



Why I Had to Eat the EGG

September 1, 2023

Dear Ministry Partner,

Balut! You're not familiar with this word? I had never heard of balut (pronounced bah-*LOOT*) until I recently encountered it, in a very personal way!

Balut is a food item—but also much more. It's also a sort of “bravery test.” In the Philippines and other parts of the world, consuming balut is a rite of passage, a kind of requirement for being regarded as strong or trustworthy.

Every culture, in fact, has rites of passage. Look at the hazing rituals in military outfits, fraternities and sororities and other groups—sometimes with extreme physical risks. I'm not excusing such rites of passage, and certainly not promoting them. I'm simply acknowledging that they happen in many, many circles.

In my doctoral program, I took a course on “climate and culture in the organization”—a fascinating study of the subcultures that develop in big corporations. It was very much like being back in my earliest missions studies—because missionary training makes you aware of subcultures among the people you're trying to reach.

Every company, large or small—from IBM and AT&T down to your local storefront business—has a certain culture . . . and the larger the organization, the greater number of distinct subcultures will develop. To influence the group, first find the sources of its culture, discover the way the culture behaves, find the patriarchs and influencers and learn “the way we do business.” This discernment is necessary in a company or a church! . . .

. . . and certainly in a new, faraway culture like the Philippines.

In the Philippines, they eat balut! It's essentially a defining line, a rite they enthusiastically employ to “separate the men from the boys.” My balut challenge was served the moment they understood that I wanted to come and minister among them. I determined to participate. After all, missions is an “inside job.” You can't do missions if you stand outside! (*But I'll try to describe balut as delicately as possible, as some will consider it unpleasant! . . .*)

They begin with duck eggs, fertilized and set apart for a certain number of days as the duckling develops inside. Then the egg is boiled.

A member of the group demonstrates for the newcomer—cracking open a small hatch on one end of the egg, removing any stray shell pieces, pouring a little salt into the hatch, and throwing the egg back into his mouth to drink down the liquid. Then he removes more of the shell, all the way to the middle of the egg, and throws it back again to eat the duckling!

The master of ceremonies (our partner in the Philippines), wanting to heighten the drama of the moment, interviewed the demonstrator. How was it? he asked. *It one of my favorites!* the man declared with a big smile. A delicacy! He insisted that balut results in various health benefits too. (Who could resist? Better than snake oil!)



Now, with tension building, the great question was called: *Who has not tried the amazing balut egg? Who wants its great benefits?* I knew every eye was on me. My evaluation card was foremost in their minds. Without a moment's hesitation, I walked quickly to the front. Everyone applauded to encourage me—though no such encouragement was needed. I was committed!

Step by step, I replicated the process according to the example I had witnessed. As I drank, the group applauded again. (Tasted like chicken soup to me!) Then I threw back the duckling. (Tasted like chicken again, with a bit of hard-boiled egg.)

The place exploded with applause and laughter, the energy of celebration! The emcee asked me for my impressions and for my commentary on those who declined the balut. I gave those guys low marks—and the audience roared with approval again.

I know some cultures object to balut on ethical grounds, but I decided there was a lot at stake, and participating in this rite of passage was more than worth it. This simple, odd version of a hard-boiled egg gave me instant credibility with the people of this culture. From the moment I finished, the people in that room were *ready to go plant churches!*

Oh, wait—did I mention where I was? This bizarre scene took place at the Bible Seminary of the Philippines! We were in the middle of our first day of a *church-planting convention*. This was an audience completely comprised of *aspiring church-planters!*

I had to eat that egg for them. They were asking themselves:

*What kind of initiative will this be? What kind of leader did we get?
Is he willing to embrace the Philippine culture at its unique source?
Balut gave them their answer: YES!*

From this moment, they were eager to hear, willing to listen, ready to apply themselves, and energized for the work at hand.

I ALSO ATE THE EGG FOR YOU! This was the best way—perhaps the only way—we could press on at full speed and full strength here. This was a crucial moment in pursuit of our God-given global goal: As we begin work here in Oceania, we will finally be preaching the Gospel and planting churches on *every continent on earth.*

I believe the Lord has led us to the Philippines because here there are 111 million people, only 10 percent of whom are aware of what it means to be born again! Yes, we could have gone to Australia, New Zealand, or Indonesia. But thousands of churches have been planted in Indonesia since the 60s. Australia and New Zealand have had a British evangelical presence for centuries.

