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Why Bro. Eddie is the Best for Philippine Democracy and Development? (At Bakit Eddie Ako?)

Bonn Juego*

On 10 May 2010, I will vote for “new politics”. I will vote for Bro. Eddie Villanueva as the 15th President of the Republic of the Philippines. I believe Bro. Eddie has the character, competence, campaign, and clear-cut development strategy best for the Philippines and the Filipino people.

I am an OFW who has had the privilege of looking at the campaigns from a distance, reading all the political parties’ and presidential candidates’ platforms, visiting their respective websites and facebook fan pages, listening to their radio interviews, and watching the news despite the obvious partiality of some of the biggest TV networks and journalists.

Come May 10, I shall cast my vote for Bro. Eddie Villanueva and Perfecto Yasay for President and Vice President. I will soon fly back home—yes, home, my dear Pilipinas—to vote for the candidate I can identify with; and to follow my mind, my heart, and my conscience in harmony.

I offer here some comments and reflections why I think Bro. Eddie Villanueva is best for Philippine democracy and development. And why I am for Bro. Eddie. I will not delve directly into why not vote for the others for this effort goes against the ideals of “new politics” that Bro. Eddie exemplifies. My focus is on the distinctive character of Bro. Eddie and the impressive campaign of the Bangon Pilipinas Party. There is something in Bro. Eddie Villanueva that the unfair media and prejudiced public do not care to understand. I believe an inspiring story must be told about the 2010 elections and about the great vision a great Filipino has for the Philippines and the Filipino people.

Politics *for* God and Country

As student of politics at the University of the Philippines (Diliman) more than a decade ago, I was taught that politics is the art and science of power relations that deals with the question “who gets what, when, where and how”. And a politics with ethical consideration begs the question *for whom?* Bro. Eddie’s objective is forthright: to get the power, not for himself, but

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for God and Country (*para sa Diyos at Bayan*). I could not think of any other much nobler political vocation and mission than that.

Most Credible Fight Against Corruption

The fundamental premise on the question of credibility in the fight against corruption is: Corruption and its attendant forms of bad rent seeking and cronyism come into being during elections. Political and business vested interests invest in candidates' campaigns for immediate and future *quid pro quos*. With this simple logic in mind, it becomes palpably evident that Bro. Eddie's resolution to fight corruption and break the vicious culture of impunity—*Anim na Taon na Walang Korapsyon*—is the most consistent and credible.

We hear corrupt politicians talking about corruption, large-scale landlords promising land reform, scandalously rich elites wooing the poor; and we want to puke. My studies on Southeast Asian, especially Filipino, elites conclude that it is personal political-economic vested interests, not ideology or party affiliation, that matter at all times. Philippine elites can be downright illiberal, anti-nationalism, anti-poor so long as it serves their interests.

If this election is a contest “between good and evil”, then why not vote for Bro. Eddie, who is certainly a very good human being. If this election is a battle between “old politics” and “new politics”, then why not support Bro. Eddie, who is the embodiment of new politics in the 2010 elections. I just do not get some people's logic, but I do understand their vested interests.

Bro. Eddie's campaign for new politics pointedly disdains “money politics” that has perpetuated clientelism and the vicious cycle of underdevelopment and poverty in the country. Bro. Eddie also earns the trust of fellow candidate for new politics, Nicanor Perlas, who categorically stated in the DZBB interview with Mike Enriquez that if he were to win as president he would appoint Bro. Eddie as anti-corruption czar. The crusade of Bangon Pilipinas and the *Bagong Pilipinas, Bagong Pilipino* movement is about the elimination of the use, influence, desire for, or lack of ‘money’ in the political decision-making of the people. The spirit of volunteerism in Bro. Eddie's campaign is truly awe-inspiring.

