

## PASTORAL LETTERS DURING THE MARCOS-AQUINO TRANSITION PERIOD

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*The study content analyzed bishops' pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period. It likewise ran a bishops' survey, asking the church leaders to evaluate the effects of their social messages. Common imageries mentioned in the letters referred to traditional biblical personages. The Father was powerful but loving. Christ-Lord was depicted as an influential but pained social leader. The more fiery imageries often cited by Philippine underground movements (e.g., the Exodus and the angry Jesus in the temple) were not dominant messages.*

*Pastoral letters were primarily religious statements backed by strong moral commentaries on Philippine contemporary politics. The attitude change explanation of the social function of Church documents is put under fire by research findings. Documents with the least anti-Marcos effects were the ones perceived by the bishops to have garnered the highest agreement scores among the diocesan flock. Instead of attitude change, environmental change may have operated to explain the social effects of the letters. The bishops' statements may have stirred just enough controversy in the already unstable political situation to catapult the February 1986 peaceful revolution into its finis.*

A week after the presidential elections of February 7, 1986, political tensions ran high throughout the country. A nation watched then President Ferdinand Marcos proclaim himself winner over Corazon Aquino, widow of former Sen. Benigno Aquino, the assassinated archrival of Marcos. Many Filipinos believed the electoral exercise was fraudulent. Meanwhile, the armed underground movement rapidly gained strength, feeding on the despair of the middle forces who staked their bets on social transformation through elections. It was amidst this politically volatile context that the Philippine bishops met (Carroll, 1986).

On February 13-14, 1986, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) held a national assembly. By the end of their day's meeting, they had agreed to sign the historic pastoral letter entitled "CBCP's Post Election Statement." Briefly, the document announced that a "government that assumes or retains power through fraudulent

means has no moral basis"; the bishops also called for "active resistance of evil by peaceful means" (CBCP, 1986). In less than two weeks, the Marcos dictatorship fell to the amassing nonviolent forces of people's power.

Many factors contributed to the downfall of President Marcos. One major force was the Catholic Church. A powerful instrument of the Church is the pastoral letter, which is authored by the CBCP. During the height of political repression under Martial Rule, the pastoral letters spoke for peace, justice and freedom. Since Catholic churches reach even the remotest of Philippine barrios, the letters were simultaneously heard from pulpits throughout the country.

What did the letters declare? What were the symbols and themes repeated across letters? What were the political consequences of the bishops' statements? This research attempted to study the imageries and themes of the pastoral letters and the bishops' percep-

tions of their political effects on the nation.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A survey of literature encompassing various topics relevant to the study of pastoral letters will now be presented. First, the review looks at the relationship of religion to Philippine politics. Next, literature are examined which evaluate the use of communication imagery and symbols in relation to social change.

### *Religion and Philippine Politics.*

( *During Spanish Times.* In the sixteenth century, Spaniards arrived on Philippine shores. One of their expressed aims for colonizing the Islands was to Christianize the pagan natives. Various consequences stem from the manner in which Christianity entered into Filipino life. First, priests occupied social positions of power as they were simultaneously feared and revered by the local population. Second, the Spanish Catholic Church attempted to expand very rapidly throughout the archipelago. This resulted in the physical presence of church buildings and church networks even in far-flung rural areas.

The politico-cultural impact of Christianity on Filipino liberation movements runs through history. What has come to life in our society is an integration of Western Christianity and the more deeply-set spiritual orientations of an Asian people. As one psychologist writes, "During Spanish times, he (the Filipino) accepted Roman Catholicism whose saints fused beautifully with his belief in a spirit world . . ." (Bulatao, 1987).

Under Spanish rule, pockets of peasant uprisings challenged the colonial authorities. The impetus for Filipino revolutionaries were cultural themes in the religious prayer called

the *Pasyon* (Ileto, 1979). Peasant leaders strongly identified with the image of the suffering Christ, whose death on the Cross was the ultimate sacrifice for the common good.

*In the 70s and 80s.* The Catholic Church's secular power in the Philippines began at the height of Spain's imperial reign in the 16th century. Four centuries later, and decades after the nation's political independence from Spain, the Church continues to wield politico-cultural might in the nation.

When the Marcos administration became extremely abusive, the only social network that could counterbalance the power and physical presence of the dictatorship was the Catholic Church. The latter occupied positions of influence not only in urban centers but in the countryside as well. Their physical presence all over the country became convenient as *ad hoc* centers of information dissemination regarding political activities.

