

The Directions of Pastoral Renewal in the Philippines

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It is more than two years since the historic Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) and more than one year since the promulgation of its *Acts and Decrees*. In July 1993, the Philippine Bishops also approved the National Pastoral Plan to facilitate the implementation of the spirit and decrees of PCP-II.

Now everything depends very much on each local Church, the diocese: its laity, religious, clergy and Bishop.

This paper is an attempt to identify the major directions of pastoral renewal to which PCP-II tried to answer. The major question that preoccupied the Council was: "How shall we as Catholics, individually and as Church, preach the Gospel more effectively so as to change not only our lives but the conditions of our society as well?"

For this purpose, it may be best (a) to present the main methodology of the Council and its vision of the Church, (b) to reflect on the directions prescribed, and (c) to indicate some of the requirements needed to move towards those pastoral directions.

A. The Methodology of PCP-II

From a global view of the Acts and Decrees of PCP-II, the following sequence may be discerned: analysis of the present situation (Part I), theological and pastoral reflection in response to such situation (Parts II-IV), and resolutions responding to the situation (the Decrees).

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By starting with the situation, the Council took the idea of contextualizing the Gospel seriously. It wanted to make sure that the Gospel is to be announced not in an abstract manner but concretely, that it be a leaven transforming the present historical situation of the faith and of the country.

The methodology followed by the Council is called the *Pastoral Spiral*. This is a method of faith discernment and pastoral decision-making that has been popularized in Asia by the office for Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC). The *Pastoral Spiral* begins with a comprehensive, holistic analysis of the situation (including cultural analysis), proceeds with faith-reflection on the situation in the light of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, and finally goes into decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The stage that the Council has now completed is the stage of decision-making. While it is true that a National Pastoral Plan to implement the decisions has been approved, this plan serves partly to help bring down the PCP-II decrees to the diocesan level. Dioceses are to determine their own pastoral emphases and priorities in the light of their particular situations and in accordance with the spirit and overall pastoral thrust of PCP-II. As PCP-II contextualized its faith-reflection and decision-making, so should the dioceses.

The importance of the process should not be ignored. To a great extent, the process assures that faith-reflection is in touch with reality and that the decisions taken are of direct relevance. One may call this: "pastoral planning from below."

B. The Pastoral Challenges

We begin then with situation analysis. A simple review of the analysis done by PCP-II would be sufficient. In this way the directions that the Council finally took might be better understood.

In the view of PCP-II, four major challenges emerge from the pastoral situation:

1. *The challenge of the economic sphere of life*: This is the challenge posed to the faith by mass poverty and under-development, by the great gap between rich and poor in the country, by injustices in the social and economic order that have given rise to this situation and continue to maintain, even aggravate it.

2. *The challenge of the political order.* This is the challenge posed to Christianity by the lack of political power among the poor, the concentration of power in the elite, the lack therefore of a truly representative democracy. And here the popular perception is that those who hold political power do not have a consistent ideology in favor of the poor.

3. *The challenge of the cultural sphere.* This is the challenge posed to the faith by cultural values that are ambivalent, having dominant negative aspects within them as to reinforce, perhaps even cause, the negativities of present-day economic and political life.

4. *The challenge of religious beliefs and practices.* This is the challenge posed by so called "split-level Christianity," the dichotomies of faith and life, the serious inadequacy of putting religious convictions into practice, the ritualism, individualism and privatism of religious faith.

Such are the pastoral challenges to Filipino Christianity. Filipino Catholics are called to respond to these challenges as individuals and as a Church.

C. The Pastoral Vision of PCP-II

It is in the light of the above challenges that we can adequately appreciate the pastoral vision of PCP-II. As a result of theological reflection on the situation, PCP-II made the crucial decision that we need to announce the Gospel in a new way.

Such a decision was made in the face of the social fact that most Filipinos have been Christians for more than 400 years. Apropos here are the words of the famous English Catholic G.K. Chesterton, uttered long ago with great perspicacity: "Not that Christianity has failed but Christians have failed."

In the considered judgment of PCP-II, there is an urgent need of forming a new breed of Christians. Christians who are guided and led by their faith to respond to the challenges. By giving the appropriate responses, they can effectively share in the Lord's work of refashioning a new way of being a person transformative of Philippine society.

The formula of PCP-II for such a change is *A Renewed Integral Evangelization*. The operative words are "renewed" and "integral." This means Evangelization that will include the social message of the

Gospel, the social teachings of the Church, the social implications of being a Christian. It requires Evangelization with "new methods, new goals, new fervor."

