

A Short History of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1945-1995

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Best known for the initials CBCP, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines was 50 years old in 1995; 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 my purpose in this essay to write the history of the CBCP's 50 years of existence. In writing that history, one has various options. One of them is to follow the traditional historiography in which history is centered on the acts and achievements of its leaders, as it is done in most history textbooks —this is "history from above." Another approach may be from the decisions arrived at and the actions engaged in by all the bishops and their co-workers —this is "history from below." Nonetheless, I do not intend to use here 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.

A. "WHY DO YOU NOT GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT YOURSELVES?" (Lk 9:13)

1. From the Backdrop of a Cruel War

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), started as the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO). It was established immediately after the Second World War. The objective of the

CWO was to serve as a liaison between the United States Armed Forces and the Filipino civilian population after liberating the Philippines from the Japanese occupation. The main function of the CWO was envisioned to coordinate with Catholics in America, and also help in the allocation and distribution of relief goods.

American campaign to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese left the country in ruins. The country saw one million people perished as a result of the war. During the month of February 1945 alone, more than 100,000 people were killed in the southern part of Manila during the liberation of the city from the Japanese. This southern part of Manila was the scene of savage fighting between the trapped Japanese forces under Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi and the U.S. Eighth Army. The city itself ranks with Poland's Warsaw and England's Coventry with the unenviable distinction of being the worst-damaged cities to emerge from the war.

Most of the buildings of Manila in the south of the Pasig River were either burned or reduced to rubble by intensive shelling and aerial bombings. Those still left standing were dangerously uninhabitable and it would take plenty of time and enormous amounts of money to rehabilitate these buildings. Many of them had to be demolished and rebuilt from the ground.

A more serious problem was the plight of those who survived the savage campaign of liberation. Thousands of people were fortunate to save their lives. But their homes were totally destroyed. Most of them were able to get away from the fighting with a few belongings. All of them were psychologically scarred by the atrocities of the trapped Japanese forces who committed wholesale murder, rape and arson.

Providing these refugees with adequate food, clothing and shelter would prove to be a gigantic task. Naturally something had to be done to save these destitute, starving people. American military officials, including General Douglas MacArthur, had been contemplating of an organization that would help in the gargantuan rehabilitation effort. The establishment of this organization would relieve military units especially the U.S. Army to undertake more important tasks.

2. From Vision to Liaison

While fighting was still raging around the city, Fr. Thomas A. Shanahan who served as a Major in General MacArthur's staff

approached Fr. John F. Hurley, S.J., the Jesuit Superior in the country. The former told him the need of having an organization which would serve as a liaison between the Catholic Church and the U.S. Army. Fr. Shanahan served as the chaplain of the Red Cross in the Philippines at the outbreak of the war. When Manila was about to fall to the Japanese, in January 1942, he was evacuated to Australia along with a shipload of wounded soldiers. Commissioned as a Captain in the U.S. Army, he served closely with General Douglas MacArthur.¹

When Fr. Shanahan broached to Fr. Hurley about the need to have a church organization to serve as a liaison between the American armed forces and the Filipino people, the latter rightly believed that Fr. Shanahan was either acting on MacArthur's instructions or he had the General's blessings.

Fr. Hurley who had just been liberated from internment at Santo Tomas was active in clandestinely supplying food, clothing, medicines and money to allied prisoners, patients, orphans and American soldiers hiding in the mountains during the war. His Jesuit mission at the Padre Faura campus in Manila served as a distribution point of relief goods which found their way to the concentration camps such as those in Cabanatuan, the Santo Tomas Internment Camp (STIC) as well as fugitive American soldiers living with Filipino resistance groups.²

Supplying goods to allied prisoners and internees was an illegal act during the Japanese occupation. Many people who served with Fr. Hurley paid with their lives. The suspicions of the Japanese about Fr. Hurley's activities led to his internment at the STIC where he was confined for more than two years.³

In view of Fr. Hurley's experience in this kind of work, Fr. Shanahan as well as other priests asked him to establish an organiza-

¹ John f. Hurley, S.J., *Wartime Superior in the Philippines*. Mimeographed Manuscript, p. 91.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 40-49.

³ Fr. Hurley was detained in the internment camp at the University of Santo Tomas from January 13, 1943 to February 4, 1945. For details about his detention, see Chapters VII and VIII of his *Wartime Superior in the Philippines*, which is an autobiographical account of Fr. Hurley's role in the Second World War. The book relates the events just before the war and life in the Jesuit community in Manila. Also Fr. Hurley's work discusses his role in aiding internees, prisoners and American soldiers hiding from the Japanese as well as those with guerrilla groups.

tion that would help distribute relief goods given by the U.S. Army as well as fellow Catholics in the United States.

At first, Fr. Hurley was reluctant of the idea of leading such an organization. He reasoned out that he would need the authority from the Holy See. Fr. Hurley's initial reluctance vanished when Archbishop William Piani, the Apostolic Delegate told him that the establishment of a relief organization was imperative. This relief organization should act as a liaison between the American military hierarchy and the civilian officials in the Philippine government. Archbishop Piani told Fr. Hurley that, by virtue of his powers as Apostolic Delegate, he was taking the initiative to establish such an organization. He ordered Fr. Hurley to act as the Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer of the organization. And the Archbishop Piani himself assumed the position as President General. This organization became known as the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO).⁴

3. From Liaison to Action

A few days after his release from the Santo Tomas Internment Camp, Fr. Hurley was transferred to the Jesuit House at Santa Ana. Gunfire could still be heard from the western part of Manila as fighting between the Americans and the Japanese was still in progress. Scores of hungry and half-naked refugees continued to arrive, painting a picture of destitution and despair. As to how to shelter and feed these refugees, the Jesuits in the center operated on the profound belief that *Deus Providevit* — God shall provide.⁵ Meanwhile Fr. Hurley undertook the first steps to realize the establishment of the Catholic Welfare Organization. The establishment of the CWO was largely due to his efforts.

On February 16, 1945, he went to the headquarters of General MacArthur in San Miguel Bulacan, 40 kilometers north of Manila. He had with him a letter from Archbishop Piani offering the services of the Catholic Church in the relief effort for Filipino civilians. Fr. Hurley manage to obtain an interview with Gen. MacArthur, who expressed his appreciation of the offer of the Catholic hierarchy. He said that while the Church may not have the material nor financial resources to carry on the relief services, he appreciated that the Church's

⁴ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

institutions would be a great help. At the same time, the General hoped that the Church would reopen its schools as soon as possible. After a long discussion with Gen. McArthur, Fr. Hurley obtained the latter's approval to allocate relief goods provided by the U.S. Army through the Catholic Welfare Organization.⁶

B. "A FARMER WENT OUT TO SOW SOME SEED" (Lk. 8:3)

1. The Genesis of the Catholic Welfare Organization

Upon returning to Manila, Fr. Hurley established the first headquarters of the CWO at the Nazareth School compound at Santa Teresita Street in Plaza Guipit, Sampaloc, Manila. This school was managed by the *Hijas de Jesus* Sisters. Fr. Hurley humorously considered as headquarter "any place he could hang his hat —if he had a hat."⁷ By April 1945, he transferred to the School of the Holy Ghost, now the College of the Holy Spirit, at Mendiola, near Malacañang. Later, the CWO headquarters were again transferred to the *La Consolacion* College, just across the street. It remained there until 1974 when it was transferred to 2655 F.B. Harrison Street, in Pasay.

The Jesuits and the CWO owed a lot to the Filipino Sisters of *La Consolacion*. The Sisters offered not only part of their building for the offices of the CWO and for the storage of relief supplies, but also for feeding its staff and lodging some of its volunteer workers.

The Staff

As for the staff of the CWO, Fr. Hurley harnessed the services of the same people who voluntarily risked their lives in supplying prisoners, internees and refugees during the war. They were the very same brave men who supplied the prisoners at the concentration camps in Tarlac and Nueva Ecija as well as the fugitive American soldiers with food, medicines and money to help them survive the harsh enemy occupation. With the same dedication, they volunteered their services to aid the more numerous refugees and other victims of the war. The most notable of them was Eitel Baumann, a German resident who served Fr. Hurley's distributor of goods at the Jesuit mission at Padre Faura. He served as the CWO comptroller. Another was an

⁶ Loc. cit.

⁷ Loc. cit.

equally selfless and patriotic person, Jesus Paredes who served as Hurley's Administrative Assistant in the CWO. Both men were later honored by the Pope for their services during and after the war.⁸

Workers

Though the CWO was headed by Archbishop Piani as its President-General, Fr. Hurley was involved in managing its day-to-day affairs. Fr. Carlos I. Beurms, CICM, headed its Ecclesiastical Properties Section. Other volunteer workers were Americans released from the internment camps. Fr. Hurley remembers them as Vance Sinclair, Chappie Chapman, S.B. George and a certain Connor and Donald from China. Not to be left unmentioned were ladies whose first names escaped Fr. Hurley's memory. These were misses Benitez, Bernardo, Buyson, Cu Unjieng, La O, Lantin, Laurel and Reyes, all of them surnames of well-off families of Manila. The staff of the CWO were all volunteers who did not receive any salary.⁹

2. The Operations

The creation of a network to distribute goods did not present a problem for Fr. Hurley. The parishes around the country became the CWO's ready-made channels for the distribution of funds and relief supplies. Parish priests only had to communicate their needs to the organization's headquarters. And so the needed goods were sent free and at no cost to the CWO as it made use of the extensive facilities of the U.S. Army and Navy.

From February to July 1945, records showed that the CWO distributed goods worth P 906,030. The cost of distributing these goods amounted only to P 506.04 or .00006 of the entire operation. This was incredibly low due to the selflessness of the workers who did not charge a single centavo for their services. Much more the CWO availed of the diocesan network which covered the entire country. In the barrios, the pastors could just report their needs to their bishops who, in turn, sent the information to the CWO headquarters. Shipments from Manila could be assembled and sent to the various dioceses and vicariates for distribution to the needy. Throughout these operations, Mr.

⁸ They were later given the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Award by Pope Pius XII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Eitel Baumann ably handled the details of his task.¹⁰

3. Assistances

To the credit of the CWO and its nationwide network, there were no pilferages of supplies. This was already in itself a great achievement at the time when many of the people were practically starving and deprived of possessions and theft or anything of value was rampant.

Before the establishment of the CWO, Archbishop O'Brien of Chicago, who headed the War Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, sent to the Philippines a thousand cases of mass wine and 10,000 sacks of flour which vanished without a trace upon landing in Leyte. A second shipment was saved because a Filipino Jesuit named Pacifico Ortiz went to Leyte and supervised its receipt. With the establishment of the CWO and its distribution network, once the goods reached the convent of the local pastor, the parish priest saw to it that these goods would reach those that needed them.

To the Laity

As soon as the organization of the CWO was established, volunteers rounded up homeless and starving refugees and provided them with shelter, food and clothing. While fighting was still in progress in southern Manila, the CWO accommodated 10,000 refugees. The organization assisted other 25,000 individuals and distributed 200,000 yards of cloth, 6,000 pounds of children's clothing, large quantities of men's and women's clothing, shoes, stockings, needles, threads, sleeping cots, mosquito nets and bars of soap. More than P50,000 were disbursed during February and March, 1945.¹¹

A gory but necessary task for the CWO was involved in the burial of people killed during the liberation of Manila. The organization sent out teams to seek out dead bodies, many of which remained unidentified and beyond recognition because they were either severely burned or mangled during the fighting. The CWO made sure that the bodies were given proper Catholic burial. There were no exact figures about the corpses which were found. However one could surmise that

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 95.

these could run into thousands. It was imperative that these corpses had to be buried immediately to avoid the spread of diseases.

To the Religious Communities

The members of the religious community who were also victims of the war were also recipients of assistance from the CWO. During the same period, 1,806 sisters and 879 priests were helped by the organization. Aside from personal needs such as food and clothes, they were provided with other provisions such as bottles of mass wine and wheat flour for the making of hosts. These were the supplies that certainly benefited the faithful who received the Holy Eucharist.

