HISTORY OF THE CBCP

(Source: Pastoral Letters 1945-1995)

Introduction*

I

Best known for the initials CBCP, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is, in its present structure, a creation of the Second Vatican Council. A permanent institution, it is a grouping of the bishops of the Philippines "whereby, according to the norm of law, they jointly exercise certain pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of their territory in view of promoting that greater good which the Church offers to humankind, especially through forms and programs of the apostolate which are fittingly adapted to the circumstances of the time and place" (*CIC*, c. 447). However, it does not, in the exercise of its apostolic and pastoral role, encroach on the autonomy of the individual bishops. In its recently amended constitution (1994), the CBCP specifies the following among its objectives: the promotion of the spirit of solidarity in the Philippine Church; the formulation of joint pastoral policies and programs; the active engagement of the Philippine Church as a body in the pastoral thrusts of the universal Church; and the assumption of responsibilities as evangelizer in its relationship with all peoples in the country, especially the civil authority. Its pastoral policies and programs are implemented through its 23 commissions with the coordination of the resources of the different dioceses. It meets twice a year. Aside from a president, a vice-president, a secretary-general, and a treasurer, it has an Administrative Council which acts on its behalf in between meetings. At present, it has 96 active members who are diocesan bishops or their equivalent in law, coadjutor and auxiliary bishops, and titular bishops who exercise for the entire nation a special office assigned to them by the Apostolic See or by the Episcopal Conference. It has 25 honorary members, who are retired or resigned bishops. Headed by the Most Rev. Oscar V. Cruz, D.D., archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, the CBCP holds offices in a three-storey building at 470 General Luna Street, Intramuros, Manila, and is staffed by 27 priests/religious and more than 82 lay workers.

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In 1995, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines was 50 years old, not many years in terms of the whole life of the universal Church, but sufficient to show its usefulness and relevance to the time and the people it serves, and the degree to which it so far realized its major objectives. It is the purpose of this essay to write the history of the CBCP's 50 years of existence. In writing that history, one has various options. He may follow the traditional historiography in which history is centered on the acts and achievements of its leaders, as is done in most history textbooks. This is "history from above." Or, he may approach it from the decisions arrived at and the actions engaged in by all the bishops and their co-workers. This is "history from below." Or he may even apply an academically biased approach (e.g., Marxist theory of class struggle) to interpret the CBCP history. Nonetheless, I do not intend here to use any of these commonly employed approaches. Rather, in describing the 50 years of its existence, I would like to take into account the ecclesiological framework within which the Conference operated and moved, as well as the changing situation and the diverse historical experiences of the Filipino people which shaped it. In writing this essay, it is my thesis that the major shift in ecclesiological paradigm in the Philippine Church, which entailed changes in theologies, values and orientations, transpired in the Second Vatican Council and that when the CBCP responded to the various challenges posed by the particular situation of the country and the people's experience in a particular period of history, it did so largely within the possibilities of its perception and its ecclesiological framework which admittedly did not always coincide with the paradigm shifts. On the basis of these two considerations, I would like – at the risk of oversimplification – to divide the history of the CBCP into four periods: (a) the period of defensiveness (1945-1965); (b) the period of difficult transition (1966-1975); (c) the period of awakening and prophesying (1976-1986); and (d) the period of renewed vision for the Church and society (1987-1995). Before treating these periods, I would like, first of all, to describe the beginnings of the CBCP.

II

The Beginnings of the CBCP

The origins of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines may be traced to as far back as February 15,1945 when the Apostolic Delegate, Bishop William (Guglielmo) Piani, even as the war was raging, created the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO), with its central office at a remodeled coop at the University of Santo Tomas interment camp. (Eventually, the office was moved to the following addresses in succession: La Consolación College at 260 San Rafael St., Manila, in the same year; 1500 Taft Avenue in 1953; 2472 Taft Avenue in 1955; 2655 F.B. Harrison in 1974; 372 Cabildo St.; and, finally, 470 General Luna St,, Intramuros, in 1983.) Obviously with the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) of the bishops of the United States as his inspiration and model, Msgr. Piani's major objective was "to meet

the war emergency created by the destruction of so many towns." Manila, for example, was the scene of the most destructive land battles in the country. As Gen. Dwight Eisenhower remarked, with the exception of Warsaw (Poland), "this is the worst destruction I have ever seen." Seeing the need of a coordinated effort to aid the stricken populace, Msgr. Piani presented the services of the CWO to General Douglas MacArthur, and the offer was accepted. In charge of the relief work was the Rev. John Hurley, SJ. Its first personnel included lay men and women as well as clerics. During and after the battle of Manila, it sheltered around 10,000 half-naked and starving refugees, acted as important outlet of the PCAU (Philippine Civil Affairs Unit) foodstuff, and sent out burial squads to bury countless corpses. In the first five months of its existence, it distributed food, medicine, clothing, and other relief goods valued at ₱906,030.

On 17 July 1945, all the bishops met in Manila for their first meeting after the Japanese Occupation, and three days after, Msgr. Piani granted their request to place in their hands the direction of the CWO and make it the official organization of the Hierarchy of the Philippines. After the Apostolic Delegate received from the Holy See the proposal and directive to incorporate the CWO, the articles of incorporation were duly registered in the Securities and Exchange Commission in Manila, on 23 January 1946, with 18 incorporators. As stated in the Articles of Incorporation, the purpose of the CWO was "to unify, coordinate, and organize the Catholic people of the Philippines in works of education, social welfare, religious and spiritual aid and other activities." The Board of Directors was composed of Bishops Gabriel Reyes (Cebu), chairman; Constancio Jurgens (Tuguegarao), Mariano Madriaga (Lingayen), Santiago Sancho (Nueva Segovia) and Alfredo Verzosa (Lipa), members. A few years later, a new constitution was approved by the Sacred Consistorial Congregation on 28 June 1952 and took effect on 30 June 1953. Such were the beginnings of the CWO. It was a welfare organization which had no juridical status in the Church. It was financed through regular quota subscription from all the bishops, and partly from the shipping service and, until 1948, the War Relief Services (WRS; renamed Catholic Relief Services [CRS] in 1955). Later on, the quota subscription was made on the basis of the Catholic population in each diocese.

The Period of Defensiveness (1945-1965)

To understand the subsequent history of the CWO until the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, it is to be remembered that with the imposition of the American rule, and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Philippine Church found itself in a new and difficult situation. Quite apart from the destruction of its churches, schools, hospitals and other institutions which was estimated at ₱250,000,000, it continued to be confronted with various enormous problems which were attendant upon the change of colonial master. Aside from the lack of personnel which compounded the problem of poorly instructed Catholics, it suffered from the

dearth of financial resources because the people, though generous in other ways, were slow to contribute to the Church, whose needs were supplied by the Patronato Real for nearly four centuries. It was also faced with the invasion of Protestant missionaries, the anti-religious influence of masonry, the anti-Catholic tendencies of former *pensionados* who studied in US Protestant universities, the anti-clerical Filipino elite who were inheritors of the anti-clerical feeling during the Revolution of 1898, and who held important positions in the government and in business. It suffered, too, from the outcome of the Aglipayan schism. In addition, it came to grips with such American innovations as public school system and the separation of the Church and State. While all this had to do with the inner life of the Church, the bishops were aware of such social problems as social injustice and the revolutionary threat of the influential communist party, *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP), especially when its military arm, the HUKBALAHAP (*Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon*, later renamed *Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan*), became a major political force, and the incursion of the American secular culture and its corresponding values. Given its ecclesiological framework which was largely defined by the ecclesiology of the Council of Trent and baroque theology, it is not surprising that since its foundation until the end of the Second Vatican Council, the CWO for the most part looked inwardly, and was principally concerned with the defense, protection, strengthening and furtherance of the vital interests of the Catholic Church as a social institution and of supernatural values. (During this period of the CBCP history, the body was headed successively by the following archbishops: Gabriel Reyes [1945-1949 / 1950-1952], [later, Cardinal] Rufino Santos [1953-1956], Juan Sison [1957-1960] and [later, Cardinal] Julio Rosales [1961-1965].)

