Much has been said and written about how the Philippines is perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2011 ranks us the 129th least corrupt nation in the world out of 183, tied with Syria, Honduras, Dominican Republic, and Armenia.

We admit, some almost resignedly, that corruption is part of our culture. But what does that really mean?

I recently read Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress, an insightful collection of essays written by prominent scholars and journalists, and edited by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington. The book sheds light on cultural values and attitudes that promote progress or stand in the way of it.

Let me cite two values, and findings on them, which resonate most with Filipinos. First is religion. The most important factors associated with low levels of national corruption are, first, Gross National Product, and having a greater percentage of Protestants and British colonial history. It is suggested that Protestant-dominated countries tend to be less corrupt than others because they promote individualism, self-reliance, and market-oriented attitude.

In contrast, some other Christian denominations, especially the Catholic Church, are familistic and communitarian, and tend to be more interventionist, which limits economic freedom.

This extends to fundamental beliefs. Protestants believe that it is our individual responsibility to avoid sin. On the other hand, the Catholic Church emphasizes man’s inevitability to sin because of inherent human weakness, and therefore the need for a Church that will forgive and protect.

Furthermore, Catholic-dominated societies prefer the poor and the destitute over the rich. As a result, the poor tend to feel resigned to their fate. In Protestant societies, the rich celebrate their wealth and success as a blessing.

Societies that promote development also put power in the law, and their people believe they have control of their destiny. They believe in an individual’s power to change the world for the better.

Whereas development-resistant societies liken the power of the state is that of an unpredictable god. Their people also rely more on luck, the gods, or the favor of the powerful, and live their temporal life to gain life eternal.

The second value is family ties. Studies show a correlation between strong family ties and high levels of national corruption. In progressive societies, it is important that trust and identification extend beyond the family to the larger society. When familial loyalty is stronger above all,
acceptance of the norms of a larger community tend to be tenuous. When societies band of trust is narrow, they are said to be more prone to nepotism, corruption, and tax evasion. Most Asian countries exhibit this characteristic, and are among the most corrupt as well.

Based on the World Values Survey, 97 percent of Filipinos say their family is very important in their life, while almost 83 percent say religion is very important. In contrast, service to others, politics, and leisure time are not as important to most.

These suggestions may be hard to accept for many Filipinos. Instead of taking offense, however, let us form a research agenda that will look into the values we cherish most – bayanihan, familial loyalty, and spirituality – and draw up guidelines toward fostering development-oriented cultural change.

The Philippines’ hosting of the international conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), in which I serve as Vice-Chair, from January 30 to February 2, 2013, will be part of this effort.

The conference’s theme is “Good Leaders. Good Laws. Good Citizens.” This is in line with our belief that corruption is everyone’s business because it is ingrained in our culture. Squashing corruption means finding solutions based on who we are as a people, and how much we are willing to change about it. In economic development, culture matters very much.


Source URL: http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/383204/two-values-religion-family-ties

Links:
[1] mailto:angara.ed@gmail.com

Copyright 2012. Manila Bulletin | All Rights Reserved