

Priests and the Filipino *Hiya* Norm



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After having discussed *utang-na-loob*, we now enter into an investigation of *hiya* (which, for the time being, we shall translate as shamefacedness) and how priests can make use of it in the performance of their pastoral duties. This, as we have said in our first article, is the second of our cultural normative values which principally influence Filipino behaviour taking the form of our sense of family loyalty.

We have previously described *hiya* as a *final-negative* norm in contrast with *utang-na-loob* which is the *initial-positive* norm. Explaining this, we said that *hiya* is *final*—because if reciprocation to a favor is not rendered, one is branded as an *ingrato* which is supposed to result in *hiya*; and *negative*—because this *hiya* is to be evaded.

We shall divide our discussion into four headings. For the sake of clarification, we shall first talk about that aspect of our topic in relation to *utang-na-loob*—we shall deal on *walang hiya* (without any sense of shamefacedness) and *walang utang-na-loob* (without any sense of gratitude) which are often confused and misunderstood. Then, we shall treat of *hiya* and its psycho-historical origin followed by *hiya* and the family-loyalty-circle after which we shall consider *hiya* and the family-loyalty-circle members. Within these headings, we shall try to point out some positive aspects of our topic which can pastorally be of help to priests.

WALANG HIYA AND WALANG UTANG-NA-LOOB

These two terms are often interchanged. Their difference is not really clear at first glance. It is obvious, however, that they are both negative. They both express an absence—one that of *hiya* and the other that of *utang-na-loob*. For, indeed, literally, the word *walang* (from the root word *wala*) actually

express this absence—a lack of something which, in these cases, should be present.

The difference, however, lies in this: that *walang utang-na-loob* is used in reference to an *ingrato* who returned evil for a good done for him by a benefactor or group of benefactors or by a single member of a family-loyalty-circle or by the whole family-loyalty-circle; while *walang hiya* is used also in reference to that same *ingrato* but only in so far as he is presumed to be a *walang utang-na-loob* who recognizes or who is supposed to have recognized his state of being *walang utang-na-loob* and yet behaves as though he does not recognize his *walang utang-na-loob-ness* (state of ingratitude).

Thus, if a person is given a favor by an individual and he returned evil for that favor, that person is more properly called *walang utang-na-loob*. Now, if this same person still asks for favors, specially the same favors from the same individual or group of individuals or if he continues to do wrong to his benefactor and does not show any sign of gratitude, this person is more properly called *walang-hiya* (or, as the streets call them *kápal moks* which means *makapal ang mukha* or thick-faced).

HIYA AND ITS PSYCHO-HISTORICAL ORIGIN

Having given a little explanation on the similarity and difference of *walang hiya* and *walang utang-na-loob*, we can now begin our discussion on the psycho-historical origin of *hiya*.

We shall divide our topic into three, namely, data from observation, psycho-historical consideration and Filipino application.

DATA FROM OBSERVATION—Psychologists and sociologists often trace this cultural norm back to the Filipino high sense of personal honor and dignity. This is attested by Macaraig and others when they said, as Robert Fox quoted in one of his articles, that to a Filipino, "his dignity and honor are everything . . . , so that the wounding of them, whether real or fancied, becomes a challenge to his manhood. One of the greatest insult to him is an affront against his sense of honor. Many quarrels can be avoided if this quality of the people is fully understood and considered".

Even Osias observes that "the Filipino has a keen consciousness of individual dignity Many a conflict between a foreigner and a Filipino is found in a disregard to the one hand, a sacred regard on the other, of this quality. The foreigner is apt to underestimate the dignity, the *dayaw* (Iloko) of the Filipino. To the national, his dignity and his honor are everything and the ordinary Filipino is willing to sacrifice almost anything and everything at the altar of his dignity and honor.

"He is keenly sensitive and highly intolerant, when his dignity is injured You have been witnesses, I dare say, of a Filipino losing his self-control because he feels he had been wronged or insulted though the cause itself may be trivial or slight. It is this sensitiveness, or shall I say supersensitiveness, that has got many young fellows in trouble with their chief, their co-workers or their companions. It is this same trait, I fear, which in moments of temporary obfuscation leads many a young Filipino to open a knife or draw a bolo from its scabbard with intent to use it upon the person of another".

Indeed, the Filipino sense of *hiya* even causes many a life to be lost due to an insult or underestimation of one's dignity or honor. True understanding of it can, therefore, help much in the priest-parishioner relationships.

PSYCHO-HISTORICAL CONSIDERATION — This sense of honor and dignity, moreover, is said to have taken root from the innate Filipino Malayan pride. For certainly, during the *barangay* era, our ancestors had many things to be proud of which they had cherished and developed in their original home before they settled on these islands later called the Philippines. And it is in this connection that Rizal observed that our fathers of the pre-Spanish period also had "their writings, their songs, their poetry, their laws".