A Meaningful Campaign and the Spirit of Volunteerism

I have watched online almost all of the candidates' campaign kickoff programs and immediately had the liking for Bro. Eddie's campaign, not replete with fancy *artistas*, but full of meaning. Bangon Pilipinas had the best kickoff rally in Luneta. The “Diyos at Bayan” theme is symbolic and classy. Kicking off at dawn is telling of the endeavour for *Bagong Pilipinas, Bagong Pilipino*. The washing of the feet and the unfurling of a two-hectare Philippine flag signify servant leadership and a great love for the country towards a new Philippines. The songs sang by the thousands “Heal Our Land” and “Bayan Ko” were very apt and timely. The Christian-Muslim interfaith presence in the program was truly commendable. Every *meeting de avance* thereafter is consistent with the “Diyos at Bayan” theme including patriotic cultural performances, singing, dancing, and stage plays—all in the celebration of Filipino arts and culture. They always start the rallies with a prayer and the singing of the national anthem. The songs chosen in these rallies like “*Ako ay Pilipino*” and “*Bayan Ko*” only reflect the deep sense of history and patriotism in Bro. Eddie.

I also think that the campaign jingle “*Eddie Ako*” is the best. Above all, its message is very empowering, not just the usual superhero myth peddled in Philippine electoral campaigns. It inspires hope, unity, and a sense of responsibility to every Filipino to urgently and proactively effect social change. I let the lyrics speak for itself:

*Sino pa'ng may malasakit at pag-ibig sa bansa
Sino pa? Eh di ako!
Kailan mag-uumpisa? Magkaisa, kumilos na!
Kailan pa? Eh di ngayon!
Sino pa nga bang gagawa?
Sino 'ng pagsisimulan?
Sino 'ng magtataguyod ng bayan ni Juan?
Eh di ako!*

Bro. Eddie has passionately and patiently explained the Bangon Pilipinas platform all the time in his rallies and answered questions (including the never-ending, hackneyed “separation of church and state” issue) during open forums. Not affected by the “superiority complex effect” or the “snob effect” created by mainstream media and surveys, Bro. Eddie has actively engaged and participated in public forums, debates, small gatherings, and media interviews here and there, local and abroad, in more frequencies than anyone would care to count and remember. All these rallies and interviews, whether favourable or not, are all uploaded to Bro. Eddie’s website. This only shows his sincerity in fulfilling his promise to institutionalize “absolute transparency in all government transactions.”

An honorable man that he is, Bro. Eddie has not exploited his influence for celebrities, singers, and athletes to endorse him or use them as crowd drawers in rallies. Some of the most revered Philippine basketball legends like Samboy Lim, Jojo Lastimoso, Marlou Aquino, Pido Jarencio and Jayvee Gayoso, and the rising basketball superstar Jonas Villanueva are known supporters of Bro. Eddie. The well-known celebrity voters and supporters of Bro. Eddie since the 2004 elections are actually some of the most sensible, the most decent artists and good role models in the Philippine entertainment industry like Piolo Pascual, Gary Valenciano, Donita Rose, Kuh Ledesma, and the late Francis Magalona. Here, I must say that I salute Gloc-9, the most admired Filipino rapper today and acknowledged protégé of Francis M., for having taken a principled stand of singing “*Eddie Ako*” and for being an ardent supporter of Bro. Eddie.

Still, I believe that the real superstars in Bro. Eddie’s campaign are the volunteers. Like Bro. Eddie, they go out of their comfort zones and support the cause in the best way they can. You see their presence in the streets, in the buses, in the malls, in the internet to reach out not only registered voters but all the people. They take the initiative to campaign without Bro. Eddie or any Bangon Pilipinas candidate, through the usual motorcades and through creative ways such as “heart to heart talk”, “house to house”, “pulong barangay”, “suyod barangay”, and “takbo para sa pagbabago”. They buy or print their campaign materials on their own. I am not a fan in any of the facebook fan pages of the presidential candidates but I have been visiting all of them. As of this writing, even with only around 60,000 fans in Bro. Eddie’s page, I think nobody can defeat the passion and fighting spirit of Bro. Eddie’s fans.

The comments and messages of the fans are moving. Volunteers and fans have found a support group in that page, sharing their ups and downs, uploading photos and videos of their respective campaigns, contributing music and songs that are not commissioned but composed from the heart, offering prayers and sending good wishes, reminding supporters to remain

good and not say bad words about other candidates and their respective supporters. They also get hurt and feel down; at times, people laugh at them, make fun of them, heckle them, snub them, insult them. It pains them no end to hear unfavourable surveys that underrate Bro. Eddie. They share these unpleasant experiences online and they never fail to find sources of inspiration and encouragement with one another.