Much of the supplies distributed by the CWO came from the U.S. Army, which was specially helpful in the relief effort. Because of its established network, the CWO became the outlet of the Philippine Civil Affairs Unit (PCAU) of the U.S. Army. During its first five months of existence, the CWO distributed P906,030 worth of food/clothing.

Brigadier General Courtney Whitney, the chief of the PCAU, assigned a staff car to Fr. Hurley as the CWO's Secretary General. While Mrs. MacArthur went around in a jeep, Fr. Hurley had the comfort of making his rounds in an air-conditioned car. Also, the CWO had the privilege of having two of the few functioning civilian telephones in Manila, again, courtesy of the U.S. Army.

The CWO staff increased with the addition of volunteers such as the former internees from the Los Baños internment camp, in Laguna. Fr. Hurley could actually send orders to American camp commanders to send former internees to Manila "to perform CWO duties."¹²

The operations of the CWO expanded greatly as other organizations came to its assistance. A number of groups in the United States who learned of the widespread destruction of the Philippines were anxious to help the Filipinos. They approached the CWO as soon as they heard about its work of helping the victims of the war.

4. The Outside help

The War Relief Services (WRS) of the Catholic Bishops of America through its Director, Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle asked Fr. Hurley if

¹² Ibid., p. 96

he could act as their agent in the Philippines. As soon as Fr. Hurley agreed, large quantities of food and medicine headed for the CWO in the Philippines. For three years, from November, 1945, it sent over P4,000,000 worth of food and medicine. It also agreed to pay for the CWO's deficits in the purchase of supplies and chartering of ships.¹³ As the agent of the WRS, the CWO's 18 bishops and apostolic prefects served as directors for its relief effort. Their network of parish priests and various Congregations saw to it that the goods were distributed to those who needed them without racial or religious discrimination.

Another organization, the National Catholic Club, sent Fr. Hurley a drawing account for \$25,000 with an offer to send more if requested.

With the conclusion of the liberation campaign in the Philippines, large organizations like the United States Organization (USO) showed interest in the relief effort. The President of the USO arrived in the country to see the postwar conditions for himself. Fr. Hurley showed him around the CWO headquarters and communities served by the organization. The CWO helped USO find a place for a headquarters in the Philippines. This was established along Rizal Avenue in Santa Cruz, Manila.

Fr. Hurley was handed a checkbook for \$25,000.00. It was made available for his disposal. Unfortunately to his eternal regret, he was not able to use this money once the USO established its own headquarters in Manila and started conducting its own relief activities.

As of November 1948, the CWO helped 1,821,970 people. It shipped an average of one thousand pounds of goods per day, which totaled 4,930,577 pounds. It had received and shipped out goods and disbursed money totaling P26,000 from the War Orphans Fund, P20,000 from the Soldiers' Recreational Fund, P750,000 from the U.S. Army and P3,038,083.77 from the War Relief Services. From other sources, it shipped goods amounting P11,534,235.93. CWO's grand total of disbursements amounted to P5,368,319.00.¹⁴

Meanwhile the expenses of the organization had increased. This was because the transportation facilities of the U.S. armed forces were no longer available. And also the CWO had to transport relief supplies through civilian channels. At the same time it had to maintain a

¹³ Ibid., pp.. 97-99.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

large office with all the necessary equipment. With a large staff, the CWO had to pay the clerks, secretaries and shipping staff with adequate salaries. However, despite the increase in costs, CWO expenses amounted only to 6.77% of all its disbursements. Throughout its operations, the CWO had to expand its activities as the pressing need of immediate rehabilitation made it necessary to increase its services.

C. "THE RAINY SEASON SET IN, THE TORRENTS CAME AND WINDS BLEW..." (Mt. 7:25)

The CWO had its share of intrigues from within the Church itself. The Archbishop of Manila, Michael J. O' Doherty, felt slighted that the organization was formed without his participation. He also felt bad that his ecclesiastical leadership in Manila and in the Philippines as a whole was being usurped by Archbishop Piani and some selected bishops. Archbishop O' Doherty was enraged by the fact that his leadership was encroached upon by Archbishop Piani, who was just the Pope's ambassador in the Philippines. He was being excluded from what he considered as his proper function of vital concern of his archdiocese.¹⁵

When he left for the U.S. on July 23, 1945, he briefed the American clergy on the Philippines' post-war conditions. The Americans promised to send assistance to the country. However they indicated that this assistance would be channeled to the CWO, headed by Archbishop Piani. Archbishop O' Doherty then ventilated his views on the CWO, whose leadership had violated his prerogatives. He sought intervention of the American bishops to use their influence to alter the CWO. Nonetheless they refused to get involved in this matter. They indicated that whatever assistance they could obtain for the Philippines would be channeled through the CWO.¹⁶

The Archbishop had to swallow his pride and send a telegraph to Archbishop Piani that assistance from the American hierarchy would be forthcoming.

On July 7, 1945, the majority of the Catholic bishops met for the first time in Manila since the outbreak of the war. They observed the

¹⁵ Martin, J. Noone, *Fr. Michael O' Doherty Archbishop of Manila His Life and Times*. (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1989), pp. 354-355.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

good work of the CWO and expressed the sentiment to convert it as the permanent and official organization of the Catholic hierarchy. Archbishop Piani who was present said that he had this in mind for a long time and said that he was glad to place the CWO at the personal direction of the bishops.

1. The Growth

On July 18, Archbishop Piani turned over the leadership of the organization to the Philippine bishops. The bishops then elected an administrative board for the CWO which consisted of Archbishop Gabriel M. Reyes of Cebu, who later would be Archbishop of Manila, as chairman, Bishop Mariano Madriaga of Lingayen and Bishop Constancio Jurgens of Tuguegarao, Bishop Santiago Sancho of Nueva Segovia and Bishop Alfredo Versoza were chosen as members. Fr. Hurley retained his position as Secretary General.¹⁷

In November 1945, Archbishop Piani was told by Archbishop Reyes that the Holy See was urging the CWO to seek incorporation under Philippine laws. And the National Catholic Welfare Conference be designated as the official representative of the Catholic hierarchy of the Philippines in regard to its relationship with the Catholic hierarchy of the United States.

Even before the issuance of these instructions by the Vatican, Fr. Hurley already started the process of incorporation of the CWO with the Securities and Exchange Commission. This was completed on January 23, 1946. The CWO had 18 incorporators. Its functions had broadened from just mere receiving and distribution of relief supplies, as seen in Article II Section 1 of its Constitution. It stated:

"The objectives to this organization shall be: to unify, coordinate and organize the Catholic people of the Philippines in the works of education, social welfare, religious and spiritual aid and other activities under the direction of their Excellencies, the Most Reverend members of the hierarchy of the Philippines."¹⁸

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 100. Archbishop Gabriel M. Reyes became the longest-serving President of the CBCP. He served two terms, the first from 1945 to 1949, as Archbishop of Cebu and the second, from 1950 to 1952, after he became the Archbishop of Manila.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

It clearly meant that the CWO had transcended its original task and graduated to serving the spiritual needs of Filipino Catholics.

The CWO became the counterpart of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) of the Catholic hierarchy of the United States. It carried out the instructions of the Holy See to make the NCWC the official representative of the CWO in Washington, D.C.¹⁹

Another role on the shoulders of the CWO was to work for the compensation of properties damage by the war. The money which would be used to pay the owners of these properties did not come from the American taxpayers but from the proceeds of seized Japanese assets. A body called the War Damage Commission (WDC) had been formed in Washington early in 1945 and sent representatives to the Philippines to survey war-damage properties, including the churches. Fr. Carlos I. Beurms, CICM, head of the CWO's Ecclesiastical Properties Section, prepared and collected evidences of damaged Church properties. He submitted them to WDC. The total cost of damaged Church properties in the Philippines amounted to \$125,000,000.²⁰

However a bill filed at the U.S. Senate allowed the American government to reimburse only \$5,000,000 for damaged ecclesiastical properties. This in contrast to the millions of dollars it allotted to private gold mining-companies and sugar centrals. This condition was clearly an unfair arrangement which had to be discussed between the Philippine and American hierarchies.

On November 1945, it was agreed between Archbishop Piani and Archbishop Amleto Giovanni of the American hierarchy that the NCWC and the CWO be recognized as the official representatives of the Philippine hierarchy. The American hierarchy felt that talks with the American government could be best conducted and handled through the NCWC, of which the American hierarchy and the Filipino hierarchy could be both represented. This arrangement received concurrence from the Vatican as well as from the Apostolic Delegates in Washington and Manila. On January 17, 1946, Cardinal Spellman informed Archbishop Reyes that both Philippine and American hierarchy would be officially represented by the NCWC.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

²¹ Ibid., p. 102.

The arrangement of combining the American and Philippine hierarchies into one body was advantageous to the Philippines because the Filipinos would have a more powerful clout in following their objectives in the American legislature. The role of the CWO on the other hand was to act as spokesman of the entire Philippine Catholic Church.

2. *The Consolidation*

To prepare for its monumental task of dealing with the U.S. Congress in the matter of compensation, four new departments had to be organized in the CWO in addition to those concerned with shipping relief supplies. An *Information Department* was established to collect reliable news of Catholic interest; it was also tasked to distribute the news through regular bulletins to the Philippines and the United States. A second department, the *Social Welfare Department* was formed and headed by Mrs. Felicidad A. Silva; it provided useful liaison work with government welfare work. A *Liaison Department* dealt with problems involving the Philippine government and the armed forces of the Philippines and the United States. A fourth department, the *Legal Aid Department*, was created to provide legal services to the CWO as well as to the bishops, priests and other religious in the Philippines.²²

As soon as the CWO embarked on its new mandate, it successfully carried out actions to protect the interests of the Catholic community of the Philippines. When the Philippine Congress proposed to tax the properties of the Church, Archbishop Reyes, the Chairman of the CWO Administrative Board, visited President Manuel Roxas and informed him of the views of the Church. Another instance was when the Department of Education issued a directive forbidding Catholic schools in places where other schools are already in existence, Archbishop Reyes met with President Quirino and had the order rescinded.²³

The CWO became the voice of the entire Catholic Church in the Philippines. Through it, the bishops expressed their collective stance on social issues especially those on poverty and distribution of wealth.

Along with the CWO Administrative Chairman, who spoke on behalf of the Church, the CWO staff, especially through its Legal

²² Ibid., p. 102-103.

²³ Ibid., p. 103.

Department, presented the stand of the Catholic Church on various government policies before the executive and legislative branches of the Philippine government. While it was unsuccessful in preventing the taxation of Catholic schools, the CWO succeeded in persuading Congress to drop a bill requiring the sterilization of lepers and their children. It prevented the passage of a bill which would have legalized prostitution in the Philippines. Other bills opposed were those which would have violated the separation of Church and State and could have been detrimental to the Church and private education.²⁴

Also lawyers of the Legal Aid Department frequently appeared in court as *amicus curiae* or friends of the court during cases in the interest of the Church. They also assisted other lawyers in preparing briefs in defense of the Church. Often they warded off attempts by local governments from collecting taxes on various Church properties which were not required by the Philippine Constitution. The CWO was able to successfully insist that all religious, educational and charitable institutions under the Catholic Church are exempt from taxation. It was also able to secure exemption from any tax fees for rites such as baptisms and marriages and it proved that tuition fees were not taxable.²⁵

Aside from these concerns, the Legal Department was of great assistance to the priests and religious in resolving problems and other matters such as those involving government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Customs, Immigration, and the Office of the Registrar General of Priests and Ministers.

Funding

On January 10 to 23, 1949, Philippine bishops met and took up the question which concerned the very existence of the CWO. Since it started to function as a liaison agency for the relief efforts in the Philippines, the CWO received 90% of its income from the NCWC. This funding would cease by January 31, 1949 or more than one week after their meeting. Funding for the CWO would now have to come from

²⁴ *Loc. cit.* Examples of bills successfully opposed by the CWO were those limiting the number of private schools, limiting the charges of private schools to the amount charged by public schools, and demanding that all religious organizations be led only by Filipino citizens.

