

DOCUMENTATION

PHILIPPINE HIERARCHY

PASTORAL ON 'SOCIAL ACTION YEAR'

Dated May 1, 1968, the 14-page document was issued to proclaim the Year of Social Action covering the period from May 1, 1968 to April 30, 1969. The following is the complete text of the joint Pastoral Letter:

The revealed word of God calls mankind to the challenging mission of filling and conquering the earth.¹ The Catholic Hierarchy of the Philippines, conscious of the contemporary pastoral implications of this task, sponsored last year a National Rural Congress.

Its purpose* was to promote a genuine awareness of the socio-economic problems that now confront the Filipino people and thereby to urge the People of God to initiate and participate in those practical actions which would help ameliorate the pitiful social conditions plaguing our brothers particularly in the rural areas.

Now, impelled by the same reasons, and desirous of furthering the gains reaped from last year's Congress, We deem it fitting to reemphasize the need of social awareness among our faithful.

Pope Paul VI declared the Year of Faith, soon to end on June 29th, and followed this up with the declaration of the World Day for Peace every first day of the year.

The United Nations has also chosen this year as the International Year of Human Rights. Our own President of the Republic has proclaimed the period from May 1, 1968 to April 30, 1969 as the Year of Social Action.

Thereby, we would like to reiterate that Christian Faith, as well as the intimate link that should exist between the promotion of Human Rights and the socio-economic progress of man, are the basis for authentic and lasting peace.

Review Since Nat'l Rural Congress: Impressive

The initiatives undertaken as a result of the growing sense of social responsibility by parochial, diocesan, scholastic and other institutional bodies, within the short span of a year, are truly impressive.

We may mention as examples, the establishment and diffusion of credit unions and cooperatives, of small scale industries, scientific techniques in farming, centers for developing skilled manpower, medical health centers, housing projects, among others.

It is not to be expected that in such a short period of time, most of these projects could so soon have outgrown the experimental phase; or that they could have been preceded by more scientific surveys of needs or by carefully studied approach to action and community development particularly on the grassroots level; or that dialogues could have immediately found free flow between the various action groups and institutes, and between private and public agencies.

We look forward eventually to an efficient and effective coordination of these vast local, regional and national projects by the National Secretariate for Social Action, with the assistance of a national foundation of experts in the economic, social and agricultural sciences.

Christian Dimension In Social Action And Rural Development

Man, the noblest work of God's visible creation, stands at the crest of the entire creative process. Man, made in the image of God is the bridge between God and all creation.

Born into this world with certain latent energies and talents, he is challenged by his role of worker and provider to develop these inner resources of his being and to achieve that dominance over the earth that will bring a sense of fulfillment to himself and will overflow in service to all mankind.

Thus every man is called upon by God to self-fulfillment. This is not something merely optional, for "...human fulfillment constitutes a summary of our duties."² Nor is the challenge limited merely to economic growth. To be authentic it must be complete and integral, that is "it has to promote the full-rounded development of the whole man and of all men."³

Self-fulfillment, however, is also by nature social, so that each man becomes an instrument of God in the service of his fellow men. Called upon

² *Populorum Progressio*, n. 16

³ *Ibid.* nn. 14 and 42

to develop himself from the less human fulfillment of material needs to the more ennobling acquisition of knowledge and culture, man should also "grow in age and wisdom"⁴ by contributing to the unity of mankind, preparing there by "for the Lord a perfect people,"⁵ and above all, by knowing, loving and serving God in this life, in order to be happy with Him in the next.

Men today are not only becoming more dependent upon each other, but they are coming to realize that all society is a system of services of which they too are a part. A simple piece of home equipment is often the work of peoples of many countries. Through international trade, and via press, radio and television, the entire world enters the humblest home. Man is ever aware of the closeness of all men. Each is a silent witness that "no man is an island." The laborer and the farmer look beyond the active part in regulating their own social and cultural life.⁶

In this context, the Christian faces an even greater challenge. For by the grace of his baptism into Christ, he stands as the exemplar of that contribution to the unity of man. He more than others, can see that the work of a family extends out to the community.

