



**'AND THEY SPAT AT HIM'
A Statement of CEAP on the Exhibit 'Politeismo'.**

Continually striking Jesus on the head with a reed and spitting at him, they genuflected before him and pretended to pay him homage. (Mark 15:19)

This was how the evangelist Mark described Jesus as He was led to his crucifixion. Jesus never retaliated with insult, but voluntarily gave Himself up unto death for the forgiveness of sins.

Last week, we were happy to know of a 12-year old girl named Janella Lelis of Albay who braved the floods during the onslaught of Typhoon Juaning to save the Philippine Flag from ruin. This inspires us. It is a vivid picture of respect, bravery and nationalism. Such an act uplifts the human spirit in the face of calamities. But shortly after this, we were saddened to know about an art exhibit entitled '*Politeismo*' - a collage of religious icons mixed with phallic symbols put up specifically to provoke, as professed by its creator.

Judging by its expressed purpose, it seemed successful. There were varied reactions; however, most of them were feelings of being appalled, shocked and hurt. Thus, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) and the group who mounted the exhibit should not even be surprised if they elicited acts of vandalism, emotions of anger and disgust, and incited quarrel. We are saddened by the purported 'artwork' that causes not the upliftment of the human spirit, but its debasement.

We are, likewise, deeply saddened that officials of CCP have given their stamp of approval to this exhibit that evidently offended the sensibilities of many Catholics, Christians and well-meaning people. What are the standards employed by CCP? We wonder whether CCP officials would have allowed the exhibit if Jose Rizal, or other national heroes, or icons of other faiths had been the subject of such desecration. Thus, we find it difficult to understand why this exhibit was displayed in what is supposed to be a shrine of Philippine culture and art.

We are confused by the position of some of those who support the exhibit, invoking rationality and freedom, yet do not realize the violence, intolerance and bigotry the exhibit does to believers and their faith. They, while discrediting the importance of faith, veer towards extremism to the point of persecuting believers and destroying what believers hold as sacred. They, while declaring freedom of expression negate the legitimate expressions of Christian faith.

This we hold true: to believe is not against reason. Our faith in the Lord Jesus is not unreasonable.



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Our Interpretation of the Work

In our judgment, the exhibit is offensively obscene and blasphemous - a sentiment shared even by well-meaning non-Christians. It hurts us for we cannot even imagine this done to our parents, how much more to Jesus, whom we consider as our Lord and Savior.

The exhibit, while misrepresenting the Catholic faith and praxis, is vulgar. It professes freedom of expression but misunderstands the nature of freedom. It ignores the fact that the exercise of freedom, especially in the public sphere is not limitless. When free expression usurps the freedom of others, it constitutes an offense, thereby an abuse of the very same freedom.

We need not forget that there are limits to freedoms. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 29, #2, states: *'In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare of a democratic society.'*

There is no authentic freedom without justice, respect, responsibility and truth.

Our Appeal

We welcome CCP's decision to close this particular exhibit. We recognize and respect CCP's desire to 'continue to act as catalyst for free expression of Filipino artists.' We, however, urge that CCP should be a guardian and promoter of Filipino art, culture and heritage in a manner that respects the rights and sensibilities of the very people it is supposed to serve.

We call on the person responsible for the exhibit, to re-examine his actions and evaluate the consequences of his work. One may have the right to express oneself, but again it is not a license to impinge on the rights of others.

We appeal to our fellow citizens, Catholics, Christians and non-Christians, believers or non-believers alike, to treat each other with respect. Respect is an indispensable and necessary condition for peace. Let us seek tolerance not by being intolerant. Respect cannot be gained by being disrespectful. Securing freedom is not simply the insistence on one's right, but also the respect and the defense of the rights of others. Thus, free expression is betrayed by bigotry, insult and malice.

We call on all CEAP schools all over the country to fully understand that we need to take this issue seriously because we must uphold both the Catholic Tradition and our Filipino Heritage which are intrinsically part of our identity as a people. We should take this as an opportunity to strengthen the Catechetical Programs in our schools. Likewise, we encourage all our schools to do acts of penance, reconciliation and reparation for the sacrilege done against the signs and symbols of our Holy Faith, which is an affront against the very image of God.



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We commit to continue to lead the Catholic Educational Community in responding creatively to these challenges by intensifying the work we are called to do in our education ministry. Towards this end, CEAP, through its Religious Education Commission, shall prepare a module to educate the young generation and the public at large on the meaning of Christian Sacred Art and Iconography. Through this instructional tool, we hope to teach our Sacred Tradition and continue to uphold the essential elements of the Catholic Heritage.

Conclusion

We are deeply saddened, hurt and insulted. The exhibit is an act of vandalism not simply of the sacred images and icons of our Catholic and Christian heritage. *'Politeismo'* is a vandalization of our Faith and desecration of our Lord.

Thus, we recall this description by the evangelist Mark: *Continually striking Jesus on the head with a reed and spitting at him, they genuflected before him and pretended to pay him homage. (Mark 15:19)* And He endured them all and gave up His life on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

As we express our revulsion at this kind of act, whether directed at Christianity or another faith, we remind ourselves of the admonition from the First Letter of Peter: *'All of you should be like-minded, sympathetic, loving toward one another, kindly disposed and humble. Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult. Return a blessing instead. This you have been called to do, that you may receive a blessing as your inheritance.'* (1 Peter 4:8-9)

Let us be a blessing to one another.

**CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES
15 August 2011**