²⁵ *Loc. cit.*

the Philippine bishops who were themselves having financial difficulties. Securing the finances of the CWO was therefore a serious problem. However when the bishops were discussing the budget for the CWO for the coming year, they recognized its past achievements in the Philippine relief campaign, its role as a spokesman for the country's religious hierarchy as well as its efforts to secure compensation for damage Church properties. They decided to approve the CWO budget for 1950. Their vote to provide funding for the CWO despite their own financial problems was a recognition that the organization's role has become a necessity in the work of the Catholic Church in the Philippines.²⁶

Pruning

Even as the vote of the prelates assured the CWO a new lease of life, the Jesuits in the CWO, including its Secretary General, the indefatigable Fr. Hurley, had to vow out from the organization. According to Fr. Hurley, during early 1951 they could no longer perform an effective job in the CWO because they "were being hamstrung by a powerful ecclesiastic who was more interested in impressing Rome than on the smooth functioning of an efficient organization."²⁷

Though Fr. Hurley was reluctant to resign from the CWO which he practically built from scratch, he submitted his resignation after meeting with the Very Reverend John B. Janssens, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus in New York. Fr. Hurley thought it best to resign to avoid conflict with other Church officials. On his insistent urging, the Very Reverend Janssens ordered on April 1, 1963, that all Jesuits in the Philippines severed their relations with the CWO.²⁸

By the time the Jesuits left, an independent audit revealed that the CWO had assets worth P 293,559.49 and liabilities amounting to only P9,279.90. This was a far cry compared to its financial condition in February 1945 when the CWO started without a cent in its coffers. This robust financial statement was a tribute to the superb stewardship of Fr. Hurley and the Jesuits.²⁹

²⁶ Loc. cit.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 103-104.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 104

²⁹ Loc. cit.

Despite Fr. Hurley's resignation as Secretary General of the CWO, he was prevailed upon by the Philippine hierarchy to remain as its representative in the United States. In this role, Fr. Hurley could follow up the war damage claims of the Church with the U.S. Congress and coordinate with the NCWC.

3. Compensation

Another great task for the CWO was to secure compensation for the properties of the Church which were damaged or destroyed during the war. At the onset of the conflict, the American government created the War Damage Corporation (WDC) which would pay for the destroyed properties in the United States and its insular territories like the Philippines. It was authorized to disburse a billion dollars. In 1944, a bill filed by Senator Robert A. Taft proposed to make available the sum of \$200,000,000. While in July 18, 1945, Senator Millard Tydings proposed to give \$100,000,000 to the Philippines.

a. Church properties

These amounts were certainly inadequate to cover all the war-damaged properties in the country. The survey team sent by the WDC found out all these during a quick visit to the country right after the war. Damage to religious properties alone including those owned by Protestants and other denominations totaled \$139,000,000. The cost of destroyed public properties according to the survey team's report made in September 1945 was well over \$200,000,000. The damage to private property was placed at \$460,000,000.³⁰

With this new information, Senator Tydings withdrew his original bill and replaced it with one appropriating \$400,000,000. After the customary hearings, the bill which became the Philippine Rehabilitation Act of 1946 was signed into law by President Harry Truman on April 30, 1946.

The money which would be used to compensate the owners of damage properties would come from the confiscated assets of the Japanese and it would be disbursed by a three-man commission called the Philippine War Damage Commission (PWDC). This commission was headed by Frank Waring as Chairman. John B. O'Donnel and Fran-

³⁰ Ibid., p. 106

cisco Delgado were members.³¹

The PWDC started accepting claims for damaged religious properties on March 1, 1947. And would continue accepting such claims until a year later or February 28, 1948. With this development, Archbishop Gabriel Reyes, as Administrative Board Chairman of the CWO called a meeting with the CWO staff and the bishops and the superiors of various religious orders to discuss the filing of claims. It was decided that the CWO would collect and disseminate the information to the bishops and the religious superiors. They would act in a consultative capacity in the pursuance of the claims. And the actual filing would be done by the bishops and religious superiors of various orders and congregations.

However despite these measure, no notice of claims from the bishops and the religious superiors were filed until the deadline was fast approaching. This was due not just because of the physical and mental fatigue of the religious hierarchy during the three years of Japanese occupation. The more compelling reason for the non-filing of claims was the misunderstanding that no claimant could receive more than P1,000.³² The PWDC had to take pains to dispel this complete misunderstanding of the law. Also, the non-filing of claims by the Philippine Church attracted the attention of the Holy See itself. The Holy See urged the Philippine bishops to take immediate action.

Ten weeks before the deadline, claims and evidences consisting of photographs, affidavits and titles started to arrive at the CWO headquarters. By the midnight of February 29, 1948, the last of the Catholic claims was filed with the PWDC.

The estimate of damage to Catholic property which were made by Fr. Carlos Beurms of the Ecclesiastical Properties Section of the CWO amounted to \$125,000,000. Yet the claims filed by the bishops and religious superiors in the entire country reached only \$27,500,000. or P55,000,000. According to the Chairman Waring of the PWDC this was a very modest figure and certainly not excessive.

However other claimants which consisted of individuals and companies were not as modest. Their claims inflated the total amount to be reimbursed to \$800,000,000 or double the amount authorized un-

³¹ Loc. cit.

³² Ibid., p. 107

der the Philippine Rehabilitation Act. The PWDC then decided to scale down the amount of claims by using the concept of depreciation in which properties like buildings and machinery lose part of their value with the passage of time. This practice was implemented by the commission even if it was not authorized by the law.

This method of computation practically made ecclesiastical buildings especially the churches without much value. Many of the churches which were destroyed or damaged were hundreds of years old. The same thing applied to the chalices, monstrances and sacred vestments which were veritable antiques. Also hospitals operated by the Church were subjected to the same method of computation. After the PWDC was computing the value of the claims of the Church, the \$27,500,000 claim originally submitted was reduced to \$5,000,000 which was further reduced to a mere \$2,500,000, a mere pittance for all its properties lost in the war. With this amount the Church stood to receive only about 10% of its original claim.³³

On the other hand, other claimants such as the big gold-mining companies have somehow avoided the depreciation method of computation. They used the cost of lost profits as a basis of their claims. The amount they would to gain would be certainly larger than the private and non-profit institutions like orphanages, hospitals and schools run by the Church. This obviously unequal treatment attracted attention from lawmakers in the United States who conducted an investigation.

(1) *Senate Bill 1033*

To remedy this problem, Senator Howard McGrath filed his bill (Senate Bill 1033) on February 21, 1949, amending the Philippine Rehabilitation Act. This bill explicitly allocated \$10,000,000 for the reconstruction of private non-profit schools, hospitals and orphanages. The McGrath bill however excluded ecclesiastical buildings such as convents and churches. The reaction of the private companies especially the mining and sugar milling companies was to oppose this bill as part of their own claims would have to be reduced to accommodate the McGrath amendment. To illustrate it, a gold-mining company stood to lose \$400,000 if the McGrath bill was passed. This also showed the size of the approved claim of the company.³⁴

³³ Ibid., p. 106

³⁴ Ibid., p. 110

When the McGrath bill was being deliberated in Congress lobbyists representing the big mining and sugar milling interests worked for its rejection. The PWDC in Manila, the U.S. State Department and the Philippine embassy in Washington sided with the big business interests in opposing the bill.

The CWO and the NCWC, labored hard to expose the arguments of these lobbyists. Despite the great odds, the McGrath bill was unanimously passed in the Senate, on August 9, 1949. The bill was then referred to the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives. It seem that McGrath bill would have no passing into law when its opponents asked that the bill be held for further consideration by the PWDC. They intended to delay the bill as long as possible.

Meanwhile influential lobbyists representing the big business interests such as the former American ambassador to the Philippines, Emmet O'Neal approached Fr. Hurley who was then following up the interests of the Church in Washington. He asked him to drop his support for the McGrath bill in favor of a new bill which would be filed by Congressman George P. Miller.

(2) Senate Bill 7600

The Miller bill (HR no.7600), which was filed on March 7, 1950, was supported by mining interests led by the Haussermann group of Benguet Consolidated. It was asking for the authorization of an additional \$100,000,000 on top of the \$400,000,000 already authorized in the Philippine Rehabilitation Act. A subsequent meeting by Fr. Hurley with the lawyers of the Hausermann group revealed that Ambassador O'Neal and Jasper Bell would guarantee that private and non-profit institutions would get \$20,000,000 under the Miller bill, not just \$10,000,000 under the McGrath measure.

At first Fr. Hurley refused to reveal his stand on the new bill saying that he needed authorization from Archbishop Gabriel Reyes, the CWO Administrative Chairman in Manila. After relaying the information to the Philippines, Fr. Hurley consulted with his allies in the NCWC, and the consensus was that the enemies of the McGrath bill were just intending to kill the measure. The Miller bill had no chance of passing into law. He then asked that he be relieved of any responsibility if any disastrous consequence might result in the legislative tug-of-war.

On June 9, 1950, Fr. Hurley received a cablegram from the Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Carlos P. Romulo asking him to drop the McGrath bill and support the Miller measure. At the same day, he received another cablegram from Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, the new Apostolic Delegate who replaced Archbishop Piani, saying that the Philippine hierarchy was favoring the Miller bill. These cablegrams revealed that the big business interests were lobbying hard in the Philippines and had won over the Philippine hierarchy.

On July 21, 1950, Fr. Hurley received a cablegram from Archbishop Reyes instructing him to support the Miller bill and leaving the McGrath bill only as an alternative.³⁵ With this message, the McGrath bill was as good as dead. As for the Miller bill, it was never passed, as predicted by the NCWC. The lobbyists of the big business interests in the Philippines never lifted a finger to move the Miller bill. The Philippine hierarchy had been double-crossed and Archbishop Vagnozzi, who had just assumed his post at that time, had been deceived. It would take another legislation in the next Congress to provide additional war damage to private, non-profit institutions. However it would be impossible to secure such legislation because the Korean War had broken out and Congress would be reluctant to shell additional funds for the Philippines.

(3) *The Final amount*

In its final report released on March 31, 1951, the Philippine War Damage Commission revealed that the Church received the amount of \$4,995,055 for its damaged edifices, which showed that the final reduced claim of \$2,500,000 was not followed. Religious organizations received \$145,026. Public hospitals, dispensaries and schools received \$38,907,319 compared to \$2,956,919 for private hospitals, dispensaries and schools.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid., p. 114

³⁶ Ibid., p. 115. The breakdown of these payments as of March 31, 1951 were:

	<i>Payments</i>	<i>Percent of Claim</i>
Agriculture	\$33,812,000	26.9
Manufacturing and dealers	26,004,000	18.9
Mining Companies	18,001,000	14.3
Sugar centrals	13,433,000	10.0
Church edifices	4,995,055	3.9
Religious	145,026	0.1

b. War victims

Aside from working for the compensation for the damaged Church properties and those of private non-profit institutions like hospitals, schools and orphanages, the CWO worked with the NCWC for the compensation of war veterans and allied internees. These people had fought and suffered for Americas' cause in the war. Many of them lost their incomes and in many cases, their personal health.

During the postwar period, many bills were filed in the U.S. Congress calling for the compensation of these suffering people. Both the CWO and NCWC were very active in lobbying for the passage of these bills. On July 3, 1948, the *War Claims Act* was passed into law. This legislation was inked to an earlier law, the *Trading with the Enemy Act* of 1917. Under the War Claims Act of 1948, a commission, called the *War Claims Commission* (WCC), was establish on September 14, 1949, to oversee the compensation of veterans and internees. The WCC was chaired by Daniel T. Cleary and had Myron Wiener and Georgia Lusk as members.³⁷ The commission functioned until July 1, 1954, when its work was taken over by the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission.

