will hit us in the head and bury us down into patriarchal oblivion. To say that our kind is not what God wants, and it's supposedly written in the Lord's book, is quite the judgment call which I thought only Jesus Christ has the right to practice during his supposed second coming. If you'll only follow how Jesus was depicted in this holy book, you'll also see how He somewhat disobeyed many "small things" to reach out to more people who are in dire need of His presence. The sinners, the outcasts, the sick, the

poor -- to reach out to them and to have them access the word of God through the teachings of His Son, well, isn't that how liberation theology is supposed to be practiced? Like how the current Pope does it -- steps out of familiar Catholic comfort zones of extravagant embellishments to reach out to the faithful who are most needy.

Religion needs to be relevant. This is the message we're getting out of Ireland, especially from the Catholics there who see that the world has indeed changed, so religion must adapt to this change -- to be relevant, to be real, and to be authentic. We've seen the parents and grandparents of Irish queer people who spoke about how they voted for the happiness of their queer family members by voting for the same-sex marriage provision in their laws. If their grandparents were happy with their Catholic marriage and their parents were happy with their Catholic marriage, why can't their queer (grand)sons and (grand)daughters be happy with their own Catholic marriage as well? Now that is how you interpret religion -- by going back to the basics of what it serves in the first place: love, togetherness, family, while under the loving and caring protection of the Supreme Being that rules that religion.

So many wars have already been fought in the name of God. Do you think He will be happy with another battle that takes His name in vain? But that is how religious fundamentalists have been doing it here in the Philippines, fundamentalists both inside the Catholic Church and outside of it. In the name of conservatism, they condemn people different from them just because our parameters of love operate on a different scale. The message we're getting from Irish Catholics is that no matter who we are, we all deserve to be loved, respected and cared for by the government that serves us and by the church that guides us. Now wouldn't that be the most authentic interpretation of the word of God, in its full benevolent glory?

Sadly, it will still take years for us to realize that some God-given rights should be granted to all people, regardless of what we are and how we practice love. Spain, the mother country where our brand of Catholicism came from centuries ago, has already rebranded their kind of Catholicism in order to fit current times. This is what the Irish Catholics also did by adapting to current concerns. No, it's not merely a case of rebranding to cater to a particular niche, but rebranding to have an even wider reach, and more humane relevance, in this day and age.

Alas, we are in a country where non-Catholics are subjected to prejudice just for being non-Catholic, and Catholic followers are threatened and sanctioned with the removal of their heavenly ticket-membership for supporting relevant laws and changes in society that will benefit more people, especially the poor and the needy. We are in a country where most Catholic leaders ride airconditioned tinted vehicles where they pass by roads littered with the poor, the needy and the sick -- or Jesus Christ's predominant target audience, to be exact. And yet, they merely drive through this scene, without batting a guilty eyelash. What would Jesus think?

I don't know what He would think but I could already second-guess what Jesus would say to these people who use His Father's name in vain to justify their bigotry and intolerance towards queer Catholics: Are you still relevant?

The Irish Catholics already have their answer. When will Filipino Catholics have theirs? //

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