The cornerstone and the mark of genuine Christian living is love for one's neighbor. "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"⁷

And the Apostle James tells, "If a brother or sister is ill clad and in lack of daily food, and one says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? Faith by itself therefore, if it has no works, is dead."⁸

The Sacred Scripture tells us that "God is love." The mark of the true Christian is also love, -- the love of his neighbor.⁹ The Christian of the early centuries shared his material blessings with his fellow men as a valid expression of his love of God.

"See these Christians, how they love one another" became a byword among the pagans, when they were forced to marvel at the heroic love of the Christian of those times.

Today's Christian must by the manner of his life present the Church as the light of the world whose vitality and ideals place their full force behind the social and economic techniques that have to be applied to the problems of human need.

⁴ Luke. 2:52

⁵ Luke 1:17

⁶ *Caudium et Spes*, n 6

⁷ 1 John 3:17

⁸ St. James 2:15-17

⁹ John 13:35

Today, the socio-economic problem has a definite Christian dimension. All undertakings towards its solution, if rooted upon the hope of mere material progress, can only lead to false ideologies, or to cynicism.

It is for the Christian to recognize in all the things that he does for his fellow man the supernatural dimension, to see in it an opportunity for sacrifice and oblation to God and the world of man.

Christian And Earthly Possessions

Man by his very nature has a right to freedom, to a certain measure of independence in the direction of his life, and to an increased share of responsibility without any oppression. He has a right "to seek to do more, know more, and have more in order to be more."¹⁰ To create the conditions that will promote the fulfilment of this right, is the responsibility of all.

The greater responsibility for the common good, however, lies with those endowed with the tremendous surplus of wealth, whether in land and other property or in liquid assets. It is upon them particularly, that demands for greater generosity, sacrifice and unceasing effort, are made.

For material resources entail a stewardship, a stewardship that is betrayed by an accumulation of returns at the price of the perpetual impoverishment of many; by vulgar display and consumption of resources that lead to scandal of the unemployed and the hungry.

"Private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditioned right. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need when others lack necessities."¹¹ Some of the exercises of responsible stewardship would be the use of resources to increase production, widen the base of capital ownership, conserve foreign exchange resources, establishment of industries, due payment of taxes.

But material possessions have a peculiar power to enslave men. Instead of possessing them in freedom, many yield to the temptation to be possessed by what they own. The acquisitive tendency that often leads men to grasping selfishness, greed and rapacity, and even to the violation of the rights of their fellow men for the sake of gain, is all due to sin.

Material possessions are like a two-edged sword. They can either help the progress of man, or they can be the cause of his moral destruction. It is only by a Christian outlook on earthly possessions that man can avoid their fatal fascination and turn them to the good for which God created them.

¹⁰ *Populorum Progressio*, n. 6

¹¹ *Ibid.* n. 47

¹² *Ibid.* n. 47

Justice requires that the goods of this world must be divided in a reasonable way. The world belongs to all men, not just to a few. All men are equal in their right to a decent life. Hence, there must be some proportion in the division of the goods of the world.

It is not a system of justice where one man is very wealthy and another is very poor. Where such a situation exists on a national scale, it becomes a matter of social justice. Not laws, but the inspired vision of the true Christian can alone redress the imbalance of such a system.

The primary duty of the Christian today is to improve the social conditions of his country. Ultimately Christian action in the social field aims to bring happiness in families by the elimination of extreme want. This is the foundation of peace and charity among men. Without it, there can be no reasonable security. Without it, the only social order possible is that of the police state, force alone constrains the desperation of men. This is not the Christian condition, but rather its very opposite.

Parasitism and Indolence

There is no question about encouraging the parasites and indolent.¹³ Each man is called upon to develop himself, just as the whole of society should develop and fulfill itself.