The Philippines, meanwhile, is a nation where God's people have a desperate hunger to break out with the Gospel in every direction. They are eager and willing partners. Just since our convention, they're already talking about starting churches in Cebu, to the north; in Greater Manila, in the center of the country; in Mindanao, to the south; and beyond. *They would love to aim for a goal of planting **50,000 churches!***

How could it happen? How could God's people launch such a movement? How could the Church of Jesus Christ here in the United States muster the will, the energy, and the funding for



such a phenomenal enterprise? The answer may surprise you: **We must own up to the reality that *people are going to hell*.**

Maybe not the answer you expected? It's still true. I actually speak these words to myself frequently, in the name of God, on the authority of His Word:

People are going to hell. Act like it! People are going to hell. Live like it!

People are going to hell. Work like it!

We must get an eternal perspective—and respond accordingly.

Yes, together we are making progress beyond anything we have ever seen in church-planting, evangelism, and the training and deployment of local leaders in countries around the world. But *the opportunities that lie ahead are far greater than even those we have already seized*. There are so many still in need of the Good News!

Our partner in the Philippines, the president of the Bible Seminary, is so passionate about the potential for reaching his country that he has placed it at the heart of the vision for his seminary. In fact, if he had to choose, he would rather go on *without* the seminary but *with* the vision of church-planting and evangelism—than to remain *in* the seminary *without* the vision!

Look at what God has accomplished through us over the years—it's thrilling! We see the joy, the hope, the freedom in Christ. But we *have also witnessed ebb and flow*. Many seminaries and ministries around the globe have wavered over the decades. For some, the pandemic was a serious blow, and their ministries have been demoralized and diminished.

It's not just a seminary issue—it's an issue for multitudes of *individuals*. We see that many Christians today have reduced the practice of their faith to the receiving of information in a small window of church attendance once a week. This is turning out to be a tragedy.

God Himself says we should act “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but *encouraging one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25).

Many have lost touch with the crucial importance of *koinonia*, the fellowship of the Body of Christ, and the encouragement that keeps us enthusiastic and strong as we strengthen one another, each of us living as the incarnation of faith and obedience, working for the Lord and for His kingdom.

I attended a revival meeting last Sunday evening. I wondered who might show up—because Sunday evening services have become so rare! We sang old rich hymns that lit up our hearts in the not-too-distant past. We were led to think of the Bible and the role it should be playing in our hearts and lives. Everything in this service was true and biblical.

It made me aware of a great gap that has opened up between today's Church and the God who made us, who saved us, and for whom we ought to be living.

“If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot
From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day,
And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the Lord honorable,
And honor it, desisting from your *own* ways,



From seeking your *own* pleasure
And speaking *your own* word,
Then you will take delight in the Lord,
And **I will make you ride on the heights of the earth.**”

—Isaiah 58:13,14 NASB

There is no caveat, no footnote specifying a “carve-out.” The whole day is the Lord’s. In our culture today, attendance at church has been reduced to Sunday morning. And not even every Sunday morning: Average attendance is just 1.5 Sunday mornings a month! (I’ve heard many justify this by insisting that “we don’t want to be *legalists*.”)

This is not Manny speaking. *God says the day is His*. From sunset the day before to sunset the day of. He made it a commandment—one of the major ten! It’s the fourth commandment, and spelled out in detail (a firm foundation for that prophetic admonition from Isaiah I just shared with you!)—but how seldom have we reread it, really studied it, and taken it to heart? . . .

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.” —Exodus 20:8-11

Of course, many have parted ways with the Ten Commandments entirely. And *how is this working for our country?* I’ve heard the phrase “Broken tablets, broken lives.” The headlines of these past several years are horrible proof of that equation.

Dear partner in the Gospel, let’s go back to all that the Lord is and *all He wants us to be*. Let’s treat Him as holy and walk in His ways. He will make us **ride in the heights of the earth** more than ever before! May the Lord bless you as you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and add all other things to you as He has promised!

With the love of the Lord,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Your gift of love today will help to launch an unprecedented outreach in the Philippines and advance the work of God around the world. Please be as generous as possible. Let me hear from you soon. The fields are white unto harvest! Thank you in advance for your gift of Christ-like compassion to reach the lost with the lifesaving Good News!



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