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**THE ODYSSEY AND THE MIGRANT WORKERS' EXPERIENCE:  
A FRESH LOOK AT AN ANCIENT SAGA**

**An Integration of Faith and Learning Model for the Study of  
Homer's *The Odyssey***

by

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*The Odyssey* served as staple reading in the task of moral education for the Ancient Greeks. Today, it is considered one of the great moral classics, and more widely taught (and read) than the other Homeric epic, *The Iliad*.<sup>1</sup>

For one, reading the *Odyssey* makes us "culturally literate" and able to understand literary allusions such as mentor (teacher), Achilles heel (weakness), "the face that launched a thousand ships" (a very beautiful face, alluding to Helen of Troy), among many others.<sup>2</sup> This ancient epic poetry also has romance, the psychological development of characters, and tight movement of the plot, all elements of a terrific story.<sup>3</sup>

Homer's second epic poem is also more well-liked probably because its hero, Odysseus, has the admirable combinations of street smarts, perseverance, and self-control, yet is more "like us" because he exhibited some weakness in character.<sup>4</sup>

And, compared to the *Iliad*, *The Odyssey's* adventure ends in a satisfying and optimistic ending. After twenty years, the hero Odysseus returns, not with the spoils of war but loaded with wisdom and experience, to his enduring wife, Penelope. He also finds that his son, Telemachus, overcomes and matures in a single-parent home.

All these make the 2,500 year old epic timely and relevant for a society where loyalty and commitment to spouse and family are endangered virtues; where the plight of left-behind children are left to the care of a single parent, extended family members, or friends.

Like Odysseus who reluctantly goes to war, many migrant workers leave permanently or temporarily for other countries to find a job, or

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<sup>1</sup> *The Iliad* focuses on the ten-year war between Greeks and Trojan. *The Odyssey* is about the adventures of Odysseus on his way home from the ten-year war, after masterminding the Greek victory over the Trojans (using the famous Trojan horse, considered the first military tank), Odysseus heads homeward, only to be beset by trials and "sorrows that Zeus sent" for another ten years. Despite his failings (in Circe's, and Calypso's islands), Odysseus has always been constant in his desire to go home.

<sup>2</sup> The Sirens, sea nymphs who lured passing sailor to their doom us the allusion "siren song" which means an alluring appeal that may have unfortunate effects. To work like a Trojan means you are dedicated, strong, and courageous. To be between Scylla and Charybdis, as what happened to Odysseus, is to "be faced with the necessity of choosing between two equally undesirable or unpleasant things. Microsoft Encarta Dictionary 2006. Those who don't know these literary allusions could get shortchanged because they allusions fill our literature, newspapers, even our daily discourse.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the most common are Odysseus' escape from the cave of the one-eyed Cyclop Polyphemus, his adventure through Scylla and Charybdis, the touching reunion with his loyal dog Argus, and with wife Penelope.

<sup>4</sup> Some of Odysseus' weak points are as follows: over-riding curiosity (which prompted him to land on the unknown island of the Cyclops, and experience the tempting Sirens' song, though tied on the ship's mast, to ensure his safety); propensity for vendetta (he put away enemy servants and suitors, which was acceptable in primitive cultures [see Vendetta, Microsoft Encarta 2007], and was again armed to battle the families and relatives of the dead suitors; until the gods intervened); and extra-marital interludes with Calypso and Circe.

to flee insecurity, disaster or famine." In a way, they fight another war: poverty.

Migrant workers, according to the United Nations, are those who engage in "remunerated activities in a state by which [they] are not a national."<sup>5</sup> There are about 100 million migrant workers—usually coming from developing countries—working in North America, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan, the United Kingdom and the Arab states.<sup>6</sup>

It is estimated that 10% of the 85 million Filipinos also resort to migration as economic solution, working or living abroad to work tentatively or permanently. The Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs, or interchangeably referred to as Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs in this paper) send between \$12-14 billion in annual dollar remittance. Their remittances have kept the national economy afloat, prompting the government to hail them as *Bagong Bayani* (The New Heroes). The impact of their migration has primarily helped in providing security and improving the well-being of their families.