Immediately after the war, the CWO continued to be largely engaged in relief services. When it was made the agency for the War Relief Services (WRS), its 18 bishops and prefects apostolic became the 18 regional directors for the WRS relief, with the parish priests and various congregations seeing to the equitable distribution without racial or religious distinctions. From 1946 through 1948, it distributed relief amounting to ₱4,645,282.95. However, not a few of its services were directed toward the institution itself. For instance, aside from the War Damage Claims services it offered to make possible the war damage payments to the Catholic Church, its churches, rectories and schools, it rendered services in particular legal problems for various bishops and religious orders, and, through its Shipping Department, handled their incoming and outgoing cargoes, inter-island and overseas. Likewise, it took care of a variety of problems of bishops, priests and religious with the Department of Foreign Affairs, Customs, Immigration, Office of the Registrar General, Registrar of Priests and Ministers Division, among others. Its Information Department issued bulletins that were of interest and use to the bishops and the major religious communities.

At the same time, the CWO became the means through which the interests and values of the Catholic Church were defended, protected and furthered. Faced with the

consequences of the separation of Church and State, among them being the lessening of the means by which it could fulfill its teaching mission and influence the people, the CWO fought much for the religious instruction in public schools which was strongly opposed by Masons, anti-Catholic individuals and religious sects, and for the private schools' right to exist. For the bishops, the Catholic schools could help create and support a Catholic order. Largely for the same reason, and to spread the faith under constant attack, it tried to maintain a national weekly, *The Sentinel*, despite the financial burden, until its closure in 1968. Likewise, it had a radio program over DZPI and DZST in Manila and DXMS in Cotabato, even though its original plan, as early as 1949, was to put up its own radio station in order to "guarantee Catholic independence to speak out on any question of morals." The "*Tinig ni Mang Juan*" radio program was instrumental both in the defense of Catholic faith against Masons and other anti-Catholics, and in the return of many to the Catholic fold. With the country under the threat of Communist takeover in the 1950s, the latter two became vehicles through which the Catholic view on Communism was expounded. In the face of indifferent or even anti-Catholic politicians and Masons, it tried to influence elections and the legislature, and mobilized public opinion. For example, it helped rouse public opinion against the efforts to liberalize divorce, introduce unwise sex education in the schools, discriminate European teachers in private school because of their religion, sterilize children of lepers, etc. With not much success, it opposed taxation on religious organizations. And against the corruption of morals, it set up, among others, the Legion of Decency, which later became a commission, to discourage the public from seeing morally objectionable pictures and from patronizing theaters which exhibited indecent films. As can be gleaned from its resolutions and letters, the CWO, of course, tended to confine the problems of morals to issues related to smutty movies, sex and birth control. In 1956, it approved not to admit ballet students to Catholic high schools. Obviously, it then lacked focus on more important moral issues as labor and social justice. And needless to mention, it was hardly ecumenical, either in its pronouncements or in its activities. As already noted, all this reflects the ecclesiology of the period, and illustrates an effort to construct a social order in which faith can be embraced, grow, and thus create a Christian culture.

At times, its battles for the protection of the legitimate interests of the Church and the furtherance of supernatural values became celebrated cases. In 1952, for instance, it was discovered that three top men in the Department of Education, sworn into office to uphold and implement the teaching of religion in public schools, were also sworn in by their masonic affiliation to eliminate it. The CWO handed a letter to the President stating the stand of the Church with regard to the Masonic commitment of the three officials. It availed itself of the services of Atty. Raul Manglapus, Atty. Ambrosio Padilla, Atty. Jose Feria and Atty. Francisco Rodrigo in prosecuting the cause of the Church. The Rizal Bill No. 438 is another case in point. Originally authored by Sen. Claro Recto, the bill, sponsored by Sen. Jose Laurel, proposed to make Rizal's *Noli Me*

Tangere and *El Filibusterismo* compulsory reading in all universities and colleges. The measure ignited a hot controversy, and encountered a determined opposition from the CWO, not to mention the various Catholic organizations led by the Catholic Action of the Philippines (CAP), on the ground that it violated freedom of conscience and religion. The controversy ended with a substitution of a different measure which accommodated the objections of the CWO.

But the concerted voice of the CWO was also communicated to the Catholics and the whole nation at large through its letters and statements. The CWO was almost always able to issue them on issues of national importance. Its opposition to Freemasonry found expression in a joint pastoral letter, issued on 18 and 24 January 1950, on the anti-Catholic book of Rafael Palma, *The Pride of Malay Race*, which tried to prove the Jesuits concerned were liars and the ecclesiastical authorities forgers of Rizal's retraction, and in its statement on Masonry (14 January 1954). Its concern for the threat of Communist takeover can be seen in its pastoral letter on social justice (21 May 1949) and on Communism (15 August 1954). In these letters, the bishops wisely pointed out the social roots of Communism, and criticized the injustices of Capitalism which encouraged the growth of the communist movement; and with the surrender of Luis Taruc showed its opposition to witch-hunt, even though it rejected Communism. That it considered the transmission of Christian truth and values through the schools important in a society that fostered pluralism in religion can be inferred from its letters and statements on Religious Instruction in Public Schools on 18 February 1953, on Catholic Education on 10 April 1955, and on the Religious Instruction Bill on 6 June 1965. The ground for its opposition to the Rizal Bill finds expression in a statement on the two novels on 21 April 1956. And against the corruption of morals, it wrote a pastoral on materialism, its first joint letter to Filipinos after the war. All in all, the CWO issued 39 joint pastoral letters and statements from 1945 to 1965. It may be observed that although these letters and statements were strong when Catholic interests were under attack, in general they tended to dwell on general principles and lacked prophetic slant when it came to particular political and social questions.

It would appear from the foregoing, that the CWO was for the most part concerned with the Church *ad intra*. In fact, its administrative structure lends support to this observation. After eight years of existence, in addition to the agencies under the secretary general (*Sentinel*, Relief, Legion of Decency, and Public Relation Office), it had only three episcopal commissions, which were hardly engaged in *ad extra* issues: Department of Education and Religious Instruction, Department of Catholic and Social Action, and Department of Mission. That, however, is understandable. The ecclesiological framework derived from the theology of the Council of Trent put theological limits to the CWO involvement in the socioeconomic and the political structure of the nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the unrest in agriculture and labor fronts, its involvement in these spheres may be characterized chiefly as social charity or welfare. The importance of the Catholic schools,

orphanages, hospitals and other charitable institutions, like the Catholic Charities which Cardinal Santos founded in 1953, may be viewed from this angle. Indeed, although it wrote letters on social principles (1948) and social justice (1949), the place of these social principles was not yet well integrated into the ecclesiological outlook inherited from Trent. Obviously, the CWO needed some vehicles to translate these principles into the particular situation.