The Church likewise took on a dominant cultural role during the dictatorship. When Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, Theology of Liberation ideas had begun to take root in the Philippines. Various liberation movements wove in and out of a political worldview that combined transcendental ideas of man with more pragmatic Marxist-style outlooks (Human Development Research and Documentation, 1982).

Catholic bishops took longer than the grassroots movements to respond to the Marcos regime (Quevedo, 1986). In the first ten years of Martial Rule, CBCP pastoral letters remained relatively non-committal. Later, a significant change took place. For example, their 1983 statements touched upon the most sensitive social issues of that year (Hardy, 1984).

The February Revolution of 1986 climaxed the blending of religion with politics.

Thousands of Filipinos faced the regime's tanks unarmed. The "revolutionaries" had nothing but prayers and whispered calls to their Mother Mary to protect them from harm. Eventual victory was not only a historical moment of political change but also "a profoundly religious experience" (Nebres, 1987).

In those momentous February days, the faith-expression was a mixture of Western Catholicism and Filipino folk culture. The Filipino's highly personalistic culture demanded that leadership emanate from persons physically present during the crisis. Throughout the four days at EDSA,<sup>1</sup> there was the "personal participation of the Sto. Niño or the Blessed Mother leading the procession. It was all very Filipino" (Bulatao, 1987).

#### *Communication, Politics and Religious Symbols*

The previous paragraphs describe how politics and religion come together in the Philippines. Any type of social struggle entails the generation of power. When the bishops drafted their pastoral letters, they apparently generated sufficient power to influence attitudes of Filipinos. Why so? The following section looks at the relationship of communication, politics and religious symbols.

Pastoral letters are a form of communication. Letters are read during Sunday mass all over the country. The communicators of these letters are the bishops of the Philip-

pinas, heard through their respective parish priests. The recipients are all Filipino churchgoers.

Messages are transmitted and received by visual and auditory senses, as the audience sees the priest and hears his words. The channel of communication is especially significant. The priest stands in the pulpit, a place of cultural authority for over four hundred years.

Encoding and decoding of messages become crucial in communication. In fact, this is where misunderstandings may occur (Kunczik, 1984). In pastoral letters, messages are encoded in religious symbols. The extent to which these religious symbols are congruently decoded by the receiver will determine the "fit" between the communicator and the recipients.

When one wishes to generate power, one has to choose symbols that capture the cultural imaginations of the communication recipients. Hence it is important to know the audience, to know what symbols they recognize as designating power (Lasswell et al. 1965). The most powerful symbols are those that permeate throughout the social life of a people and are not limited to isolated relationships (Lasswell et al. 1950).

In the Philippines, can these most powerful symbols come from religion? Perhaps so, since religion overflows throughout the social life of our nation. Nebres (1987) posits that "There is an ethos and worldview in the majority of Christian Filipinos, shaped by the symbols and practices of popular Christianity, which can be a basis for social change." It is this religious imagery that may be our "common language" in a nation so wracked with divisiveness across economic classes and regional groupings.

<sup>1</sup>EDSA is an acronym for Epifanio delos Santos Avenue. This is an eight-lane highway between two military camps where Marcos Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Vice-Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos declared their split with the Marcos dictatorship. In a display of People power, thousands of Filipinos gathered at EDSA for four days in February 1986 to act as human buffers between Marcos tanks and military rebels.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework of this research is that of social communication. It is an area of investigative interest since "social psychology acquires scientific potential, for what passes from one person to the next necessarily enters the public and thus measurable domain" (Milgram, 1977). Influence is exerted as the source delivers some message to the target.

Any communication considers three main components. First, there is the source of the message. Next is the message content. And finally, there is the effect on the target audience. In this study, the bishops of the CBCP are the source of the communication. The pastoral letters are the documents containing the message, while their effects are assessed in terms of the perceived socio-political consequences of each letter.

The focal variable is the communication message. The research attempts to describe a specific type of message — Church pastoral letters. Communications were sent out during the Marcos-Aquino transition period, a crucial period in recent Philippine history. Imageries used in the politically influential pastoral letters are investigated in detail. Thematic content is also analyzed and considered a vital dimension of the social messages.

The study likewise assesses effects of the message on the target audience. It examines perceived effects of the pastoral letters on the bishops' diocesan communities and on the Marcos government,

The research framework provides for a description of message characteristics, an assessment of the perceived social effects, and an examination of possible social relationships between these two variables. The communication source (i.e., the bishops) is not studied per se but is considered only in the

sense that the authors evaluate the effects of their own pastoral messages.