### The Social Cost of Migration

Similar to the battle in Troy, this "war" disperses families, and has "sundered the ideals of home and domestic togetherness."<sup>7</sup> The separation puts to risk the migrant workers' losing their children and spouses' affection due to long term separation. Some children who are not able to overcome this trauma and tend to interpret the migration as placing more importance on money than on them, tend to cling to other relationships to fill the void. In many cases drug addiction, early marriages, or unwanted pregnancies, and a host of delinquency problems<sup>8</sup> enter through these single-parent homes.

Thus, behind the economic boost of the migration is a tremendous social cost especially for the estimated 9 million or 27% of the children under the age of 18 left behind by one or both parents.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families". United Nations. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/45/a45r158.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim. Awad, Director of the International Migration Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) "Facing the Global Job Crisis: Migrant Workers, A Population Risk." Aug. 13, 2009. Available from <http://www.ilo.org/global>. Accessed on Aug. 25, 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Fred Dela Rosa, "Consider the OFW Family," Available at <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2003/jan/24/opinion.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Reports have reached the Philippine Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (POEA) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). Ibid, Dela Rosa, F.

<sup>9</sup>Many children of OCWs experience "higher anxiety and loneliness." The children of migrant mothers were reported to be more "lonely, angry, unloved, unfeeling, afraid, different from other children, and worried" compared to all groups of children, and children of non-OCW parents. Melanie M. Reyes, "Migration and Filipino Children Left-Behind: A Literature Review." July 1, 2008. Available at [www.unicef.org/philippines/synthesis-study](http://www.unicef.org/philippines/synthesis-study). Accessed on July 10, 2009.

The 2006 research of Estrella Mai Dizon-Anonuevo, Executive Director, Atikha, Inc. says that with increased OFW income, consumerism has increased, family structures have malfunctioned, and juvenile delinquency are prevalent among migrant families. A relationship of dependency on the migrant by both the immediate families and relatives is also created, along with increased incidents of dropping-out of school of OFCW children, growing disinterest in attaining higher education, drug addiction, among others. "Addressing the Social Cost of Migration in the Philippines: The Atikha Experience," Estrella Mai Dizon-Anonuevo, Accessed on August 12, 2009. Available at [http://icgmd.info/sessions/session\\_1\\_2/pdf\\_estrella\\_anonuevo.pdf](http://icgmd.info/sessions/session_1_2/pdf_estrella_anonuevo.pdf) Anonuevo's

Studies show that children and adults fare much better in a stable married situation.<sup>10</sup> Despite the separation, studies records optimistic news to the migration story. For instance, with regards to academic performance, it was found that OCW children "performed well, but tend to score lower" than the others. As for their general well-being, socialization and learning to be independent, a 2003 study said, that compared to the previous report in 1996, OFW children have generally adjusted socially.

Two reasons were cited: strong social support from family members and relatives, and global parenting which (thanks to technology), keeps the "long distance" love affair going.<sup>11</sup> Without a doubt, OCWs make the sacrifices not only for material welfare. It really all boils down to love for their respective families.

### **A Christian Approach**

Students are motivated to study hard when they know they have a strong chance to pass the exams. People are inspired to follow divine direction or act responsibly when they know something good can happen. The *Odyssey* abounds in realistic concepts that posit hope for the contemporary Penelope and Telemachus who are caught in the economic war their parent/s have to battle.

By using the Biblical-Christian approach, it is the aim of this paper to highlight the "hope-full" themes and values in *The Odyssey*. In particular, this paper will explore the effects of the "war" on the Greek soldier's families (represented by Odysseus and Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek army in the Trojan war) and on the migrant worker's families (as represented by the Filipino OCW) and draw similarities between them. It also provides an Integration of Faith and Learning model, using the Biblical-Christian approach, thus giving a relevant and fresh perspective to teaching an ancient Classic.

Homer is explicit about the values of love, faith, family loyalty, responsibility, perseverance, and self-control, as if he were expounding Scriptures. In the hands of teachers who take ownership of their students' moral destiny, who try "to create a space for the learning" and "practice [of] obedience" to truth values, there is a great possibility that students will make them their very own.<sup>12</sup>

### **Literature as Life and Moral Resource**

Stories were central to the training of the young Greeks, who shaped their ideals in "right thinking" according to the nobility of

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findings also have not changed much from 2003 reports of Fred Dela Rosa which spelled out cases of incest, children demonstrating "deviant behavior" or loss of respect for parents.