But the westerners came. They arrived with their fair skin and sophisticated weapons. Consequently, they were thought to have also brought with them better culture, more advanced civilization and more progressive traditions.

And the Filipino's sense of pride, honor and dignity was still with him. It was there when Rizal exhorted fathers to instill in their children noble and honorable ideals, when he

enjoined them to open their children's eyes so that they may jealously guard their honor, when he wrote to his brother and sisters that it is better to die with head raised and brow serene than to fall with the stigma of dishonor, when he said that despite the snares laid upon him, never had he conceived of an unhonorable idea. Indeed this sense of honor and dignity was there and acquired a national significance when Mabini inscribed in his memoirs that we must fight to save our country and national honor. And this was still there when the Act of Proclamation of the Independence of the Filipino People, in Cavite El Viejo, was written which says that "having firm confidence in the protection of Divine Providence, we guarantee for the support of this declaration our lives, fortunes and the most sacred that we have, honor."

Seeing, therefore, the seeming superiority of western culture to the native culture in all its aspects, Rizal himself observed that the Filipinos ". . . gradually lost their ancient traditions, their recollections — they forgot their writings, their songs, their poetry, their laws, in order to learn by heart other doctrines which they did not understand. . . . Then, there was a falling off, they were lowered in their own eyes, they were ashamed (*ikinahiya*) of what was distinctly their own, in order to admire and praise what was foreign and incomprehensible: their spirit was broken and they acquiesced". In short, the Filipino begot his sense of *hiya*.

FILIPINO APPLICATION — From then on, the Filipino tried to copy what was foreign. Doña Victorina, one of Rizal's characters in his *Noli Me Tangere*, became the epitome of this newly acquired Filipino character. And it was also Rizal himself who observed that he regreted the state of women in his country. For, unlike the women in other countries like Germany, their main ornaments always consisted in dresses and luxury. This observation, however, was not a surprise. For our women before the coming of the Spaniards were recorded to be *exceedingly ugly*. With the coming of the Spaniards, therefore, they tried to appear like the Spanish women. They dressed and ornamented themselves. They would not be inferior to Spaniards. They would not hurt their pride and sense of honor and dignity. They would not experience *hiya*.

This also happened with the other Filipino characteristics. The Filipino tried to imitate the Spaniard in all ways. His carefree life became rigid. The freedom given to them by the *guhít ng kanilang palad* (lines on their palms) or by their *kapalaran* (fate), which also comes from the rootword *palad*, was caught in the dictatorial trap of the *hari* (king). Thus, the expression *harinawa* was coined which signalled the enthronement of the Spanish ways of life which had to be copied and obeyed. For, is it not true that *harinawa* which literally means *so may it be* actually signifies: may you have the lips of a king so that the good which you say may materialize?

Also, it is said that the Filipino custom of pouring water on others on the feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24) is an outlet of the originally wild *barangay* life of the ancient Filipino. And this is also said concerning the November 1 celebration of All Saints' Day on which one may steal other people's goods.

Thus, there was really an actual transvaluation of values. The old tribal morality was transformed into the new Christian morality, much in the same way as this same Christian morality is now challenged by the so called New Morality. Indeed, what was done by the Jews in ancient Rome through their shrewdness was also done here by the Spaniards through the sword and the cross, eliminating our *barangay* ways of life to give place to the new western culture falling short or disobedience to which, whether premediated or not, usually results in *hiya*, which had since then, become a social determinant.

HIYA AND THE FAMILY-LOYALTY-CIRCLE

Moreover, even in this operation of copying the culture of the west, the Filipinos contested among themselves. Each *barangay* tried to outdo a neighboring *barangay*. Thus, they really never had unity. Even in practicing their newly acquired faith, they could not go along well with one another. As a proof to this, we can point out with Nick Joaquin, the fact that they never had a national patron saint. They never had a St. George like Britain or a St. Patrick like Ireland. Each one tried to cling to its own small group patron saint, always trying to see to it that their *fiestas* are gayer or noisier than those of the others since this will more resemble the Spanish *fiestas*. More brass bands. A greater number of days for the celebrations. More food and drinks.

It would be *nakakahiya* (shameful) if the *fiesta* is not successful or less successful than those of the others.

The family-loyalty-circles, our modern barangays, behave in the same way. Each one tries to surpass the others. In connection to this, priests will do well not to direct any of his criticisms in his sermons to any of them for these will surely embitter the group. Honoring an invitation to a banquet of a circle and not honoring that of another without any explanations may also create conflict. Any show or repulsion during sick calls may also cause trouble. Priests, therefore, must take great care in such cases.

