

REFLECTION

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These are what we have to look for in choosing our public officials. Of course, to be realistic, we have to put these qualities in the context of the candidates' popularity and electability. But for Pete's sake, let's not make mere popularity the main guide in electing our officials.

We have to go beyond looks, PR gimmicks, smart sound bites, spins and vote-getting machineries. Sad to say, we cannot help but observe how local candidates tend to congregate around national candidates and political parties with vast and deep war chests. They are there more for the "fund" of it.

Neither should we go by mere genealogy and pedigree—that one is the son or daughter of so-and-so, or that his father or mother died in some dramatic circumstances. This is a dangerous way to elect officials. It's like impulse buying that leaves many of us with the buyer's remorse.

Neither still should we be guided by some forms of kinship—blood, political, cultural, social, geographical. While these factors and conditions have their valid values, they can only play a secondary role. They should never be the primary criteria. Of course, a big no-no is choosing candidates on the basis of who give us more money, dole-outs and other forms of perks. This way can only spell disaster.

We should not even be guided solely by the candidates' fame or their mass appeal, though that would already be a big help. We have to be wary of image-building tactics that do not necessarily show the true character of the candidates.

We should not be naïve as not to consider the many subtle forms of propaganda that sway people's favor unfairly. We have to discern whether that mass appeal that candidates may have, spring truly from some divine or humanly legitimate charisma, or it is simply a product of some witchery.

What we should look into in vetting the candidates is their track record, their performance in public service, their achievements and their mistakes and how they handled those.

Integrity and competence should always go together. Integrity without competence would not give us good governance. Neither competence without integrity. They are supposed to have a mutual relationship.

Integrity evokes a sense of completeness and wholeness as well as order, harmony, consistency, honesty. For us, it is crucial because it is something to work and live out, protect, defend and even fight for. It does not come automatically with our DNA.

We have to know its real essence, its firm basis and real source. We have to know the different elements involved in achieving it, as well as the techniques and skills to get the act together. Hopefully we can develop a clear and correct science about it, both in its theoretical and practical aspects.

Offhand, we have to be clear that the ultimate foundation, source and goal of our integrity is God, our Creator and Father. Hence, we have to understand that the pursuit of integrity cannot be done outside of this original religious context. Any understanding of integrity outside of this would be compromised right from the start.

Even if our concept of God and of how to relate to him is not yet clear, we have to hold it as a necessary prerequisite, at least theoretically, because it would be funny to look for the origin, meaning and purpose of integrity simply in ourselves or in the world.

That way of pursuing integrity would make it a mere human invention, and given the way we are, we could not help but be subjective and therefore prone to have different versions of integrity.

Competence requires a working knowledge of the common good and of what it requires. It involves a good understanding and practical skills to live the social principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. It demands one to have a clear vision of the goals to achieve. Otherwise, there would be disorder and chaos.

It requires continuing formation, continuing effort to know the concrete conditions and circumstances of the relevant issues and situations of one's work. Thus constant updating of relevant knowledge and skills is needed.

It urges the officials to always polish their virtue of prudence, making due study, consultations as well as timely decisions and action. It requires the officials to know how to coordinate the different elements of his office. It also involves a certain sensitivity to changes taking place and the ability to correspond to them without getting lost in the essentials.

With what we are seeing in this funny but painful episode of the “tanim-bala” in NAIA, let's hope that we can learn the lesson of how to choose our leaders and public officials.