<sup>10</sup>Bernie Villegas, "Family as great source of OFW happiness," Available at [www.globalnation.inquirer.net](http://www.globalnation.inquirer.net), Accessed on July 27, 2009.

<sup>11</sup>Reyes, Melanie M, Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, (NY: Harper Collins, 1993), 69,88.

their heroes. Similarly, Jewish tradition used stories to transmit the moral principles in "right acting."<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in the 1990s, there has been a renewal of concern for teaching and learning values through literature.<sup>14</sup> Prominent educators recommended it, and bookstores displayed more story books than ever before.

Is it possible for fiction to speak spiritual truth and impart values to the young readers? The following studies support this fact.

### **Rossenblatt's Transactional Theory**

Louise Rossenblatt's Transactional Theory in literature teaches that during a literary experience, "a reciprocal interchange takes place between the reader and the literary work" which she calls the **effereent** or **aesthetic** focus. The **effereent** focus encourages readers to "take away" information from the text (such as character, setting, plot, theme, etc.) while an **aesthetic** stance allows a reader to make responses, reactions, give their own way of solving the dilemmas of the character, and even to seek for personal application.<sup>15</sup>

When students ask, *How does it help me? What's in it to apply in my life?*, they make an aesthetic transaction with the literary work.

### **Bandura's Theory of Imitation**

Good stories, William Bennett agrees, "invite us to slip into the shoes of other people, a crucial step in acquiring a moral perspective." This belief is supported by Albert Bandura's Theory of Imitation which states that children imitate living as well as symbolic models.<sup>16</sup>

Symbolic models can be celebrities, historical personalities, and even fictional characters on film and literature. Bandura says that children, and even adults, are more likely to imitate models who are similar to them in sex, age, and background, and when the latter's behavior has been rewarded.

### **Lewis: Strong Values are Supportable**

Values are standards or qualities considered worthwhile and desirable. They serve as moral boundaries that influence man's everyday behavior. According to Robert Lewis, for a real value to be

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Ann Freese Witt, , et al., *The Humanities: Cultural Roots & Antiquities*. (Toronto, Canada: D C Heath and Company, 1989), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Tony R Sanchez, "Using Stories about Heroes to Teach Values." ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN. Nov. 1998. Available from <http://www.vtaide.com/png/ERIC/Heroes-Values.htm>. July 23, 2009

<sup>15</sup> Frances Goforth, *Literature and the Learner*. (CA: Wadsworth, 1998), 20.

<sup>16</sup> James E. Mazur, "Bandura, Albert." "Learning" Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2006. Microsoft Corporation.

really strong they must go beyond "because I said so" and must be supported with "God said."<sup>17</sup>

For instance, the value that marriage as commitment before God may be backed up by Matthew 19:4-6. To strengthen the relevance of values, they must be supportable by history, everyday events, statistics and modern research, when applicable, "to help reinforce why God's Word is trustworthy."<sup>18</sup>

### **Ethical-theological Approach**

In studying and discussing literature, especially myths, fantasies, and other "works of the imagination," TS Eliot recommends the ethical-theological approach which seeks to find the moral implications of a literary piece, particularly their "explicit ethical and theological standards."<sup>19</sup> Also considered as the Biblical-Christian approach, this literary interpretation, TR Wright says, brings into focus the religious dimension and Christian themes even in literature which is "not overtly Christian."<sup>20</sup>

The Hebrews and early Christians also used this approach to the mythological stories of their pagan neighbors. Because they are such good stories, they demythologized and treated them as artistic or allegorical devices.<sup>21</sup>

When treated in this manner The *Odyssey* theme on the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus becomes an allegory or spiritual philosophy on the oneness, permanence and exclusiveness of marriage; the intervention of gods and goddesses (e.g., Athena, Hermes, who always came to Odysseus' aid) prove that "God's power is made perfect when we are weak."<sup>22</sup>

### **The Christian Worldview**

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows."<sup>23</sup> This conviction sets the tone for a Christian worldview.