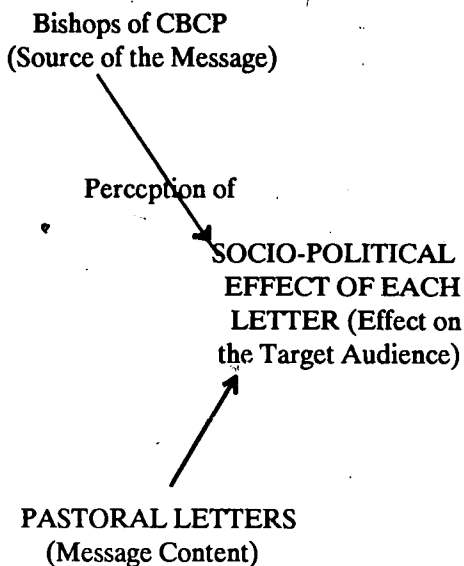


Illustration 1. The Research Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research analyzed the bishops' pastoral letters written from 1983 until early 1987. Below were the specific questions to which the study addressed itself.

1. What religious imageries appeared frequently in the pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period?
2. To what extent did the pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period carry religious, political and/or moral themes?
3. What were some of the bishops' perceptions about the pastoral letters' effects during the Marcos-Aquino transition period?
  - a. To what extent did the bishops agree with each letter?

b. To what extent did the diocesan "flock" agree with each letter?

c. To what extent was each letter perceived as politically effective in toppling the Marcos regime?

4. Was there any relationship between the thematic content of the letters and their perceived political effects?

### METHOD

The research content analyzed the pastoral letters. This procedure provided information about the imageries and themes depicted in the bishops' messages. A survey conducted among some bishops gathered data on the perceived effects of the letters on the socio-political environment. The following section first describes the content analysis procedure, then presents the survey strategy.

### CONTENT ANALYSIS

#### *Source of Data*

Thirteen pastoral letters were content analyzed. They were written from 1983 until 1987. These dates mark the four year transition period between President Ferdinand Marcos and President Corazon Aquino. Senator Benigno Aquino's assassination in 1983 accelerated the protest movement against the dictatorship, especially among the crucial middle classes in urban centers. The arbitrary cut-off point at the end of the transition period is May 1987, when congressional elections established truly independent legislative bodies in the Philippines.

Table 1 lists the pastoral letters and corresponding dates of publication.

1. Reconciliation Today (December 4, 1983)

2. The 1984 Plebiscite & Elections (January 8, 1984)

3. Let There be Life (on the Sacredness of Human Life and its Defense) (July 22, 1984)

4. The Celebration of the Marian Year (February 2, 1985)

5. The Biblical Apostolate (February 24, 1985)

6. Message to the People of God (July 8, 1985)

7. We Must Obey God Rather than Men (on Snap Elections) (January 25, 1986)

8. CBCP's Post-Election Statement (February 13, 1986)

9. Pastoral Exhortation on the Constitutional Commission and its Work (May 18, 1986)

10. 100 Days of Prayer & Penance for Reconstruction and Peace (August 31, 1986)

11. A Covenant Towards Peace (on the Ratification of the 1986 Philippine Constitution) (November 21, 1986)

12. One Bread, One Body, One People (on the National Eucharistic Year) (November 23, 1986)

13. The Fruit of Justice is Peace (January 27, 1987)

#### *Content Analysis Procedures*

The study looked for religious imageries often mentioned in the letters. A qualitative analysis of the contents identified such imageries. Thematic patterns across letters were also evaluated. A more rigid measurement procedure, requiring data quantifica-

tion, was implemented to study themes.

*Qualitative imagery analysis.* The unit of analysis consisted of any word or phrase that depicted a biblical character, event or imagery. The study extracted the sentences containing these phrases in order to see the context within which the imageries were written. Data analysis qualitatively described the more common imageries, and the contexts within which they were mentioned in the pastoral letters.

*Quantitative thematic analysis.* The unit of analysis for themes was the paragraph. Two judges, independent of each other, content analyzed all the paragraphs in the thirteen letters. Each judge received a manila envelope containing cut-out copies of all the paragraphs in all the letters. The purpose for mixing the paragraphs randomly was to avoid response set. The research suspected that if paragraphs from one letter were read one after the other, the evaluator may tend to associate the same themes with sequential passages.