Each one has received from past generations and from his contemporaries, but each one also has obligation towards all in proportion to his capabilities

Each one is called to enjoy the blessings of present civilization, but each one has also to work to support and develop the society he lives in. "If any man will not work, let him not eat either."¹⁴ "The man who is idle at work is blood-brother of the destroyer."¹⁵

As the Vatican Council reminds us: "Let the people be mindful that progress begins and develops primarily from the efforts and endowments of the people themselves. Hence, instead of depending solely on outside help, they should rely chiefly on the full enfolding of their own resources and the cultivation of their own qualities and traditions."¹⁶

The use of superfluous wealth for the creations of employment is a most relevant expression of love for the poor in our days. It is not enough to provide subsistence for the helpless; opportunities must be created for them to help themselves through employment.

¹³ *Ibid.* n. 23

¹⁴ 2 *Thes.* 3:10

¹⁵ *Prov.* 18:9

¹⁶ *Church in the Modern World.* 86 a

For a more fundamental need than more goods necessary for subsistence, is that economic independence that enables a man to take initiatives and exercise responsibility in the economic, political, cultural and spiritual life of the nation.¹⁷

The Philippine Situation

Against the background of the ideal Christian community, we turn our eyes upon the realities of our own dear country. Despite our Christian heritage, it must be sadly confessed that social conditions in our midst are far from being ideal. Indeed they seem to be marching with gathering speed toward a most serious crisis.

While a few have far more than they need, the vast majority lack even the barest essentials of life. To us, indeed, the words of our present Pope are plainly applicable:

"We must make haste; too many are suffering, and the distance is growing that separates the progress of some and the stagnation, not to say the regression, of others."¹⁸

The situation is not entirely the fault of the present generation. Each nation carries with it the history of its past. This is also true of the Christian people. While the sins of the father are not attributable to the son, it is inevitable that children will suffer from the errors and faults of their parents. So it is with us.

While the blame for our present ills may not all be laid at our doors, today the decision to remedy the situation is wholly ours. This is now a moment of truth for the Christian Filipino, our Christianity is to be tested at the bar of history.

Two of the most serious problems confronting our country are the land-tenancy system in the rural area and the growing numbers of the unemployed. Both these problems are linked together by the inherited evils of an oppressive social structure, which long-ingrained custom and unchristian habits of thought has permitted to endure until now it threatens the very existence of peace and order in our nation.

As a result, selfishness has ruled our social and economic decisions. The common good of all our people is not the norm of personal or even of governmental decision. Ownership and power is not regarded as a stewardship.

The grossest exploitation of workers and tenants is not only tolerated

¹⁷ *Caudium et Spes*, n. 64

¹⁸ *Pop. Prog.*, n. 29

but viewed as an inherent right. Disciplined work is neglected in favor of smuggling, bribery and corruption of every kind. The dignity of manual labor is effectively denied by despising those who engage in it.

Land Reform

We see the roots of much of our social evils in the present pattern of land ownership in our country. Originating in a long-past colonial era, it is still looked upon as an absolute and inalienable right. It has given rise to a system of land tenure which is a great obstacle to rural development.

It does not merely stifle incentives to improve production and one's standard of living, by the perpetual dependence that it fosters, it condemns the farmer-tenant to a miserable condition that strips him of that economic independence so necessary for the exercise of free decisions regarding the management of one's life. It undermines his dignity as a person.

Too many owners compound the evil by their absentee landlordship. Theirs is a negligible contribution to the very soil they claim to own. Such land owners can scarcely be called worthy stewards of the property entrusted to them.

Meantime, the population grows apace, the harvest per family becomes smaller and smaller, economic tyranny frustrates personal rights, shadow governments usurp control, and the common good of all now stands in serious danger. There is no begging the question.

At this point, individual rights must yield to the common good. The public authority must step in to effect the orderly transition to a new social order.

In this connection, we have the clear teaching of *Populorum Progressio*:

"If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interest of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation."¹⁹

With all the earnestness that we can summon. We urge all Christians to cooperate in implementing the land-reform program.

