

**THE CONFRONTATION OF THE ROMAN  
CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH THE ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE  
PHILIPPINES IN RELATION TO THE INFLUENCE  
OF THE SOCIO-THEOLOGICAL POSITION  
OF THE II VATICAN COUNCIL**

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## INTRODUCTION

A. The historic visit of Pope Paul VI to Asia, particularly the Philippines, in November 1970, focused the attention of the Catholic world on the R.C. Church in the Philippines. For her and the majority of Filipino Catholics, it was the "crown" of more than four hundred years of Catholic Christianity in the country: the first visit of a Roman Pontiff to the so-called "only Christian nation" in the Far East. To determine the full impact of this visit is beyond the scope of this study, and besides, the necessary material for it - if any exists - is not available to the writer.

The significance of the Papal visit had already been anticipated by various sectors of the Church and society long before the actual visit took place. Generally the expectations for the visit were high, because of the Pan-Asian Bishops' Conference (PABC) which was then taking place (Nov. 23-29) and because of the critical condition of the R.C. Church in the country. The expectations were reflected in the statements made by the Pope himself regarding the purpose of his visit to the Philippines: "to meet the episcopate of the Philippines and that of the countries of that immense part of the world."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the aim of the Pope to have direct contact with the local Churches of Asia (through their bishops) and their particular problems evoked a kind of hope for the Church there, especially for the Church in the Philippines. A typical expression of this expectation was the Pastoral Letter of the Philippine Hierarchy issued shortly before the Papal Visit; in this the Hierarchy described the two-fold significance of the Popes' presence in the country: first, his presence in the PABC was "a sign of unity among the bishops"

<sup>1</sup> - Pope Paul VI quoted in a report of Oscar M. Rojo, Philippines Herald (Manila, Nov. 26, 1970) pp. 1, 18.

in the conference and "a sign of unity" with the Pope himself; and secondly, "at a time full of doubt and rebellion ... there is one authority (i.e. the Pope) to whom we can turn with security and follow with peace of soul."<sup>1</sup>

E. The 1970 Pan-Asian Bishops' Conference in Manila was the first of its kind in Asia, hence it became an historic event for the R.C. Church in that part of the world. It inaugurated the period of cooperative work among the different Bishops' Conferences in Asia and established among the bishops themselves a sense of "openness".<sup>2</sup> But what is actually its significance for the local R.C. Church in each country and the peoples of Asia as a whole, if the promise to do "a greater and effective service" ("Declaration" 2) for them is not to remain simply pious words? There are two concrete accomplishments of the PABC, which must be mentioned: its declaration or message and the resolutions. These are all important documents, since they represent not only the way the bishops saw and presented the realities of Asia, but also how they defined the tasks of the Church in that region. The approved documents show that the bishops had reached a degree of unanimity, which might have been bolstered by the presence of the Pope himself towards the close of the Conference. The main theme itself "The Development of the Peoples of Asia" was indicative too of the common interest among the participants at the PABC. But that would be only presenting an incomplete picture, if the difficulties characterizing the Conference were not also noted.

The fact is that from the beginning, the PABC had been beset with difficulties. Even before the start of the Conference, questions had been raised as to whether such a comprehensive theme

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<sup>1</sup> - Quoted in: Gene de Gracia, "He comes with Love and Truth", Republic Weekly, Dec. 4, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> - Cf. Editorial, PPF, March, 1971, p. 7.

in relation to the "problems of Asia" could be treated successfully in one week's time. How could the complex "problems of Asia" be handled by participants, who came from different cultural backgrounds, with various orientations, mentalities and interests and who were not themselves experts on the problems?<sup>1</sup> This became clearly manifest when the conference met for its last plenary session to decide on the final draft of its "Declaration" and "Resolutions". There were more suggested amendments brought to the plenary than the number of archbishops and bishops participating. The conference worked under time-pressure so that when the bishops finally adjourned there were still 56 suggested amendments, which had not been considered.<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Gracias of India had been reported comparing the PABC to a jet plane leaving smoke that vanishes into the air, but he had hopes that its joint-declaration and the resolutions would last.<sup>3</sup>