Because it holds the ideologies and guiding principles of the "relevant interpretive community, in this case, Christianity," the Bible should be the basis of a Christian approach in literature.<sup>24</sup> With

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<sup>17</sup> Lewis, Robert. *Real Family Values*. (Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000.) 233

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature" in *Religion and Modern Literature: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. By G. Tennyson and Edward E. Ericson, Jr. (MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 21.

<sup>20</sup> T. R. Wright, *Theology and Literature*. (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr. *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature*. IL: Crossway Books, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>23</sup> James 1:17

<sup>24</sup> Delmer Davis. *Teaching Literature: A Seventh-Day Adventist Approach*. (MI: Andrews University 2002), 31. God's values are His direct commands and laws, (e.g., The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20) and Bible verses where He gives a condensed version of principles for Christian living: 1 Peter 3:8-9; 1 Corinthians 13; Proverbs 1, Matthew 3 - 11, and Romans 12, to name a few.

the Bible as guide, people need not speculate or guess God's will and values when confronted with moral issues.

"All truth is God's truth, wherever it is found."<sup>25</sup> Within the limits of the pagan world within which it was woven, *The Odyssey* themes that celebrate commitment, loyalty to spouse, perseverance and responsibility are capable of imparting Biblical values like "a gleam of thought [and] a flash of the intellect from the Light of the world."<sup>26</sup>

### Interpreting Literature

One of the benefits of reading literature is to know lessons about how to live a good life. To reach this lesson objective, teachers must employ the three levels of interpreting literature, with each step guided by leading questions which progress from seeking knowledge and description, to analysis and interpretation, and finally evaluation and application to life.

Level I is an efferent transaction and reading which aims to cite literal sequence of events in a selection.

The Level II stage aims to make inferences, a "reading between the lines" to discover the author's central message by finding the common thread that binds the events and action that happen to the characters in a story. This second level entails a combination of efferent and aesthetic transactions.

In works of fiction that are considered the great moral classics, such as the *Odyssey*, the truth lies in their themes that are timeless, universal, and in the words of Susan Galagher, "eternal."<sup>27</sup>

Discovery and discussion of these truths enables the teacher to create a space for learning about God's values and principles. Knowledge about God's values is a good thing, but, according to Dr. John M. Fowler, it is a neutral act. "A Christian teacher who knows better goes a step higher."<sup>28</sup>

In the Level III, students try to evaluate and find the impact of the meaning of these life messages to themselves. Through a series of questions which students can reflect upon, students read "beyond" the lines, a purely aesthetic transaction. In this stage, students can practice what Parker Palmer said as "obedience to the truth earlier discovered," and allows for the integration of faith and learning to take its role.

By reflecting on the truths and responding to leading questions from a wise Christian teacher, students can choose to use this

<sup>25</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, (USA: Wm. B. Eerdsman, 1987), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education*, (CA: Pacific Press, 1903; reprint, Manila: Philippine Publishing House, 1975), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Gallagher, Susan V & Lundin, Roger, *Literature Through the Eyes of Faith*. (USA: Harper, 1989), 107.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. John M. Fowler, "The Adventist Worldview: A Ground to Stand, a Life to Live," Lecture for the 40<sup>th</sup> International Faith and Learning Seminar. Asia-Pacific International University, Muak Lek, Saraburi, Thailand. July 24, 2009.

knowledge to be socially responsible and "to be an effective agent of needful and helpful change."<sup>29</sup>

### AN IFL MODEL IN TEACHING "THE ODYSSEY"

When studied from a Christian perspective with the aid of the three levels of interpreting literature, a pattern of optimistic themes can be gleaned from this popular epic. Table 1 shows the sample themes, possible insights and Biblical concepts that may emerge from them:

Table 1

Theme/Theme Story	Life Truth/ Insights	Biblical Law or Principle
<b>1. The Maturing of Telemachus</b>	Trouble can be good for you	Romans 5:3 – Suffering produces perseverance.
	Value of experience	Galatians 3:15 – Learn to take an example from every life.
<b>2. The Wanderings of Odysseus</b>	Think with discernment	1 Kings 3:9 – Discern between good and evil.
	Sexual temptation can be overcome	1 Corinthians 10:13 – You can escape and endure temptation.
<b>3. Return, Vengeance and Restoration of Order</b>	You reap what you sow.	Galatians 6:7 – A man reaps what he sows.
	Humility precedes glory	Luke 14:11 – The humble will be exalted.
	Justice sometimes comes delayed	Psalm 103:6 – The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
	Humility, not vengeance, restores peace	Psalm 37: 11 – The meek will enjoy great peace.
<b>4. The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope</b>	Oneness, permanence, and exclusiveness of marriage	Matthew 19:5 – Therefore what God has joined together let man not separate.
<b>5. Value of Intelligence</b>	Play it smart	Matthew 10:16 – Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.
<b>6. You Become the Company you Keep</b>	Choose your friends well	Proverbs 4:14 – Do not go with wicked and evil men.
<b>7. Wise and Foolish Son</b>	A wise son heeds instruction	Proverbs 1:5 – The wise listens and learns.
<b>8. Intervention of the gods and goddesses</b>	Human and divine powers are indispensable to success	2 Corinthians 12:9 – God's power is perfect when we are weak.
<b>9. Consequences of War on the Soldier and his Family</b>	There is no place like home	Psalm 127:3 – We are comfortable in our home, we are special to our family.
	Separation exposes partners to temptation	Genesis 2:18 – It isn't good for man to be alone.
	Separation results in alienation	1 Timothy 5:3 – Care for one's own family.
<b>10. Relevance of the Odyssey of Penelope:</b>	Single parents can survive temptation	2 Corinthians 13:4-7 – Love is patient... it always perseveres.
<b>of Telemachus:</b>	Children can mature in single-parent homes.	Ecclesiastes 4:10 – Two are better than one... if one falls down, his friend can help him up.
<b>of Odysseus:</b>	OFWs can overcome temptation with divine help and a resolute mind.	Matthew 17:20 – Faith and optimism can "move mountains."

The last theme, "Consequences of War on the Soldier and his Family," is one that is most relevant for migrant workers and their families. When treated with Levels I, II and III interpretation we can see commonalities between the Greek soldiers' family and the OCW family, followed by sample leading questions and discussion resource.

<sup>29</sup> Holmes, 103.



**A Fresh Look at an Ancient Saga: Relevance of the  
Odysseys of Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus**

Odysseus reluctantly goes to war<sup>30</sup> leaving his wife and young son. In like manner, the Filipino OCW parent resorts to forced migration to address the root causes of poverty, his personal "battle."

Table 2 shows the domestic consequences when the Achaeans went to war and their similar effects on the OCWs' "war" on poverty.<sup>31</sup> The details in Table 2 serve as resource answers for the Level I literary activity below.

**LEVEL I - LITERAL LEVEL**

**Sample Leading Questions:**

1. Why did Odysseus go to war?
2. Why do OCWs leave the country and go abroad? What "war" are they fighting?
3. What do soldiers "earn" which motivates them to go to war?
4. What troubles do Penelope and Telemachus experience in the absence of the head of their family?
5. What happens to the family of Agamemnon in his absence? Research on the background of the character of Agamemnon as depicted in *The Iliad*.
6. What sometimes happens when families are separated for long periods of time? What problems usually arise?

**LEVEL II - DISCOVERING TRUTH/THEMES LEVEL**

**Effects of the War on Penelope**

**Sample Leading Questions:**

1. Why was Penelope able to survive the hardships of being a single parent? How did she overcome the temptation of marrying again?
2. According to the Bible how can one stay true to your spouse? What is true love?
3. Who are some of the smart women in history who survived without a husband? Why were they able to accomplish so much, despite being single?

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<sup>30</sup> It is said that Odysseus is really reluctant to go to war and avoided being drafted by "feigning madness and sowing his fields with salt." But the Greeks placed his son Telemachus in front of the plow, and Odysseus was compelled to join the invading army. See "Odysseus" [CD-ROM] Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Dela Rosa, Fred, "Consider the OFW Family" Available at <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2003/jan/24/opinion.html>.