Initially, its work for the socioeconomic aspect of the people's lives was handled by the Social Welfare Department. However, in 1952, the Social Action Department of the CWO was established to promote, on the national level, a sound and effective program of Catholic action in the social field for the reconstruction of the social order in accord with the directives set forth by the popes especially in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. On 13-27 April 1953, the department organized the Priests and Laymen's Institute of Social Action (PLISA) under the auspices of the Ateneo de Manila, and one of the concrete results of the PLISA was the establishment of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) on 8 September 1953, under the leadership of Atty. Jeremias Montemayor. Staunchly anti-Communist, its purpose was the organization of small farmers and tenants for cooperative action in defense of their rights, and promotion of their social welfare. (The Federation of Free Workers [FFW] was organized earlier, but this was not the initiative of the CWO, even though it was inspired by Catholic social teaching, as was Atty. Raul Manglapus' Christian Social Movement [CSM] in 1967.) Even so, the CWO was not very much involved in labor and rural problems of the day, despite the fact that its statements often quoted papal social encyclicals. In 1956, the Organization suffered a setback in its socioeconomic involvement, because after the UST strike by the FFW-affiliated UST Employees Organization, the Catholic Church, in the words of Bishop Lino Gonzaga, "lost much prestige in the labor front." It was not until 1970, and even more strongly in 1976, that the bishops' body would issue a statement on labor rights.

The same ecclesiological framework marked off the lay participation in the social apostolate. Understandably, Pius XI, in his *Ubi arcano Dei* (1922), within the boundaries of a monarchical ecclesiology, defined lay apostolate in terms of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. Still, that cooperation was a major link between the Bellarminian view of the Church which rooted all ministry in the Hierarchy and the consciousness that each Christian had to be a witness to the Gospel in the world. In the Philippines, the lay participation was accomplished through the coordination of various religious organizations on a national scale under the Episcopal Commission on Catholic Action. Their primary objective was to strive, give practical effect, in their respective fields, to the *mandata* of the Hierarchy in accord with the directives of Pius XI. The Catholic Action was represented at both the diocesan and parochial levels: the *Barangay Sang Birhen*, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Legion of Mary, Student Catholic Action, Young Christian Workers, Sodality of Our Lady, etc. At the national level, these were federated into the Catholic Action

of the Philippines (CAP). Aside from such traditional activities as organization of religious celebrations, congresses, and catechesis, these organizations were the frontliners in many rallies, lobbied in Congress, and were engaged in various social activities. The Catholic Action of the Philippines sponsored the first Lay Institute of Social Action (LISA), and held its first post-war convention in 1952. It was not within the province of the lay apostolate to be directly involved in socioeconomic institutions and their activities. And obviously, it was the thinking at that time that if the social order was to be renewed, it would come from the top.

Four outstanding events, which came to pass during this period of the CBCP history, and in which the CWO played a part, may be recalled because, among other reasons, they demonstrated that the Philippine Church, despite the onslaughts against it by the Masons and other anti-Catholics, was vibrant and flourishing. The first one was the convocation of the First Plenary Council of the Philippines in Manila from 7 to 25 January 1953, presided over by Cardinal Norman Thomas Gilroy, archbishop of Sydney (Australia). Its purpose was to bear witness to the Catholic faith of the Filipino people, and to decree such legislations as may be necessary for the preservation, enrichment and propagation of Catholic life. To solve the problems confronted at the time, the Council, no doubt within the Tridentine framework, offered to renew the social order through the renewal of spirit of both clergy and laity. That spirit was to be manifested in the concern for individual salvation and formation of social conscience. And the individual and social energy generated was to be organized in the forms approved by the Church and under the direction of the Hierarchy. The second one was the Marian Congress in Manila, held on 1-5 December 1954, with Cardinal Fernando Quiroga y Palacios, archbishop of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), presiding. It was a grand manifestation of Catholic faith, which culminated in a liturgical celebration, participated in by more than a million Catholics, headed by President Ramon Magsaysay and his family. Then, on 7 October 1961, the Pontificio Collegio-Seminario Filippino, whose cornerstone was laid on 1 August 1959, was finally inaugurated and blessed, so that Filipino seminarians and priests could be trained *sub umbra Petri*. Lastly, the nation observed a six-day celebration of the 4th centenary of the Philippine Christianization in Cebu (27 April – 2 May 1965), graced by Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate to the US, and by most of the Philippine bishops. It saw the birth of the Philippine Mission Society, signifying, among others, that it was now the turn of the Filipinos to spread to other lands the faith they had received.

The Period of Difficult Transition (1966-1975)

When the Second Vatican Council ended in December 1965, it created a paradigm shift in ecclesiology, as noted earlier: from a Church understood mainly as a social institution, the self-understanding moved primarily to a Church as the people of God. The CWO was met by the challenge of the shift, and its corresponding theological and

pastoral implications. The changes brought about by the council were, of course, partly noticed even in the CWO Constitution itself which was revised pursuant to the conciliar decree, *Christus Dominus* (nn. 37-38), and in accordance with the legal specifics provided for by Paul VI's *motu propio*, *Ecclesiæ sanctæ* (I, 41). The revisions chiefly consisted in the altering of the name from CWO to Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and in the reformulation of its purpose which came to read thus: "to study, promote, coordinate in a way corresponding ever more to the needs of the present time the apostolate of the Church in the Philippines." Unlike the CWO, however, the CBCP became a canonical body, a status hardly possible in the pre-conciliar period. Approved by the Sacred Consistorial Congregation on 12 December 1967, the newly amended constitution was filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission on 29 Feb. 1968. (However, since this constitution was *ad quinquennium experimenti gratia*, it was revised and approved in July 1973, and given *recognitio* by the Holy See on 21 May 1974.) The episcopal commissions were augmented: created were the Commission on Seminaries, Commission on Lay Apostolate, Commission on Liturgy, Commission on Family Life, Remuneration and Distribution of the Clergy, and the Commission on Emigration. (From 1966 to 1975, the following were presidents of the Conference: Archbishops Lino Gonzaga [1966-1969], Teopisto Alberto [1970-1973] and Cardinal Julio Rosales, whose term extended to the next, even more difficult, period.)

Admittedly, however, the impact of the conciliar ecclesiology in terms of the collective theological outlook of the bishops was not immediately felt in the years that immediately followed. Like the pre-Vatican II CWO, the CBCP tended to look inwardly, and it would even seem that Bellarmine's institutional model of the Church continued to dominate the greater part of this period, and its mission in society seemed to be premised, at least in the initial stage, still on the social-charity model. In fact, on average, most of the CWO/CBCP decisions were connected with *intra*-Church renewal in accord with the conciliar decrees on liturgy, ecumenism, seminaries, canon law, etc.: others pertain to the CBCP internal affairs, and the promotion of Catholic faith and doctrine (religious instruction, clerical attire, etc.). On this score, the post-1965 episcopal body was much in continuity with the post-war CWO. This is reflected in the subject matter of most of its joint pastoral statements from 1965 to 1971: religious instruction, *Humanæ vitæ*, priestly celibacy, the Holy Father, East Pakistan Refugees, prayer and interior life, etc. The *intra*-Church endeavors saw an important event when Pope Paul VI visited the country on 27-29 November 1970 which the bishops regarded as a reminder of the country's vocation in a new world. A year before, Radio Veritas (Asia), which could be heard as far as Red China (People's Republic of China), was founded.