The "Joint-declaration" and "Resolutions" of PABC repeat ideas of the Vatican Council II (V.C. II) and Populorum Progressio (PP); but this does not necessarily mean the "Declaration" and "Resolutions" are of less importance, since a repetition of the same point in another context could be a significant act. This seems to be the case of PABC as revealed in its presentation of the complex "problems of Asia", its demands for their solution and a definition of its own common task. It presents the problems or challenges of Asia in four picture-categories: Asia has the face of poverty and suffering, the face of youth, the face of ancient culture and history, and the face of awakening. The most prominent of these faces of Asia,

1 - Cf. "Reise des Papstes nach Asien und Australien", HK, 24. Jg. 1970, p. 511; see Cardinal St. Sou Hwan Kim's expressed doubts and suggestions during the preparation of the PABC in: HK, 25, Jg. Feb. 1971, p. 78ff.

2 - See: HK, Feb. 1971, pp. 79, 82.

3 - See: The Philippines Herald, Nov. 29, 1970, p. 2.

is the awakening face. The masses have awakened and PABC observes the end of the period of "re-signed fatalism, ignorance, poverty, injustice, exploitation", etc. The youth have awakened: self-confident, idealistic, impatient, shouting for socio-economic and political reforms. An awakened Asia, therefore, from whose horizon "a true community of nations is ascending," and where the walls, which have separated the Asian nations from one another for so long, are now falling down (see: "Declaration", 5-8; 10-12).<sup>1</sup> Here, the PABC re-echoes merely the optimism of Gaudium et Spes (GS) and PP in their attitudes towards historical development (cf. "Declaration", 26). One must distinguish the Asia of the PABC's picture presented as a so-called growing "true community of nations" where there is a wish "to know one another better" and develop a relationship between nations on "friendship, trust, cooperative work and genuine solidarity" from the present reality of Asia where almost half of the population live under the "atheistic communism" against which PABC pledged to fight (see: "Declaration", 12 and "Resolutions", 7). The general anti-communist attitude of PABC<sup>2</sup> is difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> - Cf. "Erklaerung der asiatischen Bischoefe", IFD, Jan. 27, 1971, Roma; - IFD published the full Texts of the "Resolutions" and "Declaration" of PABC in German, upon which I depend. The English original is available to me only through excerpts published by newspapers in Manila.

<sup>2</sup> - The original version of Resolution 7 mentions among others "inner aggression and imperialism of every kind", but Cardinal Yu-pin from Taiwan proposed to change the phrase "inner aggression" to "atheistic communism". Out of 148, 108 voted for the change, thus Resolution 7 now reads: "We support the fight against atheistic Communism and imperialism of every kind, etc." It is evidenced from this voting that the majority of the bishops had not learned or had not been convinced by the reference of Cardinal Th. Cooray from Ceylon to the People's Republic of China (PRC): "Strangely enough, it is some who do not believe in religion, who seem most concerned with such issues (pressing social and economic problems). Atheistic communism is more

understand in the light of the concept of dialogue proposed by GS (21) and John XXIII's attitude towards atheism in *Pacem in Terris* (158-159). In fact, PABC itself considers it a duty to have an open and continued dialogue with "brothers of other great religions of Asia" ("Resolutions" 12, 14) and is ready to work with them to further the realization of human rights ("Resolutions" 2). Thus, by adopting an anti-communist attitude, the Asian bishops have not only fallen back into the cold war and the pre-V.C. II era of the Church<sup>1</sup>, but they have also missed an opportunity to be examples of "moral leadership" to their respective "secular governments", by initiating an attitude of "openness" and "dialogue" for the sake of the development of the whole man and all the peoples of Asia. The PABC could probably have done "a better and more effective service" had it taken the reality of the People's Republic of China seriously and not resolved "to support the fight against atheistic Communism."<sup>2</sup>

The PABC considered it important to fulfill its tasks in Asia together with men and institutions all over the world who also work to further the development of man and the whole human race. This means not only acknowledging and supporting

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deeply concerned with such radical political, social and economic issues," Manila Bulletin, Dec. 1, 1970.