These people have shown me how and what is meant to fight for a noble cause. Without the strong belief in this noble cause for social change and without the inspiration of their good leader, these volunteers would not have the same passion that Bro. Eddie demonstrates. Here, I am reminded of what my mother said to me before: “*Anak, tingnan mo ang mga lingkod ng Diyos, parang hindi sila napapagod noh....*” I, however, come to realize just now that it is not simply passion but pure love for God and country. They live by the virtues of faith, hope, and love that Bro. Eddie epitomizes—that is, faith, hope, and love in/for God, country and the Filipino people; and that the greatest of these three virtues is love.

I am proud to be a fan of Bro. Eddie’s volunteers and will soon join their facebook page. Food for thought: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Policy Coordination in the Platform for Democracy and Development

I encourage everyone to read Bro. Eddie’s platform of governance. I argue that it is the best platform I have come across since I started voting in the 1998 presidential elections: well thought out, specific, and straightforward. But I shall not dare argue with any critic who has not read it. The platform is elegantly yet sensibly summed up as the “Seven Es”: [1] Eradicate bad governance; [2] Energize the economy; [3] Elevate the living standards of the people; [4] Empower the people; [5] Emancipate the people; [6] Educate the people; [7] Establish peace and order in the land.

My reading is that the overarching principles of these seven advocacy points are *democracy and development*. Bro. Eddie always says that he is a “full-blooded democrat”; I think he is! As can be perceived in his platform of governance, his interviews and speeches, Bro. Eddie understands democracy as both a political and an economic ideal with both substantive and institutional senses. Political democracy refers to people power and liberal freedoms. And economic democracy is not simply about economic redistribution of wealth but also about the principle of democracy as the *driving mechanism* of the economy. At the heart of economic democracy is the welfare and protection of Filipino labor at all times. Bro. Eddie’s Vice President Perfecto ‘Jun’ Yasay has been resolute on this ideal and strategy for the democratization of wealth to address fundamental inequalities in the country.

Overall, the hallmark of Bro. Eddie’s platform is the sensibility of “policy coordination”: that is to say, the coordination of economic policy, agricultural policy, environment policy, social policy, education policy, foreign policy, innovation policy, trade policy, peace and security policy, etc. The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) shall be tasked to oversee policy coordination and facilitate development planning and implementation through a bottom-up, multi-stage process that generates the collective wisdom of the Filipinos from the grassroots to the national government. No wonder why the Philippines’ finest former economic planning secretaries trust Bro. Eddie, namely, Winnie Monsod who was impressed by him and voted for him in 2004 and Cielito Habito who is now president of the Bangon

Pilipinas Party. In fact, Bro. Eddie also convincingly won the 2004 mock elections among NEDA staff.

Economic Development Common Sense

What is distinctive about Bro. Eddie's platform is that it is not merely a platform; it is a sharply defined "development strategy". The election has put us in a regime of chronic mendacity promoted by incompetent politicians. The uncritical media have largely contributed to this mediocre—if not low—level of public debate in which the people have been deprived of understanding a crucial political-economic issue: that is, development strategy.

While the mainstream candidates through their empty rhetoric address only the symptoms, Bro. Eddie deals with the *causes* of poverty and inequality. The mainstream candidates have anti-poor platforms like the fiscal policy of E-VAT, which in the real context of Philippine plutocracy is only about taxing the poor.

They attack the poor. Bro. Eddie targets poverty. The economic revolution project of Bro. Eddie entails strategies for wealth creation and wealth redistribution. In terms of policy, industrial policy (wealth creation) is the *sine qua non* of fiscal policy (taxing and spending).