This is not to say, however, that the CBCP remained on the defensive. Quite the contrary, it slowly changed its focus from defensiveness to awareness of the role of social apostolate in the mission of the Church, as it did not fail to address the

problems of the time, which by 1968 through 1970, especially in the First Quarter Storm, became the issues of rallies, strikes and demonstrations in Metro Manila. Hence, the appropriateness of calling this period (1966-1975) one of difficult transition. The issues during these years of rage were the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the oligarchy and the feudal structure, the IMF-dictated economy, the country's neo-colonial status and the US interference, graft and corruption, compartmentalized justice, and inadequate law implementation, among others. These were given expression in the student slogan, "Down with Feudalism, Fascism and Imperialism." These years saw the resurgence of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and its influence on students was greatly felt in the unprecedented growth of the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) in 1964. Later, a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-oriented group of the CCP was established, and by 1969, the New People's Army (NPA) was already attracting adherents to its program to change the society by revolution. But while some sectors of society opted for radical change, others preferred social and political reforms.

The CBCP was not without social awareness, and it stood for the amelioration of the socioeconomic order. Indeed, at this stage the Conference, in its letters and statements, showed a better contextualization of Christian principles. Already on 8 January 1967, it issued a pastoral letter on social action and development in which it emphasized, among others, the mission of the Church in the temporal order, the relationship between evangelization and development, and, in particular, the rights of workers. In answer to the request of the PISA (Priests' Institute of Social Action) participants, the CBCP created the NASSA (National Secretariat for Social Action) which served as secretariat of the Commission on Social Action. In the same year, it organized the National Congress on Rural Development (4-11 February) to promote a genuine awareness of the socioeconomic problems. A popular slogan at this time was "The Church Goes To The Barrio" – quite a significant development in a Church structure which was *población*-centered and organization-oriented. The congress was followed up by a pastoral letter on social awareness (1 May 1968). In its statement on bishops and moral leadership on 5 July 1969, it affirmed that the mission of the Church included the concern for man's bodily and temporal welfare, though "her mission is a work of mercy and love." Acting on the suggestion of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, it decided in 1967 to adopt the Commission on Social Action as its counterpart of the pontifical commission. Priests were trained to head the Social Action Centers in different dioceses. The following year (1 May), which Pres. Marcos himself declared as "Social Action Year," it put out a pastoral letter on social action in which it affirmed the role of the Church in creating a more just social order. It appears, then, that in the late 1960s the CBCP saw non-conflictual development (cooperatives, credit unions, farm-goods subsidy, social insurance for farmers and fishermen, self-help projects, etc.) as its new and relevant form of social involvement. It is probably from this perspective and from the particular ecclesiology

it presupposed that one is to interpret the CBCP's response to the statement of the Divine Word Junior Clergy Conference (16 May 1969), calling on the Hierarchy to respond to the critical social situation. It must be acknowledged, however, that the development model was a remarkable step from that of social charity.

It is within the familiar framework that the Conference addressed political and government-related issues and problems. Then, by 1970, student and peasant demonstrations became more frequent, and the CBCP was at first concerned with the demonstrations themselves and the analysis of their tactics. It detected in them the dangers of Communism, and defended the Church against the accusation that it was rich. It proposed dialogue between teachers and the youth, establishment of recreation and training programs for the youth, even recommending the holding of a congress for the purpose. When the issues raised in these rallies and demonstrations led to an urgent call for a Constitutional Convention in the hope that a new fundamental law would provide new principles and provisions for solving the national crisis, the CBCP, on 25 Jan 1970, appealed to Congress for a non-partisan convention. In preparation for this convention, the Conference agreed to deliver talks and sermons about this political exercise, cooperate with other groups for honest and free elections, hold convention of priests on the subject, and allow clerics to run as candidates. It may be noted that the bishops exerted much effort and worked hard so that provisions on religious instruction and tax exemption of Church properties be included in the proposed Constitution. Six months later, as the violence in the country escalated, it issued a letter on civic responsibility, denouncing what it perceived as the evils of society, and asking citizens to participate conscientiously in the political life of the nation. Avowedly, however, there were progressive members of the CBCP who perceived that more than social charity and development were needed to restructure the Philippine society and thus solve the social ferment. Though these were a minority, this nonetheless indicates that the CBCP was being caught up in the difficult transition from the old to the new ecclesiological paradigm.

But to what extent the paradigm shift in Church's understanding of itself and its mission after the Second Vatican Council impacted on the collective ecclesiological outlook of the CBCP is probably nowhere shown more clearly than during the years of the Marcosian regime from 1972 to 1986. Ostensibly declared on 21 September 1972 to save the Republic from Communism, the oligarchy and the Muslim rebellion, and to reform the society by a "revolution from the center," martial law – despite its grandiose rhetoric – eventually showed its true colors: with the democratic institutions dismantled, Marcos acquired almost unlimited concentrated state powers clothed with a veneer of legality by the 1973 Constitution, curtailed the freedoms of the media, revoked the writ of *habeas corpus*, forbade assembly, strike and mass action, legalized arbitrary arrest and detention, engaged in disinformation, and gave the military almost unlimited authority. In the process, thousands of oppositionists and suspected "subversives" were jailed (around 70,000 by 1977), a climate of surveillance and fear

prevailed, and a sense of powerlessness engulfed most people. With US support, he beefed up the military to more than 150,000 in 6 years, to more than 150,000 in 6 years, and to more than 275,000 in 8 years, and flung open wide the country to the world market. A new oligarchy began replacing the old one. The economy deteriorated, and the foreign debt, which amounted to only $600 million when Marcos became president, ballooned from $2.2 billion in 1972 to around $28 billion at the end of his regime. The poor became poorer, and violation of human rights was almost pandemic. In the face of these realities that altered the people's lives, the CBCP met head on with a new challenge which almost eclipsed many side but grave issues.

In general, it may be said that the responses of the CBCP to the challenges under the new dispensation underwent uneven development, and were not always homogeneous. Five days after the declaration of martial law, its Administrative Council made public a letter recognizing the right and duty of civil authorities to take appropriate steps to protect the sovereignty and assure peace and security of the nation, and asking martial law implementors to exercise prudence and restraint and respect human dignity, and the people to be calm and law-abiding under the new political realities (26 September). But despite the uneasiness of a number of bishops, and despite such important issues affecting the nation as the abolition of Congress and the Referendum of 1973 through National Assemblies, and despite the appalling realities brought about by the new order, the CBCP was generally silent in the first five months, nay, in the first three years of the martial law regime (1972-1975). Of course, in its first plenary meeting in 1973, the bishops agreed to organize a CBCP liaison group with the government, but then the issues were *intra*-Church: radio stations closed, Catholic schools, Chinese priests' integration with Philippine society, and cases of priests having difficulties with martial law. This concern for the interest of the institutional Church is reflected in its various decisions. In the same year, it made a stand on contraception vis-à-vis the government policy, and condemned sterilization which a decree of Marcos' made officially acceptable. Late in the year, as a result of the Church's protest against military actions on Church property and personnel, a Church-Military Liaison Committee (CMLC), which, among other tasks, monitored arrests, detentions, and subversive activities, was established, with the Citizens' Committee on Justice and Peace at the local level as counterpart. And also, the CBCP petitioned the reopening of the closed radio stations. Thus, apart from a few cases, like the putting up of a fund for the families of detainees, most decisions which touched on the martial regime were relative to the defense and protection of the Church's vital, legitimate interests.

