Making Cultural Heritage Alive in Contemporary Philippine Culture

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The critical question: *An Sit?* Is it?

"Why do we preserve or restore these old churches when they are symbols of oppression, subjugation, and injustice?" This dismissive question caught off guard the participants in the September 1995 National Conference on Culture organized by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Culture, in Cagayan de Oro City, in Northern Mindanao. It was a rhetorical question that discomfited so many in the audience because the interlocutor was a Filipino Jesuit priest and canon lawyer.

It has been almost thirteen years since that query was posed. I believe we have had the answer all along. Prevalent among a fairly good number of Philippine Bishops and priests, this line of thinking is not difficult to comprehend, because many cut-and-paste historians and Filipinologists have said a thing or two about the so-called forced labor, or the *polo* system, the whipping and lashing of disobedient *Indios*, and the paranoid imagery of dark and dank dungeons housed under the *casa parroquial* where the poor hapless Indio was incarcerated. As Dr. Summers will tell you about the so-called *leyenda negra* and Prof. Jose about his archival research into the *cargo y data* of parish records proving that people were paid for their manual services, all of these were aberrations rather than the norm in the Hispanic Philippines. Following this train of thought, then, these colonial churches dotting the Philippine cultural landscape were nothing but miserable malignant cysts that continue to burden the poor Filipino, the Indio. And so, the question, "Why bother at all in preserving and restoring these monuments of subjugation?" strikes us as a deceptively apathetic issue screeching with insidious intent.

If these emblematic structures truly represent the worst in a people or society, why do we at all preserve them? When the Ottoman Turks walloped the Eastern Roman Empire on 29May 1453, following the Julian calendar, they did not destroy the Hagia Sophia Cathedral, but rather retained its sacred character and adaptively re-used it as an Islamic mosque. One cannot also negate the impact that the Nazi concentration camps, especially the one at Auschwitz Birkenau, among a handful of other shrines of death, have as a capital symbol of indescribable persecution. However, greater wisdom prevailed to maintain them for what they are. Or, perhaps, nearer to everyone's heart is the fabric of what was once the Hiroshima Prefectural Industry Promotion Hall that later on, after 6 August 1945, came to be called the A-bombed Dome in Hiroshima, Japan. Many an ordinary Japanese citizen would no doubt welcome the destruction of the only remaining wounding presence that the A-bombed Dome represents. And yet, wisdom prevails, and the A-bombed Dome endures as a reminder to us all what human life on earth would be without peace.

In view of all these different layers of meaning and interpretation we assign to our symbolic capitals, let us reiterate the query posed by our Filipino Jesuit priest: "Why do we preserve or restore these old churches when they are symbols of oppression, subjugation, and injustice?" Or, stated simply without biases, why do we bother preserving and/or restoring them at all?

Principles of identity and gnoseology

There are two fundamental answers, among many that we can conjure up. The first confirms the principle of identity, and the second regards the principle of gnoseology.

As to the first proposed answer, we submit the argument that we preserve and restore sites, structures, archival, and library materials, the plastic, fine, literary, and performing arts, *inter alia*, because these consitute are heritage, and heritage is deeply woven into the fabric of community life. Heritage, both tangible and intangible, is the expression of culture, and as such, it constitutes an extension of who we are. It stimulates and strengthens our pride in a sense of place and in our identity. However, that which compels us to protect, preserve, perpetuate, and promote our heritage is the significance we attach to it. A site, place, or object is considered heritage to me or to us as Filipinos or as Americans precisely because it has scientific, social, religious, aesthetic, and architectural significance. Significance is identified or established through physical, oral, archival, library research, and study. It is embodied in the place or object itself, its fabric, setting, uses, associations, meanings, records, and even in related objects and places. When a place or object is significant to a culture or a community, that place or object is valued by that community.

Valorization of heritage is results from the significance we find imbedded in a place or object. Human experience shows us that values change. But then again, as the Church Magisterium teaches us, permanence is the subject of change, not its object, and therefore, invariable or immutable. Dogmatic interpretations and expressions may change depending on our subjective appreciation of theological truths, but not dogma itself. And so, what is significant two generations ago may not be significant for the generations that come after us. Here, then, we see the bond that relates the past and the future through heritage and in it. And this leads us to the second reason for preserving and restoring heritage.