The parish can also be considered a family-loyalty-circle. And in regard to this, priests should not criticize a parish specially if he is only invited to preach or if he is new in the parish or if there are non-members of the parish in the congregation. And this is more specially true if the priest did not originate from that parish.

Truly, the Filipino is so careful in handling the reputation of his family-loyalty-circle that I once met a parishioner who talked against his parish priest just because this priest bought those five-centavo-enveloped coffee in a grocery instead of the usually more *class* Nescafe or Cafe Puro or any of those imported brands.

Also, we cannot deny that men are usually adverse to going to the Church. With regard to this, we can point out that it is convenient to appeal to their sense of family-loyalty-relationships. It is gratifying to note that the Cursillo Movement has done a great deal of good on this matter. But still we can say that this movement needs follow up from the parish priest which he can do through a proper appeal to their sense of solidarity and loyalty as cursillistas. For, is it not *nakakahiya* to hear: "Cursillista pa naman . . .". (He is a cursillista. And yet . . .)

Indeed, this Filipino *hiya*, properly understood, can be a very good means towards the reorganization of Filipino Christianity. To be convinced of this fact, one should only remember how effective those big NAKAKAHIYA political gimmicks last presidential election were.

HIYA AND THE FAMILY-LOYALTY-CIRCLE MEMBERS

After having briefly discussed *hiya* and the family-loyalty-circle taken collectively, we now proceed to our consideration of *hiya* and the family-loyalty-circle members taken individually. Under this heading, we shall have three sections, namely, *hiya* as shyness, *hiya* as embarrassment, *hiya* as shamefacedness and *hiya* as guilt.

HIYA AS SHYNESS — It is a must for a priest to consider this kind of *hiya* in his dealings with kindergarten or elementary children or even with adults. A child, for example, who can dance, sing, recite a poem or do tricks before the members of his family may not be able to do the same in front of strangers because of *hiya*. It is very seldom that a child offers the same familiarity to strangers as to those with whom he lives.

This same experience is had by an adult when being an inferior, he is confronted by a superior. Thus, a priest usually finds people upon entering their house excusing the humbleness or poverty of their dwelling and upon serving him snack repeatedly say: "Bahala na po kayong magpasensiya sa aming nakayanan". (Please, have patience with what we can afford.)

Even when a Filipino receives gifts from other people and he does not presently see any means of reciprocation which he can afford in the near future, he usually finds himself saying: "Nahihiya na po ako sa inyo.", which literally means "I am already ashamed to you."

A priest who does not well understand this part of the Filipino psychology may find these situations irritating which, if shown, may embarrass the other person. But, properly understood, this kind of *hiya* can be very well transformed into the true Christian hospitality, politeness and modesty (*kahinhinan*).

HIYA AS EMBARRASSMENT — This *hiya* varies in degrees.

The case, for example, of a host inviting a visitor to join his family at supper and was rejected is a mild form of embarrassment. This usually results only in a *tampo* or *sama ng loob* in the part of the host. In

some instances, the agrieved party may not talk to the offender for a period of time thinking that "iyon lang hindi siya pinagbigyan" (only for a little thing, he was refused).

In graver occasions, moreover, this may cause the death of either of both parties. This happens when embarrassment amounts to an insult. It is because of this that, often, we hear of court proceedings where a lawyer tries to justify the crime of his client saying that he did the act because he was *hiniya* or *napahiya* (shamed).

With regard this kind of *hiya*, priests should take great care. Shouting during confession and counselling should never be done. This will make people shun the confessional and the counselling desk, which are places where the priest can more effectively care for the people of God. It is in these places where, as a matter of fact, priests should exercise great tact in being a good talker. *Deretsohang salitaan* (direct speech) like those prohibited in speeches or sermons are out of place. Euphemisms are usually advisable to be used.

It is also here, where, above all, the priest should have prudence, temperance and great respect to the person of another. He should always be slow to anger.

Also, to refuse giving Holy Communion to a bride and a groom during a wedding mass may lead to a lot of trouble. This happened to a priest who had this bad habit. One Sunday, the groom to whom he did not want to give Holy Communion, organized a demonstration against him, called him names, prevented the faithful from performing their Sunday obligation, tried to drive him out of the parish and created a great scandal not only in his parish but also in the adjoining parishes. In a separate occasion, the father of the groom went up the altar and tried to force the priest to give Holy Communion to his son when he noticed that his son was bypassed by him.

HIYA AS SHAMEFACEDNESS — This is *hiya* more properly so called. It consists in the fear of not being able to reciprocate for past or present favors received from an individual or from a family-loyalty-circle as expected by society. Reproach from the public eye serves to be the main motivation in the obedience rendered by Filipinos to this norm.