Also in the manila envelopes were eight letter-size envelopes with the following labels: (1) purely religious (2) purely political (3) purely moral (4) mixed religious-moral (5) mixed religious-political (6) mixed moral-political (7) mixed political-moral-religious and (8) none of the above. These smaller envelopes were placed in a horizontal line in front of the judge as guides to classification.

Judges used the following operational definitions of themes to classify the paragraphs:

(1) religious – (a) pertaining to God, biblical characters and events (b) Catholicism, the Christian faith, Catholic leaders (c) attitudes, beliefs and practices related to God and/or Catholicism.

Some examples:

Church	evangelization
Lord Jesus	people of God
pray	bishops

(2) political – (a) pertaining to influence and control in relation to government (for or against government) (b) attitudes, beliefs and practices related to large-scale power (c) competition between groups or individuals for power and leadership.

Some examples:

terrorism	critical collaboration
ideologies	nonviolent revolution
inequity	country

(3) moral – (a) ethical (b) relating to principles of right and wrong to behavior (c) expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior.

Moral usually entails a judgment while political is non-judgmental.

Some examples:

authentic renewal  
love  
justice/injustice  
(it will be) wrong  
moral principles  
(surrender to the) evils  
conscience

After classifying the paragraphs, the judges placed the cut-out pieces into their respective letter envelopes for eventual coding. The researcher summarized the data from each judge in an 8 x 13 tally sheet, with the eight themes as columns and the thirteen pastoral letters as rows.

The study measured inter-judge consistency in order to check the reliability of the thematic categories. Cohen's coefficient of agreement for nominal scales (1960) was used for this purpose. The coefficient has as its

upper limit + 1.00 while its lower limit is -1.00. It is directly interpretable as the proportion of classifications on which the two judges agree, after chance agreement is excluded.

Findings showed that the classification scheme was highly reliable. Table 2 presents the inter-judge reliability results, in frequencies. The table is an 8 x 8 matrix, as it correlates the decisions of the two judges on each of the eight thematic categories. Chance expectancies are listed only for the cells in the agreement diagonal since the other values are immaterial.

With  $k = .593$ , more than half of the joint judgments are agreements, even with chance excluded. The corresponding z-value is an extremely high 21.96. The chances that the population  $k = 0$  is far less than 1 in 1000.

The final scores considered as measures for thematic analysis were the average ratings of the two judges. This was done in order to

make maximum use of all the categorized data available.

## SURVEY

### Sample

Thirty-four bishops from various parts of the Philippines participated in the survey. They were delegates to the annual CBCP Conference in July 1987.<sup>2</sup> Although questionnaires were distributed to all 83 bishops, only 34 answered the research forms.

Twelve of the bishops came from Luzon, another 12 from Mindanao, 7 from the Visayas, while 3 had no dioceses.

### Survey Variables and Questionnaire

Survey data covered the perceived socio-political effects of the pastoral messages. Three dimensions were included, namely: (1) effect on the bishops themselves (2) perceived

Table 2. Inter-judge Agreement Matrix of Proportions

Categories	Judge								$f_{iB}$
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
(1) Pure Religious	92(36.35)	0	0	14	2	0	0	0	108
(2) Pure Political	0	12(1.82)	1	0	0	19	0	1	33
(3) Pure Moral	0	1	7(0.54)	3	0	3	0	0	14
(4) Mixed Rel-Mor	3	0	0	22(4.60)	0	0	4	0	29
(5) Mixed Rel-Pol	6	0	0	5	10(1.68)	1	15	0	37
(6) Mixed Mor-Pol	0	2	2	1	0	30(6.82)	2	0	37
(7) Pol-Mor-Rel	0	0	1	3	2	2	30(6.27)	0	38
(8) None Above	3	2	1	1	0	2	0	4(0.21)	13
$f_{iA}$	104	17	12	49	57	51	5	5	309

$f_0$ : frequency of paragraphs in which the judges agreed

$$f_0 = 92 + 12 + 7 + 22 + 10 + 30 + 30 + 4 = 207$$

$f_c$ : frequency of paragraphs for which agreements is expected by chance

$$f_c = 36.35 + 1.82 + 0.54 + 4.60 + 1.68 + 6.82 + 6.27 + 0.21 = 58.29$$

$k$ : proportion of agreement after chance agreement is removed

$$k = (f_0 - f_c) / (N - f_c) = 0.593$$

$$z = k / \sigma_k = 0.593 / 0.027 = 21.96$$

<sup>2</sup>The research thanks Bishop Claver, S.J. for distributing and collecting the questionnaires during the conference.

effects on their diocesan "flock" and (3) perceived effect on the Marcos regime. The first two dimensions assessed intensities of agreement or disagreement relative to each letter. The last component measured the extent to which the bishops perceived the pastoral letter as weakening the Marcos regime.