As regards the principle of gnoseology, we submit this assertion that every heritage is a knowledge resource. Every place or object that is considered as heritage is a vital depot of information. Once a community loses its heritage, it loses its information: it loses its identity and self-realization, because it simply does not know itself. No place or object stimulates the community to recall where it came from, who they are, and where they are going. That is why the conservation of heritage does not revolve simply on the place or object considered as such, but also on the information that this place or object contains. That information itself is the place's or object's inherent intangible perquisite. The information ingrained in a heritage place or object tells as much about the

community as its tangible manifestation or cultural expression. Now, once this information is retained either in technical form or as mental constructs, then we are readily able to know what it is, appreciate it for its worth, value it for its significance, and deploy actions to further the knowledge resource of ourselves as individuals and as members of our community.

From the arguments above, we can propose a simplified philosophy of heritage management that can be plainly stated thus: heritage is conserved, i.e., preserved and restored in order to ensure the security from theft, safety from mishandling, and survival from natural and human-induced disaster, of the tangible and intangible legacy, for the purpose of maintaining its significance by which it is valued.

If we are managing our heritage by conservation, what is heritage then?

Quid Sit? What is heritage?

Heritage as such

We have just said that heritage is the cultural expression of a given community and is woven in it, that heritage is us, that heritage bonds the past and the future.

As the word implies, heritage is whatever you want to preserve or restore in order to promote or perpetuate for the next generations, as its etymology suggests: /*heri*/, yesterday + /*tangere*/, to touch. "Whatever" in the descriptive definition of heritage can be tangible or intangible, or usually both, as we have demonstrated previously. That is to say the heritage place or object carries the vital information. This vital information holds its significance by which such a place or object is valued.

Heritage has a fairly large domain, for it encompasses the natural and cultural, the tangible and intangible, and the moveable and immovable that the individual, community, province or state, region, nation, and the world assign significance for the very reason such heritage is more or less valued.

The Authenticity and Integrity of Heritage

We said before that a place or object is considered heritage when it possesses significance to a community, and that that same community values it. Before proceeding further, let us examine two conditions that are mandatory in valuing heritage. These are the conditions of authenticity and of integrity.

The condition of authenticity is met when the knowledge resource held by a heritage place or object is assessed to be credible or truthful. This is to say that the knowledge resource is not faked, not simulated, not deceptive, not pretentious, not a sham. In other words, the knowledge resource is unadulterated; it is genuine.

On the other hand, the condition of integrity is realized when the following factors are present: first, all vital elements necessary to express the common outstanding value of a heritage place or object are included. Second, the heritage place or object is of such a dimension as to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes that convey its significance. And third, the heritage place or object suffers no adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

Cultural Heritage in the mens *of the Church*

Having said this, I would like us to resume our focus on heritage, and now in particular, the cultural heritage of the Church. We will narrow this further to give attention to the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

Many Filipino writers aver to the standard account that Spain's greatest and enduring legacy to the Philippines is the Roman Catholic religion. As an aside, a Spanish legacy the Philippines lost is the Spanish language. Though it was a mandatory subject in high school and college, this was abolished during the Aquino Administration (1986-1992). The Catholic religious confessionography is conspicuously embodied in the old colonial churches the Spanish missionary orders erected, which to this day remain what they are as sacred gathering places of the community.

Ecclesiastical edifices were not the only structures punctuating the Hispanic Philippines. The Spanish friars also built or commissioned the building of civil structures and infrastructures, such as *escuelas de niños y niñas*, forts and fortifications, bridges, and markets, among others. This is not to say that the Spanish Crown or its political machinery made no impact on the Indios' way of life, but that it did so at different levels precisely through the agency of the Spanish friars. Let us say as a matter of historical fact that though Spanish political government was present, it came to life most of the time through them. As most Spaniards were concentrated in Intramuros, the majority of the Filipinos living in the provinces would experience the Spanish presence through the friars. They were the personification of the Spanish Crown in more ways than one, because, by a treaty between the Kingdom of Spain and the Holy See, the Spanish Crown was obligated to support the missionary endeavors of the Church through State funding for construction and stipends for the priests. In fact, Felipe II, in his *Ordinanzas Generales de descubrimiento de Nueva Población* of 1563, decreed that no church or parsonage would be erected in his royal realm without his consent. This historical anecdote will vividly explain why, as we said beforehand, and this is also common knowledge, 80-85 percent of the cultural heritage of the Filipino nation was, at one time or another, generated, and continues to be owned, utilized, administered, and managed by the Catholic Church in the Philippines, or that, as in the case of civil structures and infrastructure, the heritage of the Filipino nation was the result of the social works or *apostolates* of the agents of the Church in the Hispanic Philippines, acting on behalf of the Spanish Crown.

It has been 110 years since Spain left the Philippines, only to be replaced by another Western colonial power. The vagaries of our colonial history place Spain in a

bad light. Filipino nationalists have and will always demonize Spain. It is obvious why the Filipino Jesuit priest detonated that question: "Why bother preserving or restoring old colonial churches when these are symbols of oppression, inequality, and injustice?"