And the other part of the equation for change is *Renewed Pastoral Workers of Evangelization*. If the what and how of evangelization are to be renewed, then those who announce the Gospel, namely, all the members of the People of God, must also be effectively renewed. And here, the transformation of people becomes a key and crucial factor towards a change that endures.

With such factors of renewal considered, PCP-II projected the end-term of renewal by way of a vibrant and gripping vision:

"...a Church that is truly a Community of Disciples,
a Church of the Poor,
a Participatory Church,
an Inculturated Church,
a saving and liberating Church
that serves and mirrors the Kingdom of God."

That is, indeed, a mouthful. For the vision is everything that Filipino Catholics today are not. Still that radical vision can degenerate into a mere platitude unless systematic planning and implementation are done in the direction that the vision requires.

D. Pastoral Directions of PCP-II

If the vision of PCP-II concerns the kind of Church that must engage itself with the contemporary needs of people and of society, the directions of renewal will have to deal with the areas that will create such a Church.

The following is one way of looking at the movements which constitute the directions of renewal.

1. *Towards Authentic Discipleship*

What this movement of change requires is the eradication of the dichotomies that characterize Catholic life in the Philippines, such as: a privatistic view of religion ("my religion is a private affair between me and God and does not concern the business of others"); a ritualistic view of faith ("attending rites and devotions are enough, their practical

implications on private and social behavior are not necessary"); an individualistic view of morality ("social sins are not matters for confession").

The end-result of such dichotomies is the fact that while Catholics seem to observe the outward practices of religion (disciples in name), this is not so with regard to interior meaning that must flow into individual and social behavior (disciples in deed).

For such a movement to take place, the renewal of catechesis and liturgy would be necessary. It would mean, for instance, retrieving the religious meaning and highlighting the social dimension of liturgy (e.g. the Mass, Baptism, Confirmation, and Marriage) and worship.

The end result of such a movement should be genuine discipleship in the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, the formation of a disciple-businessman, a disciple-politician, a disciple-farmer, a disciple-fisherfolk, etc.

2. Towards Community

Discipleship is not lived alone; it is lived in community. But we are aware of various realities that are divisive of community (e.g., narrow family or vested political interests, economic, social and cultural divisions).

The movement of change will require once again a renewed catechesis that would emphasize the essential community dimension of Christian life, a renewed social apostolate that would facilitate initiatives in community building, and a renewed liturgy which would underline the element of community, the loving, sharing, serving aspects of worship and of the sacraments.

The end-result of such a movement should be discipleship lived in an authentic community —towards the building of community.

3. Towards Co-Responsibility and Participation

We are also aware of the lack of participation of the laity in decision-making processes at the parish level, of the clergy, religious and laity at the diocesan level.

Obviously the movement will require a re-education of all. Firstly, of the Laity, so that awareness of their roles and charisms may impel

them to be active in all affairs of the Church and in society. Second, of the Clergy and Religious, so that they may facilitate the empowerment of the laity through the giving up of many responsibilities that heretofore they have considered as their preserve. And finally, of Bishops, so that they may become the symbol of unity in Christ, coordinating the various charisms of clergy, religious, and laity activated for the building up of the community.

At another level is the lack of participation of the poor in the affairs of church and society. This matter shall be treated a bit more below.

The end-result of such a movement would be a re-definition of roles in the Church and the building up of new structures of decision-making at the parish and diocesan levels.

4. Towards a Preferential Option for the Poor

More than ever before, we are aware of the nature of God's love in the old Testament as well as in the New, in the person of Jesus. It is a love of preference for the poor. Such love has been described by Pope John Paul II as an "obligatory option."

This is the special love of Jesus for the poor, a love that his incarnation as the God-made-poor for our sake demonstrates from the very beginning.

This is the love, which when religiously practiced, will enable the Church to become a Church of the Poor. Yet it is a radical form of love and, given our historical reality, we need a profound conversion to have such a love. Even as I consider the Church of the Poor as the most radical of our vision of Church, so do I consider this movement towards preferential option for the poor as the most radical.

PCP-II itself said that to become a Church of the Poor, the center of gravity in the Church, which presently seems to favor the rich and powerful, will have to be tilted towards the poor. This is a daunting task!

Such movement will require once again a renewed catechesis which would, day in and day out, present Jesus as the model of Christian love of preference for the poor and make the Beatitudes truly the operative guidelines for Christian living. It will also require a renewed liturgy: We are aware that present practices in sacramental celebrations perpetuate the imbalances in the socio-economic and political structures of society. The changes here would have to be

towards simplicity and away from extravagant ostentation, towards equal treatment of rich and poor and away from treatment according to one's ability to pay for church services.