The "wealth-creating" logic of Bro. Eddie's development strategy—through the synergy among agricultural modernization, industrial innovation, advanced services, and vibrant SMEs—encourages productivity explosion from agriculture to manufacturing to services to small enterprises. Land reform is seen as a mandatory passage point to agricultural modernization. The protection of local industries and manufacturing sector comes with projects to set-up a national system of innovation (with a coordinated, combined effort among the government, industry, and academe) and to institutionalize R&D so as to generate Filipino invention and innovation; and hence shifting away from mere raw material production and towards value-added manufactured goods. The advanced services are geared toward offering science- and technology-intensive skills and professions. The SMEs shall be financed through a national cooperative bank, supported by technical skills training, and sustained through continuous learning in entrepreneurial high schools and a revitalized Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

The synergy among these economic sectors and activities—agriculture, manufacturing, services, and SMEs—constitutes Bro. Eddie's national development framework that understands development as a process of cumulative causation. Bro. Eddie's development strategy does not resort only to simplistic formula of correcting fiscal and monetary policies; he also sees the solution to our underdevelopment in the sphere of the productive sector, in the realm of technology and productivity.

This comprehensive development strategy is designed to put an end to elitist kind of development in which economic growth only benefits the few. Bro. Eddie's development strategy provides an institutional guarantee for "democratic development" where the fruits of economic development lead to *higher wages for the workers, higher earnings for investors and entrepreneurs, and a larger tax base for the government*. Therefore, this strategy goes against past administrations' failed neo-classical economics' growth obsession that blindly relies in market trickle-down effects. As an alternative, Bro. Eddie's development framework sees that economic growth is only desirable when it leads to increasing standard of living of

the Filipino people. Fiscal and monetary disciplines are only enforced to promote overall price stability, to strengthen the purchasing power of the Filipino consumers, and to ensure access of all Filipinos to basic commodities.

The effect of ever-increasing tax base managed by a righteous government, together with the political will to negotiate and implement debt moratorium, will thus be the foundation of the “wealth-dispersing” policy that will be able to extend our social security network, infrastructure, massive urban and rural housing projects, health and education sectors. The rights and access to these social entitlements shall be guaranteed. This process of cumulative causation in Bro. Eddie’s development strategy leads to the creation of a strong middle class and the countervailing power of labour unions.

It is this dynamic between wealth-creating and wealth-dispersing strategies—in other words, “wealth creation *for* wealth dispersion”—that only Bro. Eddie gets. We have to create wealth first in order to redistribute. It is in this economic development common-sense that distinguishes Bro. Eddie from the rest. He knows that the first-order development problem of the Philippines is the mode of “production” (the productive sector) and not simply redistribution. The man really knows political economy, specifically, political-economic development.

Peace by the True Christian-Muslim Democrat

In addition to the question of development strategy, the issue of peace and development for Muslim Mindanao is omitted in the campaigns of mainstream candidates. Even if these mainstream candidates speak about it, they have either taken a fixed militaristic stance or shown a snobbish, practical unconcern about Muslim Mindanao. It is only Bro. Eddie who has reached out to the Muslims, both civilians and rebels, listening to their legitimate demands and aspirations, entering into a covenant to address them once elected, and promising to prioritize Mindanao development through the policy of “assured regional pie” and to support Muslim Mindanao’s genuine regional autonomy. Believing in the true spirit of the rightful representation of Muslims in Philippine governance, Bro. Eddie has joined hands with two Muslim leaders as senatorial candidates of Bangon Pilipinas, namely, Zafrullah Alonto and Adz Nikabulin.

I, myself, had worked for peace and development in Muslim Mindanao for some years. But it is only now that I have seen a Filipino leader—not a government official at all—who has sincerely reached out to our Muslim brethren. Bro. Eddie is the only presidential candidate warmly welcomed and received by Muslim leaders and multi-sectoral groups in the Islamic City of Marawi. Once an activist who continues to be revolutionary, Bro. Eddie is a respected Christian pastor trusted by Muslims—the true Christian-Muslim democrat!

On a related note, I believe that Bro. Eddie can also act promptly and accordingly to the legitimate demands of the armed communist rebels. Having been a communist and a community and labour organizer in his younger years, Bro. Eddie understands the history and the ins and outs of the armed struggle. I am confident he has the heart and the will to bring about lasting peace to the Philippines.

Education by an Educator

The mainstream candidates speak about education policy without linking it to economic policy. Again, it is Bro. Eddie's idea of "policy coordination" that makes the difference. For instance, even if we invest 6% of GDP in education under conditions of a backward productive sector, it will just feed emigration. Bro. Eddie's development common-sense focuses on "wealth creation *for* wealth dispersion". We have to create a demand through an energized economy in the sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, advanced services, and SMEs for the talents and skills we are developing in schools and universities.