In the first paper I shared with you, we encounter a number of individuals, groups, and agencies applying their personal and communal intervention in heritage conservation, whether such heritage belongs to the Philippine State or to the Church in the Philippines, or even to private individuals or corporate bodies. It is my humble estimation, considering where I am coming from, that there exists heightened awareness of heritage as a result of sensitivity-raising activities in the form of lectures, conferences, conventions, fora, and the widespread use of the various media of mass communication. Heritage practice in the Philippines is, however, tedious, taxing, and very frustrating. In the Philippines, when we talk about projects, we would always love to say: "There are funds, but no cash!" In the midst of explosive political, social, economic, and religious issues perpetually raging in the Philippines, one can even ask, "Why bother with heritage at all?" "How," we would say, "can heritage feed us?" It is an economic driver, but only if we know how to tap this particular resource.

Even for the Catholic Church in the Philippines, heritage issues innumerably flourish. From many heritage workers' gatherings and in the course of time, we are able to enumerate the reasons and underlying causes for these heritage issues.

Discontinuance of the *Patronato Real de las Indias*. The *patronato* was a complex of privileges granted by the Holy See to the Kingdom of Spain commencing in the second half of the fifteenth century, delegating to the Spanish Crown the construction, repair, and maintenance of churches, rectories, etc. The *patronato* provided that there will be no construction and/or repair of said ecclesiastical edifices without the Crown's consent, since money for construction and repair came from the royal treasury, not to mention the priests' stipends. Likewise, there would be no repair or maintenance of those structures without the bishop's approval. The *Leyendas de Las Indias* were promulgated as a logical consequence of the *Patronato Real*. With the discontinunace of the *patronato* when the United States invaded, occupied, and colonized the Philippines, the *Leyendas* were understandably rescinded. Consequently, church construction, repair, and maintenance also stopped.

Misinterpretation of Vatican II. Vatican II was and is synonymous with reform and change. Changes were interpreted as the abandonment of the old. This is, however, far from reality, as the popes (notably, John Paul II and Benedict XVI) and the Council sought to provide guidance and correct interpretation of the letter and spirit of Vatican II. But, with Vatican II came the removal of sacred art, the desacralization of the sanctuary that led to the loss of sacred music and music fitting for the liturgy, the clericalization of the laity, laicalization of the clergy, and the wanton refashioning of worship spaces and environment.

Contemporaneity of heritage. Heritage only entered church vocabulary and given wider dissemination in 1988, when Pope John Paul II created in the Roman Curia the

Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church. It was only in 1991 when the baccalaureate, licentiate, and doctoral degrees on church cultural heritage were introduced as a specialized course at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and later at the Pontifical Lateran University, both in Rome. However, one can construe that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council already contemplated the preservation of the ecclesiastical cultural heritage by decreeing in 1963, in its constitution on the liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the creation of commissions for sacred art at the diocesan level. With these, one can say that the church's awareness of and sensitivity to cultural heritage only began in the early 1960s, some twenty years after the close of the Second World War, when most of this heritage was destroyed.

Shifting priorities in the seminary curriculum. After Vatican II, there was a shift in focus from the cultic aspect to the so-called meal aspect in the celebration of Holy Mass. The meal aspect stresses the community dimension of the Faith and Faithful. As a result, emphasis was laid on poor communities, on the so-called Church of the Poor, on the BEC, utilizing Marxist analysis as the instrument to address the socio-political and economic conditions of the poverty and squalor found in Third World and formerly colonized and Catholicized countries.

The constitutive normativity of the principle of Church-State separation. While this principle works in favor of the Church in matters of heritage conservation, recent initiatives of the Holy See's Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church encourage collaboration and partnership with civil authorities in matters of the proper care of ecclesiastical cultural goods. This motive is based on the social doctrine of the Church that teaches the *principle of mutual autonomy of the Church and the political community*. As the Magisterium of the Church points out, this principle does not mean separation or reciprocal difference between these two sovereign entities, but rather highlights *wholesome cooperation* in all legitimate actions that serve the common good of the people.[1] And so, to avoid discord and conflict between the Church and the government, the Church proposes structured dialogue that finds its expression in the stipulation of mutual agreements. The dialogue tends to establish or strengthen relations of mutual understanding and cooperation, and serves really to prevent or resolve eventual disputes.[2] Only recently, on April 14, 2007, the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines signed an international bilateral agreement on the care of the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. Fortunately, I was intimately involved in its preparation, and it was very historic because it was the first such international bilateral agreement we entered into between these two sovereign entities specifically marking their cooperation in the area of heritage care.

