

PH103 Final Exam

The late archbishop, St. Oscar Romero's quote on our liberation resting on the Kingdom of God that lives beyond us reminds me of our Filipino Roman Catholic concept of "Kalayaan" in the context of the Philippine revolution. In both Romero's time and our time, in the face of war, upheaval, and unrest, people lived and died in the name of an emancipation that they might never see and was never theirs to begin with, yet in the postmodern text of Sartre it is popularly argued that our freedom is achieved by our means, and is hence, ours alone.

In the context of faith, Sartre's position can be tenable and austere: he argues that we live by our own means, are accountable for our own existence, and that, the question of whether God exists or otherwise is ultimately irrelevant when we speak of what is for the good of all humanity. While Sartre meant well in his philosophy, it is also by his very hand that I learned to reject the modern thinking which overestimates the benevolence of man. History has relentlessly showed us that goodwill can still spiral into human caprice, and that, no matter how intelligent we think we are, we are still humans, foolish and fickle.

Looking at Monsignor Romero's context, and no different from our historical experience, we come to see man justifying tyranny and repression in the name of "social order" or "the common good" (at least according to the oppressive oligarch's terms). These values became blankets to safeguard power, silence, and stifle dissent. Communists were radicalized and hunted, and merely accused peasants were killed mindlessly and collaterally. The country learned how to turn against itself while being intercepted by the Cold War where American democracy and Soviet Communist ideals were pitted against each other. It is in this regard that we see the glaring limitations of Sartre and are called to bring ourselves to ask again: do we really know for and by ourselves what is good for all humanity?

Sartre entrusts us this capacity by arguing that: "we always choose the good," and that, "nothing can be good for us without being good for all" (23), but his excessive faith in humanity falls short in failing to justify the position or the rationalization for us to do the good, or, in other words, its lack of base apart from our subjectivity. Sartre tells us that we have to be good for the sake of humanity; but also that I alone am responsible for my own existence; that I am condemned to be free; that I can choose to do things in the name of my own will. So I asked

myself, in light of these idiosyncratic exclamations: if I can self-legislate and live for my own existence, why should I be responsible for the good of any other man?

If we deconstruct the very core of having a faith position oriented in a God, and trace back to its very origins, it is not a muddled religion peddled by human ideology that we see today. We see Christ, who--much like Romero--was also a radical in his time who renounced social injustice and endured suffering and death for humanity in the name of a greater good that is beyond us. A true faith position seeks to clarify that we follow in the footsteps of Christ and Romero, not in the name of an institutionalized church, nor in the mere reverence for their wooden iconographies that we pray over, but in the understanding that our reason to be good comes from our yearning to follow a higher good that Christ and Romero built and sacrificed their lives upon--that which, in our philosophy of religion, we come to know as God.

Harking back to the five proofs, Aquinas tells us that, who we come to know as God, is the very standard of all things good and the highest of all gradations, beyond our human comprehension. God is a base, as much as he is a standard, a principle, and a model; but He is not a standalone being. Over the course of philosophizing religion, we learn that followers participate in His being, and that while hierarchy exists, the faithful are not treated as slaves and minions conforming to the ideology He champions and bowing down to His dictates. In the context of having faith in a God, we are given the capacity to reason, endowed with the freedom to make a choice, but are called to gear them towards communion with Him and all beings; giving us firm conviction that we are responsible for each other's good. In contrast, it is only by our own self-legislated means, subjective rule of what is good for all humanity, and overindulgence in our reason, autonomy, and power, that we come to know and experience dictatorship, violence, selfishness, and war.

In spite of all these, it is necessary to clarify that Sartre's philosophy, albeit limited, is nonetheless relevant. My history teacher once told me that the world has ended so many times--in World War II for the Germans, in the Holocaust for the Jews, and in the Civil Wars for us Filipinos and the people of El Salvador; yet in these moments of stark darkness and devastation, we are still here. Rather than dismissing Sartre's position, I believe his faith in humanity and one's faith in God have a common goal that can be reconciled in hope; in the hope that we can still grow the seeds of a Kingdom we might never have the chance to see; in the hope that the sun will still rise even in the pitch black ashes of the world as an unending warzone; and in the hope that, beyond our existence, there are still things greater than us that are worth living and dying for, just as Romero envisioned.

In Romero's quote, I see both the faith position and Sartre's philosophy working hand-in-hand as we are called to participate in the good of all humanity. Across all generations, we come to know that this good endures only by the work of those who chose to sow the seeds that we reap today in blood, sweat, tears, and fervor for a cause. Romero's words then ring true: we may never see what lies beyond our efforts today, but in our work--in our participation in the Master Builder's vision to bring His kingdom on earth--there is a present that holds future promise. It is only through this, in the continuing efforts of those before us, and in our own participation in this good we know across all generations, that we are able to exercise more freedom and envision a future where poverty, pain, oppression, and hunger will cease to exist, even in a godless world.

Works Cited

Sartre, Jean Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Les Edition Nagel, Methuen & Co, 1946.