The survey form was organized in the following manner. Each socio-political dimension was presented as a main question at the top of a single page. Beneath the question was the list of 13 letters — their titles and the dates on which they were circulated. The bishops then described their perceptions through a five-point Likert scale presented beside the title of each pastoral document.

The research tried to control for the variable of forgetting by including brief summaries of the pastoral letters in the survey kits. Many of the letters were drafted years ago. Some bishops, particularly those advanced in age, may have had difficulty recalling the contents of all 13 letters without some "reminders."

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses study results. Findings are organized according to the research questions. The first three sections contain univariate descriptions of imageries and themes in the letters, plus summaries of scores from the bishops' opinion survey. The last part reports the results of bivariate analysis of data from two sources: content analysis and the survey. Here, themes from the pastoral letters are correlated with their socio-political effects, as perceived by the bishops.

### *What Imageries? Qualitative Content Analysis*

Two qualities describe the imageries of the pastoral letters. First was nonviolence: God the Father showered love upon his children in

the Philippines. Christ took on the social leader role, but he absorbed human pain as a symbol of ultimate sacrifice. The Holy Spirit acted as moral inspiration, while Mary stood by as the protective mother.

The more fiery religious imageries often used by Philippine underground movements were not cited in the letters. Such passages would have been, for example, the Exodus, other Old Testament narrations of war and bloodshed, or the story of Jesus angrily driving moneymakers away from the temple.

A second characteristic of the imageries was their being highly personality-oriented. Religious, moral or political statements appeared in connection with spiritual personalities. Four "persons" were mentioned most frequently in the pastoral letters. They were: God the Father, the Christ-Lord, the Holy Spirit and Mary.

Personalism fits well with Filipino culture and local political styles. In the Philippines, concrete personal relationships influence political currents more successfully than abstract ideological principles do.

Christ-Lord had the most numerous imageries in the letters: 148 out of the 344 words or phrases attributed to religious personalities referred to Him. Next came God the Father with a score of 96. Mary was cited 68 times. The Holy Spirit ranked last with 32 mentions.

*God the Father.* Imageries associated with God the Father are those of being powerful but loving, and someone who constantly communicates with His people. The power figure appeared most frequently. Below is a list of God the Father imageries found in the pastoral letters:

1. Powerful — God's power; kingdom; reign; plan; law; Your Will be done; almighty;



total obedience to God; glory; authority; just and all knowing; obey God

2. Loving — God's providence; love; image; Father; help; bless; healing; providential grace; healing grace

3. Communicator — God's word; speech; script

The imagery of God the Father finds parallels in the Filipino family and in recent national politics. In Philippine culture, the father of the family is the authority figure. He "reigns" over the wife and children. Other family members are expected to "obey" him so that his "will (may) be done." The Filipino father's power is not abusive. It is tempered by his strong feelings of protectiveness towards the "weaker" members of his family. He provides for them, loves them, helps troubled ones, and blesses them with his loving spirit.

In Philippine politics, there are two sources of social potency: *lakas* and *awa*. The former wields strength through control of politico-economic-military resources; the latter generates power through compassion for the weak (Claver, 1987). God the Father imageries are similar. There is power from almightiness, which goes hand-in-hand with a loving *awa* for His children on earth.

Another imagery associated with God the Father is that of a communicator. He links up with His people, speaks to them, and writes scripts upon which human events unfold. He is not an alienated God, but One who reaches out to mankind.