Intervening attitude of the Philippine national government and its cultural agencies. This is the other side of the story of the Holy See-Philippines bilateral agreement on heritage. The Philippine Bishops, ever wary of government assistance, recoil at the expression of interest that government cultural agencies have shown in the conservation of church cultural heritage. This attitude among the Philippine bishops is borne of their many unhappy experiences with these agencies, which, without first having sought consent of the legal owners of the ecclesiastical cultural goods, declared church

structures and sites as national historical landmarks and/or national cultural treasures. A memorandum of agreement was entered into, by and between the CBCP and the NCCA, to address many concerns relative to the declaration of colonial churches as national cultural treasures. With the recently signed bilateral agreement, minus its exchange of the instruments of ratification, it is foreseen that many of these disputes can be resolved.

McDonaldification or Disneyfication of the Filipino. A great majority of Filipinos always look up to Uncle Sam or Uncle Donald or Uncle Walt. We seem to want to mirror the U.S. in so many ways. This is an issue that runs hard and deep into the Filipino soul, at the Filipino's sense of being Filipino, of his self-knowledge, self-worth, of his being an Asian, of his uniqueness in spite of globalization, and of his destination as a contributor to progress in his own country.

Effects of these issues and concerns are readily seen, e.g., the almost spiteful modernization of heritage places, the practice of the edifice complex, total aversion to heritage by demolition of structures, misplaced understanding of restoration, loss of the representative elements of music, and the contradistinction between pastoral needs and heritage significance and value. And this is where I think the Catholic Church in the Philippines must play a vital role and be a countervailing to and unifying force against the extraneous cultures that bombard the Filipino. Notice how in the U.S. and elsewhere wherever the Filipino is, churches are filled because there is a sizeable presence of our kind.

Making cultural heritage alive in contemporary Philippine culture?

Now, faced with these many underlying causes and regrettable effects, in what way can we in Philippine society address these concerns? How do we make cultural heritage alive in contemporary Philippine culture?

Heritage education is always my first proposed answer. Only by addressing this fundamental issue can these causes, symptoms, and their deleterious effects be avoided, contained, and eliminated. Heritage education or heritage studies, to be effective, need not be confined to academia, but heritage studies can be promoted through informal venues, such as this one. In the Philippines, formal heritage studies are offered as a graduate course at the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, in Manila, a non-thesis programme leading to the degree of Master in Cultural Heritage Studies. Only the University of the Philippines at Diliman, Quezon City, offers the degree of Master in Music, major in Musicology (that same degree that Prof. Sandy Chua obtained for her work on the Baclayon cantorales in Bohol).

Sadly, in that monolithic and influential institution—the Catholic Church in the Philippines, I mean—which owns, administers, manages, and actively utilizes 80-85 percent of the Philippine cultural heritage, heritage education in the seminary curriculum is not yet in place. The reasons for this situation are rather intricate and would demand a separate conference. It is sufficient to say here that the pastoral intent and function of the cultural heritage of the Church continues to be an emergent pastoral concern—even after

thirteen years—and is of lesser priority to the Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippine Islands.

Heritage legislation**.** This is my second answer to the question, "How do we make cultural heritage alive in contemporary Philippine culture?" Legislative and regulatory measures for protection and perpetuation of the cultural heritage of the Church and of the Filipino nation at the national and local levels should assure the survival of these heritage sites and their protection against development and change that will negatively impact the significance, outstanding common value, authenticity, and integrity of these cultural goods. And yet, it is not enough that legislation is in place. It is imperative to have adequate and enforceable legislation that truly affects how Philippine society at large appreciates and values its own heritage. Such legislation is not only effective but *affective*.

At present, we are on the threshold of attaining a beginning to this kind of legislation at the national level. While there are a number of municipal and provincial ordinances regulating heritage use (though within the end-all-and-be-all context of tourism), a new proposed bill, the Philippine Heritage Law, is being heard in the Philippine Congress. Only recently, on April 21, 2008, a roundtable symposium was organized by the HCS at the NCCA to flesh out this bill so that the many stakeholders of Philippine heritage will have a say as to how the bill can effectively address the multifarious heritage concerns of the Philippines.

There have, of course, been heritage laws crafted by the Philippine Legislature since the beginning of the American civil governance of the Islands. For instance, Republic Act No. 4846 was signed into law by the Philippine Congress in the 1950s. The Act was also known as the Cultural Properties Preservation and Protection Act. It was amended a number of times when the late strongman President Ferdinand Marcos proclaimed Martial Law in the Philippines in 1972. R.A. 4846 was amended first by Presidential Decree No. 260 that Marcos signed into law on August 1, 1973, then by P.D. 374 of January 10, 1974 substantially altering R.A. 4846, and then by P.D. 260 of August 1, 1973, and P.D. 1505 of June 11, 1978.