Table 2

Effects of War on Greek Soldiers' Families	Effects of War on Poverty on the Migrant Workers' Left-Behind Families
1. War earns honor and booties for Odysseus but his family struggle in his absence.	1. Working abroad makes OCWs earn more; their families reap financial benefits but at a social cost.
2. War hurts Odysseus' family, exposes remaining spouses to temptation. Penelope remains steadfast; Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra gets a lover.	2. War hurts many families, wrecks many marriages. Parents or one of the parents begin to stray; infidelities or betrayal whether by the breadwinner abroad, or by the lonely one at home.
3. All Greek soldiers fail to communicate home until they finally come home. Odysseus' crew has the worst fate, because they all died on their journey home.	3. Some husbands or wives have stopped communicating or sending money, or have not visited for years.
4. Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover is a fruit of an incestuous marriage between his father Thyestes' and daughter, Pelopia. Although it is not the direct consequence of the Trojan war, the scandalous union is caused by a rivalry for the throne of Mycenae between Thyestes and his Atreus. <sup>32</sup>	4. Incest has visited many homes that miss a mother.
5. Rearing of Telemachus is left to Penelope; Clytemnestra acts as single-parent of Orestes.	5. Rearing of children is left to left-behind/single-parent or relatives.
6. Orestes, forced to avenge the death of his father in the hands of her mother's lover; murders Aegisthus.	6. Children, abandoned by a parent, stumble into delinquency.
7. Odysseus hardly recognizes Telemachus who was still a baby when he leaves for Troy. When at last they see each other again, Telemachus needs some convincing that Odysseus is really his father.	7. OFW parent tends to lose the children's affection and vice versa; alienation sets in.

## DISCUSSION RESOURCE

### Single parents can survive temptation

The opening chapters of *The Odyssey* show Penelope as angry, frustrated and powerless against the corrupt horde of suitors. Yet through it all she manages her household well, trains a disciplined son who is respectful to the gods and elders. Things turn ugly when a corrupt horde of suitors, who do not court her properly, overrun her house.

Penelope survives the many hardships of war on the domestic front, by using her intelligence, wisdom, and skill in diplomacy. When she runs out of options to keep the suitors at bay, she uses one last strategy: the suitors must wait until Telemachus returns from his search of his father.

In this aspect, there is an obvious parallel to Penelope in English history in the person of Queen Elizabeth I. The latter survived in a man's world without a husband and dealt intelligently with those who wanted to use her for their own advancement. Her 45-year rule decisively shaped the future of England as a stable monarchy.

Penelope's fidelity and steadfast love to Odysseus helps her overcome her loneliness, and therefore makes her a woman worth coming home to. Patience and perseverance are the magic ingredients that make the difference between her loving loyalty and that of Clytemnestra's

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<sup>32</sup> See "Aegisthus," [CD-ROM] Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

murderous adultery. These virtues tell between successful and failed marriage; between successful and failed parenting. Because, "Love is patient... it always perseveres" (2 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Penelope's persistence has loaded implications for the left-behind spouses: to hang in there though everything seems dark. There is always light at the other end of the tunnel.

### Effects of the War on Telemachus

#### Sample Leading Questions:

1. Why did Telemachus grow up respectful and responsible? Who helped raise him up?
2. What kind of a mother to Telemachus was Penelope?
3. Is having both parents at home important? Why?
4. Do you know of single parent homes where children have grown responsibly?

### DISCUSSION RESOURCE

#### Children can mature in a single-parent home

Studies show that when it comes to imparting value, "not just any parent will do." Michelle Borba writes, "both parents should be actively involved in their kids' lives and [also] emotionally available. Involved fathers, she continues, also "make a major contribution" to raising values-oriented children.<sup>33</sup>

Many children reared by single parents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents suffer from a lack of adult attention and supervision. But not all become part of statistics. Despite the instability of their home lives, many thrive and have grown resilient.

In the house of Odysseus, Penelope becomes the active parent. Loyal servants and heralds also make up that home-unit set-up, where a culture of positive values prevails. In the hands of his persevering mother, exposed to their responsible servants, Telemachus grows up an equally principled citizen.