The same may be said of most of its joint statements and pastoral letters. During these three martial-law years, most of them never had the major problems spawned by the regime as primary focus: Statement on Drug Abuse (1972), Pastoral Letter to the Priests of the Philippines (1973), Pastoral letter on the Population Problem and Family Life (1973), Moral Norms for Catholic Hospitals and Catholics in Health Services

(1973), Lenten Pastoral Letter on Alay Kapwa (1975), and *Ang Mahal Na Birhen*: Mary in the Philippine Life Today (1975). These are rather numerous when compared to those directly related to martial law. But even these latter were very circumspect and, when viewed against such grim realities as arbitrary arrests, mysterious disappearances, and torture of prisoners, which martial law continued to leave in its wake, mild. For instance, its joint statement on evangelization and development, issued on 25 July 1973, among others, accepted the goals of the new society, though it cautioned against their pursuance at the cost of dignity and freedom. The same may be said of its 31 January 1975 statement on the referendum of 27 February 1975, although with reference to conscientious objectors, it managed to quote St. Thomas More's dictum, "We are the King's good servant, but God's first." It would seem, then, that during the first three years, the CBCP as a whole did not condemn martial law; but it did not make any endorsement, either. At least it may be safely said that the majority of the bishops did not want to court the antagonism of the Marcosian regime. At the same time, the silence gives evidence of disunity within the Conference. Later, as was bound to happen, a fissure in the already strained relationship between the Church and the government occurred in the aftermath of the military raid of the Sacred Heart Novitiate in Novaliches on 24 August 1974.

The Period of Awakening and Prophesying (1976-1986)

To be sure, the authoritarian regime was a novel experience to the CBCP, and if from 1972 to 1975, its statements and letters were moderately tame in face of a worsening, greatly reshaped socioeconomic and political situation, it was not simply because they were compromise documents, but, to view them more deeply, more because of the different ecclesiological frameworks and their corresponding pastoral implications, within which the bishops approached the issue of martial law. Some chose to support it ("the conservatives"), others preferred to collaborate with it critically ("the moderates"), still others rejected it ("the progressives"). That this was so can be argued from the statements of the individual bishops. But these different ecclesiological approaches came to a head in 1976. (The first CBCP president during these difficult years was Cardinal Julio Rosales; he was succeeded in 1977 by Cardinal Jaime Sin [1977-1981], Archbishop Antonio Mabutas [1981-1985] and Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, who assumed office in 1985). It would seem that serious impact was being made by the ecclesiology or, more accurately, ecclesiologies which developed after the Second Vatican Council, especially those enshrined in such documents as *Populorum progressio* (1967), the Medellín (1968), which gave birth to the Theologies of Liberation, *Octagesima Adveniens* (1971), *De Iustitia in Mundo* (1971), and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). In a deeper sense, this largely explains the different, sometimes conflicting, statements of the individual bishops and the two controversies that year. The first one, in which the Administrative Council was rumored to have had a deal with Malacañang, was triggered by the deportation of two PIME missionaries. The other was occasioned by

a statement of the Administrative Council (28 September 1976) which urged citizens to vote in the referendum as a moral obligation, and which was thought to be in contradiction to "A Declaration for Human Dignity at the Polls" signed by 14 bishops. The latter called the referendum "a vicious farce." The right of the Administrative Council to issue the statement was questioned by 12 bishops on 6 October 1976. These conflicting ecclesiologies were later exemplified in "*Ut omnes unum sint*," a letter of 4 November signed by 17 "progressive" bishops as a response to the joint letter of Cardinal Sebastian Baggio of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Cardinal Eduardo Pironio of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. What the letter pointed out was hardly reconcilable with the content of "*Et veritas liberavit vos*," a letter written by two "conservative" archbishops the following month. (The rift, it may be conjectured, was not lost to Marcos who, after the massive boycott in the 16 October referendum, retaliated against the Church by deportation, raid, closure of radio stations and publications, as well as arrest and detention of lay workers.) Chiefly for this reason, the January 1977 meeting of the CBCP was preceded by a colloquium which brought to conclusion the bishops' thinking on the Church's involvement under the martial law regime.

From 1977 to 1982, the CBCP became more united and its collective approach to the challenge of martial law is best described by Cardinal Jaime Sin's policy, namely, "critical collaboration," although, in the light of the bishops' letters and statements, it was largely more critical and prophetic than collaborative. Even though at this point in time it did not yet question the legitimacy of the regime, the CBCP, no doubt, was in touch with the concrete historical experience and the aspiration of the common people. At the same time, it became obvious that in its understanding of the role of the Church in the socioeconomic and political order, it was not only development but, more accurately, it was integral liberation, and the CBCP became more committed to it. Its statement of its mission in the January 1977 pastoral letter, "The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Gospel," deserves to be quoted: "This is EVANGELIZATION: the proclamation, above all, of SALVATION from sin; the LIBERATION from everything oppressive to man: the DEVELOPMENT of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian: and, ultimately, the RENEWAL OF SOCIETY in all its strata through the interplay of the GOSPEL TRUTHS and man's concrete TOTAL LIFE (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 9, 29). THIS IS OUR TASK. THIS IS OUR MISSION." This shift to the liberationist understanding of ecclesiastical mission can be noted even in the themes of Alay Kapwa in the early 1980s: "Communal Action Toward Human Liberation" (1980), "Beyond Poverty into Total Liberation" (1981), and "People's Participation, a Way to Total Human Liberation" (1982).

This, to be sure, constitutes a significant advance from the cooperative and development thrust in the late 1960s. But in this January 1977 pastoral letter, the CBCP sharply criticized the government population program, the treatment of national minorities, the handling of the Mindanao situation, the harassment of basic

ecclesial communities and the disregard for the human rights of evangelization workers. And it is not without significance that the Conference viewed the establishment of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), which the military perceived as part of the alleged attempt by the radical clergy to build a revolutionary base, as springing from the mandate of the Church's mission. For all the harassment and the efforts to suppress them, it held the lay workers essential in the implementation of that mission. This teaching marks a change from the pre-conciliar one in which lay apostolate was understood to have been derived from the *mandata* of the Hierarchy. (This would become more fully developed in the next period, especially in the Second Plenary Council which fostered "the empowerment of the laity" and promoted the BECs as a way of being Church.) Clearly, as a body, the CBCP awakened to its mission of liberation and assumed the role of "a prophet to the nation." The year 1977 may then be considered a turning point in the CBCP history. Henceforth, the Conference no longer engaged in generalities with regard to political problems; it did not remain at the level of pronouncing principles, as it did for instance in 1969. Instead, it courageously made moral judgment, denouncing the excesses of the regime. As the socioeconomic and political situation continued to deteriorate, and as militarization and repression intensified, the CBCP came out with a pastoral letter, "Exhortation Against Violence," on 7 October 1979 to stress that the escalating violence in the country had its roots in the unjust structure of society, and that it could be stopped by putting peace with justice to the same structure. Marcos lifted martial law in 1981, but this was merely a cosmetic (it was most likely timed for Pope John Paul II's first pastoral visit to the country on 17-22 February when Lorenzo Ruiz, the Filipino protomartyr in Japan, was beatified at the Rizal Park), for the dictatorial effects were well in place. In fact, the following year was a bad one for the Church, for it endured not just threats to its legitimate interests, like the campaign to legalize divorce in 1976 or the threat to tax Church-owned schools and hospitals, but what amounted to Church persecution: arrests and detention of priests (more than 50 of them by 1976), layworkers, and activists; raids of institutions; attempts at infiltration; accusation of communist infiltration in the Church; trial by publicity in the media, etc. In other words, the CBCP was now paying the price for prophesying.