Like *hiya* as embarrassment, this kind admits variations in degrees.

First, it varies in degree according to how much a person voluntarily shares in the performance of the shameful act (*nakakahiyang gawain*). For indeed circumstances can easily change the gravity of the base act done. As, for example, to ridicule a person privately out of anger is less grave than to gossip him around premeditatedly.

Second, this kind of *hiya* varies in degree according to the knowledge of the public or of another person as to the truth of the accusation that that person really committed that particular shameful act. For example, a person is more likely to have a more intense *hiya* towards another person who really caught him doing a shameful act rather than to still another person who just heard about the incident from a neighbor.

Third, it varies in degree according to how often a person encounters the people, things and places which shared in the performance of that shameful act. As, for instance, a person would be more ashamed (*mahihya*) if the person who caught him doing that shameful act often talks to him or is often in company with him. This is more specially true if the evil committed was against that person.

And fourth, it varies in degree according to the morality of the person or group of persons who know the crime. For example, a criminal would be less ashamed to face a fellow criminal than to face an honest citizen. For as the adage states: misery seeks company.

This kind of *hiya* has evidently some bad effects because it excuses persons who can hide their crime and who are able to avoid the circumstances related to his crimes. This is usually what happens to our *politicos*. They commit a crime and they do not feel *hiya* because their crime is not proven through the formal investigative process of the court.

It is also obvious, however, that this kind of *hiya* can help toward the performance of good. For we believe that no secret forever remains secret. Besides, we Filipinos, often identify the act with the actor, and the actor with his family-loyalty-circle. The fear of placing a stain on our person or on the family-loyalty-circle to which we belong hinders us from doing evil.

Indeed, even for priests who are also often subjects of this kind of *hiya*, this may serve as a support in order that he may not deviate from the socially, canonically and divinely accepted norms of the priesthood. For indeed whatever they do will mark in their own names and not only in their names but also in the name of the clergy and of the Church as a whole.

This fallacy of concluding from a particular to a universal is so prevalently Filipino that often only because of one, the whole group suffers or only because of one mistake the whole reputation of a person is ruined. Thus, we see people having known only one bad priest already deducing the evil of all priests.

HIYA AS GUILT — Aside from the four means of variation in degree of *hiya* as shamefacedness, there is another means often numbered among them. This is the means of variation in degree of *hiya* as shamefacedness according to the effect of the disgraceful deed performed. For example, if a man hurts a person and that person is killed, he is supposed to experience more *hiya* than when that person was just wounded or injured.

Moreover, in this example, we shall find two aspects, namely, the aspect of *hiya* as regards society and the aspect of *hiya* as regards the criminal's self.

In connection to that aspect of *hiya* as regards society, we can say that this is more properly *hiya* as shamefacedness because it concerns two terms, namely, the criminal and society. For, as we said, *hiya* is founded in the ungratefulness of the *walang hiya* to society. Thus, we see that society would confer different sanctions to deviants according to the effect of their acts. Thus, arousing different degrees of *hiya* in the outlaw.

We, therefore, mean this aspect when we say that *hiya* as shamefacedness varies according to effect.

With regard to that aspect of *hiya* as regards the criminal's self, we can properly translate this as guilt. For, indeed, we hear people say: "Hindi ka na nahiya sa sarili mo!" (You never felt ashamed to yourself.) meaning "You never felt guilty of what you do." However, we can also call this *hiya* as embarrassment but only improperly, that is, the bad self getting ashamed to the good same self.

Objections, however, may arise against this use because to permit it is to tolerate the split level personality much condemned in the Filipino.

In extreme cases, a combination of this *hiya* as guilt and *hiya* as shamefacedness leads to suicide. It is, therefore, to avoid these cases that a priest must open himself more widely for counselling and consultation as one who is *nagmamalasakit* (one who wishes the good of others). He should teach the people how to have more *hiya* to God than to society following more strictly the *interior principles* than the *exterior principles* which must be obeyed only in so far as they conform with and facilitate the putting of the interior principles into action.

It is common knowledge today that priests are no longer usually approached for guidance. That the need is rising is, however, clear. The growth in number of counselling programs in radios, guidance pages in magazines and even in comicks prove this.

And it is with this need in mind that we have tried to write these articles — in order to help priests more fully understand their faithful.

For example, here, we have just discussed the Filipino *hiya* norm. In our last paper, we considered the Filipino *utang-na-loob* norm. We gave expositions of these norms because we believe that understanding them, priests can more easily direct their actions according to them and thus preserve or retain their role and the roles of those who will try to benefit from their knowledge in the circle or circles to which they belong.

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