

## DOCUMENTATION

### **JOINT STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES ON CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

The Philippines is a Christian and a democratic country. In the light of contemporary events, however, we begin to wonder if this is truly and fully so. One has just to read the daily papers to know that it is not all well on the national scene. Although the media of mass communications cannot always give reports accurate to the minutest detail, we believe that a great many of the happenings reported are, at least in substance, true.

The burning and pillage of the barrios in Ilocos Sur. The cold-blooded slaughter of barrio officials perpetrated in broad daylight, near a P.C. Camp, before scores of witnesses including the Provincial Governor himself. Killings even inside holy places. The land-grabbing in Mindanao, Negros and other places. Armed terrorism in certain restive sectors of the country. These are but some of the many troubles reported by the media that afflict the Philippines today.

Certainly there are a good many honest government officials who are doing their utmost to afford the opportunity for redress to those who suffer from injustice, to alleviate the burden of those who live in poverty, and to protect those who cower under the shadow of fear caused by armed terrorism. We know that our courts of justice have sent to prison and even condemned to death criminals who have brazenly and shamelessly flaunted our laws. We are also aware that our lawmakers have passed wise laws for the social amelioration of the masses, like, to cite just one example, the Land Reform Law.

But, despite these laudable efforts, there still remain to be righted a great many wrongs, and serious ones, too.

In the early days of our democracy when there was more *delicadeza* among us, the mere exposure of the slightest irregularity was sufficient to pressure for a remedy. But in these times, more than mere exposure is needed to awaken and sensitize consciences. That is why we, as Pastors

of the people of God in this country, must speak out against these ills or be derelict in our duty.

Christianity and democracy have one basic principle in common: the respect for the dignity and value of the human person, the respect for those means which man requires to make himself fully human. For the democrat this respect springs from a realization of the value of man. For the Christian, it is that and more. He sees the value of man as a person created to the image and likeness of God. Moreover, he believes in what Christ said: "What you did to the least of my brethren, you did to me." (Mt. 25:40) And this indeed, is the test of the Christian, to what extent will he follow and put into practice the words of Christ.

It is precisely these words of Christ that impel us to speak to our Christian people.

While we praise and encourage the many honest and conscientious public officials, and support their efforts to preserve our democratic and Christian society, we strongly denounce.

- bribery and extortion, for they are the root of graft and corruption in government;
- the illegal traffic in arms and the use of them to oppress the weak and defenseless, for this is destructive of the freedom from fear;
- the exploitation of the poor and the deprived in life, for it is a violation of their dignity as persons and children of God;
- the unjust and sometimes violent, dispossession of farmers of the land that for long years they have made fruitful by the sweat of their brows and the brawn of their arms, for it is tantamount to depriving them of their only means of livelihood;
- the wanton destruction and pillage of homes as a display of force or vendetta, for this is a sadistic method of victimizing the innocent and a desecration of the sanctuary of their homes;
- the miscarriage of justice through political stratagem, for it deprives the citizen of his last recourse for redress.

When we, Christian and citizens, who have the power to remedy the evils that surround us and yet do nothing, who can improve the sorry

state of affairs and yet choose to be indifferent, who can speak out and yet remain silent, we act like men who have lost their Christian heart. We deny Christ. We leave Him to be crucified again.

On the other hand, we highly commend the exemplary courage of those concerned citizens, young and old, who, guided by true democratic and Christian principles, have championed the cause of good government and just social reforms.

We must not wait for the State to do everything for us. It is true that the primary obligation to maintain public order, promote the public welfare and correct social injustices rests on the State. But the State alone, without the cooperation of the citizenry, cannot attain these ends. In the final analysis, in a democracy the responsibility for good government rests on every citizen, and the failure of good government is the failure of every citizen. The duty of establishing a just regime does not rest on the shoulders of the politician alone. It rests on the shoulders of all citizens. And for the Christian citizen this duty is more binding because for him, it is a duty not only to a fellow citizen, but also to Christ Himself.

And so it is the duty of the Christian citizen to stand up and be counted in all matters affecting the public welfare. It is the duty of the Christian citizen to conscientiously participate in the political life of the country. It is his duty to break the silence of the "silent majority" when injustice is committed, when those in public office fail in their obligations.

We recall the words of Christ:

"Happy the peacemakers:

they shall be called sons of God.

"Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:

theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:9-10)

The Christian must follow Christ, even in suffering, to bring about the reign of justice; and through justice peace and love.

For the Catholic Bishops Conference  
of the Philippines:

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