For the family owned and family-operated farm is the basic structure for insuring increased productivity and for inspiring a healthy sense of independence and personal responsibility on the part of the farmer.

Man's most urgent right is to have a sufficiency of food, shelter and

¹⁹ *Ibid.* n. 24

clothing. This he secures more readily and humbly when the land which he tills is his very own.

We are aware, however, that land-reform is a very complex social operation. It requires careful planning, absolutely fair implementation, and the mass education of all concerned. Mere transfer of ownership is not enough.

Credit facilities must be made available to the independent farmer or else he will be like a man set adrift in a boat without oars or sail. He must be taught the advantages of cooperative ventures, and the modern means of increasing production.

Every effort must be made to provide irrigation, cheap farm implements, and the marketing opportunities so necessary to absorb the produce of the farm.

In this connection the efforts of the government to construct feeder roads and provide expert assistance and supervision merit the praise and cooperation of every citizen.

The Church rejoices in and encourages those landlords who even before the entrance of governmental efforts into their area, have of themselves initiated remedial measures on their farms.

The owner-tenant relationship must always respect the proper dignity and freedom of the tenant and his family. He must be allotted his fair proportion of the crops in accordance with law. Exorbitant and usurious rates of interest offend both Christian justice and charity.

It should be the ambition of the Christian landowners to promote such living conditions as will permit their farmers and tenants to live in accordance with their human dignity.

Above all we call upon all Christians, owners and tenants, to have the good will to learn the true meaning of brotherhood and Christian love. Theirs is the joint task of building families into communities, and communities into a nation wherein reigns justice and peace.

We especially urge priests, religious and laymen to show by their own example what social justice means. By sponsoring pilot projects they can illustrate the practical applications of Catholic social teaching and thereby enable the people to learn the Christian way of life by actually living it.

Farmers must be taught and encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities open to them through credit unions and farmers' organizations which can provide them with mutual help and enable them to have an active and effective voice in both public and private agencies which are concerned with agrarian matters.

We urge those who thus far have failed to cooperate in this most Christ-

ian endeavor, and may in erroneous adherence to a false understanding of the purpose of private property, have even resisted this movement for reform, to heed the urgent pleas of their brothers in the Lord to measure up to the demands of their inner Christian faith, and by every means in their power, to work for a peaceful solution of this acutely distressing problem.

This is a serious failing in Christian commitment which may "call down upon them the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor with consequences no one can foretell."²⁰ "How can you say that you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your brother whom you do see," was the pertinent remark of the Apostle John.²¹

But true love is rooted in the soil of self-sacrifice. "For he who loves his life for my sake," says the Lord, "will save it"²²

A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL IMPACT

The second most urgent need of our nation at this time is the creation of more job opportunities so that the increasing number of young adults may find gainful and satisfying employment.

The solution to this problem involves long-range plans embracing many factors. Here the financier, the lawmaker, and the government administrator have a vital part. All should aim at the achievement of a modern and efficient economy free of unnecessary red-tape and vexations.

The industrialists and the businessman, the laborer and the consumer must all be convinced that honesty and efficiency in their respective tasks is a true Christian service to their fellowmen and to their country.

To create the conditions that are favorable for the maximum development and fairest distribution of the wealth of the nation is the preeminent task of the Christian layman.

To this end it is the duty of priests and religious to inspire the leaders of industry, business and labor in the genuine meaning of the supernatural life and in the practice of social justice and charity.

The social doctrines of the Church must become an intimate part of their personal lives, an instinctive reaction to every problem, an ever-widening dimension in their following of the Gospel.

Educators have the serious obligation to open the minds of the young

²⁰ *Ibid.* n. 23

²¹ *I John.* 4. 20

²² *Mt.* 10:39

to the injustices that are daily committed round about them. They must plant in the hearts of their students the seeds of justice and charity and inflame in them a sincere desire to use their talents and efforts to eradicate these injustices, and to build a happier community and country.