Aside from the promotion of skills training in a revitalized TESDA and entrepreneurial high schools to create a culture of socially embedded entrepreneurship, Bro. Eddie, a student of history himself, is resolved to foster a sense of history, patriotism, morality, and social solidarity among students. There is no other trustworthy individual who can restructure the education system than an educator like Bro. Eddie. In addition, Bro. Eddie is evidently the most credible to speak about the values of public education being himself a product of public schools from elementary to college to law school. He has the wisdom and first-hand experience from basic to tertiary education as founder of the JIL Colleges Foundation and as the longest-sitting member of the Board of Regents of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP).

Philosophy of the Child

While using the child for the campaign has become commonplace, Bro. Eddie uses the campaign *for* the child. I have not seen any "philosophy of the child", which is now one of the most pressing concerns in development discourse and practice, in candidates who use children in their campaigns. Bro. Eddie has this philosophy through his advocacy as shown in his progressive health policy, education policy, and social policy for a Philippine nation to rear a healthy, educated, and productive child who is proud of his/her Filipino identity with a strong sense of history and social responsibility.

Bro. Eddie's "Liberation Theology"

I have not yet seen Bro. Eddie in person. But listening to his speeches and interviews is akin to meeting the old-fashioned Latin American revolutionary movement of "liberation theology" that has had fascinated me as a young activist. I could sense the sincerity in him. Even though he is the only candidate who has the simplest and most modest lifestyle, he is not a self-proclaimed *tunay na mahirap* or *para sa mahirap*. Like the liberation theologians, Bro. Eddie has so much compassion and empathy for the poor, critiquing the unjust political, economic, and social conditions "through the eyes of the poor". But *unlike* the typical Latin American liberation theology organic intellectuals, Bro. Eddie has a real mass base working and operating at the grassroots. With the emphasis he puts on free will, reason, and belief in the democratic rights of the people in deciding issues like reproductive health, same sex marriage and divorce, Bro. Eddie can also be said to have a sense of "liberal" theology.

To careless media and critics, I'm sorry to say but Bro. Eddie is not the stereotypical evangelist; the man is revolutionary. He is able to feel deeply any injustice committed against anyone and is consistently fighting for the cause of social justice.

Final Remarks: Heart, Mind, and Conscience in Harmony for Bro. Eddie

I have found refreshing politics in Bro. Eddie and found hope in a rat race replete with a bunch of trapos, old elites, and incompetent *artistas*. He is the only candidate I can identify with based on my political-economic development studies and my personal values. There are so many things that can be told about the character, competence, and charisma of Bro. Eddie, as well as my impression and reading of his campaign including his other visions and advocacies. But I guess I have already argued a convincing case why I think Bro. Eddie Villanueva is the best for Philippine democracy and development. At kung bakit *Eddie Ako*. I wish that if Bro. Eddie could gather millions of his supporters again in Luneta like in 2004—which is recognized as the largest ever political rally in Philippine history—he should lead these millions of supporters to march by the sidewalks without interrupting the traffic in Manila and proceed to Malacañang to awaken the silent multitude and claim victory *ng mga Bagong Pilipino para sa Bagong Pilipinas*.

My heart, my mind, and my conscience are now in harmony to vote for “new politics” and a true Filipino hero. On May 10, an enlightened vote shall be cast in Precinct 2010-B at the Juan Luna Elementary School in Sampaloc, Manila for President Eddie Villanueva, Vice President Perfecto ‘Jun’ Yasay, and the impressive Bangon Pilipinas APPOINT PV senatorial candidates.

Within the next six years, I will most probably have a child, or two, or even three. My vote is for him, for her, for them. It is my wish for my children to be born and to grow up in a new Philippines with Bro. Eddie as President, the national leader they can be proud of, with exemplary servant leadership and excellent governance *na hindi ko pa naranasan, na hindi pa naranasan ng sambayanang Pilipino. Si Bro. Eddie, ang Pangulo na aking maipagmamalaki!*

Denmark, 20 April 2010.