It will require empowerment of the poor, not only in decision-making processes at the parish and diocesan levels —therefore, a revision of processes of selecting and forming leaders—, but also in the socioeconomic and political spheres. Here a renewed social apostolate would be of great help.

In the movement towards preferential option for the poor, the end result flowing from comprehensive changes —which surely cannot be achieved overnight, but neither should they be delayed— would be what we dream about, a Church of the Poor.

5. Towards an Inculturated Church

Inculturation will require in the area of catechesis the teaching of the faith with serious consideration given to the cultural values of farmers and fishermen, of Tribal Filipinos, slum dwellers, and *sacadas* —in other words, the Filipino culture of poverty. Here, intellectual understanding counts considerably much less than concrete lived experience. The pedagogical method of Jesus announcing the Gospels by using concrete imagery and events and the cultural elements of his time would be a model.

In the area of liturgy and worship, attempts must be made to bring the liturgy of life, its hopes and struggles, into the people's formal worship of God. In the area of the social apostolate, work must be done towards purifying, strengthening, renewing and reinforcing, as the case may be, the cultural values that make for integral development.

The end-result of such changes would be a Filipino faith precisely as struggling in a situation of poverty and deprivation, a faith that strives towards a more abundant life. Thus, inculturation does not merely mean exploration into old indigenous forms of liturgy, which draw the efforts of small elite groups. Inculturation should deal with the historical, largely rural, and existential realities of Philippine poverty, which is the cultural matrix of most of our people.

6. Towards Integral Spirituality

Spirituality is "walking in the Spirit," "remaining in the Spirit," "abiding in the Spirit," "living in the Spirit." These are various ways by

which the letters of St. Paul and St. John describe union with God, which is holiness. This, too, is the way PCP-II describes the common spirituality of all believers which manifests itself in various forms for lay people, for religious, for the clergy.

The operative word here is "integral." It means that spirituality is a way of living in the Spirit in all spheres of life, social, economic, political, cultural and religious. No phase of life is divorced from spirituality. Thus should we speak of holiness and spirituality in business, in politics, in the world of work, etc.

Integral spirituality will require changes in the Filipino Catholic perception of spirituality as basically and almost exclusively related to pious, devotional practices for the lay person, and fidelity to religious commitments and obligations for religious and clergy. What is particularly required is the proper integration of the profane and the sacred, of the marketplace and the sanctuary, of work and prayer, of life and worship.

Such integration is achieved most eminently in the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, Jesus used the very ordinary daily event of having a meal to share with us, lovingly, the most sacred of things —his own Body and Blood. It is at the Eucharist that we find complete integration of the profane and the sacred. A Eucharistic spirituality is integral spirituality.

The requirements towards integral spirituality are the same requirements for the movement towards authentic discipleship. After all, spirituality is "nothing more and nothing less than following Jesus-in-mission."

E. The Movement towards Basic Ecclesial Communities

What has been presented above must be seen as *general but basic directions* for renewal. Decisions, resolutions, decrees, plans that emerge from diocesan pastoral synods, congresses, or assemblies should be formulated and evaluated in so far as they help move the people of God towards these directions.

From my own experience both in Mindanao and Northern Luzon, I see these directions being achieved in Basic Ecclesial Communities at the grassroots level. This is also why PCP-II states categorically that the BEC is an expression of a renewed and renewing Church.

While I recognize the existence of difficulties, I see no reason why it would be impossible to build BECs among the elite, or to build a BEC that is composed of rich and poor families. What is important is for everyone to have a genuine sense of faith and community, of preferential option for the poor, of solidarity, of poverty of spirit, and of discipleship.

Conclusion

If one may summarize the directions for renewal in terms of personal changes that pastoral workers must move towards, these would be what PCP-II itself determined, namely, that the Laity be truly empowered, that Religious be truly prophetic, and that priests and bishops be servant-leaders.

All these desiderata require a profound conversion of values and life-styles. They will require new ways of formation, new processes and structures within the Church.

It is only through such a profound renewal that the Church can truly be an effective evangelizer and a leaven in Philippine society.

Without renewal, the Church would be a "clanging cymbal," sounding sonorously but without truth and power. But evangelizing itself with the Lord's Good News and led by the Spirit, the Church can help bring about more fully the in-breaking of God's kingdom into our midst. This is the hope and prayer of the Church in the Philippines.