

Living Our Life in Love: Challenges

by Jake C. Yap

Goals:

- I. To speak on the truths of the journey of discipleship and establish a framework for understanding how the formation of community was God's plan in transforming us and using us in dealing with the world and establishing His kingdom.
- II. In this regard, to speak about practical atheism, ungodliness, and similar challenges, describing these not only as a means of describing the world *out there*, but even how it seeps into the life of a disciple (whether a new convert or even a mature disciple of 40 years).
- III. To relate how the journey and process of discipleship is best handled in the context of a community, and how, in fact, this is why God formed Ligaya as an environment for us to grow in our respective discipleship, and to equip us to fulfill the mission of making disciples of others.

I. The Call to Live Our Life in Love

- A. We are not the only ones commanded by God to do so.
 - Jesus says that all the commandments are reducible to simply one: to love – both God and our neighbour.
 - St. Paul says that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10).
 - All Christians, all disciples of Jesus Christ, must live a life of love, their *agape* and *philadelphia* in imitation of the One who “loved us first” (1 John 4:19).
- B. This life of love is meant to be lived in communion with others. This is where first of all the Church, God's people, comes in. “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)
 - This is the meaning of the “one another” in Jesus' *new commandment* (Jn 13:34): “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
 - “One another” means our brothers and sisters in God's new family, the Church.
- C. Let's take a further step: Through our covenant commitment with one another, this special and further commitment we make in *Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community*, we are resolved even more to “live our community life in love.”
 - Founding prophecy in 1975: “You will see my face in the love you have for one another.”

II. The Challenges We Face in Living Our Life in Love

- A. In the winter of 2013-2014, I used my service break by spending it with the *Antioch Community* in London. During those five months in Europe:

- Belgium approved a law allowing a minor to ask for and obtain *euthanasia* without parental consent.
- A 12-year old girl in Britain, who was *pregnant* from her 13-year old boyfriend, announced that she was keeping her baby and not having it aborted; her father praised her for her “courage.”
- Also in Britain, a 17-year old boy, after taking 200 selfies in one day, committed *suicide*.
- Sir Elton John was waiting to get *legally married* his civil partner, David Furnish.

I was glad to be in Europe for a break, but I was also glad finally to leave it! *Ang gulo!*

B. For many people, the controversial issues of our day have to do with sex and life issues. This is true enough, and these topics *are* important. But I don’t think they really go to the heart of the problem.

- In the gospels, Jesus says that we must learn to read and understand “the signs of the times.” The signs of the times are all around us, but we need to discern their true meaning.
- Here are two Christian leaders giving their “take” on what the signs of the times are saying:
 1. “We are living in a period of great dangers and of great opportunities both for man and for the world, a period that also imposes a great responsibility on us all.” (*Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, written by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger shortly before becoming pope)
 2. “Sorrow upon sorrow, agony, terror and sickness of heart will be your companions in the days ahead. The storm is rising, the clouds gather, lightening, wind and storm great enough to carry off even the strong, ready to break upon the slumbering, the unprepared, the confused. Where now is the shelter? Where the bulwark, the refuge? Where is the strength of my Church when the storm is upon it?” (Prophecy given by Bruce Yocum, August 1, 1976)

C. Back to my question: What is the problem today? Actually, several interrelated problems.

1. Atheism: the active rejection of a belief in God. Atheists give intellectual arguments as to why there can be, or has to be, no God. Friedrich Nietzsche (19th century) said: “Gods too decompose. God is dead. And we have killed him.”
2. Agnosticism: The agnostic says, like Brad Pitt: “I don’t think anyone really knows [whether there’s a God or not]. You’ll either find out or not when you get there, until then there’s no point thinking about it.”
3. About 30-40 years ago, “secular humanism” = the exaltation of the human spirit, of human reason and achievement; the triumph and greatness of man, but for this age only and usually to the exclusion of God. The secular humanist says, like Professor

Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*): “I am thrilled to be alive at a time when humanity is pushing against the limits of understanding. Even better, we may eventually discover that there are no limits [to our being human].”

D. What about today? What do I think is the most common religious stance today, affecting even Filipino Catholics and, yes, even some of us? *Practical atheism*.