Among the powers of the WCC was to compensate the personal injuries and property losses of veterans and internees. It was to pay for the medical and hospital expenses of these people and to furnish them disability payments in weekly amounts up to \$7,500.

Among those who received benefits from the War Claims Act were the Jesuits who each received \$2,220 for their 37 months detention at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp.

A provision in the *War Claims Act* called for the reimbursement of religious organizations which "furnished shelter, food, clothing, hospitalization, medicine and medical services to the armed forces or civilian American citizens."³⁸

Though Fr. Hurley never expected that he would be reimbursed for his labors during the war, he collected evidences and filed a claim with the War Claims Commission for \$500,000 which was honored by the Commission.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 117

³⁸ Loc. cit.

Like in the rehabilitation effort in 1946, the CWO informed the various church organizations to file their claims for reimbursement. However, like in the past, these organization were again remiss in filing their claims that only three out of an estimated one hundred religious institutions filed their claims with the WCC.

On April 30, 1951, Senator Herbert R. O'Connor filed in the Senate an amendment to the War Claims Act seeking to compensate private, non-profit institutions in full. Also it sought to compensate Filipino veterans and allied internees in dollars not pesos. American military personnel were well paid for in American dollars. The intention of the O'Connor bill was to address these iniquities. The bill called for the transfer of \$16,000,000 to the War Claims Commission which would increase its funds to \$75,000,000. The money would not come from the pockets of the American taxpayer but from the proceeds of sale of confiscated Japanese and German assets.

Despite the noble intentions of the bill, it met severe opposition from the same people who opposed the McGrath bill. These were the big business interests in the Philippines who wanted the bulk of compensation channeled to them. Supporting them were the U.S. State Department and the Department of Treasury, and the Philippine War Damage Commission. Even the War Claims Commission was against the O'Connor bill. The opposition of the two U.S. government departments was based on the argument of economy. While the PWDC and the WCC were against the bill allegedly because there was not enough money to pay off all the claims.

The new Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop Vagnozzi, who had been promoted to Papal Nuncio on April 9, 1951, was persuaded to oppose the bill. There was a story that Filipino politicians approached the Archbishop and hinted to him that the Catholic Church in the Philippines would be "persecuted" if the bill is passed.³⁹ Archbishop Vagnozzi opposed the O'Connor bill until the Pope himself ordered him to stop his involvement in this issue.

Meanwhile, the Philippine hierarchy, led by Archbishop Reyes, rallied the bishops to support the bill. The American hierarchy, led by Cardinal Spellman, threw its support. The CWO and the NCWC in the United States labored hard for the measure while Senators O'Connor and Patrick McCarran in the U.S. Senate and Majority floor Leader

³⁹ Ibid., p. 118

John McCormack in the House warded off attempts to kill the measure. The O'Connor bill was passed in both halls of Congress. It was signed into law by President Truman on April 9, 1952.

Despite the passage of the bill, the WCC filed another (unnecessary) bill providing only \$60,000,000, not \$75,000,000 as authorized. It also wanted that the money be allotted to the payment of non-religious claims, while the religious organizations had to go again to Congress to ask for \$20,000,000 more funds, if they wanted to have all their claims paid. This action of the WCC smacked of unfair discrimination. When the bill passed through Congress, the CWO and the NCWC explained to the legislators that the funding to pay off the claims was \$75,000,000 not \$60,000,000. And that this money would come from seized enemy assets. On August 3, 1953, the bill allotting \$75,000,000 for the compensation of all claims was signed into law.⁴⁰

By the time the WCC was replaced by the Foreign Claims Settlement in 1954, the Commission disbursed a total of \$120,447,097.07 which was greater than its original authorized funding. The excesses were due to the amendments of the War Claims Act of 1948. Of this amount, \$33,415,259.07 were awarded to religious institutions in the Philippines. The rest, amounting to \$87,031,838, was granted to American and Filipino veterans, internees and for the payment of disability claims.⁴¹

Summing up its role to secure compensation of American internees, Filipino war veterans and various religious institutions, the CWO served as the agent of the Philippine hierarchy and the noble assistance of the NCWC, which acted as the organ of the American hierarchy. It had successfully obtained the badly-needed financial assistance to enable these people and institutions to start life anew.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 120

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 123. This amount was broken down as follows:

<i>Beneficiaries</i>	<i>Amount</i>
American internees	\$ 13,675,329.00
Disability payments	23,410,954.00
American USAFFE Veterans	34,941,555.00
Filipino USAFFE Veterans	15,000,000.00
Catholic churches and institutions	33,415,259.07
TOTAL	\$120,447,097.07

(Subsequent legislation added some more funds to the original allocation of \$75,000,000 as authorized in the War Claims Act of 1948.)

**D. "AN ENEMY CAME AND SOWED SEEDS THROUGH HIS WHEAT."
(Mt. 13:25)**

Aside from the problems of the destruction of ecclesiastical buildings, schools and other institutions and the task of working for the payment of war damages, the Church in the Philippines was confronted with the inroads by Protestant denominations, the influence of the Masonry, and the invasion of western ways, styles and their accompanying social values. Also, the menace of communism and the possibility of a communist takeover of the country during the postwar period was very real.

Furthermore the constitutional separation of Church and State lessened the means of the Catholic hierarchy to influence the people and teach them the mission of the Church. Also the public school system which was introduced by the Americans eliminated religious instruction for its students.

To protect the people from various negative and anti-Catholic propaganda, the Church realized that it needed to keep in touch with the people. Access to communication was necessary to give the Church the independence to speak on the question of morals.

It was in this need that the CWO made plans to establish a radio station as early as 1949. It established radio programs which became the voice of the Church intended to reach as many people as possible. These programs were aired over radio DZPI in Manila and DXMS in Cotabato. These two radio stations were also effective in countering communist propaganda. One radio program sponsored by the Church, the *Tinig ni Mang Juan*, was responsible for the return of many people back to the Catholic fold. Aside from these, access to the medium of radio enabled the Church to expound its view on the influence of masons as well as indifferent politicians on various matters. Aside from radio, the CWO initiated the establishment of a national newspaper, the *Sentinel*.⁴²

To stop the slide in values, the CWO set up the Legion of Decency, which later became a commission. The Legion discouraged the public from seeing morally objectionable films and denounced movie houses showing such films.

⁴² Araceli Atlamann Linsangan, *Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines 1945-1995* (Manila: CBCP, 1995) p. 25.

1. The Masonry

One problem faced by the Church was the influence of the masonry. Introduced during the latter part of the 19th century, the Masonry became the outlet of anti-clerical sentiments. Many eminent Filipinos and historical figures were freemasons. And it became vogue for the *literati* to join the masonry. Historically, the masons blamed the Church for its intolerance on religious beliefs and for the persecution and death of Filipino heroes like Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar and Graciano Lopez Jaena. Actually what should be blamed was the Church in the Philippines during the 19th century and certain friars who interpreted the questioning of Spanish colonial authority as questioning the authority of the Church and God himself. As many members of the Masonry occupied high positions in the government, the conflict between Freemasonry and the Church rage on until the present.

The Church and Freemasonry are in contradictory positions on matters of religious instruction in public schools and private education. The Masonry advocated the elimination of religious instruction. On the other hand, the Church through the CWO lobbied hard for its introduction in the public schools. The Masons and other anti-clerics sought the elimination of private education and the nationalization of the educational system. The CWO, on the other hand stood for the retention of private education and foreign school administrators.

In 1952 the CWO found out that some top officials of the Department of Education who were sworn into office to uphold religious instruction in private schools were actually masons sworn to eliminate it. It sent a letter to President Quirino expressing its concern over the commitment of these officials. The CWO also hired the services of Catholic lawyers like attorneys Raul Manglapus, Ambrosio Padilla, Jose Feria and Francisco Rodrigo to defend the side of the Church.

On January 18, 1950, the CWO issued a joint pastoral letter stressing the need for religious instruction in public schools. Six days later, it issued another letter condemning as anti-Catholic the book of Rafael Palma, *Pride of the Malay Race*, on Rizal's biography. The pastoral letter said that Palma, who was a mason, tried to prove that the Jesuits were liars, especially on the issue of Rizal's alleged retraction from the masonry, and that the Jesuits forged the hero's retraction.⁴³

⁴³ Ibid., p. 33

Though the book was denounced by the Church, its publication was continued.

2. The Rizal Law

Perhaps one of the most spectacular battles of the Church through the CWO and the anti-Catholic forces was the deliberation on the Rizal Law which introduced required readings of the two novels of Jose Rizal, the *Noli Me Tangere* and the *El Filibusterismo*. In 1955, Senator Claro M. Recto authored a bill making both novels compulsory reading in all colleges and universities. The bill, if approved, would require the readings of the two books in their unexpurgated versions.

The CWO immediately opposed the bill saying that Rizal's two novels contained few, if any, patriotic ideas which Recto believed would be imparted to the young students. Instead the two novels contained falsehoods which tend to breed hatred against the Catholic Church. Also it said that compulsory reading of the two novels violated the freedom of conscience and religion.

According to some observers, Recto filed his Rizal bill to antagonize the Church for his poor showing in the 1955 elections. He had been the target of a well-organized campaign by the members of the Catholic hierarchy and many organizations who charged him of being a communist and anti-Catholic.⁴⁴

As the bill was being discussed in the Senate, it was opposed by Senators Francisco Rodrigo and Mariano J. Cuenco. Both men had close ties with the Church. Rodrigo, being the former President of the Catholic Action and Cuenco, being the brother of Archbishop Miguel Cuenco. They argued that the bill violated religious freedom.

The controversy heated up when the CWO issued a pastoral letter enjoining all Catholics to oppose the bill. Lobbyists from the Church were very active in the proceedings. Many priests, many of whom were foreigners sought conferences with the senators to convince them to oppose the bill.

One priest, Fr. Jesus Cavana, who was presented as an authority on Rizal during a symposium organized by the Catholic Action of Manila, said that the novels belonged to the past and it would be harm-

⁴⁴ Renato Constantino and Letizia R. Constantino, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*. (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1978) p. 296.

ful to read them because they presented a false picture of the country at the time. He added that the *Noli Me Tangere*, for example, was not really a patriotic novel because out of 333 pages only 25 contained patriotic messages and 120 pages contained anti-Catholic statements.⁴⁵

The battle of the Rizal bill was also being fought by the Church in the airwaves. One commentator, Jesus Paredes said that "since some parts of the novels had been declared objectionable matter by the hierarchy, Catholics have the right to refuse to read them so as to not to endanger their salvation."⁴⁶ Another speaker, Narciso Pimentel Jr., said that the Rizal bill was Senator Recto's revenge against the Catholic voters. Recto was a tail-ender in the 1955 polls.

On the floor of the Senate, while Senator Rodrigo said that when he was 20 years old, he had to secure Church dispensation to allow him to read Rizal's two novels and after reading them, he declared that he would not let his own son read these books because these would endanger his faith. He proposed instead the compulsory reading of the footnoted editions of the *Noli* and *Fili*.

Tempers flared during the debates in the Senate as opponents attacked each other with increasing virulence. Some senators began to succumb to the intense lobbying by the Church but Senator Recto stubbornly resisted.

Finally on May 12, 1955, a compromise was reached to accommodate both the Church and its opponents when Senator Jose P. Laurel filed a bill which still provided for the reading of the two novels in their unexpurgated versions. However under this bill, students could be exempted from reading the *Noli* and *Fili* on the grounds of religious belief.⁴⁷ The Laurel bill was later approved by both houses of Congress on June 12, 1956. It became law as Republic Act No. 1425.

E. "GREW UP AND YIELDED GRAIN A HUNDREDFOLD." (Lk. 8:8)

1. The General Situation during 1945-1965

Aside from countering the influences of the anti-clerical elements, a major concern of the CWO was to strengthen itself in the face of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 296-297

⁴⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 298. See also *Official Gazette*, Vol. 52, No. 6 (June 1956), 2071-2072.

changing times. With the communist threat posed by the Hukbalahap movement, there was a hysteria stirred by government officials who were quick to suspect political non-conformists as communists and leftist sympathizers. While the CWO made its position against communism, it opposed the witch-hunting perpetuated by the Philippine government.