Priests and seminarians alike should take to their hearts the words which the Second Vatican Council addresses to them: "...they should understand plainly that they are called not to domination or to honors, but to give themselves over to God's service and the pastoral ministry... By sacred ordination they will be moulded in the likeness of Christ the Priest, who had compassion on the crowd."²¹

It is indeed a welcome and hopeful sign that the youth of our land is beginning to awaken to this huge problem of human suffering and is eager to bring its energies to bear upon finding a solution. They must arm themselves with the weapons of justice and charity if they wish to conquer the world for Christ and His cause.

A COMMON EFFORT

The nation at this moment in its history urgently needs the right climate for the development of its human and material resources. This climate can only be brought about through the reign of justice and charity.

It is the high calling of every Christian and indeed of every citizen to work together in earnest for the establishment of a healthy and sound social atmosphere. This demand in the first place that the principles of social justice be loyally observed.

The climate needed for development demands that the law be applied equally to rich and poor alike, without fear or favor. Officials whose very office it is to seek and guard the common good, are bound to resist the allurements of graft and corruption. Nor should they use of position of public trust for private aggrandizement.

This is to betray their trust to destroy the common good, and eventually to lead the nation not to glory but to disaster. For he who injures his brother, in the end has betrayed himself. He has contributed not to justice and love, but to cynicism and despair.

Above all it is necessary to remember that the building of a just social order is not merely the sum of individual actions. Social well-being is a structure of human cooperation; it is the actual living of a Christian community wherein the welfare of each member is equally the concern of all.

²¹ *Decree on Priestly Formation*

Cooperation in this sense, is more than just a means to a better community. It is the actual external and effective expression of the charity that should impel us both as human beings and as Christians.

By the reception of baptism, the Christian is born into a new life, the body of Christ. This is the nucleus of the new society, the community of the people of God, by his membership in this community the Christian is committed to bring the love of Christ into every nook and corner of his many faceted social life.

To further this common effort, we fully endorse those plans that will decentralize authority and by means of provincial development councils, will stimulate the people of each region to take an active part in the solution of their own area-problems.

It is to be hoped that these councils will not be politically but community-dominated, and that they will assess the resources and determine the priorities in the solution of their problems.

For it is only when the entire community is freely and actively enlisted in the common welfare that economic improvement is placed at the service of man, and does not become a vehicle of further enslavement.

The Church can take its part in these worthwhile measures by the establishment in each diocese of a secretariat of social action, with trained and fully employed personnel who can undertake and coordinate all diocesan works and projects.

Wherever possible, these ought to be linked to the general effort of the people of that province or area. Parishes in a proportionate way should develop the same process of social action.

In all these endeavors, it must be kept uppermost in mind that it is the people themselves who must become the architects of their own actions and destiny. Nothing less than this is worthy of human dignity.

CONCLUSION

No better sentiments could conclude this letter than those expressed by the fathers of the last Vatican Council in their pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. "Mindful of the Lord's saying: 'by this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'²⁴

Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the

²⁴ John. 13:35

men of the modern world with mounting generosity and success. And so, shouldered a gigantic task for fulfilment in this world, a task concerning which they must give a reckoning to Him who will judge every man on the last of days... By thus giving witness to the truth, we will share with others the mystery of the heavenly Father's love. As a consequence men throughout the world, will be aroused to a lively hope, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit."²⁵

To emphasize our own commitment to this ideal, and to stimulate the entire Christian people to take the lead in this enterprise, We, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, in the spirit of the International Year of Human Rights, do also declare the Year of Social Action for all the faithful, starting from May 1, 1968 to April 30, 1969.

Given at Manila on the first day of May, in the year of Our Lord 1968, on the Feast of St. Joseph, the Worker.

For Philippines:

† LINO R. GONZAGA, D.D.
Archbishop of Zamboanga

Catholic Bishops Conference of
the Philippines

²⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 93