- 1 - This criticism, which Joerg Bopp used against PP's attitude towards "materialistic and atheistic philosophy" can also be applied to the PABC, see further: Joerg Bopp, Populorum Progressio Aufbruch der Kirche? (Kohlhammer, 1968), pp. 66-68.
- 2 - The PABC in its "Declaration" (26) is determined to work for a just end of conflicts and wars in Asia. How will PABC do this, is not known. At any rate, there seems to be a conflict here between "Resolution 7" and "Declaration 26". In the meantime, the People's Republic of China has become a member of UNO (October 25, 1971) and the countries of the West, primarily the U.S.A. continues a policy of rapprochement with PRC.

the work of others, but also cooperating with those whose aims correspond with its own: to build societies within the nations of Asia, which "comply with the deepest needs of man and the demands of the Gospel" (Declaration", 14).<sup>1</sup> According to the Asian bishops, the primary step towards this end is for the Church to become the "Church of the Poor": identifying herself with them and enabling them to exercise and defend their rights through training, education and organization. This act of solidarity with the poor or being the "Church of the Poor" does not mean for the PABC marking off the rich from the Church, rather it means to be free to speak for the poor and fight with them against injustice without being bound by the power or influence of the rich. The bishops are determined not to have any compromising relationship with the rich and the powerful in their respective countries, but to participate in destroying injustice and changing inhuman structures.<sup>2</sup> This consequently leads the PABC to acknowledge the "dynamic and prophetic role of Asian students in the development and change of society" ("Resolutions", 15). In the context of Asian realities, what PABC has declared and resolved to do for the poor and their condition reflects not only courage, but also a progressive decision on development, which could work positively for the countries in the region. But equally prominent with the bishops' determination to identify with and help the masses of Asia from their poverty, ignorance and suffering, is their almost total silence over the problem of population explosion.<sup>3</sup> How could one speak of the

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<sup>1</sup> - See further Resolutions 8, 9, 10 for information about world organizations both religious and secular, which PABC supports or acknowledges.

<sup>2</sup> - See "Declaration" 19-20; also: "Resolutions" 3.

<sup>3</sup> - The PABC's Resolution 5, which deals with the problem of population explosion is the shortest among the 22 Resolutions. The "Declaration" has no mention of it. Two Cardinals (Yu-pin and

development of the masses of Asia without at the same time taking into account one of the acute problems which affects them most?<sup>1</sup> In spite of the claim of "full knowledge" of the problem, one looks in vain for programs of action, even within the means allowed by the Church, in order to tackle the problem. Merely calling people to "responsible parenthood" according to the means approved by the Church does not help much as long as the PABC has no extensive and concrete programs to implement the idea of "responsible parenthood". The PABC has published its "Declaration" and "Resolutions" but the warning of Cardinal Kim of South Korea prior to the meeting of the Asian bishops still seems to carry weight. He warned that it would be a "great tragedy" if the meeting ended only with "pious suggestions or resolutions" but did "not lead to concrete actions."<sup>2</sup>

C. What relation has this reference to the Papal visit and the PABC to the present problem of the R. C. Church in the Philippines? Viewed in relation to the general Asian scene, both events have shown the "peculiar" position of this country among the other countries in Asia. The Philippines shares with most of them the experience of a colonized past and the complex problems that beset Asian nations today; but it stands alone as being a country with a long tradition of Christianity as the predominant religion; hence, naturally, the Church sometimes thinks and reacts differently from other local R.C. Churches in the region on problems which confront her and society. There is a difference for example, in the

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Cooray) raised the question of "Population explosion" and "Birth Control" in their respective papers, but offered no concrete solutions to them. Cardinal Cooray re-echoes MM when he proposed speeding up development so that "production grows faster than the population," HK, 25.Jg., Feb. 1971, p. 81.

1 - Cf. PP, 37; also: GS, 87.

2 - Quoted in: "Die panasiatische Bischofskonferenz in Manila", HK, 25. Jg., Feb., 1971, p. 79.