The CWO traced the problem of communism to the social injustice endured by the poor in its pastoral letter issued on January 14, 1954. On August 15 of the same year, it issued another pastoral letter condemning the red-baiting by the government which was in reality a persecution of political non-conformists. During the 20-year period from 1945 to 1965, the CWO issued a total of 33 joint pastoral letters and statements.⁴⁸

First Plenary Council in Manila, 1953

There were three significant events in which the CWO gave active participation. The first was the convocation of the First Plenary Council of Manila which was held from January 7 to 25, 1953. The council was presided over by Archbishop Norman Thomas Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney, Australia. Its purpose was to bear witness of the Catholic faith of the Filipino people. And to decree such legislations which may be necessary for the preservation, enrichment and propagation of Catholic life.⁴⁹

The Marian Congress, 1954

The second event was the Marian Congress which was held on December 1, 1954 which was presided over by Fernando Cardinal Quiroga y Palacios, the Archbishop of Santiago Compostela in Spain. The Congress was a huge demonstration of Catholic faith which was participated by more than a million Catholics led by President Ramon Magsaysay.

Quadricentennial of Christianization of the Philippines

From April 27 to May 2, 1965, the Church celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christianization of the Philippines. The commemora-

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p.26

⁴⁹ Loc. cit.

tion was held in Cebu and attended by Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, who became the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, and most of the Philippine bishops. During that event, the Philippine Mission Society was born.

During the same period, the CWO continued to develop itself. On June 28, 1952, a new constitution was approved during a Sacred Consistorial Congregation. The new charter took effect a year later, on June 30, 1953.⁵⁰

Also in 1952, a new department of the CWO, the Social Action Department of the CWO was created. Its purpose was to work for a sound and effective program of Catholic action in the social field for the reconstruction of the social order. This was in keeping with the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.⁵¹

The following year, the Social Action Department initiated the establishment of the Priests and Laymen's Institute of Social Action (PLISA), which was placed under the auspices of the *Ateneo de Manila*. One of its accomplishments was the formation of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF). Led by lawyer Jeremias Montemayor, the FFF organized small farmers and tenants toward the creation of a united and cooperative action for the promotion of agrarian reform and the defense of the social rights of the agrarian sector.

On the overall assessment of its pastoral role from 1945 to 1965, the CWO developed a solid stance against communism, materialism and social justice. Throughout those years, it issued a total of 33 joint pastoral letters.

2. The Changing Times: The Late Sixties

The second half of the 1960's ushered a new era for the Catholic Church in the Philippines. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which had just concluded in December 1965, resolved to give a new role for the Church. It was no longer a social institution concerned with salvation men, but an embodiment of Christ on earth. This means that the Church will take a more active role in man's temporal affairs.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 26-27

This decision of Vatican II had its theological and pastoral implications on the Churches around the world. In the Philippines, the CWO as the organization of the country's hierarchy responded to this new paradigm shift. During the Consistorial Congregation on December 12, 1967, the Bishops agreed to change the name of the CWO to its present name, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Along with the change of name, the organization revised its objectives. The greater commitment of the CBCP to the laity is reflected in its new constitution which states that, the CBCP aimed "to study, promote, coordinate in a way corresponding more to the needs of the present time the Apostolate Church of the Philippines."⁵²

The new Charter was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission on February 29, 1968. It was recognized by the Holy See on May 21, 1974.

The new mission of the Catholic hierarchy, however, was not immediately felt in the next two years as most of its accomplishments were geared towards intra-Church matters concerned on the implementation of conciliar decrees on liturgy, ecumenism, canon law, and seminaries. It issued statement regarding priestly celibacy, attire, the Pope, and the life of prayer. Other statements aside from Church matters were the pastoral letters on the plight of the refugees of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the one reminding the laity on modesty in dress and religious instruction.⁵³

Conscious of the inroads of the Protestants who were becoming more aggressive in their preaching efforts, the CBCP endorsed the *Cursillos de Cristianidad*, better known as the *Cursillo* movement in which lay people became involved in spreading the good news. Also endorsed was the Christian Family Movement which encouraged the praying of the rosary and explained the role of the Blessed Virgin in the salvation of man. Both movements flourished in the late sixties and the latter years.

The National Secretariat of Social Action

The period of the late sixties and the early seventies was marked with increasing social unrest because of rising student activism and

⁵² Ibid., p. 27

⁵³ Loc. cit.

mass demonstration over the issues of feudalism, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor and graft and corruption in the government. The Church hierarchy was aware of these issues and urged the amelioration of the social order. On January 8, 1967, the CBCP issued a pastoral letter on social order and development. The same letter stressed the mission of the church in the temporal order and that there is a relation between its mission of evangelization and development. It emphasized the protection of the rights of the workers.⁵⁴

On the same theme, the CBCP formed the National Secretariat of Social Action (NASSA) at the request of the Priests' Institute of Social Action and held a National Congress on Rural Development from February 4 to 11, 1968. This was followed by another pastoral letter on social awareness which was issued on May 1, 1968.

In 1969, the CBCP decided to create a Commission on Social Action which would serve as the Philippine counterpart of the Pontifical Commission on Social Action. The commission which was formed on July 5, 1969, affirms, the Church's concern for man's temporal and bodily welfare.

The Church was also aware of the need to institute changes in the political system which would be crucial in protecting the welfare of the people especially the poor. Of special concern was the revision of the Philippine Constitution which would be replaced by a new one. On January 5, 1970, the CBCP appealed to Congress for a non partisan constitutional convention. While the country was drafting the candidates for the convention, the Church allowed priests to run. The CBCP agreed to hold talks and seminars about the constitution and the importance of its drafting. It cooperated with other groups to ensure the holding of free and honest elections and sermons were delivered about this political exercise.⁵⁵

In June 1970, the CBCP issued a pastoral letter urging the citizens on their social responsibility in exercising their right to vote and urging them to participate conscientiously at the same time denouncing the evils of society.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 28

The Visit of Pope Paul VI

One event which gave a respite from the social strife of this period was the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines, which lasted from November 27 to 29, 1970. The Pope's visit, the first in the Philippines was made on the occasion of the Conference of Asian Bishops that was being held in Manila. The Conference had the twin themes of "The Development of the Peoples of Asia" and "The Pastoral Care of University Students."⁵⁶ At that time, the President of the CBCP was Archbishop Teopisto Alberto of Caceres. During his visit the Pope met with 400,000 students at UST, on November 28. On the following day it was the audience of the farmers, fishermen and members of the armed forces. On the afternoon of the same day, Pope Paul VI inaugurated *Radio Veritas*, the Catholic radio station.

The Radio Veritas

Radio Veritas became the fearless voice of the Church especially on social issues. It played a crucial role 16 years later in 1986 when it echoed the indignation of the CBCP over the result of the February 7 presidential elections.⁵⁷ And *Radio Veritas* rallied the people in a non-violent campaign and the largely bloodless revolution at EDSA, which resulted in the ouster and exile of President Marcos.

Meanwhile social conditions worsened with the escalation of political violence and the alleged resurgence of the communist movements in the next two years. These culminated with the declaration of martial law on September 23, 1972.⁵⁸

3. The Crisis Years of Martial Law (1972-1981) to the Authoritarian Rule of 1981-1986

Along with the rest of the population, the Catholic hierarchy came under martial rule. Martial law was imposed ostensibly to save the Republic from the domination of economic and political oligarchs, com-

⁵⁶ Loc. cit.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 56-58

⁵⁸ Contrary to the widely-accepted belief, martial law was actually declared on September 23, 1972, instead of September 21, 1972, which appeared in the Proclamation 1081 signed by President F. Marcos. It was possible, according to some historians, that Marcos antedated his proclamation as well as other decrees.

munists who threatened to establish radical social changes through a bloody revolution and secessionists tried to dismember the state. Marcos declared that he intended to create a new society out of the old and corrupt one.

However, in the process of imposing martial rule, the President used his emergency powers to dismantle the Country's democratic institutions, especially the Congress, and maintained a subservient judiciary. Also hundreds of Marcos' political enemies and other political activists were arrested. Some of them were detained for a prolonged period. Through his subsequent manipulations of the 1973 Constitution, the Country under President Marcos became an authoritarian state.

On September 26, or three days after the declaration of martial law, the CBCP administrative council issued a statement urging the people to remain calm and law-abiding. While the council recognized the right of the state to protect the country's sovereignty and to preserve peace and order, it called on the government to exercise prudence and restraint and to respect human dignity.

In the first five months of martial rule, the CBCP was generally silent. This was because the political condition was a new experience in the Philippine hierarchy. At the same time, it exercised prudence in order not to antagonize the martial law administration which exercised almost unlimited powers. In 1973, the bishops met for the first time since the declaration of martial law. They discussed the need to set up a CBCP Liaison Group to help priests and other religious having trouble with the martial law authorities. They asked the government to reopen the Church radio station which have since remained closed. Also they asked the government to help reintegrate Chinese priests into Philippine society. During the same meeting, they condemned the family planning program of the government and the policy of sterilization which had been endorsed by a Presidential decree.⁵⁹

Church-Military Liaison Committee

One of the results of the meeting of the bishops was the formation of the Church-Military Liaison Committee (CMLC) in 1974, which took up matters concerning individuals detained by the military. A

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.30

fund was set up for the families of the detainees and petitions were made to reopen the radio stations.

Much of the actions of the CBCP during the first two years of martial law was focused on Church Affairs. This could be seen in its statements during 1972 to 1975. Examples of these statements were the: *Statement on Drug Abuse* (1972); *Pastoral Letter to the Priests of the Philippines* (1973); *Pastoral Letter on the Population Problem on 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 Philippine Life Today* (1975).⁶⁰

While the Conference did not condemn martial law, it did not endorse it either. While it accepted the goals of Marcos' New Society, it warned the people against pursuing progress at the expense of human dignity and freedom in a pastoral letter on evangelization and development which was issued on July 25, 1973.

Meanwhile the regime's human rights record continued to worsen. The government employed measures such as the Arrest, Search and Seizure Order (ASSO) to apprehend and detain indefinitely persons perceived as threats to public order.

The Church itself was not exempt from government harassment. Church workers were often suspected of coddling leftist activists. And many of them were arrested or placed under surveillance. Priest who spoke against government abuses and those who were against certain government policies and actions were molested. Among the first targets of government harassment were two Irish priests, who were deported. The deportation of these priests triggered the first confrontation with the government.

The Referendum of 1976

On October 6, 1976, the CBCP Administrative Council branded the results of a just-concluded referendum as a "vicious farce." The referendum was held to consult the people when to create a new government under the 1973 constitution. It turned out that the results have been "managed" to suit Marcos' desire to remain as martial law President. Earlier, the CBCP, through a pastoral letter, urged the electorate to vote as a matter of moral obligation. The manipulation

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 38

of the results of the referendum made it a mockery of the people's will. President Marcos retaliated against this criticism by stepping up deportations of foreign missionaries, closure of radio stations and arrest and detention of lay workers. These incidents triggered another confrontation between the Church and the government.

The Critical Collaboration

With the prevailing social conditions and the confrontations with the state, the CBCP deliberated on three options on the approach toward the martial law regime: these were support; critical collaboration and rejection. The Conference chose the second approach which was a middle way between endorsement and condemnation.⁶¹

During the presidency of Jaime Cardinal Sin (1977-1981), the CBCP exercised critical collaboration as a policy in dealing with the government. Actually, it was more critical than collaborative. The Church through the CBCP became more committed not only for the political, and economic and social development of the people but also for their liberation in these fields. It became more concerned in defending human rights and condemning its violations. The CBCP, under the presidency of Jaime Cardinal Sin, condemned the government's population program, its handling of the conflict in Mindanao, and its harassment of Church programs particularly the Basic Ecclesial Communities which were targeted as communist fronts.