Dr. Ben Carson, the most celebrated pediatric neurosurgeon used to be a ghetto kid who grew up in a fatherless home. In his second book, *Think Big*, Dr. Carson spells out his philosophy of living, and emphasizes the big influence his mother and many mentors have played in his life.

Telemachus' success story can be a comfort to children of OFW and/or single-parents. Though living with one or other surrogate parents, they can grow into mature and dependable individuals. Close relatives can fill the void left by parents; they can pull themselves

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<sup>33</sup> Michelle Borba, *Building Moral Intelligence*. (CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), \_\_\_\_.

together and impart the same vision and values to their wards, because "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."<sup>34</sup>

Further, this story proves this proverb true: "Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow." Indeed, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up."<sup>35</sup>

### Effects of the War on Odysseus

#### Sample Leading Questions:

1. What incidents show that Odysseus is really committed to his family?
2. What temptations do men usually face? Is it possible to overcome them?
3. What are the consequences of prolonged separation of spouses?
4. Can migrant workers become loyal to their partners? How?
5. What does God say about marriage?

### DISCUSSION RESOURCE

#### **Migrants can overcome temptation with divine help and a strong resolve**

The desire for sexual lust and to have an "affair" is a powerful temptation men face. Unresolved marital tension contributes to a person's readiness for an extra-marital affair. For Odysseus, his entanglement with other women is not conscious and premeditated. True, he had interlude with these women as "unwilling" victim, yet down deep they "could not persuade the heart within [his] breast." Despite his failings, Odysseus' love for Penelope has always been constant. His *Odyssey* gives hope that despite his weakness, he can overcome temptation with divine help and a resolute mind.

To Odysseus, honoring his commitment is more than "doing one's duty," or giving up promises of personal happiness in order to provide happiness for Penelope. He does so because of his respect for family order, which, like hospitality and kindness to strangers is a divine directive in the Greek culture. Unlike Odysseus, Aegisthus (Agamemnon's wife's Clytemnestra's lover, who was killed by Orestes) transgresses this directive "against murder and adultery," and paid for it with his dear life.

God's plan for life is actually simple. The command, "You shall not commit adultery" found in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18 sets a

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<sup>34</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:12

<sup>35</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:9,10

clear boundary. He never approves sexual relationships apart from a solemn commitment and the sanctity of marriage.

"True love always hopes."<sup>36</sup> Odysseus never stops trying because he believes that success is possible. He expects it because as prophesied by Teresias, "he will grow-a man of wealth and ease-Surrounded by people rich, at peace."

Research shows that optimism can inspire people to strive harder. This process is known as self-fulfilling prophecy. It is therefore very important that spouses stay optimistic. Scriptures call this element as faith, and if one possesses one "as small as a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible."<sup>37</sup>

Is there any hope when marital tensions grow and an OFW is tempted that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence? Odysseus' and Penelope's good choice must move frustrated spouses from despair to hope. Something good can happen when spouses hope and try hard to live responsibly, concentrate on their marriage exclusively under God's guidance.

### LEVEL III - LIFE APPLICATION

#### Sample Leading Questions:

1. How can OCWs and single parents overcome temptation?
2. If your father/mother is an OCW, how will you encourage them to keep their long distance relationship endure the temptations they are facing? What will you say?
3. True love always hopes for the best. How?
4. Marriage should be a lifetime commitment. When you see these threatening your family, what's the best thing to do?
5. The blending of the divine and human powers ensured success for Odysseus. Do you see the same in real life problems? Have you witnessed a problem solved by God's divine intervention?

#### Sample Activities:

6. Write an essay on either of these topics:
  - a. How I can keep my future family together
  - b. My Priorities in Life
  - c. My Humble Proposal to Solve the Migration Problem
7. Sponsor a "How Migrant Families Can Keep the Love Alive" seminar in your school with students as speakers, based on a marriage enrichment book.
8. Case Study: A Successful OCW Family. Interview the left-behind family how and why they are able to cope. Report findings in the school paper.
9. Class Project: Writing letters of cheer and encouragement to classmates who are children of migrant workers.

