

Narrative

A Sin Forgiven

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Synopsis

Christian education teaches that religion liberates people. It gives them hope and a chance to transcend their tarnished past, be forgiven and be reborn. And yet this paper shows how religious doctrines have created feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in a woman. Unlike the teachings of Christ that challenged the hypocrisy of the status quo and helped restore self-respect, doctrines have evolved to discriminate and punish those who have gone astray.

This paper presents how a woman made sense of her realities and yet felt a long and deep sense of guilt as she knew she was not living up to what her family and her religion expected of her. In a country like the Philippines, these institutions are more often than not, intertwined.

In this particular case, even if her physical world seemed well, her personal circumstances did not go with her personal understanding of her God and her Church, and she fell short of her own and society's expectations. This alienated her from a community that should have been accepting, comforting and forgiving. This paper seems to suggest that as religion illuminates one's shortcomings, its own set of principles create boundaries that divide, judge and label those who do not achieve a certain level of morality.

SHE STOPPED RECEIVING COMMUNION a long time ago. She was taught that unconfessed sins prevented one from receiving the Body of Christ. Hers was mortal and marked her soul.

After Lou separated from her husband, she had relationships which she hoped would make things better. She met Anton who was single and was willing to help her in raising her two children. They lived like husband and wife, making both ends meet, moving from one room until they were able to buy a house. After ten years of living together, they had two more daughters.

Life was good to them. Their business grew and the older children were able to finish their education while the girls were in preschool. It was not a perfect life but it was a comfortable one. But when no one was looking and when she was alone, Lou was bothered. In her heart, she knew it was immoral living with someone she was not married to. But he was kind and he loved her and the kids and he completed the image of a family that she always wanted. So she kept on.

Anton, though very kind-hearted, lived carelessly. He drank heavily, partied with friends and kept occasional girlfriends. He assured them that these were all forms to pass time and since Lou felt that she was indebted to him, she accepted everything that she knew.

At 47, Anton had his first stroke. Lou and the two girls were already based in Cebu then. Despite his condition and doctors' orders, he continued drinking. Three years later, he had another one, this time, he underwent neurosurgery to prevent further damage. He was left bedridden and unable to speak. All his money was gone and so were his friends.

After five years, news of his death came. Lou, who was now living in the US, cried at the thought that he was gone and it was all over. All that she could say was, "Salamat. Ganoon siguro talaga."

Lou came from a very religious family and often felt she had been abandoned for her personal decisions. Every time she went to church, she would kneel and pray for forgive-

ness for having gotten into such a relationship. She was thankful for the kids and what they have become and yet there was a nagging feeling inside her. This prevented her from receiving Holy Communion. She believed that she should not since she had not sought for forgiveness through the Sacrament of Confession for it meant cutting the relationship, leaving the children fatherless—her picture of a normal family crumbling. The number of decades that they were together was the same number of decades that she felt alienated from the God she knew and the Church she loved. She lived a blessed life and yet, she had a heavy heart; in front of the cross, she ached in silence begging for mercy and understanding.

I was the one who broke the news. "He's gone, Ma." There was silence at the other end of the line and then she replied, "Ganoon ba?" I heard her voice break but she chose not to say more. I knew she felt the loss. I knew she was grateful for the opportunity of having known him and for all the good that he had done but more importantly, I felt Mama's inner peace for her sin was finally forgiven.