The liberationist ideas of the CBCP is reflected and can be seen in the pastoral letters it issued from 1980 and 1982. These were "Communal Action Toward Human Liberation" (1980); "Beyond Poverty into Total Human Liberation" (1982). In another pastoral letter, titled "The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Good News," the CBCP criticized the overall government policies on population control, its worsening human rights record and its treatment of cultural minorities. Meanwhile, the country's socio-economic condition continued to worsen with the devaluation of the peso, and the ballooning of the foreign debt. Equally alarming was the rise of political violence and the militarization of the countryside. To call the attention of the country's leaders, the CBCP issued a pastoral letter on October 7, 1979 titled "Exhortation Against Violence." The letter pointed out that the escalating violence has its roots in the unjust social structure of society and it said

⁶¹ Loc. cit.

that such violence can be stopped by putting justice and peace into the same structure.⁶²

The Visit of Pope John Paul II

A week before the visit of Pope John Paul II to the country on February 17, to 22, 1981, President Marcos lifted martial law. This was however a cosmetic action meant to impress the Pontiff. During the Pope's visit, the second since Pope Paul VI, country's leaders including President Marcos were admonished to uphold human rights and dignity and to give preferential treatment for the poor and the underprivileged.

Political repression, however, continued as it was during martial law. That year was marked with more arrests of Church workers, raids of institutions and trial by publicity by the media. The Church itself was accused of being infiltrated by the communists.

In 1983, the CBCP became more critical of the regime. This was perhaps because of the Pope's messages to the President in 1981. Its mission had become clearer: the CBCP was not only calling for the reform of individuals but also of the societal structures which contribute to the unjust social order. By this time, the CBCP was not only criticizing the individual acts of the government but the regime itself. Many of its statements during this period referred to the country's political conditions.

a. Dialogue for Peace

On February 20 of that year, the CBCP issued the first of its strongest statements against the authoritarian regime with a pastoral letter titled "Dialogue for Peace," which took to task the government's anti-people and anti-poor programs, official corruption, and its disregard for due process. The letter said that these are roots of injustice and called for the restructuring of society according to God's plan. The bishops clearly sided with the poor and called for the protection of their rights and dignity.⁶³

⁶² "Exhortation Against Violence," Pastoral Letter, October 7, 1979.

⁶³ "Dialogue for Peace," Pastoral Letter, February 20, 1983.

b. Pastoral Guidelines for Priests, Religious and Lay Workers in the Task of Social Justice

This scathing letter was followed by another titled "Pastoral Guidelines for Priests, Religious and Lay Workers in the Task of Social Justice." These two letters prompted President Marcos to offer the bishops participation in his development programs. The bishops rejected the offer stating that they were interested more of the reform of the political structure. Also Marcos' offer was typical of the government policy of cooperation in which its critics are offered positions and money to keep quiet if physically eliminating them was not politically feasible.

With continued government pressure on Church institutions and activities, the CBCP withdrew its participation in the Church-Military Liaison Committee. This was a sign of worsening relations with the state. When President Marcos instituted by decree the Presidential Commitment Order (PCO) which replaced the notorious ASSO, only in name but not in meaning as arbitrary arrests and detentions continued, the CBCP passed a judgment saying that PCO's Decree implementation was immoral.

The state of the country's political, social and economic conditions plummeted with the aftermath of the assassination of former Senator Benigno S. Aquino, on August 21, 1983. With the country practically teetering at the edge of collapse with the capital flight and social unrest from massive demonstrations demanding the resignation of the government, the CBCP issued a call for reconciliation, on November 27. It called for a genuine reconciliation with God and one another as an alternative to the present injustice and violence.⁶⁴

On December 28, the CBCP administrative council issued a statement concerned with the forthcoming plebiscite and the elections for the *Batasang Pambansa*, which would be held in May 1984. The statement discussed the people's right not to vote if it was contrary to their conscience. At that time the government threatened actions against people who intended to boycott the plebiscite and elections. Among these actions were imprisonment and prohibition to travel abroad.

In the midst of that chaotic year, the CBCP quietly transferred its headquarters from Cabildo Street in Intramuros to its present site

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p. 33

along General Luna Street, near the San Agustin Church, also in Intramuros.⁶⁵

c. *Let There Be Life*

On July 11, 1984, the CBCP published a pastoral letter titled "Let There Be Life," which defended the sacredness of human life.⁶⁶ This letter was a response to the rampant killings with salvaging or summary executions by both leftist and rightist forces. The "secret marshals" or policemen who were authorized to kill with extreme prejudice were reactivated by Marcos to stem the rising criminality. Marcos himself continued to exercise his martial law powers and continued to rule by decree under Amendment No.6 of the Constitution, which he inserted despite the establishment of the *Batasang Pambansa*. The economy, meanwhile, was almost bankrupt because of the capital flight and the closure of businesses. The CBCP's letter demanded the revamp of the country's political structure, the end to summary executions and the deployment of secret marshals, and the abolition of Amendment no.6. It called for the immediate solution to the prevailing economic crisis as a way of restoring public confidence in the government.⁶⁷ One of the results of this pastoral letter was the disbandment of the notorious secret marshals.

In January 1985, the CBCP convened and discussed national issues as well as those confronting the Church. Among these issues there was the question of communism and the infiltration of the Church by the Left. Some members of the clergy had subscribed to the theology of liberation which included the taking up of arms to effect changes. A number of them had joined the communist rebels fighting the government. Also discussed in this meeting was the manipulation of the Church to serve the objectives of the leftist elements. Other issues which were tackled involved the U.S. military bases, the construction of a Philippine nuclear power plant, social justice and social development. The bishops' meeting concluded with a stand rejecting communism, the path of armed struggle for the attainment of liberation and a renewed commitment toward social justice and development. The CBCP committed itself for clean, honest and orderly elections and it

⁶⁵ Before *Cabildo*, the CBCP had its headquarters at F.B. Harrison St. in Pasay.

⁶⁶ "Let There be Life," Pastoral Letter, July 11, 1984.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34

agreed to support the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) to attain this purpose.

During that year, the CBCP renewed its call for spiritual renewal with the issuance of three statements, one on biblical apostolate, which was released in February, and the two other, on February 2 and August 6, during the Marian Year. On July 8, the CBCP denounced terrorism by the state. This was prompted by the killings of priests and laymen who were dedicated in the service of others. The Conference denounced the use of religious cultists in the counter-insurgency campaign and the torture and the summary executions of civilians suspected of collaborating with communist insurgents. The bishops called for the reform, if not abolition of the Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF) which had become notorious for human rights abuses.

d. *We Must Obey God Rather Than Men*

Late that year, President Marcos announced the holding of early presidential elections. This announcement caught many, including the bishops by surprise because Marcos' term was due to expire in 1987 since he was elected in 1981 for a six-year term. The reason for the elections which "snapped" his term as President was mainly due to foreign pressure that he was losing control over the government. Immediately the CBCP convened and released a pastoral letter named "We Must Obey God Rather Than Men," on January 26, 1986. In this letter the bishops declared that elections could become a great scandal and an offense against God. In the letter they said that:

"It has been our sad experience that God's will has been flagrantly transgressed in the past through the violation of our electoral process. These practices are sins against the Lord. We should not passively surrender to the forces of evil. Refuse to cooperate with and resist all efforts at cheating, intimidation and violence."⁶⁸

The bishops' urged that the people should not be cowed into cynicism by the forces of evil bent on frustrating their will. The bishops urged the people to let the will of God prevail and that the CBCP will be one with them. The tenor of this pastoral letter indicated that the bishops predicted that the Marcos regime would do anything to win in the forthcoming snap elections.

⁶⁸ "We Must Obey God Rather Than Men," Joint Pastoral Letter, Jan 25, 1986.

When the elections were conducted, on February 7, the predictions of the bishops were confirmed with the massive cheating, vote-buying and terrorism committed mainly by pro-Marcos forces. The fraud and deception were systematic and incredible in proportion. The results obtained by NAMFREL showed the opposition candidate Corazon Aquino leading by a wide margin compared to Marcos. The brazen moves to switch the election results prompted the computer operators at the COMELEC to walk out in protest. Despite the questionable election results, the parliament dominated by Marcos' KBL (*Kilusang Bagong Lipunan*) partymates declared him the winner of the elections on February 12.

The following day, the CBCP convened and branded the just-concluded elections were "unparalleled in the fraudulence of their conduct." The result of this meeting was a strongly-worded pastoral letter labeled as the "Post Election Statement," which was a judgment of the February 7 elections. In the letter, the bishops cited the systematic disenfranchisement of voters, tampering of election returns, intimidation, harassment, vote-buying, terrorism and murder.

In reference to the mandate of the government over the people, the bishops declared that "a government that assumes or retains power through fraudulent means has no moral basis."⁶⁹

While they rejected violence as a wrong for righting another wrong, they endorsed a non-violent means as a struggle for justice. This pastoral letter was read during a mammoth rally at the Luneta on February 14 and copies were issued to the public the following day. The result was a massive response by the people who complied by participating in a non-violent civil disobedience campaign which culminated in the EDSA Revolution forcing President Marcos and his family to flee the country on February 25. During these historic events, the CBCP was acknowledged as the moral leader of the people which actively participated in their struggle for liberation.

4. The Challenges of the Democratic Years of the Early Nineties (1986-1995)

The abolition of the authoritarian regime did not mean the end of the crusade of the CBCP to work for the socio-economic and political

⁶⁹ "Post Election Statement," Pastoral Letter, July 11, 1989

welfare of the people. Actually, more work lay ahead for the bishops. The departure of Marcos did not immediately mean the dismantlement of the oppressive social structures. The martial-law oriented military was very much around. At the same time the leftists wanted to accelerate their drive for power through legal and extralegal means. The new president, Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino, was inexperienced in statecraft and was surrounded by advisers who were guided by their varying personal agenda.

The Church and the CBCP developed close relations with the Aquino government and became supportive of the new regime. The CBCP continued to pursue its policy of critical collaboration, having high hopes that the new government would be instrumental in the renewal of the social order and in the establishment of lasting peace.

The 1986 Constitution

In order to get rid of the authoritarian past, the Aquino government embarked on the drafting of a new Constitution. The new regime subscribed to the reform of the social order advocated by the Church. At the drafting of the new charter, Mrs. Aquino appointed three persons from the Catholic community. They were Teodoro Bacani, auxiliary bishop of Manila, Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S. J., of Ateneo, and Sister Christine Tan. Other influential members of the Constitutional Commission were Catholic leaders such as Ambrosio Padilla, Francisco Rodrigo, Bernardo Villegas and Wilfrido Villacorta. The Charter, which was ratified in 1987 reflected the CBCP's stand on many issues such as the primacy of the family, the prohibition of abortion and divorce, the abolition of the death penalty and the possibility of imparting religious instruction in public schools.

a. Thou Shall Not Steal

Graft and corruption in the government was among the social problems tackled by the CBCP. It came to the knowledge of the Conference that there were some government officials and their relatives were using their powers to a mass wealth. On July 11, 1989, the CBCP, through the pastoral letter "Thou Shall Not Steal," said that graft and corruption was a sin hateful before God because it stole money from those who are already poor.⁷⁰ The bishops suggested that anti-graft

⁷⁰ "Thou Shall Not Steal," Pastoral Letter, July 11, 1989.

councils were instituted throughout the country to monitor the use of public funds and the mustering of public opinion to discourage anomalies in the government.

b. Solidarity For Peace

With the forces of the Left and the Right still tugging at the government, with the frequent occurrences of ambushes by the communist hit squads in the city and rebels in the countryside, and the continued summary executions by the police and the military, the CBCP voiced its concern in a pastoral letter titled "Solidarity For Peace" in 1988. The letter called on the warring sides to come to the negotiating table. This appeal by the bishops was adopted in House Resolution No. 849 urging President Aquino to take steps to end the twenty-year old communist rebellion.⁷¹

c. Thirsting For Justice

The CBCP denounced political extremists from the Left and the Right which were fighting for influence and control of the government through coup attempts and infiltration. On January 26, 1987, it condemned the guiding ideologies from both sides, atheistic communism and liberal capitalism, which had no respect for human dignity. The CBCP urged the opposing groups to talk over their differences as a way of achieving peace. On July 14 of that year, it urged the government through a pastoral letter "Thirsting For Justice," to undertake a meaningful and comprehensive land reform program as a way of expanding social justice. It said that it was the landless, the poor and the powerless who had the single claim on the conscience of the nation.⁷²

d. Seek Peace, Pursue it

When the rightist elements in the military launched its bloodiest coup attempt to seize power on December 19, 1989, 17 bishops led by Cardinals Ricardo Vidal and Jaime Sin issued a statement expressing support for the Aquino administration. On January 31, 1990, the CBCP issued a letter titled "Seek Peace, Pursue It," condemning the

⁷¹ *CBCP Monitor*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (November-December, 1988). Rear Flap cover. (Ibid., p.39).