*Christ-Lord*. By far the most popular and frequently mentioned personality in the pastoral letters is Christ. He acts as a powerful social leader, peacemaker and sacrificial lamb. Following is a summary of the Christ-Lord imageries found in the various text pas-

sages of the pastoral letters:

### 1. Powerful Social Leader

a. One-with-mankind — one bread, one body; one people; reconciliation; incarnate; Lord of history; friends; brothers and sisters; human beings with whom the Lord has united himself; God-with-us; Body of the Lord; communion

b. Leader-to-follow — imitation of Him; light for revelation; may Jesus truly shine out in our part of the world; according to the mind of Christ; the pattern Christ has set for us; follow Christ with greater liberty and imitate him more closely

c. Power-on-earth — Christ our King; Lord of justice and peace; Prince of Peace; The Lord . . . granted the fulfillment of our liberation aspirations . . . last February; manner of striving for revolutionary change which is patterned after Christ's own way of redeeming people; what God in Christ is doing in the world . . . trying to bring into history new relationships and social structures

2. Peacemaker — Lord of peace; non-violence of the Cross; great peacemaking act of the Lord; it is inconceivable . . . for Christ . . . to destroy people in any way; love; our acting must always be according to the Gospel of Christ, that is, in a peaceful non-violent way

### 3. Suffering/Sacrificial Christ

a. suffering with-and-for man — Him who gave His all for us; Our fast . . . is a declaration of our renunciation, in the spirit of the Cross, of all death-dealing violence; (our position as your pastors will remain unalterably that of) the Lord Jesus who suffers in his people; pains of crucifixion and division; (we labor in vain...unless) the Lord labor with us.

b. suffering/sacrifice-that-brings-salvation — through the Cross, through the death of Christ, we were redeemed; to be for life, to work strongly for its deliverance from present evils through the nonviolence of the Cross; sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus; for Jesus remembers that the Cross is the beginning of our ability to triumph over our suffering and death and to crush the power of evil; through . . . the Eucharist, understood as sacrifice, sacrament and presence, Jesus enables us to come into life-giving contact with Him . . . a source of salvation for others; Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is central to our ability to proclaim the continuing concern and care of Christ; broken bread to feed the hungry of the world; sacrifice on the Cross through which we have become his brothers and sisters; we re-present to the Father the Sacrifice of his Son, and we receive in return the gift of reconciliation and peace.

During the Marcos-Aquino transition period, the Filipino people needed social leaders to steer them through the crisis. The Christ-Lord in pastoral texts provided a good model for "correct" political behavior.

Leadership was concrete and not abstract ("incarnate"; "Lord of history"; "Body of the Lord"). Social activity aimed to unify during a period of so much factionalism among groups ("one bread, one body, one people"; "reconciliation"; "friends"; "the Lord has united himself"; "communion").

Unlike God the Father's imageries, however, Christ's relationship with His followers was horizontal rather than vertical. He was more of a partner than an authority figure. Christ acted as a leader to be imitated, so much like the leadership-by-example called for by President Corason Aquino during the critical transition months.

Several passages come close to describing Christ as a political man. His power-on-earth

seeks the "fulfillment of our liberation aspirations." Filipinos are exhorted to continue "striving for revolutionary change which is patterned after Christ's own way of redeeming people." One pastoral letter depicts Christ's work in this world as "trying to bring into history new relationships and social structures."

Liberation, however, should be attained through nonviolent means. The radical Christ is portrayed as a political peacemaker. In their letters, the bishops refer to the "Lord of peace" and the "nonviolence of the Cross." Letters claim that "it is inconceivable . . . for Christ . . . to destroy people in any way." Socio-political activities, though socially revolutionary in objective, "must always be according to the Gospel of Christ, that is, in a peaceful non-violent way."

The most dominant picture of Christ is that of the sacrificial lamb. This confirms Ilet's (1979) association of Filipino revolutionary leadership with the suffering Christ in the *Pasyon*.

Pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period constantly called for self-sacrifice. In the final days of the dictatorship, most Filipinos suffered from the politico-economic narcissism of the Marcos regime. The pastoral letters elevated and perhaps even "consecrated" social suffering to the level of a Christ-God's experiences. The Lord Jesus was one who "suffers with his people" and "labor(s) with us." Along with the Filipinos, Christ undergoes the "pains of crucifixion and division." Social difficulties become easier to bear because of the psychological identification with a God who suffers along with Filipino martial rule victims.

Although suffering occurs, it is in the context of a sacrifice-that-brings-salvation. The present darkness is the very seed of future

light. The bishops speak to the Filipino people of hope, not despair. There is meaning in suffering, because pain is necessary before joy, crucifixion before resurrection. The bishops' message is timely in a society pushed to bitterness by oppression from the dictatorship, impatient with the violence from the extreme left and opportunism from the elitist anti-Marcos forces. It inspires Filipinos to continue working for authentic structural changes, inspite of the odds.