1. Practical Atheism: This means that one lives his or her life *as if God does not exist*.
 - Evangelical author Jerry Bridges has another, more biblical, term for this: *Ungodliness*. And he says that Christians are all guilty of ungodliness to some degree. He writes: “Does that statement surprise you, or maybe even offend you? We don’t think of ourselves as ungodly. After all, we *are* Christians; we are not atheists or wicked people.”¹
 - But that’s his point: Ungodliness is not the same as wickedness or aggressive atheism. “A person may be a nice, respectable citizen [and a fine, upstanding Christian] and still be an ungodly person.” He defines ungodliness as “living one’s everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God’s will, or of God’s glory, or of one’s dependence on God.”²
 - When God is no longer in the picture, then the “self” becomes “Lord.” It is what the Catholic historian James Hitchcock calls “the imperial self.”³
 - Fr. Ruben Tanseco, SJ, says that the greatest enemy of the human person is the human *Ego*, the Self.
2. A good description of practical atheism is given by a Jesuit theologian: “God is missing but is not missed.” He goes on to say: “This is a genuinely new situation, which never existed before in the world.”⁴ “God is missing but is not missed.” Let’s look at both parts of this sentence.
 - a) God is missing.
 - i) You also see this when you ask people: “What’s your purpose in life?” [Video Clip; quick summary: most of the respondents say either “I don’t know, never thought about it”; another common answer: “happiness”; only one person among about 50 people mentions “Jesus Christ.”]
 - ii) You see this in how people spend their time and money:
 - Their choice of entertainment, recreation and leisure: To what do they turn to re-energize, de-stress, relax, and divert their minds? Not God.
 - “Sunday” is no longer a holy day; or people rest and spend their time without any thought of God.

¹ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 53.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ James Hitchcock, “The Imperial Self,” in *New Covenant Magazine* (July 1980).

⁴ Fr. Josep Vives, SJ, “Dios en el crepusculo del siglo XX,” *Razón y Fe* (Mayo 1991): 468.

iii) You see this in the moral choices that people make – decisions of right and wrong.

- “What’s right for you might not be right for me.”
- “Right and wrong – it all depends on the situation, on the circumstances.”
- “If it feels good, do it.”
- “If it’s love, it must be okay.”

iv) You can also see this in simply how people make choices in life: whether of career, state of life, lifestyle choices, what to read, what to listen to, what to believe. Where is God in all this? Answer: God has receded to the background, largely ignored.

b) God is not missed. Why don’t people miss him?

i) Life is too busy.

- Technology has not simplified our life, it has complicated it.
- “Work hard, play hard.”

ii) Life is too full.

- “Full” not in the sense of “full of meaning” but full of “things,” of “stuff,” activities, distractions.
- The “mall culture”; SM’s tag line “we’ve got it all”

iii) Life is too good.

- Affluence makes us less dependent on God, less mindful of him.
- More opportunities today for travel, migration, work or a new life abroad
- When things are going well, God is not in our radar.

III. God Has Prepared Us “For Such A Time As This” (*Esther 4:14*).

A. So what does all this have to do with us in Ligaya?

1. First of all, can we also live like “practical atheists”? *Yes*.

- It’s not because we *want* or *choose* to be a practical atheist. It is those times, occasions, even longer periods, when we act, live, make decisions *as if* God did not exist, as if we were the sole architect of our destiny.
- One way that we can very easily slip into the way of thinking of a practical atheist is described in James 4:13-16. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain’; whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.’ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”
- Remember that James is writing to *Christians*.

2. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul says to the Corinthian Christians (and to us): “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” This is the hallmark of a godly person, a godly Ligaya member: one who does everything with God in mind, living and loving and thinking and feeling and acting *always in the presence of God*, doing everything in radical dependence upon God’s grace and for God’s glory.
 3. What does it mean to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31)? Jerry Bridges says:⁵
 - First, it means that I want all my actions to be pleasing to God. I want God to be pleased with the way I go about the ordinary activities of my day.
 - Secondly, it means that I desire that all my activities of an ordinary day will honor God before other people.
- B. Our community, *Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon*, is where we can live our life in love in a consistent way in the midst of practical atheism and ungodliness.
1. *Everything* in our community life is designed to keep us on track in being disciples, rather than being practical atheists:
 - Our committed relationships
 - Our regular community activities
 - The “elements of good membership”
 - Our teachings, retreats, service and mission
 All this keeps us centered on God, mindful of his love, and concerned for his glory.
 2. A prophecy that we in the Sword of the Spirit have recently received is: “I have built you for more. In the midst of your trials and difficulties, cry out to me and remember that I have built you for more. I will spread and grow this work. Remind me: ‘You have built me for more’.” (Summary of Jean Barbara, SOS President, at the International Coordinators’ Meeting in 2012)
 - Like most prophecies, this can be applied to various things. But I would like to see this as applying to Ligaya in this sense: 40 years ago, God called a people into existence here in Manila. 40 years later, we have become a people that is much bigger, much more committed, living a distinctive way of life, engaging in more mission and service. 40 years ago, God began building the Ligaya for “something more.” And even today, He is *still building us for more*.
 3. Earlier I quoted Bruce Yocum’s 1976 prophecy: “Where now is the shelter? Where the bulwark, the refuge? Where is the strength of my Church when the storm is upon it?” My brothers and sisters in Ligaya, we in Ligaya and in The Sword of the Spirit wish to say to the Lord: *Here, Lord, is a shelter for your people, a bulwark, a refuge. Use us, Lord, as a strength for your Church, now that the storm is upon us. Amen.*

⁵ Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 57.