"words and action" of a Church that is represented by the majority and a Church represented by a minority. Consequently, the Papal visit and the PABC have most likely bolstered the hope of the Christian minority in Asia. Viewed in relation to the particular Philippine situation the two events have underlined the "crisis" in the Church, which has now found a "regional audience." This "crisis" is typically reflected in the demonstrations of Catholic students, who have presented their demands for Church reforms to the Asian bishops - demands which they made during the Marathon Demonstration of 1969.<sup>1</sup> It has also been indicated in an "editorialized complaint" of priests and sisters, who unlike the Hierarchy, top government officials, the oligarchs, etc. were not allotted time for an audience with the Pope.<sup>2</sup> The decision of PABC not to have any compromised relationship with the "rich and the powerful" so that it can freely take side with the "disadvantaged and the powerless" in their struggle against injustice (cf. "Declaration", 29), has helped articulate clearly the charge of some Catholic laymen against the Philippine Hierarchy for its entanglement with wealth and power. The entanglement hinders the Church from exercising her "prophetic role" in the Philippine society.<sup>3</sup> The PABC has resulted also in accentuating the dilemma, in which both Catholic Christianity in Asia and the R.C. Church in the country find themselves. The Church's recognition of "plurality" of world-views in society consequently leads her to adopt a "dialogical attitude" towards them on equal terms, so that there will be mutual enrichment and more effective cooperation in the work for the development of man, (cf. "Resolutions", 28, 12); at the same time, this work of cooperation towards development is in

<sup>1</sup> - See: Text, p. 196ff.

<sup>2</sup> - See: PPF, March, 1971, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> - See: Text, pp.224ff.; 196ff.

fact a means, through which "a true family of nations" in Asia, which correspond to the "demands of the Gospel and the deepest needs of the people" shall be established; nations related by "noble bonds of brotherhood and love", (cf. "Declaration" 14, 26, also GS, 40 b c; 89). For such an aim, the question is raised whether the Church takes seriously her partner in dialogue, who do not and cannot share her convictions on the concept of the "social order" which she aims to establish. Considering her minority role in the Asian room and the complexity of world-views and competing ideologies in contemporary Asia, one asks whether this kind of motivation can still be advocated for Christians in their day to day relationship with men, who do not profess Christianity?

The beginning of the "crisis" in the R.C. Church came with the response of some groups in the Church to the "Spirit" of the Vatican Council II. At the beginning, no one had defined exactly what the "Spirit" of the Council really was, but Catholic students, laymen and priests founded their organizations with the view to applying the "Spirit" of the Council in the Church. For many of them, it meant then the "opening" of the Church to the world and the reform of the Church. Since both elements are closely related, students, laymen and priests have been drawn practically together demanding from the Hierarchy a "dialogical atmosphere" in the Church and a more relevant Church involvement with the potentially explosive condition of the Philippine society. Because the Philippine Hierarchy was and is essentially conservative and authoritarian, a "religious clash" within the Church ensued.

Almost over-night the R.C. Church found herself caught up in a "crisis" both internally and externally, which gradually gained significance and manifested itself as the crisis of leadership in the context of the Church as the "People of God"

and of a relevant Church in the context of society. For the first time, the picture of the Philippine R.C. Church as "an autocratic body of bishops governing a cowed and apathetic clergy and laity"<sup>1</sup> began to crumble: responsible for or at least participants in setting the whole "crisis" in motion were and still are: a) Catholic students under the Laymen's Association for Post Vatican II Reforms (LAPVIIR) and the Christian Social Movement (CSM), b) Philippine Priests Inc. (PPI), a nation-wide association of priests (secular and religious) for mutual development in the spirit of V.C.II, and c) the Philippine Hierarchy. The problem-complex, which has so far been denoted simply as the "crisis" or the "crisis of leadership and relevance" must be understood under two further aspects: first, the pressure of the revolutionary condition of the Philippine society and the "re-forming spirit" of V.C.II affected radically some segments of the Church, leading them to a discovery of a new role in the Church for the society; and secondly, the demands, which accompany the practice of this role in the Church have not found immediate acceptance from the Hierarchy. But this confrontation in the Church of the present social problems and the social teaching of V.C.II has left no choice for the Hierarchy but to re-think its own role not only within the Church as the "People of God", but in the society as well.