*Holy Spirit.* Imageries associated with the Holy Spirit are relatively fewer, less intense and more abstract than descriptions of God the Father and Christ-Lord. Action verbs and moral nouns describe the Spirit.

Words written in connection with the Holy Spirit are: "moves," "strengthens," "guides," "love," "enlightens," "wisdom," "freedom," "justice," "service," and "unity." These expressions describe positive moral acts that en-vigorate. The pastoral letters seem to describe the Spirit as a source of psychological energy in the struggle for moral righteousness amidst political turmoil.

*Mary.* Descriptions of Christ's mother fit the Filipino concept of the ideal woman: pure, honorable and nurturant.

Imageries related to Mary are the following:

1. Purity – immaculate, holy, blessed
2. Woman-to-honor – Queen of Peace; honor Mary; patroness of our country; Queenship of Mary
3. Female Nurturer – Mother; Nativity of Mary; Mother of the Poor; intercession; assist us; guidance; help

The pastoral letters praise Mary's purity. She is also placed on a pedestal, honored by

salutations of "Queenship" and "patroness." Her nurturant maternal role is repeated across several text passages.

Marian imageries create a strong impact on Filipinos. The emotionally intense cultural value Filipinos ascribe to mothers explains why this is so. As a helpful mother of the Filipino nation, she guides her children during critical times. She intercedes for them when they ask favors from God the Father or Christ. Acting as a bridge to male authority figures is a female role in the Filipino family. In a home, fathers often remain physically or emotionally distant. Mothers or eldest daughters intercede for the younger children in asking favors from the father.

#### *What Themes? Quantitative Content Analysis*

What themes frequently appeared in the pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period? Were the messages predominantly religious, political, or moral? Did the text paragraphs tend to mix themes in singular statements? If so, what combinations occurred: political-moral, religious-political, religious-moral, or political-moral-religious? This section on thematic content analysis addresses itself to the above questions.

The table below presents a summary of the themes found in all the paragraphs of all the letters.

*Table 3. Total Number of Paragraphs with Theme Occurrence in All Pastoral Letters (Average Scores of Two Coders)*

Paragraph Theme	(Average) Number of Paragraphs in All Letters
Pure Religious	106.0 paragraphs
Mixed Moral-Political	47.0 paragraphs
Mixed Moral-Political-Religious	44.5 paragraphs
Mixed Moral-Religious	39.0 paragraphs
Mixed Political-Religious	25.5 paragraphs

Pure Political	25.0 paragraphs
Pure Moral	13.0 paragraphs
No theme	9.0 paragraphs
Total	309.0 paragraphs

Pastoral letters carried predominantly religious messages. More than one-third of all the paragraphs contained purely religious themes. The Church still functioned mainly as a religious institution, even during the critical period of the Marcos-Aquino transition.

The profile of moral theme occurrence is quite interesting. Paragraphs did not contain pure moral themes. Rather, moral statements appeared frequently, but in combination with religious and political themes. There seemed to be a tendency to avoid pure "homilizing" or "moralizing."

Instead, attempts were made to integrate moral messages into the context of concrete religious and/or political statements. One interpretation of this thematic pattern in the pastoral letters was that morality (consciously or unconsciously) functioned as the bridge between religiosity and liberation politics. Content analysis findings suggest that the Church acted as the guardian of morality in a social context during the Marcos-Aquino transition period.

Political themes seldom occurred. This gives the lie to accusations made by pro-Marcos sympathizers during the transition period that the Church took on a political role through its pastoral letters. However, the moral statements of the Church may have had strong political consequences when interpreted by the oppressed Filipinos. Claver (1986) suggests this when he writes that "the Church's call for a righting of wrongs was clearly a moral imperative; but the consequence of this was a change in government — a political question."

### *Bishops' evaluation of pastoral letters' effects: Survey findings*

The bishops were asked to evaluate their own pastoral letters. Their replies indicated that they tended to agree with all the CBCP letters. On a scale of 5 where "5" signified complete agreement and "4" meant that one agreed with most of the letter contents, the church letters' mean scores ranged from 4.47 to 4.85. The bishops also perceived a general acquiescence among diocesan communities. Mean scores of "flock" agreement with the letters varied from 4.00 to 5.00.