By 1983, the year in which many Filipinos (cause-oriented, mass-based, party-based, etc.), as a result of the tarmac incident, were mobilized in the struggle for freedom and justice, the CBCP understandably became even more prophetic and scathingly critical of the martial law regime. And it may be conjectured that the Pope's sociopolitical messages during his visit two years ago could have emboldened the bishops in their concern for the construction of an alternative vision of society. In fact, the CBCP's posture, as it finally turned out in 1986, was on collision course with that of Marcos' "Constitutional Authoritarianism." The Conference was not only, as it were, marching with the people; it was leading them on the march, and it did so credibly. The Church – and probably no other – was looked up to as the bastion of hope. No doubt, the

collective ecclesiological outlook of the CBCP was liberationist, and the understanding of its role in the socioeconomic and political order became even more defined. Indeed, it called for the transformation not only of individuals but also of societal structures as part of integral liberation. In the final result, what was under criticism was not simply the individual acts of martial law; the whole structure of dictatorship itself stood under severe criticism. It is not insignificant that from 1983 through 1986, all its joint pastoral letters and statements, except for its statements on biblical apostolate (February 1985) and on the Marian Year (1 February and 6 August 1985), had direct reference to martial law and the major problems it engendered. Not surprisingly, then, the CBCP-Government relationship became increasingly strained.

Thus, on 20 February 1983, it made the first of its strongest indictments against the Marcosian regime in the pastoral letter, "Dialogue for Peace," even though it was meant as a call to restructure society in accordance with God's plan. It amounted to an exposé of problems (arrest and detention, disregard for due process, torture, etc.) which have their origins in poverty, anti-people economic program, economic corruption, and unjust laws. It took a clear preferential option for the poor, supporting them in their assertion of dignity and defense of rights. The letter was followed up by the CBCP's "Pastoral Guidelines for Priests, Religious and Lay Workers in the Task of Social Justice." As a result of the pastoral letter, Marcos asked the bishops to join him in his development programs, but the bishops made it known that reform of structure was what was in their mind. In the same year, the CBCP withdrew its membership from the Church-Military Liason Committee because of an apparent pattern of government pressure on Church people, especially priests and BEC workers, and activities. With his authority slipping off, Marcos instituted the PCO (Presidential Commitment Order) by means of a decree, which enabled the military to arrest arbitrarily and detain indefinitely. On 7 August, the CBCP, in its message to the people on the exercise of PCO, passed a moral judgment on the presidential decree, calling it, along with its implementation, immoral. (To forestall the reading of this letter in the pulpit, Marcos announced the abolition of the PCO, and hoodwinked the bishops by replacing it with the Presidential Detention Action [PDA] which was scarcely any different in substance.) The second half of 1983 was marked by a worsening of political, economic and social conditions, including the erosion of the government's credibility, precipitated by the assassination of Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr. With the country on the brink of chaos and anarchy, the CBCP issued a statement of reconciliation on 27 November, calling for a social transformation – transformation of unjust structures and individuals – required by authentic reconciliation with God and with one another as an alternative to the continuance of the present injustice and violence.

Late in the year, the CBCP Administrative Council (28 December) decided to issue a statement on the forthcoming plebiscite on the constitutional amendment restating the office of the vice-president, and the Batasan elections in May 1984. Published on 8

January 1984, it did not fail to mention, among others, the right not to participate in political exercises which citizens consider contrary to their conscience. In terms of political outlook, this is a clear indication of the acceptance of pluralism which the CBCP now recognized as a right. The CBCP itself decided to support the NAMFREL (National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections) in their efforts to oversee the polling and the canvassing of ballots. Meanwhile, the national situation continued to turn for the worst: people were being "salvaged" both by the Left and by the Right: the foreign debt increased to $24 billion; the peso depreciated very much and the economy, already known as "crony capitalism," was almost bankrupt; the military became a new source of political patronage. Marcos revived the "secret marshals" who were virtually licensed to kill; and he continued to exercise martial law powers through the notorious Amendment 6. At the same time, the "parliament of the streets" became a formidable force, while the forces of the Left were – it was believed – about to reach a stalemate. It is against this background that on 11 July, the CBCP published a letter, drafted as early as January, on the sacredness of human life and its defense: "Let There Be Life." It called for a revamp of the entire economic and political structure and, in particular, severely criticized the institution of secret marshals (which Marcos later disbanded), the Amendment 6 whose repeal it demanded, and the economy, whose crisis, according to the bishops, could be solved if, in the first place, confidence in the government were restored.

The following year, the CBCP did not issue any pastoral letter or statement which had direct bearing on politics, except the one on terrorism (8 July). In this letter, the CBCP denounced the murder of those dedicated to the service of others, the execution of civilians suspected of collaboration with the Left, the use of cultists in counter-insurgency campaign, and urged the reorganization, if not the dismantlement, of the paramilitary Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF). Early in the year, it released a joint pastoral letter on biblical apostolate (February) and two others on the occasion of the observance of the Marian Year (February and Aug. 6). But the ever deteriorating situation was not far from their minds. In their January meeting, they held a brainstorming on the national problems and searched for positive action regarding them. They discussed such issues as the question of Communism (faith and ideology), violence and non-violence, and such specific questions as the US bases, the Bataan nuclear plant, social justice and social development. The CBCP committed itself to a free, clean and honest election and to support NAMFREL in its work to achieve the goal.

The climax of the CBCP's involvement and commitment during the Marcosian years came in 1986. When Marcos, faced with a deteriorating situation, an expanding credible political opposition and, under strong American pressure, called for a snap election in late 1985 to give him a fresh presidential mandate, the CBCP took up the issue in their January meeting and on 26 January issued the joint pastoral letter, "We Must Obey God Rather Than Men." Having stated that elections could become a

great scandal and an offense against God, or an event of conversion and national renewal, it urged that the forces of evil bent on frustrating the people's will should not make them succumb to cynicism, and in the conflict of interests and loyalties, it reminded them to let God's will prevail. It assured them that the bishops stood with them. Elections were held on 7 February, and as they bishops feared, the fraud and deception were systematic and of incredible proportion. The NAMFREL tally showed Aquino leading by a large margin, but the COMELEC (Commission on Elections) tabulation had Marcos coming ahead. Eventually, the COMELEC computer operators walked out to protest the discrepancy between the input and the COMELEC count. On 12 February, the Batasang Pambansa, which was dominated by the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), declared Marcos winner. The following day, the Bishops drafted a post-election statement and issued it to the public on 15 February. The unprecedented statement labeled the elections as unparalleled in fraudulence, and virtually accused Marcos of criminally using power to thwart the people's sovereign will. In its strongest condemnation of the Marcos dictatorship, it declared that "a government that assumes or retains power through fraudulent means has no moral basis." And in an action without precedence in the history of bishops' conferences, it called for a peaceful, non-violent and systematic struggle to correct the wrong. The pastoral statement proved to be historic. In a few days, "People Power" was brought forth and the EDSA Revolution was born. Marcos was dislodged, his regime collapsed. Clearly, quite aside from displaying its faith in the power of prayer, the CBCP stood as a moral leader of the people, showing itself as champion of democratic principles. And its celebrated statement became a catalyst of non-violent revolution.

With Marcos gone, the CBCP assumed the role, it may be said, of a moral and spiritual leader and guide in the direction which efforts at social transformation had to take. No doubt, its ecclesiological outlook remained one of integral liberation, and though it continued its policy of critical collaboration under the Aquino government, this time the emphasis was on collaboration. On the whole, it would seem that the CBCP was supportive of the Aquino administration, probably because it had high hopes that it would be instrumental in the renewal of the social order and in the establishment of a more lasting peace. Of course, there is little doubt that the bishops had some influence on President Aquino. She appointed to the Constitutional Commission four people easily identified with the Church. Such provisions in the Constitution as the primacy of family, the prohibition of abortion and divorce, and religious instruction in public schools were indicative of the moral influence of the CBCP. Understandably, with its pro-life, pro-poor and pro-Filipino provisions which are consonant with authentic human values, it was not surprising that the CBCP, after much discussion in a meeting to which some members of the Constitutional Commission were invited to speak, opted in its letter "Covenant Toward Peace" on 21 November 1986, for the ratification of the proposed constitution.

