

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 14, 2011 at 8:04am

WOW! From Manila

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Distinctly Catholic

The Holy Father today named Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle as the new Archbishop of Manila. The new archbishop gave a talk at the Eucharistic Congress in Quebec in 2008 where he obviously caught the attention of then-Archbishop of Quebec, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, who is now the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. And, well he might. Thanks to Rocco for providing this extract from Tagle's talk:

It is interesting to note that quite often, Jesus was denounced as a violator of God's law when he showed compassion for the weak, the poor, the sick, the women, and public sinners. He offered new life to those considered impure by eating and mingling with them. He assured them that God was not distant and there was hope in God's loving mercy.

But he himself got no mercy from his adversaries, only ridicule for disobeying laws that were supposed to embody God's will. Jesus suffered on account of his self-offering for those loved by God. But he never wavered in his sacrifice. In the process he exposed the false gods that people worshipped, erroneous notions of holiness and the blindness of righteous people to the visitations of God. Jesus' sacrifice uncovered the link between the worship of false gods and insensitivity to the needy.

An idolater easily loses compassion for the weak. Though he was judged, Jesus was the one actually judging the untrue worship that kept people blind and deaf to the true God and the poor. The Church that lives the life of Christ and offers his living sacrifice cannot run away from its mission to unearth the false gods worshipped by the world. How many people have exchanged the true God for idols like profit, prestige, pleasure and control? Those who worship false gods also dedicate their lives to them. In reality these false gods are self-interests.

To keep these false gods, their worshippers sacrifice other people's lives and the earth. It is sad that

those who worship idols sacrifice other people while preserving themselves and their interests. How many factory workers are being denied the right wages for the god of profit? How many women are being sacrificed to the god of domination? How many children are being sacrificed to the god of lust? How many trees, rivers, hills are being sacrificed to the god of "progress"? How many poor people are being sacrificed to the god of greed? How many defenseless people are being sacrificed to the god of national security?

The Church however must also constantly examine its fidelity to Jesus' sacrifice of obedience to God and compassion for the poor. Like those who opposed Jesus in the name of authentic religion, we could be blind to God and neighbors because of self-righteousness, spiritual pride and rigidity of mind. Ecclesiastical customs and persons, when naively and narrowly deified and glorified, might become hindrances to true worship and compassion. I am disturbed when some people who do not even know me personally conclude that my being a bishop automatically makes me closer to God than they could ever be. My words are God's words, my desires are God's, my anger is God's, and my actions are God's. If I am not cautious, I might just believe it and start demanding the offerings of the best food and wine, money, car, house, adulation and submission.

After all, I am "God!" I might take so much delight in my stature and its benefits that I might end up being callous to the needs of the poor and the earth. I remember an experience in the market of our town of Imus, the seat of our diocese. One Saturday morning I went to monitor the prices of goods and the condition of the simple market vendors. I saw a woman selling fruit and vegetables in a corner. She was one of those who went to Sunday Mass regularly. It was only 10 o'clock in the morning but she was already closing her store. So I asked her the reason. She told me, "I belong to a prayer group. We have a big assembly this afternoon.

Some tasks were assigned to me. So I want to be there early." Upon hearing this, the pragmatic side of me surfaced. I responded, "The Lord will understand if you extend your working hours. You have a family to support. You can benefit from additional income. I am sure the Lord will understand." With a smile, she said, "But Bishop, the Lord has been faithful to me. The Lord has always been there for us. We may not be rich but we have enough to live by. Why will I fear?" Then looking at me tenderly, she said, "Are you not a Bishop? Are you not supposed to be encouraging me in faith?" I was quite embarrassed. But for me it was an experience of spiritual worship. I, the religiously and culturally accepted presence of God was revealed to be a faltering representation of God.

That simple woman, offering herself to God in trust for love of her family, became for me the manifestation of the presence of God. She had brought the Eucharistic sacrifice and Jesus' spiritual worship from the elegant Cathedral to the noise and dirt of the market place. God must have been well pleased.

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