As of the present dispensation, the Philippine Heritage Bill now pending in Congress intends to harmonize discordant Philippine laws and jurisprudence concerning the proper care and stewardship of the nation's cultural patrimony to set a cutting-edge legal instrument by which Philippine heritage will be protected.

The Church, too, as an institution born in this world, but not of this world, has laws on the pastoral care of its own cultural heritage. Unfortunately, canon law is *terra incognita* to the vast majority of the Catholic clergy. The basis of canon law, not only the ecclesiastical legislation favouring church heritage, is theology, or dogma, or doctrine. The *ius agendi*, the law or norm of acting, i.e., canon law, follows and flows from the *ius credendi*, the law or norm of believing, i.e., theology. Suffice it to say that the purpose of having canon laws or church laws on church heritage protection is not only to regulate or monitor conservation intervention concerning heritage places and objects in the

church, but canon law becomes the catalyst in bringing out and conveying the catechetical, sacramentological, ecclesiological, and biblical significance. It is through the identification and utilization of this significance that the cultural heritage of the Church is valued, and is ascertained to possess its inherent pastoral function.

Concomitant with all these, the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines signed on 14 April 14, 2007, the bilateral Agreement on the Cultural Heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. It now awaits the exchange of the instruments of ratification. Following that, the joint commission contemplated by the Agreement will be constituted to work on an accord applicable at the national level that will elaborate on the stipulations of the recently signed international bilateral Agreement.

Community advocacy. This is an essential component to making heritage alive in contemporary Philippine culture. I hasten to add an admonition here: individuals in the community and the entire community itself need formation, and not just instruction, about cultural heritage. For starters, communities need basic orientation kits to be able to take concrete and effective action in protecting their patrimony.

Heritage conservation and management are fundamentally basic housekeeping. If the community and its leadership learn stewardship, then they can keep their house in order, built as it is on solid rock and not on shifting sand. Let no unsympathetic remodeling of your heritage take place. Let no destruction occur. Do not let tackiness compromise the authenticity and integrity of your heritage, but let what is genuine and integral be ensured, for these are what make value.

Networking, linkages, synergy, convergence. These words mean the same thing: communal concerted action directed towards shared goals bonded by shared heritage. And because the group is one, heritage work becomes less taxing; heritage work is fun.

Conclusion

I believe today we are in possession of a mature insight on the conscientious stewardship of the cultural patrimony of the Filipino Nation, and that on the pastoral care of the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. To summarize in a few words this very difficult and frustrating work of heritage conservation, advocacy, and sensitivity: we apply conservation measures today to our cultural heritage because they are, and do contain, knowledge resources useful to bridge the past and the future. As provocateur of memory, heritage contains the seeds of nation-building. Because heritage is knowledge resource, heritage contains everything that is essential in nation-building, on the condition that the resource content is authentic and integral: nothing fake, nothing fancy, nothing fraudulent.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera (1929-), in his *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), speaking about history and memory, quoted Milan Hübl, a Czech historian (1927-1989): “The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books,

manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long, the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster."

The *Encuentro Filipino* assays not only to reunite the Philippines to its Hispanic past, but also to remind us all that this Hispanic past was also benign, that it allowed the display of cultural vibrancy suitable for its time. The research conducted by our colleagues, Dr. Summers, Dr. Mirano, Profs. Chua, Silvestre, and Jose, is a declaration that we will not forget; we care to remember. Were it not for Dr. Summers, we would not be here and the Corella music manuscripts would have been lost forever. Without Dr. Mirano, Marcelo Adonay will only be a little appoggiatura in the scale. Without Prof. Chua's work on the Kyriales, we would not be singing once more this grand melody that directs humanity to immortality. Without Prof. Jose's bells and ivory *santos*, no sights and sounds would attract our eyes and ears to the world that is beyond us. And without Prof. Silvestre's Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje, no one would intercede for us powerfully in our faith journey towards the greatest legacy of our Faith and nation, our belief in a Savior that the world needs.

May the heritage that we have bind us together and stimulate our memory not to forget, nor to remember forgetting, but to care to remember at all. And may this Encuentro Filipino, the first one of its kind, provoke us to form communities of heritage discernment ever mindful of the fact that heritage is us, but it is not ours. We simply borrow it from our future generations.

[1] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Nos. 424-25.

[2] Ibid., No. 445.