The Period of Renewal of Vision for the Church and Society (1987-1995)

This period after the EDSA Revolution was one of hope and expectations. (The archbishops who served the CBCP as presidents during this period were Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, whose term ended in 1987, Leonardo Legaspi [1987-1991] and Carmelo Morelos [1991-1995].) Since the sociopolitical situation has changed, it appeared to the bishops that an opportune time had come to renew the local Church. As already noted, a paradigm shift in ecclesiology took place in the Second Vatican Council, and while its effects gradually influenced and eventually altered the collective thinking of the bishops, there was a need to exteriorize the implications of the shift in terms of the theological thinking and aspiration of the people (hitherto hardly influenced by the shift) and the pastoral programs of the local Church which, with the increase in the number of ecclesiastical territories and population, had become even more complex and problematic. While the CBCP understood the Church as the People of God, and its mission as integral liberation, yet the implications of this understanding had yet to be enshrined in a clear and coherent vision and made concrete in a comprehensive pastoral program for the Philippine Church. In view of all this, the CBCP approved in January 1988 to hold a plenary council which, it may be noted, had been broached as early as 1981, and suggested by the Nuncio in 1984. Work immediately began, and the preliminary phase having been completed in three years, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) was finally celebrated at the San Carlos Formation Complex (in Makati) from 20 January to 17 February 1991, presided over by Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, OP, CBCP president, and participated in by a total of 479 delegates (96 bishops, 181 priests, 21 major religious superiors, 12 presidents or rectors of Catholic universities, 24 rectors or deans of seminaries and 146 lay faithful). The decrees of the PCP-II were given *recognitio* by the Holy See on 25 April 1992, and promulgated at the Cathedral-Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Manila on 22 July. Without exaggeration, and without deprecating other important ones, the council may be recognized as the greatest ecclesial event in the CBCP's 50 years of existence.

Basically, what the Council did was to define what the Philippine Church ought to be in the light of the Vatican II and the post-conciliar theologies and ecclesial praxis vis-à-vis the contemporary historical experience of the Filipino people. In its final document, the Council envisions a Church which is a community of disciples, in which there is unity in diversity, equality in dignity and participation; a Church which is at the same time a community-in-mission: a Church of the poor which finds expression in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Its mission is integral evangelization, which involves the salvation of the total human person and the liberation and transformation of society. Evidently, this is far cry from the institutional understanding of the Church (presupposed in the first years of the CWO/CBCP) whose mission is the salvation of the soul by means of grace, word and sacrament. (In the Philippines, Word was not stressed in view of the Protestant polemics, and

sacraments were so underlined that the ecclesiology produced Catholics who were sacramentalized but little evangelized.) However, this vision of the Church needed some decisive steps toward actualization. Hence, the CBCP resolved to implement the Council's mandate for a National Pastoral Plan. On 11 July 1993, it gave its official approval to the draft. At long last, after so many years, the Philippine Church has a national pastoral plan! The present challenge to the Conference is to see to it that the plan is implemented through a pastoral management and administrative policies and system that will operate from the top down to the smallest ecclesial communities in the different parishes, from Batanes to Jolo. So far, the most significant move taken – at the national level – by the CBCP in the implementation of the national pastoral plan was the publication of the final draft of the *Catholic Faith Catechism* (CFC) by the Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE) in 1994. Though it is basically a follow-up volume to *Maturing in Christian Faith*, the National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines, which the Vatican approved in 1984, it is greatly enriched by the Acts and Decrees of the PCP-II and the Catholic Church's universal catechism. Firmly grounded in Scriptures and Catholic teaching, it addresses itself to the Filipino context.

Though the council was the most significant event in this period, yet the CBCP's vision for renewal was not confined to the Church. As can also be seen in its *ad extra* statements and activities, the Conference so exercised its pastoral ministry with the end in view of helping construct an integrally developed and liberated Philippine society. (Of course, the effectiveness of this prophetic ministry ultimately depends on the people's ability to listen and respond, although this does not excuse the body of bishops from formulating vehicles to help make consequential impact.) By 1987, the formal trappings of a democratic government were restored. But despite the hope that a new political society would emerged from the EDSA Revolution, it became clear that the substance of democracy remained in the air. Power, political and economic, remained in the hands of a few elite. Hopes were turning into disappointment, and the features of the old society were back. No wonder, the CBCP, conscious of its mission in the sociopolitical order, was critical of the post-EDSA administrations. For example, the realization that corruption still remained, involving even high government officials, occasioned the pastoral letter, "Thou Shalt Not Steal," on 11 July 1989. The letter considered graft and corruption a sin that is hateful before God because it steals money from the already poor. It suggested the formation of multi-sectoral anti-graft councils across the nation to monitor the use of public funds and muster public opinion in the hope that a massive, persistent campaign would discourage the practice. On 24 July 1992, it opposed the Ramos administration's move at restoring the death penalty and, instead, proposed that the President does something to the ground which breeds criminality (poverty, defects in law enforcement, justice and penal systems, presence of scalawags in uniform). In its pastoral statement on kidnapping (25 January 1993), it appealed to the Philippine

National Police (PNP) and the Military to cleanse their ranks of kidnapper accomplices or masterminds. Of no less importance, it called for a thorough review of the Republic Act 7716 in a statement on taxation and expanded value-added tax (EVAT), questioning whether the law merely strengthened the tax structure's bias against the poor (10 July 1994).

Of course, as can be substantiated from their letters and statements, it appears to the bishops that the transformation of society requires more than a change of leaders and the elimination of corrupt officials. First and foremost, it demands structural changes and is fundamentally a work of justice in which the community participates and cooperates. Hence, on 26 January 1987, it addressed the issue of peace process, and stressed that only non-violence is consistent with Gospel values. It advocated land reform, denounced political extremists, condemned atheistic Communism and liberal Capitalism, and encouraged dialogue. In its efforts to help transform the economic disarrangement, the bishops reiterated the call for a comprehensive and effective land reform program in their exhortation on 14 July, "Thirsting for Justice." It is the landless, the exploited, the disadvantaged and the powerless who have the single most urgent claim on the conscience of the nation, the bishops said. (Eight days later, President Aquino signed Proclamation 131 and Executive Order No. 229 which dealt with the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program [CARP]. The document, however, proved to be far removed from what the CBCP had envisioned.) When the putschists attempted a *coup d'état* on 28 August 1987, which dealt a serious blow to the government stability, 17 bishops, headed by Cardinals Ricardo Vidal and Jaime Sin, made a statement of support to the Aquino government the following day. And on 31 January 1990, in the pastoral letter "Seek Peace, Pursue It," it likewise condemned the attempted December 1989 *coup d'état* – the bloodiest, costliest and most serious one – as immoral and unjust usurpation of power.

To be sure, the attainment of a transformed, really peaceful society not only presupposes structural change. It also requires the participation of the governed in the peace process, and the cooperation of the Rightists. Of no less importance, it cannot dispense, even if they had been sharply divided and reportedly reduced from the estimated peak of 25,000 in 1986 to 8,000 in 1994, with the support of the Left, specifically in the effort to put an end to their two-decade struggle. Dialogue with the CPP-NDF is essential. When, in 1992, President Fidel Ramos organized the National Unification Commission (NUC) to make contacts with the Left, the CBCP encouraged the move, and in 25 January 1993, it published a pastoral letter on peace building whose purpose, among others, was to enjoin people to participate in the peace process, directly or indirectly. This was followed by another letter, "Peace in Our Times," in which the Conference expounded the meaning of real peace. Indeed, as early as Jan. 1992, the CBCP acceded to the request of the National Peace Conference (NPC) to head a delegation which would meet with the CPP-NDF representatives, either in Hongkong or in Switzerland, to discuss proposals for a

dialogue. But it may not be forgotten that despite its effort to enlist them to the peace process, the CBCP never recoiled from criticizing the Left (even as its criticism applies to the military as well) on various occasions, as in its statement on the manipulative use of human rights violations on 11 July 1989.

