

## On My Mind

4/9/04

Holy Week is a religious event, not a political one, yet it is hard not to draw political parallels. Though Christians believe Jesus is the son of God, and that therefore his crucifixion is unlike the crucifixion of ordinary men, nonetheless the crucifixion is representative of the cruelty that one human is capable of imposing on another. Whether or not one is Christian, it would not seem inappropriate for all of us to contemplate man's weakness that gives rise to such acts of cruelty and horror, and to vow to prevent further occurrences thereof - not only in one's home and neighborhood but also anywhere else in the world.

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The resurrection, while a more uniquely Christian event, can also lead to broader parallels, in the sense of both a belief in miracles, and the concept of redemption. Miracles are not the exclusive property of Christians. Nor must redemption be only of the soul. Honor, integrity, can be redeemed as well - another thought worthy of contemplation especially during Holy Week.

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That, in part, seems to be what is wrong with Mel Gibson's "Passion." It doesn't provide the grace of redemption - it focuses only on the horror - in excess, making it totally inappropriate as a Holy Week offering.

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This is Holy Week, but coming close behind is income tax day, Thursday, April 15. In the CNMI, where the payment of tax refunds cannot be taken for granted, it tends to be a time of aggravation, frustration and sometimes, downright anger. I've always thought that the CNMI ought to allow people to deduct this year's tax due from amounts owed them in past not-yet-paid refunds.

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A friend has come up with a better idea. She suggests that the CNMI government issue debit cards, in an amount equal to the refund, to all those who are owed a refund. As my friend - who chooses to remain anonymous for understandable reasons - put it (with slight editing):

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"[P]erhaps the CNMI gov. just needs to issue a Tax Rebate Swipe Card. You know, like a credit card with a preset limit. That way, whenever I need to pay the CNMI gov for anything I just have them swipe my Tax Rebate Card. Once I reach my limit the card is invalid. I could swipe my licensing fees for both my business and my car. I could swipe hospital expenses, like for x-rays and ER visits. Maybe the CPA would take it when I park at Charlie Dock to go to Managaha. I would go more often if I didn't have to fork out the \$10 parking fee all the time.

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"Maybe the government could take over a Joe-Ten for a week. The way my son eats I would use up my rebate in 7 days; especially if I buy the "flown-in" fresh strawberries at \$7.99 a carton.... If only I had had a CNMI Tax Rebate Swipe card I could have purchased enough cartons to satisfy my strawberry urge for a whole year - long enough to last me until I get my 2003 Tax Rebate Swipe card!!!

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I could use my card to buy a brick in the Footsteps to Freedom Hall of Fame Walk (hey, FTF is my idea for a catchy name for the brick sidewalk). “

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Rev & Tax, Finance, Legislature, Administration - are you listening????

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Another creative idea emerged from this past week’s Chamber of Commerce meeting. As has been reported elsewhere, Dr. Daniel Lamar of PacifiCare spoke of the burden placed on doctors by employer requirements that persons claiming sick leave provide doctor-signed “excuses.”

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In the process of what is often a fruitless examination, the physician has wasted his time and, in most instances, a health insurance charge has also been incurred - both contributing toward the high cost of health care.

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Instead, suggested Dr. Lamar, employers should drop the paid sick leave benefit and give their employees what he called “well days” - presumably in addition to their vacation time - and let employees decide how to use their time. If employees are never sick, they get a longer vacation.

If they are sick and need more than all their “well” days, they would have to take a shorter vacation, or take leave without pay.

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While other provisions would have to be made in the case of catastrophic illnesses, in principle, the idea of holding employees responsible for their use of leave days sounds eminently reasonable, and well worth pursuing.

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The renewed push to open Pagan to ash-mining once again highlights what seems to me an unfair and conflicting burden on both the CNMI’s Coastal Resource Management Office and the Marianas Public Land Authority. As it now stands, developers must first obtain a land lease from MPLA before applying for a permit from CRMO. Requiring a developer to first pay for an MPLA lease, however, puts considerable pressure on the CRMO agencies to approve the CRM permit, since otherwise the developer would be left with an expensive land lease he cannot use.

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On the other hand, requiring that the developer obtain a CRMO permit before requesting a lease from MPLA puts pressure on MPLA to approve the land lease since otherwise, the developer would be left with an expensive permit he cannot use.

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In either case, the scales are weighted in favor of the developer, not the CNMI. The agencies should be able to make their decision based on the mission of their agencies - and on the over-all impact on the CNMI’s environment - without regard to how much and to which agency the developer has already paid.

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Maybe the two agencies could get together and work out a more acceptable arrangement?

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A related issue: MPLA's criteria for evaluating Pagan land lease applicants - as listed in a *Tribune* story earlier this week - do not include any mention of how applicants would respond to possible adverse environmental impacts or their mitigation. Surely prudent use of public land would require attention to such concerns as well?

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Short takes:<br>

- As quoted in the *Tribune*'s Thursday edition, CNMI Attorney General Pam Brown has said that the Office of the Public Auditor's recently issued report regarding questionable spending practices in the Office of the Washington Rep is "suspect since it was based in illegitimate facts." Excuse me?

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- I don't think I've ever met the Tina Sablan whose letter to the editor appeared in Wednesday's papers, but I think she's got it absolutely right in regard to the move by some in the CNMI to make gay marriages unconstitutional. She is opposed to the move, asking such questions as "...must public policy be defined by Catholic doctrine?" and why "supporters of this initiative [do] feel threatened by same-sex marriage...?"

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Her most telling argument, however, is her statement that "I believe that we have a great tradition of tolerance....most of us are also open-minded enough to recognize that our gay and lesbian family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors are fully and equally human, fully and equally deserving of the rights and responsibilities that we claim for ourselves." Well said, Tina!

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- Once again, there is talk of breaking up the domain of the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, the largest and said to be the most liberal of the Appeals Courts. Perversely enough, the latest proposals, just like most of the others, would put Guam, Hawaii and the CNMI - relatively conservative - together with more radical California, while putting Alaska, another more conservative entity, with more liberal Washington and Oregon. A third new district would lump together Arizona, Idaho, Montana and Nevada. Better, it seems to be, would be to combine Guam, Hawaii and the CNMI with Alaska, Idaho and Montana - a far more appropriate combination of areas with common interests, perspectives, issues.

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- Cast calls for the movie "Max Havoc" being filmed on Guam are, largely, for "tanned" wannabees. Let's hope the term includes "brown-skinned,"and isn't meant to be discriminatory.