Thus, the objects of my investigation are the contemporary R.C. Church in the Philippines, her socio-ethical teachings before and after V.C. II with reference to the present state of the Philippine society. It is a study of her self-understanding and function in a society, of which quantitatively she is represented by a major part. This need not become a "pure" sociological treatise, in which the Church as such is simply regarded and

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<sup>1</sup> - Pro Mundi Vita (PMV), No. 30, (Brussels, 1970), p. 45.

understood as a "social institution", without any reference to her own claims or faith in relation to or expressed in her work and service in society. Neither can it be a theological treatise alone, in which the Church is understood only through her "divine origin" with unchangeable laws universally valid for all times as if the Church as such could be isolated from her sociological setting and continue existing without being affected by her surroundings. The Church must be seen and understood in her own setting, in a situation where she presents herself in "words and programs."

This investigation of the R.C. Church in the Philippines limits itself to the official letters, statements and other publications of the Church, which articulate her socio-ethical and socio-theological teachings. I have made separate critical analysis of the letters and statements of the Hierarchy, the priests' and the students' in order to show what kind of "crisis" has been going on in the Church. At the same time, in order to indicate what changes have taken place in the thinking and behavior of the Church because of this inner "crisis". As far as possible, I have referred only to the facts, figures or critical positions about the socio-economic and political situation of the country, which have been mentioned or been called to attention by the Church. By this, I intend not only to confirm the fact that the Church has paid attention to them, but also to confront the Church with the situation with which she must live and communicate her faith and from which she must correct her theology. Out of necessity, however, I have depended on the studies of others in the fields of social, economic and political sciences and used their methods critically. I have not written a history of the R.C. Church in the Philippines, and there is also no claim that all aspects of her existence in society have been considered. I have applied nevertheless, a historical-critical

analysis of the materials, institutions and events directly and indirectly related to the whole theme.

I have dealt with a period which approximately covers the time from 1949 to 1971: 1949, the year when the Philippine Hierarchy issued its Pastoral on Social Justice and 1971, the year when the PPI published its Position Paper about the condition of the R.C. Church in the country for the Third Synod of Bishops in Rome (1971). 1949 was also the year when peace and order was at its lowest in the country: The Huk Movement declared as its objective "the overthrow of the government",<sup>1</sup> while 1971 was the last year before Martial Law was proclaimed (1972). My reference to the past (Part One: The Antecedents in the Past) is aimed at providing an insight into the colonial history in order to establish the fact that the present problems of the Church and society have their roots in the past. They are presented or described in such a way as to bring out their consequences more fully. Part Two: the Context of the Confrontation, describes the context - that is to say, the condition of the R.C. Church and the situation of the Philippine society. The structure and the basic socio-ethical as well as ethical-theological position of the Church are analyzed. The society, on the other hand, is presented under socio-economic and socio-industrial aspects together with their related problems. Part Three: The Consequences of the Confrontation, is an attempt to show the tension in the Church through the different articulations of the various "reform" groups and to indicate the changes that have taken place because of this tension in the self-understanding of the Hierarchy and the other entities of the Church. The conclusion is an

<sup>1</sup> - L. Taruc, (Huk Supremo at the time) quoted in: Teodoro Agoncillo et al. "History of the Filipino People, revised edn. (Quezon City, 1969), p. 540.

elucidation of the theological consequences that manifest themselves not only in the confrontation of the Church with the socio-economic and political problems of society, but also in the "crisis" within the Church ensuing because of this confrontation.

Now a last word regarding the sources and materials. The Pastoral Letters and statements of the Hierarchy have been available in three forms: mimeographed, printed in newspaper or magazine, and printed in books; the statements and resolutions of the PPI have been printed in its official organ, the Philippine Priests' Forum (PPF); and the resolutions, manifestos or statements of the Catholic students have been published in secular newspapers and magazines. In addition to these primary sources, commentaries on and analyses of particular aspects of the main theme by Catholic theologians and laymen have been used. Most of these have been published in a Jesuit-owned monthly journal, "Philippine Studies" of the Ateneo de Manila University. For the section on *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum Progressio*, I have used mainly commentaries and studies in German on these two documents. For the Text of GS, I used the English translation, "The Documents of Vatican II", Walter M. Abbott, S.J., (General Editor), published in London, 1966 by G. Chapman; for the PP, I used the English N.C.W.C. Translation "The Five Great Social Encyclicals", (Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1967). Where German sources are quoted in English the translation is my own; quotations left in their original language are found in the footnote. Secondary literature, used predominantly for Part One, is accordingly registered in the Bibliography found at the end of this dissertation. The different abbreviations are also clarified there.