If the CBCP lodged criticisms such as these, it was therefore part of its effort at helping the people (including the administration, and the oppositionists) make concrete its image of a renewed sociopolitical order. It is for the sake of this renewal that it gave much importance to the holding of truly democratic, peaceful and clean elections in which citizens must be truly involved. In its "Pastoral Letter on Preparing for the 1992 Elections" on 22 July 1991, it pointed to the wastage of the nation's resources and the perversion of democratic principles in the disservice done by individuals unworthy of the office, and hence the need for education of voters. Thus, in its desire to strengthen the democratic ethos, widen the horizons of peace and unity among the people, it issued "Renewing the Political Order" on 28 November 1991 – a pastoral guideline on choosing candidates for the 11 May 1992 elections. It is noteworthy that among the desirable qualifications of candidates that the letter enumerated were *maka-Diyos*, spirit of service, vigorous defender and promoter of justice and an enduring and preferential option for the poor – qualifications which are consonant with integral development and liberation. And on 31 January 1992, it produced another letter, "Decision at the Crossroads," appealing to the people to set priorities aright: honor and dignity before money, service before power, common good before self-interest, the nation before *utang na loob*. The following year, it decided to recognize and encourage the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV). In all this, the CBCP asked the people to take seriously their participation in the political process by various means. It reiterated this point in its statement "Election 1995 – A Challenge to the Young" (16 January 1995). The CBCP was active in the elections through NASSA's Votecare (Voters' Organization – Training and Education for Clean, Authentic and Responsible Elections) program in all the 79 dioceses, with more than 250,000 volunteers.

Of no less importance, the idea of concretizing the vision of an integrally liberated society helps explain why in the Post-EDSA situation, the CBCP, in a prophetic manner not possible within a different ecclesiological outlook, addressed itself to various issues of national importance: devastation of nature, overseas contract workers, foreign debt, oil prices, etc. For instance, having observed the devastation of natural resources, which has to do with the inequality of the social structure, it drew up the letter, "What Is Happening To Our Beautiful Land?" on 29 January 1988 – probably the first one on ecology ever to be written by an episcopal conference in world history. In protest of the inhumanity, abuse and exploitation of overseas workers, whose migration is rooted in the poverty of the people, it asked the government to take effective measure to safeguard the rights of Filipino expatriates, and appealed to all for economic recovery so Filipinos would not be forced to leave

the country. In 1990, it recommended that a desk for pastoral care of migrants and their families be set up in the diocesan social action centers. On the occasion of the funeral of Flor Contemplacion – a Filipina domestic helper in Singapore who, it was widely held, was unjustly meted out with death penalty – a few weeks before the 1995 elections, it repeated its appeal to the government to provide the overseas workers protection, which should take precedence over potential economic gains. Even its rather long pastoral letter on the Eucharist, "To Live in Memory of Him: One Body, One People" (21 March 1988), does not fail to allude to integral human liberation: "we desire to become eucharistic communities active in the defense and promotion of the downtrodden, ready and willing to give of ourselves eucharistically to others, struggling in the building of a just, peaceful and loving society." The same may be said of the bishops' view on the country's foreign debt which reached $28 billion despite the high percentage of the budget allocated for debt servicing, weighing heavily on the people and which constituted a humongous obstacle to economic recovery. Of course, the CBCP, through the Permanent Council, offered no solution in its statement on 10 September 1990, but it asked the government to consider the debt crisis within the context of the ethics of survival. Since the massive annual payments only served to further weaken the country's ability to repay debts, it raised the question of whether it is moral to place the nation in a kind of prolonged serfdom. (The foreign debt increased to $34 billion in 1994.) And of no less significance, in 1994, it registered a strong protest against the price increase of petroleum products authorized by the Energy Regulatory Board (ERB). It saw no objective justification for the increase, and regarded the increase prior to the holding of hearing a lack of concern for the common good.

It may be said that the 50 years of the CBCP's existence ended with a year of historic note. In 1995, Pope John Paul II made his second pastoral visit to the Philippines on the occasion of the 10th World Youth Day, the theme of which was: "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). The purpose of his coming was for the youth who, as the third Christian millennium approaches, "are entrusted in a special way with the task of becoming communicators of hope and workers for peace in a world that is in ever greater need of credible witnesses and messengers consistent with [Christ's] message." At the same time, the year saw the quadricentennial celebrations of the archdioceses of Manila, Cebu, Nueva Segovia, and Nueva Caceres, and the diocese of Palo. But for the CBCP itself, this period of hope and expectation (1987-1995) witnessed other important events and activities which may be mentioned in passing: the canonization of Blessed Lorenzo Ruiz (1987), a meaningful event in a period which accepts "lay empowerment," the publication of the English edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) (1994), the Statement on Fundamentalist Groups (27 January 1989), and the Guidelines for the Eucharist (1990), the birth of the Program for the Rehabilitation of Mt. Pinatubo Victims, and the holding of the

National Retreat for Priests (1992, 1993 and 1994), and the publication of the maiden issue of the *CBCP Bulletin* (1994).

III

Conclusion

That, in brief, is the history of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines – a body that is vibrant, willing to learn, confront, suffer and change, a body that leads, builds up, engages, commits, prays and serves. Its fifty-year history sketched out above, if it be summed up even more succinctly, may be described in terms of transformation: from a CWO that was mainly defensive of the legitimate institutional interests to a CBCP that serves in the integral liberation of society; from a generally silent CWO to a prophetic CBCP in the face of sociopolitical and economic disarrangement and injustice; from a CWO that viewed the Church as a social institution to a CBCP that understands the Church as a Communion of the People of God; from a CWO that, it seemed, had answers to human problems to a CBCP that reads, listens to, and scrutinizes the "signs of the times"; from a CWO that tended to pronounce general moral principles to a CBCP that speaks of and judges the morality of the concrete sociopolitical and economic actions and situations; from a CWO that was inclined to focus morality to problems of sex, birth control and smutty films to a CBCP that, true to the tradition of the first bishop of the Philippines, Bishop Domingo de Salazar, OP, protests against, denounces and condemns violation of human rights, social injustices and various forms of violence to the poor; from a CWO that saw involvement in the social order as part of pre-evangelization to a CBCP that considers transformation of the social order as constitutive dimension of its mission; from a CWO that looked at the work of the laity as part of the apostolate of the Hierarchy to a CBCP that recognizes the lay apostolate as springing from the lay person's dignity as baptized Christians; from a CWO that viewed the laity as *ecclesia discens* (the learning Church) to a CBCP that respects them as partners in the task of integral evangelization; from a CWO that tried to renew the social order from the top to a CBCP that regards the lay persons as co-workers in the task of that renewal; from a CWO that was engaged in social charity to a CBCP that is involved in total development and liberation. It is not an exaggeration to say that the CBCP, looked at from this angle in its 50 years of existence, to a significant degree served its major objectives and demonstrated its relevance to the changing times and the concrete historical experiences of the people it continues to serve in leadership.