

JOINT PASTORAL LETTER TO OUR PEOPLE THE BOND OF LOVE IN PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS

Our dearly beloved People of God:

"I must proclaim the GOOD NEWS of the Kingdom of God."
(Lk. 4:43)

"It is a duty that has been laid on me (preaching the Gospel);
I should be punished if I did not preach it." (I Cor. 9:16)

"The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential
mission of the Church." (Synod 1974, n. 36)

A. EVANGELIZATION

This is **EVANGELIZATION**: the proclamation, above all, of **SALVATION** from sin; the **LIBERATION** from everything oppressive to man; the **DEVELOPMENT** of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian; and, ultimately, the **RENEWAL OF SOCIETY** in all its strata through the interplay of the **GOSPEL TRUTHS** and man's concrete **TOTAL LIFE** (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 9, 29). **THIS IS OUR TASK. THIS IS OUR MISSION.**

With the help of the Holy Spirit and in communion with one another, we undertake to analyze with sincere objectivity our present Philippine situation in the light of the **GOSPEL**, and therefrom draw principles for reflection, norms of discernment and guidelines for action (*Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 4).

While we are well aware of the vastness and complexity of the situation particularly in matters involving basic human rights and obligations, at the moment we consider the following as more urgent and deserving of **OUR PASTORAL CONCERN**.

B. PHILIPPINE SITUATION

FAMILY LIFE: We readily appreciate the efforts of the Government to improve the quality of family life. However, we detect a marked tendency to implement this endeavor at the expense of GOD-given rights. Parents are at least indirectly denied the right to determine by themselves the size of their family through socio-economic legislations. Anti-natalist programs are openly promoted with the concerted use of Government resources; employing coercive measures, violating consciences and even destroying the innocence of children under the guise of sexual education. In fact, abortion is fast becoming a practice, gradually losing its criminal character.

NATIONAL MINORITIES: People have a right to the integrity and enrichment of their cultures. In this context, we praise the intent of the Government in behalf of the National Minorities. Nevertheless, the otherwise laudable program is defeated by the way it is implemented. We regret in particular the prevention of their growth and development through a false notion of cultural authenticity.

We refer here specifically to the Presidential Arm on Cultural Minorities (PANAMIN). It has been given the special task of protecting and uplifting the various non-Muslim minorities of the nation. But, as we have indicated in a letter of protest to the President, the actual implementation of its programs destroy rather than preserve the cultures of the people PANAMIN works with. And men and women working for the rights and development of cultural minorities precisely as cultural communities have been harassed and intimidated, arrested and jailed. This we strongly deplore and condemn.

MINDANAO SITUATION: We recognize the delicate situation obtaining in the Government's effort to solve the centuries-old problem in Mindanao. This compelling desire to have peace in that area has led the present Administration to enter into dialogue with Muslim groups. We pray and hope that these negotiations lead to a happy and just solution.

In our prophetic role, we voice our people's apprehension lest basic human rights be ignored in the attempt to resolve the problems. We stand solidly for the protection of equal rights for all.

WORKERS FOR EVANGELIZATION: The final stage in the process of Evangelization is reached when an Evangelized Community becomes an Evangelizing Community. The implantation of a Local Church that is self-reliant, is a sign of that maturing process. In this spirit, Local Churches have consistently prepared their members, both the Clergy and the Laity, precisely to participate actively in the work of Evangelization. The establishment of Basic Christian Communities, whose members are united in one Faith and Hope, and bound together by Love and Service, springs the mandate of Evangelization. And our lay workers are essential in the implementation of this mission. We thank them and give them our pledge of support.

It is most unfortunate that in many cases this evangelizing work of forming and strengthening Basic Christian Communities has been misunderstood, and led to the arrests of foreign missionaries.

Throughout her whole history, the Church has always upheld the right of the State to protect itself against any threat to its existence. This we have never doubted. The Church has likewise upheld the Gospel to all men at all times. This right deriving from the Divine Command has been generally respected by all Nations. Our own Nation bears that salient distinction. But like other God-given rights this right should not be denied in the name of National Security.

DUE PROCESS: Times of crisis such as the present one produce tensions that disturb the otherwise harmonious relationship between the Workers of Evangelization and the Guardians of Peace. The missionary work of building Basic Christian Communities is now not frequently suspected of subversion. Sometimes this suspicion may be the work of insidious instigators. At times it may be conjured by exaggerated fears.

Sobriety goodwill and openness of mind can minimize, if not totally prevent this lamentable situation. Our missionaries, specially the foreign ones who come to our shores at the impulse of the Holy Spirit are caught in the dilemma of obeying God in serving man and being suspected of subversion with its untoward consequences, or avoiding such suspicion by giving up altogether their missionary task.

We are searching for that happy understanding where the Workers of Evangelization and the Protectors of National Security can understand and consider one another as promoters of the common welfare. The least we ask therefore is that at all times due process be observed in all cases of arrests and deportations of Workers of Evangelization be they priests, religious or lay workers.

C. UNITY

We plead that we all raise our minds and hearts to HIM who has called us to be People so that we may resolve our misunderstanding particularly between the Workers of Evangelization and the Guardians of National Security, and start anew the common task of uniting our People for progress and peace. Let us remove the painful irony that while we share common aspirations, we have nevertheless looked at each other with suspicion and mistrust.

To our Co-Workers for Evangelization, we say this: Our evangelizing zeal must spring from true holiness of life, and, as the Second Vatican Council suggests, preaching must in its turn make the preacher grow in holiness.

The Church embraces all men as brothers under the Fatherhood of God. She is not partial to any group. She has a motherly sympathy for the poor and voiceless. She has love for all, no malice towards any one.

Finally we express our profound gratitude to you, the countless men and women and children who kept praying and offering sacrifices for us during our Meeting. The many communications we received assuring us of your prayers that the Spirit of light and truth would enlighten our deliberations expressed not just our solidarity but that vital truth that without HIM we can do nothing, and that when we are gathered in His Name, the God of Truth and Justice will abide in us. These expressed your unity with us. These manifested your deepest concern for our unity. You inspired us. You strengthened us. We sincerely thank you. We put in GOD our trust. We ask for no greater blessing than that the unity signified in these prayers remain a permanent reality.

(Sgd.) All the Members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in its Meeting In Cebu City — January 25-29, 1977