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 36

coup attempt and branding it as immoral and unjust usurpation of power.⁷³

Concern Over the Environment

Though taking a backseat to politics, the CBCP also tackled an equally important issue of the period which concerned the state of the environment. On January 29, 1988, it released a letter "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Country?" which decried the deteriorating state of the environment. The letter, probably the first of this kind in the episcopal history of the world, assailed man's greed and neglect of the environment. It warned that the pollution of the air and water, and the disappearance of forests, would have disastrous consequences on man himself. It called on government to effectively and decisively initiate moves to protect the environment and to conserve the nation's limited natural resources.⁷⁴

The 1992 Elections

With the term of President Aquino reaching its end, the people looked forward to the possible personalities who might lead the country in the next six years. The priorities of the future President of the Philippines would be crucial in determining the social order. Thus the CBCP felt that it was its moral duty to guide the people on the choice for the country's next leader. It was in this context that the Conference issued three pastoral letters related to the approaching presidential elections which would be held on May 11, 1992.

The first of such letters was "Pastoral Letter on Preparing for the 1992 Elections," which was issued on July 22, 1991, emphasized the importance of the holding of truly democratic, peaceful and clean elections. This letter was aimed to help everyone concerned in the political exercise including the administration and the oppositionists. The second letter, "Renewing the Pastoral Order," on November 28 of the same year, listed down the criteria of a good president: He or she must have the desirable qualifications for public service; the person must have the spirit of service, *maka-Diyos* or obedient to the will of

⁷³ Loc. cit.

⁷⁴ "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land," Pastoral Letter, January 29, 1988.

God, a vigorous defender and promoter of justice and he must have an enduring preferential option to help the poor.⁷⁵

On January 31, 1992, the CBCP's third letter "Decisions at the Crossroads," was issued. It appealed to the people to set their priorities aright. In reference to vote-buying and bribe-taking, patronage politics and distorted values of loyalty, it urged them to put honor and dignity before money, service before power, common good before self-interest and the nation first before *utang na loob* or debt of gratitude.

Even after the holding of the elections, the CBCP acted to safeguard future elections. In 1993 it endorsed the *Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting* (PPCRV) and on January 16, 1996, it released a statement in preparation for the 1995 national and local elections. The statement, titled "Elections 1995 — A Challenge to the Young," asked the people to take their electoral duties seriously. The CBCP was also active in the Voters' Organization, Training, and Education for Authentic and Responsible Elections (VOTECARE) program. It organized more than 250,000 volunteers in all the 79 dioceses in the country.⁷⁶

The Plight of the Overseas Filipino Workers

Another important concern which attracted the attention of the CBCP were the problems of the Filipino overseas workers. While the government benefited greatly from the remittances of the country's workforce abroad, they were not amply protected. Abuses and maltreatment by foreign employers were common. Many prospective workers were victimized by unscrupulous recruiters.

The CBCP pointed out in 1990 that the reason why Filipinos have to seek work outside their country was because of poverty at home. It urged the government to take adequate measures to safeguard the rights of migrant workers and their families. During the funeral of the executed Filipino domestic worker Flor Contemplacion in 1995, it repeated its appeal for better protection of Filipino overseas workers which should take precedence over economic gains.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "Renewing the Pastoral Order," Pastoral Letter, November 28, 1991.

⁷⁶ Linsangan, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁷⁷ Flor Contemplacion was charged with killing a fellow Filipino domestic worker, Delia Maga, her Singaporean ward. The outrage over the government's perceived

The Present Problems and Challenges: Crime and Poverty

Another prevalent problem addressed by the CBCP was the rising criminality especially the incidences of kidnapping, which involved former or active members of the police and the military either as masterminds or accomplices. On January 25, 1993, it called on the administration of President Fidel Ramos to institute a decisive campaign against criminals and rid the Philippine National Police and the forces of scalawags and other misfits. On the cause of crime, the CBCP said that the roots of criminality lay in the poverty of the people, the defects in the criminal justice system, law enforcement and penal systems.⁷⁸ Earlier, on July 29, 1992 it opposed the re-imposition of death penalty as a deterrent against crime and called on the President to address the roots of criminality.

The bishops also opposed measures of the government perceived as anti-poor. The CBCP cited the system of taxation, which it said should reduce its burden on the poor. The bishops called for a review of *Republic Act 7716* on the expanded value-added tax law and questioned whether the law merely strengthened the tax structure against the poor.

The CBCP also asked the government to consider its debt policy in the context of the ethics of survival. The bishops registered their opposition to the increases in the prices of petroleum products, saying that these measures were indicative of a lack of concern for the common good.⁷⁹

The Peace Process

As one of the thrusts of the Ramos administration, the government initiated moves to reconcile with its enemies from the Left, Right and Muslim secessionists. The CBCP supported this initiative and declared that all sectors should be included in the dialogue.

The government then formed the National Unification Commission (NUC) to make contacts with the different rebel groups. To en-

inaction during her trial caused the victory of opposition candidates in the 1995 elections. The controversy over her trial and execution also strained the relations between the Philippines and Singapore in 1995.

⁷⁸ Op. cit., p. 36

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

courage all parties to come to the negotiating table, the CBCP issued a pastoral letter, on January 25, 1993; it encouraged indeed everyone to support the peace process. This letter was followed by another titled "Peace in Our Times," in which the Conference enunciated its desire for genuine peace.⁸⁰ Earlier in 1992, it agreed at the request of the National Peace Conference to send a delegation to meet with the representatives of the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) in HongKong or Switzerland.

The process of the talks between this group and the government was not smooth as both sides accused each other of bad faith and violations of human rights. The CBCP for its part, though it wished to participate in the conclusion of a successful agreement, never hesitated to criticize either side of using the issue of human rights for their own objectives.

F. "LET EVERYONE HEED WHAT HE HEARS" (Mt. 13:9)

The CBCP remains as the national organization of the Catholic hierarchy in the Philippines. At present, 79 ecclesiastical territories, including 16 archdioceses, and 48 dioceses are represented in the body. This does not include the Military Ordinariate of the Philippines, which consists of the chaplains of the Armed Forces. The CBCP is headed by a permanent administrative Council consisting of a President, a Vice President, a Treasurer and a Secretary General which administers the day-to-day affairs of the organization. The three geographical regions of the country have their representatives in the permanent council. The current President (1996) of the Conference is the Most Reverend Oscar V. Cruz, the Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan. His predecessor, the Most Reverend Carmelo D.F. Morelos, the Archbishop of Zamboanga, was the 13th President of the CBCP since its foundation as the organization of the Philippine hierarchy, in 1945.

The CBCP has five departments with their respective commissions, these are: the Department of Doctrine and Religious Affairs, which has seven commissions; the Department of Clergy Formation, with four commissions; the Department of Lay Formation, which has five commissions; the Department of Social Services and Communication, six commissions; the Department of External Affairs, with two

⁸⁰ "Peace in Our Times," Pastoral Letter, January 25, 1993

commissions and a National Appellate Matrimonial Tribunal, which decides on the second instance on sentences involving marital cases.⁸¹

1. An Outlook to its Role in the Future

The year 1995 was a significant one for the CBCP. During that year, the organization celebrated its 50th year of existence as the organization of the Church hierarchy in the Philippines. Also very significant is the second visit of Pope John Paul II to the country. The first one was in 1981, from February 17 to 22. The Second visit, which lasted from January 12 to January 16, 1995 was marked with an enormous outpouring of love and support for the Supreme Pontiff of the

⁸¹ The CBCP has 24 commissions plus the National Appellate Matrimonial Tribunal under its five departments. Broken down these are the following:

Department of Doctrine and Religious Affairs

1. Commission on Doctrine of the Faith
2. Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education
3. Commission on Canon Law
4. Commission on Liturgy
5. Commission on Ecumenical Affairs
6. Commission on Inter-Religious Dialogue
7. Commission on Culture

Department of Clergy Formation

1. Commission on Clergy
2. Commission on Seminaries
3. Commission on Pontificio Collegio Filipino
4. Commission on Vocations

Department for Laity Formation

1. Commission on the Laity
2. Commission on Biblical Apostolate
3. Commission on Family and Life
4. Commission on Youth

Department of Social Services and Communications

1. Commission on Social Action, Justice and Peace
2. Commission on Social Communications
3. Commission for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People
4. Commission on Prisoners' Welfare
5. Commission on Indigenous People
6. Commission on Health Care

Department of External Affairs

1. Permanent Committee on Public Affairs
2. Mixed Commission on Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious
3. National Appellate Matrimonial Tribunal.

Church. The crowd at the mass for the World Youth Day on January 15 at the Luneta numbered four million people. It was a world record for a crowd which gathered for anything. During the papal visit, the Church hierarchy was in the thick of things to see that the visit went smoothly.

A Collective Voice for Social Concern

Since its foundation as the CWO, in 1945, the CBCP's role has vastly differed from its original task of distributing postwar relief and working for war damage compensation. Through it, the collective voice of the bishops — the heads of the Catholic Church in the Philippines — speak on issues not limited to religious and spiritual matters but also those of social concern. This could be seen in the topics of the pastoral letters it issued during its more than fifty years of existence.

From 1945 to 1995, the CWO/CBCP published a total of 102 pastoral letters. Of these thirty-four (34) were on matters of social justice or social action; twenty-eight (28) were on political matters, mostly on elections; thirty-one (31) dwelt on pastoral concerns; and nine (9) were about educational and religious instruction.⁸²

This concern of the Church and the CBCP on other matters can be traced to the encyclicals of the Pope starting from the epochal *Re-rum Novarum* and other statements calling for the involvement of the Church as a vehicle of social transformation and liberation. With this orientation, the Church has risen to meet the challenges of the times. It has become an activist Church, a champion of justice, the defender of the poor, and protector of human rights and dignity, aside from its role as the agent of salvation. This concept has been gradually introduced to the Philippine Church through the CBCP.

In 1986, the CBCP organized the version of the Bishop's Institute for the Lay Apostolate in the dioceses. It was intended to expose the bishops to the laymen and vice-versa. From this interaction, the Church is expected to be active and participatory in its relation with the laity.

In 1988, the CBCP affirmed the closer commitment of the Church in its oneness with the people in the path toward social liberation. This was dramatized in its rather long pastoral letter "To Live in

⁸² Ibid., pp. 41-42

Memory of Him: One Body, One People," which was issued on March 21. The bishops declared:

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.⁸³

A Church of Integral Evangelization

During the meeting of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines held from January 20 to February 19, 1991, the bishops presented the vision of the role of the Church in the future. The plan, which had been earlier approved by the CBCP in July 1990, envisions the Church as a community of disciples, in which there is unity in diversity, equality in dignity and participation; a Church which at the same time a community-in-mission; a Church of integral evangelization.⁸⁴

Though this paradigm shift is not new to the Philippine Church, the application of this vision has been gradual. With its adoption by the Plenary Council of the Philippines, its dissemination throughout the Church would have a strong and lasting impact as books and doctrines would convert the Church from a mere teaching Church to one that learns (*Ecclesia discendi*).