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<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:7

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 17:20

## DISCUSSION RESOURCE

### **Oneness, Permanence and Exclusivity of Marriage**

The most touching scene and suspenseful scene of the epic is the reunion of Odysseus and his wife, Penelope. It is also loaded with beautiful implications on the oneness, permanence and exclusivity of marriage.

Even after he has restored order in his household and was recognized by their servant, Odysseus fails to convince Penelope that it was really him. When she tells Telemachus, "we too shall certainly know one another without questioning," Penelope was saying all couples have a way of knowing each other. After years of adjusting to each other's personalities, they have come to know each other's strengths, weaknesses, and secrets.

Except for another trusted slave, only Odysseus and Penelope share the secret of their bed, which he himself fashioned. One of its posts is the trunk of the olive tree, hence it is impossible to carry it outside their bedroom. When he mentions this "password" Penelope dismisses all doubts that he is indeed, Odysseus, the husband she has waited after twenty long years.

The secret of the bed known only to the couple symbolizes the oneness of Penelope and Odysseus. It is the oneness that God intends for marriage: two persons becoming one in the purpose of love, in hopes and aspirations for each other.

In marriage, oneness becomes "instantaneous and continuous by virtue of divine pronouncement. This oneness is first instituted in the Garden of Eden: "the two shall become one flesh." At the wedding in Cana, Jesus reiterated: "the two shall become one flesh. Immediately after, he adds; "Therefore, what God hath joined together let man not separate."<sup>38</sup> His statement condemns divorce and affirms another attribute of marriage: permanence.

The bedpost that is a rooted tree suggests the immovability of marriage. When Odysseus got incensed that somebody tore the bedstead from its base," he alludes to this truth. Indeed it will only take a "god" to shift his marriage from its proper place.

Sex within the context of marriage is holy and approved of the Divine. When at last they share intimate moments in their room, the Divine, as symbolized by Athena, blesses the reunion by slowing the night and holding back the Dawn. This implies the exclusivity of this most intimate act to married couples, and the reason why God included this safeguard in the Ten Commandments.

### **Divine Power is Indispensable to Success**

Telemachus, Penelope and Odysseus all possess will, conviction and commitment to keep on pressing their goals. But soon they run out

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew 19:5

of steam. Telemachus hides in their shepherd's hut, Penelope cries in her room and sleeps her heartaches away, and Odysseus spends his acute homesickness weeping on the shores.

These show that human will alone is not enough. In the rivers of strife, "you are always rowing upstream, against the strong currents of the devil" who "specializes in broken homes and broken hearts."<sup>39</sup>

After rowing hard, men become tired to get any farther. Just as the friendly gods interfere against the wiles of Poseidon (who hates Odysseus so much) people need a Power greater than that of the devil. His name is Jesus.

God's power goes full when the one reaches the end of his resources, "for his power is made perfect in weakness."<sup>40</sup> This Power is sufficient to crush the many forces of evil. It is enough to save a home being forced to crumble because He delights in making marriages work, in fixing broken hearts and disheartened spirits. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

An aesthetic experience in literature should be a blending of intellectual, emotional and spiritual experience, and should be guided by consecrated teachers who have experiential knowledge of God and His truth, and are steeped in Biblical knowledge. They must also have authentic experiences with the potential of literature to lift readers to a higher, more spiritual plane.

Using a Christian approach, we have drawn parallels between the Greek soldiers and the OCWs, or parents who must go on a mission and leave their families behind. A pattern of optimistic themes were gleaned, as the left-behind family of Odysseus survives, providing hope for single parent homes and families.

Because these insights and conceptual values are told in good-gripping, optimistic stories that reward the wise and good choices the characters make, they advance God's truth as attractive, and acceptable. Because these values have moral moorings in Scriptures, they have become clear and strong.

Christian teachers who allow students to find time to reflect, write and do something about these truth and values, promote a vision of heroism in the heart. For it is a distinctive of Christian education to help form responsible and ethical citizens whose actions and decisions are borne out of strong Christian convictions.

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<sup>39</sup> Gordon Martinborough, *I Love You*, (Manila: Philippine Publishing House, 2000), 122.

<sup>40</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 19:26

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