

## Spirituality for a New Humanity

*Biblical Verse:*

*Psalms 46:8-10*

*Hebrews 11:1-3*

Good Morning!



It is always a challenge for a lay person to prepare a message. This challenge is magnified when one is asked to prepare a message for the National Council when there are Bishops, pastors and theologians present.

It is best to stray away from topics I have no competence talking about and focus on something for which I have competence. So for today's message I have entitled it "Faith and Ideology."

The first time I encountered these two words discussed as one was when I was a student in De La Salle University majoring in History and Political Science. I read a book written by Dr. Feliciano Cariño with the same title. The conclusion I was able to derive from that book is

that faith and ideology are essentially the same. Ideology is our worldview as to how society should be from political, social, and economic perspective. Faith, in a way, is also our worldview from a religious perspective.

In fact, a few years later a friend of mine during my NCYF days asked me the question as to what is the difference between the two and I gave the answer that they are the same – to which she agreed later on.

Thirty (30) years later and standing before you, I must confess that I was terribly wrong. Their similarity starts and ends in the fact that they are both perceptions of what society should be. Having gained vast experience here and around the world I can say that there are big differences in having a **faith-based approach** versus an **ideology-based approach** - differences that are crucial to success and definitely will define us as a church moving forward as we seek to establish a new humanity in these critical times. I will identify four (4) of them.

**First, faith is inclusive and ideology is exclusive.**

Our faith dictates that we accept people, regardless of who they are and what they believe in. We will and should be willing to help anyone in need.

On the other hand, history is replete with examples of how ideology, because of its desire to be exclusive, has devastated humanity. The best example to this is the Nazi ideology of Hitler. The desire to establish an Aryan supremacy led to the Holocaust. Not far behind is the apartheid ideology, an ideology that created different classes of human beings purely based on the color of their skin. What kind of Christian can believe in such a thinking much more support it?

And this is precisely why I love our church. We are the first church and possibly still the only church in the Philippines that embraced LGBT, going so far as making a statement in favor of this. And this is at a time when several churches here and abroad still grapple with allowing women to become priests or bishops.

**Second, because of the first, faith is empowering while ideology is controlling.**

Exclusiveness requires a level of control so that status quo is preserved. And the desire to preserve the status quo requires that those who have the power of decision-making consolidate more power on them to ensure that everyone tows the line. This need of control includes regulating who will rise up to the level of power and decision-making. Competence is but secondary; toeing the line is the defining criterion.

On the other hand, faith requires us to empower people. Jesus empowered his disciples with the latter empowering more people. Empowerment enlarges our capacity to do things because it builds confidence. This confidence-building rubs off on others thereby increasing interests and desire to do better.

This is definitely something we should be able to do as a church. We have so much talent out there and we need to harness them so that the church is empowered as more faithful serve and give their talents to the church. Developing people, particularly our church workers, regardless of political inclination, strengthens the church.

Apart from Christ, I think another good example here would be Mahatma Gandhi. He wielded no political, economic, or military power. But his Satyagraha created more power that even the British Empire could not even control, and which eventually led to the independence of India.

**Third, faith is evolving while ideology is static.**

We have heard this statement countless of times – that the only thing constant in the world is change.

Values change and have changed over the years. What was socially or culturally taboo 20, 50, or 100 years ago may not just be acceptable now but can even be the norm. Before, in Christian countries, it was unthinkable for people to just live in with each other without the benefit of marriage. This would be sacrilegious. In the western world, this has become more of the norm than an exception. That people live with each other first to “test” whether they are compatible before deciding to get married.

In the same way, ideologies have often been influenced by society and the state of society. For example, when Karl Marx wrote Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital, it was the height of industrial revolution in Europe. He saw the plight of the workers, working long hours in poor working conditions and earning little. Just enough for them to get by but not enough to rise up their “class”.

Germany now has one of the most advanced labor standards in the world. They have a 35-hour work week with one of the highest wage levels in the world. Apart from these, they are guaranteed paid vacation of 24 days a year. If Marx were born today and witness the working hours and condition in Germany, I have strong doubts whether the same philosophical views would have been developed in him, motivating him to write those classics.

This ability to evolve and adapt is one reason why religions have lasted longer than any ideology. Hinduism has been in existence for more than 2200 years, far older than Christianity. Possibly equally as old ~~is~~ as Judaism.

It is not a just a matter of evolving for the sake of perpetuating existence. It is because at its root, humanity is at the essence of faith. And this leads us to my last point.

**Faith focuses on humanity while ideology primarily focuses on systems and structures.**

Christian faith is and always will be about humanity. What else will it be for? People have been entrusted with creation and given by God this responsibility. Jesus Christ’s ministry is for the people - telling them how they can be freed from their problems, burdens, sickness, and other challenges in life.

Ideology promotes that if we have the right systems and structures the ills of society ~~is~~ will be solved. Capitalism, socialism, federalism, parliamentary, presidential systems are just a few examples that have existed. There are so many more. There are hits and misses and the reason for the success and failure are still about people.

Even some religious fanatics or extremist think that the solution to society’s problem will be solved if strict religious instructions are observed. This is the philosophy of Isis and the Taliban. This was the same philosophy during the time of the crusades. And what did those ideas of strict religious code and belief brought the world? War.

Destructions of property and most importantly, countless lives lost because some people think they have THE solution to the world's problem.

### **A New Humanity**

The coming of a New Humanity is not an abstract idea for which realization is like traveling to the next galaxy light years away. It has started and can arrive sooner than we expect it. But for it to arrive sooner, we need to make a change in how we focus on things.

I have always said that UCCP members are very good in debate. I guess that is how our system was organized. We can spend so many hours debating on the idea of change. I have seen conferences, annual sessions, and meetings whereby lots of energies are expended to make a point as to what the best idea of change is. Oftentimes, that is where this matter ends – a mere idea. Because after we have focused on the idea, we seem to be satisfied and think it will sort itself out and the solution will find its way into our system and the change will happen.

The problem with focusing on the idea of change, we tend to focus on our differences. And this leads us to highlighting our divide and thereby makes the solution more difficult than it actually is. Perhaps we need to have a different approach. Instead of focusing on the ideas of change, we need to focus on the INSTRUMENTS of change. And these are our PEOPLE. Our members – both the clergy and the laity – are the main instruments of change.

In my humble opinion, New Humanity is about having this burden in the church on how we can have our people be the best they can be. Allowing each person the opportunity to reach the fullness of being and experience a fulfilled life. This means continuing our current focus on people and having a faith-based approach towards genuine development.

These are exciting times in the church and I do hope others will join and be part of this journey towards a New Humanity in the UCCP. Amen.

**Larry Millan**

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