Empowered Laity committed to Self Liberation

With this doctrine, the Church foresees an empowered laity committed to self-liberation. The Church will be an active body of people rooted in the concept of Christ on earth which will give preference for the poor and emboldened by the Holy Spirit to spread His evangelic message. This is the vision of the Catholic hierarchy for the next millennium. Truly, from Catholic Welfare Organization to Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, from an apostolate of social action to social transformation; from witness to witnesses; from a community of disciples to a Church-in-mission, "it grew and became a large shrub and the birds of the air nested in its branches." (Lk. 13:19). □

⁸³ "To Live in Memory of Him: One Body, One People," Pastoral Letter, March 21, 1988.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 40

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- Joint Statement at the Close of the Holy Year (1950-1951)*
- Joint Pastoral Letter on the Forthcoming Plenary Council* [November 29, 1952]
- Unity, The Prime Witness of God (Pastoral Letter Issued at the Close of the First Plenary Council of the Philippine Islands)* [January 25, 1953]
- Joint Statement Concerning Optional Religious Instruction in Public Schools* [January 29, 1953]

A Time to Speak (Pastoral Letter on Religious Instruction in Public Schools) [February 18, 1953]

Joint Pastoral Letter on Elections [September 12, 1953]

Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on Masonry [January 14, 1954]

Joint Pastoral Letter on the Marian Year [April 9, 1954]

Statement on the Accusations of Being Communists [July 6, 1954]

Joint Statement on the YMCA [August 15, 1954]

Joint Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education [April 10, 1955]

Statement on Adherence to Religion [June 18, 1955]

Statement on the Persecution in Argentina [June 24, 1955]

Statement on Elections [November 1, 1955]

Pastoral Letter on the Bishops Successors of the Apostles [February 2, 1956]

Carta de la Comision Episcopal de Filipinas Acerca del Segundo Congreso Eucaristico Nacional [Febrero 11, 1956]

Statement on the UST Strike [March 13, 1956]

Statement on Dr. Jose Rizal's Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo [April 21, 1956]

Statement on Juvenile Delinquency [July 26, 1957]

Joint Statement on the Eve of the National Elections of 1957 [Oct. 11, 1957]

Statement on the Nationalization of Schools [January 28, 1959]

Statement on Mission Year [May 17, 1959]

Statement on Nationalism [December 3, 1959]

Statement on Liturgical Revival [August 6, 1961]

Bishops Pastoral Letter on the Ecumenical Council [February 9, 1962]

Joint Pastoral Letter on the Fourth Centenary of the Evangelization of the Philippines [February 2, 1964]

The Philippines for Christ: Time to Launch a New Evangelization [December 8, 1964]

Statement on the Formation of the Foreign Mission Society

Pastoral Letter on the Religious Instruction Bill [June 6, 1965]

Joint Pastoral Letter on Social Action and Rural Development [January 8, 1967]

Joint Pastoral Exhortation on the Nineteenth Centennial of the Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul [June 2, 1967]

Pastoral Statement on the "Year of Social Action" [May 1, 1968]

Pastoral Letter on the Encyclical Letter 'Humanae Vitae' [October 12, 1968]

Statement on Priestly Celibacy [July 10, 1969]

Bishops and Moral Leadership [July 5, 1969]

Statement on Public Policy Regarding Population Growth Control [July 4, 1969]

- Appeal for a Non-Partisan Constitutional Convention* [January 25, 1970]
Statement on Civic Responsibility [July 9, 1970]
Joint Pastoral Letter on the Visit of the Holy Father [September 22, 1970]
Report on the Deliberations at the Annual Bishops Conference [Febr. 20, 1971]
An Appeal for the East Pakistan Refugees [July 8, 1971]
Joint Pastoral Letter on Prayer and the Interior Life [July 8, 1971]
Statement on Drug Abuse [January 29, 1972]
Statment on Martial Law [September 26, 1972]
On Plebiscite
Pastoral Letter to the Priests of the Philippines [June 10, 1973]
Pastoral Letter on Evangelization and Development [July 4, 1973]
Pastoral Letter on the Population Problem and Family Life [December 8, 1973]
Moral Norms for Catholic Hospitals and Catholics in Health Services [December 8, 1973]
Lenten Pastoral Letter on Alay Kapwa 1975 [January 31, 1975]
Statement on the Referendum of February 27, 1975 [January 31, 1975]
Ang Mahal na Birhen (Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary) [February 2, 1975]
Because I was a Stranger and You Made Me Welcome (Letter of Appeal for War Refugees of Vietnam and Cambodia) [May 18, 1975]
Message to our beloved Catholic People of the Philippines on the Occasion of Pope's Day, 1975 [June, 1975]
Statement on the Doctrine of the Church on Christian Marriage [January 30, 1976]
The CBCP on the Apostolate of Christian Education [January 31, 1976]
Joint Pastoral Letter on Christian Marriage and Family Life [May 1, 1976]
Statement on the Referendum-Plesbicite [September 28, 1976]
The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Good News [January 29, 1977]
CBCP Position Paper on the Synod Theme "Catechesis in our Time" [July 13, 1977]
Pastoral Letter on the Holy Father [September 8, 1977]
Letter on the Elections for the Batasang Pambansa on April 7, 1978 [July 10, 1978]
Education for Justice [September 14, 1978]
"Thou Shalt Not Kill" (Pastoral Letter on the Life of the Unborn Child) [January 29, 1979]
"I Was a Stranger..." (Message on Migration Sunday) [August 19, 1979]
Exhortation Against Violence [October 7, 1979]
Papal Visit and Beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz [February 11, 1980]
Statement of the CBCP on Refugees [July 6, 1980]

- A Church Sent* (On the Anniversary of the Visit of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II) [February 17, 1982]
- A Statement Concerning Current Issues that Affect Church-State Relationships* [November 29, 1982]
- A Dialogue for Peace* [February 20, 1983]
- Pastoral Guidelines for Priests, Religious and Lay Workers in the Task of Social Justice* [July 12, 1983]
- Message to the People of God* (July 10-12 meeting in Baguio) [Aug. 7, 1983]
- Reconciliation Today* [November 27, 1983]
- A Statement on the 1984 Plebiscite and Election* [January 8, 1984]
- Let There be Life* (Pastoral Letter on the of Human Life and Its Defenses) [July 11, 1984]
- Proclamation of a Marian Year for the Philippines* [September 8, 1984]
- A Declaration by the CBCP on the Agrava Board* [1984]
- The Marian Year 1985: A Pilgrimage of Hope with Our Blessed Mother* [February 2, 1985]
- Joint Pastoral Letter on the Biblical Apostolate* [February 24, 1985]
- Message to the People of God on Terrorism* [July 8, 1985]
- Joint Pastoral Letter on the Marian Year* [August 6, 1985]
- We Hear the Lord's Cry: An Appeal* (On the Sugar Workers in Negros) [July 9, 1985]
- "We Must Obey God Rather than Men"* (Pastoral Exhortation on the Snap Elections) [January 25, 1986]
- Post Election Statement* [February 13, 1986]
- Exhortation on the Constitutional Commission and Its Work* [May 18, 1986]
- One Hundred Days of Prayer and Penance for National for National Reconciliation, Unity and Peace* [August 6, 1986]
- A Covenant Towards Peace* (Pastoral Letter on the Ratification of the 1986 Constitution of the Philippines) [November 21, 1986]
- "One Bread, One Body, One People"* (Pastoral Letter on the National Eucharistic Year) [November 23, 1986]
- The Fruit of Justice is Peace* [January 26, 1987]
- Statement on the Mendiola Incident* [January 26, 1987]
- Thirsting for Justice* (on Agrarian Reform) [July 14, 1987]
- Religious Instruction in Public Schools: An Opportunity and a Challenge* [July 15, 1987]
- A Call to Prayer, A Call for Self Examination, A Call for United Action* [September 4, 1987]
- What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land* (Pastoral Letter on Ecology) [January 29, 1988]

- Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of National Migration Day* [January 29, 1988]
To Live in Memory of Him: One Body, One People (Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist) [March 21, 1988]
Solidarity for Peace [July 12, 1988]
"Hold Fast to What is Good" (I Thess. 5:2) (Pastoral Statement on Fundamentalist Groups) [January 27, 1989]
The Manipulative Use of Human Rights Violations [July 11, 1989]
"Thou Shalt Not Steal" (On Graft and Corruption) [July 11, 1989]
To Form Filipino Christians Mature in their Faith (Pastoral Letter Announcing 1990 as National Catechetical Year) [January 31, 1990]
"Seek Peace, Pursue It" [January 31, 1990]
Guiding Principles of the CBCP on Population Control [July 10, 1990]
Statement on the Foreign Debt Problem [September 19, 1990]
Love is Life (Pastoral Letter on the Population Control Activities of the Philippine Government) [October 7, 1990]
Statement on the Plight of the Poor [July 21, 1991]
Pastoral Letter on Preparing for the 1992 Elections [July 22, 1991]
Renewing the Political Order (Pastoral Guidelines on Choosing Candidates for the 1992 Elections) [November 28, 1991]
Decision at the Crossroads (On the Elections of May 11, 1992) [January 31, 1992]
Pre-Election Statement [May 5, 1992]
On the Non-Restoration of the Death Penalty [July 24, 1992]
In the Compassion of Jesus (Pastoral Letter on AIDS) [January 23, 1993]
Pastoral Statement on Peace-Building [January 25, 1993]
Pastoral Statement on Kidnapping [January 25, 1993]
1993-Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples [January 25, 1993]
Peace in Our Times [July 12, 1993]
Save the Family and Live (Pastoral Letter on the Family) [July 13, 1993]
"Go... Make Disciples!" (Pastoral Letter on the Fourth Centenary of the Archdioceses of Manila, Cebu, Caceres, Nueva Segovia) [January 29, 1994]
"As the Father Sent Me, So Am I Sending You" (On the 10th World Youth Day) [January 30, 1994]
On Father Cirilo Nacorda and the Abbu Sayyaf [July 10, 1994]
On the Cairo International Conference [July 10, 1994]
On Taxation and the Expanded Value Added Tax Law [July 10, 1994]
Open Letter to the Senate for Deferment of GATT [November 26, 1994]
Election 1995 — A Challenge to the Young [January 16 1995]
"Do Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (A Call to Christian Participation in the Elections) [April 9, 1995]

"I Will Make a Suitable Companion for Him" (Pastoral Statement on the Forthcoming Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing) [July 9, 1995]

"Comfort my People, Comfort Them" (Pastoral Letter on Filipino Migrant Workers) [July 10, 1995]

On the Lahar Victims of the Mt. Pinatubo Eruption (December 1, 1995) [December 1, 1995]

CBCP PRESIDENTS

1945-1949	Most Rev. Gabriel M. Reyes, D.D., Archbishop of Cebu.
1950-1952	Most Rev. Gabriel M. Reyes, D.D., Archbishop of Manila.
1953-1956	Most Rev. Rufino J. Santos, D.D., Archbishop of Manila.
1957-1960	Most Rev. Juan C. Sison, D.D., Archbishop of Nueva Segovia.
1961-1965	Most Rev. Julio R. Rosales, D.D., Archbishop of Cebu.
1966-1969	Most Rev. Lino R. Gonzaga, D.D., Archbishop of Palo.
1970-1973	Most Rev. Teofisto V. Alberto, D.D., Archbishop of Caceres.
1974-1977	Julio R. Cardinal Rosales, D.D., Archbishop of Cebu.
1977-1981	Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, D.D., Archbishop of Manila.
1981-1985	Most Rev. Antonio Ll. Mabutas, D.D., Archbishop of Davao.
1985-1987	Ricardo J. Cardinal Vidal, D.D., Archbishop of Cebu.
1987-1991	Most Rev. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, OP. DD., Archb. of Caceres.
1991-1995	Most Rev. Carmelo D. F. Morelos, D.D., Archb. of Zamboanga.
1996-	Most Rev. Oscar V. Cruz, D.D., Archb. of Lingayen-Dagupan.

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