Mean scores were more scattered in the third survey variable concerned with the perceived effects on the Marcos regime. The scale had the following numeral definitions: 5 = tremendously weakened Marcos hold; 4 = significantly weakened Marcos hold; 3 = slightly weakened Marcos hold; 2 = neither weakened nor strengthened Marcos hold; and 1 = strengthened Marcos hold. The political effectiveness mean scores of the letters ranged from a strong 4.79 to a relatively weak 2.21.

Table 4 shows the means of the questionnaire items.

The bishops personally agreed most with the letter "Let There be Life," a statement in defense of the sacredness of life. This was circulated on July 22, 1984 at the height of human rights violations and social atrocities. They agreed least with the document on the ratification of the 1986 Philippine Constitution, published on November 21, 1986.

Another questionnaire item asked the bishops to rate the general sentiments of their diocesan "flock" toward each pastoral message. "One Bread, One Body, One People" received the highest rating. All the respondents gave the document a score of 5.0 on the five-point Likert scale. Thus, the standard

**Table 4. Means of Bishops' Responses to Survey Questions**

Pastoral Letters	To what extent did you personally agree or disagree with the contents of the letter? 1=completely disagreed; 5=completely agreed	Rate the general sentiments of your diocesan flock towards the following letters. 1=completely disagreed; 5=completely agreed	To what extent did the letter weaken Marcos' hold on Philippine society? 1=strengthened Marcos' hold; 5=tremendously weakened Marcos' hold
	Mean (f)	Mean (f)	Mean (f)
1. Reconciliation Today (December 4, 1983)	4.79 (34)	4.18 (28)	3.24 (33)
2. The 1984 Plebiscite & Elections (January 8, 1984)	4.53 (34)	4.00 (28)	3.33 (33)
3. Let There be Life (on the Sacredness of Human Life and its Defense) (July 22, 1984)	4.85 (34)	4.50 (28)	3.41 (32)
4. The Celebration of the Marian Year (February 2, 1985)	4.82 (34)	4.96 (28)	2.64 (33)
5. The Biblical Apostolate (February 24, 1985)	4.62 (34)	4.82 (28)	2.21 (33)
6. Message to the People of God (July 8, 1985)	4.71 (34)	4.32 (28)	3.62 (32)
7. We Must Obey God Rather than Men (on Snap Elections)(Jan.25,1986)	4.77 (34)	4.24 (29)	4.49 (33)
8. CBCP's Post-Election Statement (February 13, 1986)	4.71 (34)	4.00 (30)	4.79 (33)
9. Pastoral Exhortation on the Constitutional Commission and its Work (May 18, 1986)	4.62 (34)	4.03 (30)	3.58 (33)
10. 100 Days of Prayer & Penance for Reconstruction and Peace (August 31, 1986)	4.53 (34)	4.53 (30)	3.18 (33)
11. A Covenant towards Peace (on the Ratification of the 1986 - Philippine Constitution) (November 21, 1986)	4.47 (34)	4.23 (30)	4.00 (33)
12. One Bread, One Body, One People (on the National Eucharistic Year) (November 23, 1986)	4.73 (34)	5.00 (29)	2.85 (33)
13. The Fruit of Justice is Peace (January 27, 1987)	4.68 (34)	4.72 (29)	3.39 (33)

deviation of the letter was an absolute 0! Apparently, ordinary Filipinos tend to agree with calls for unity and non-confrontational solutions to social problems.

Conflict may be psychologically difficult to handle. The letter that the bishops felt generated the lowest level of agreement in their localities was the "CBCP's Post-Election Statement." This came out on February 13, 1986, barely two weeks before the EDSA revolution. It called for massive boycotts in the wake of rampant cheating at the presidential polls. "CBCP's Post-Election Statement", however, ranked highest. When bishops scored their documents according to the perceived degree to which each helped weaken Marcos' hold on Philippine society.

How can a pastoral letter seemingly rejected by church members contribute significantly to the dictatorship's downfall? The concepts of controversy and social change may help explain the dilemma. If the majority agree with an issue, then the issue may be non-controversial. When an issue is noncontroversial, it does not go against current circumstances, and thus cannot change the present situation. Social change occurs when there is deviance from the norm. "CBCP's Post-Election Statement" was relatively confrontational in stance. It may have gone against the traditional Filipino value of *pakikisama*. But because of its controversial nature, it produced enough political impetus to significantly weaken the Marcos regime.

The social deviance communicated by the "CBCP's Post-Election Statement" may have provided the right amount. More controversy may have generated an anti-CBCP reaction from the conservative majority. On the other hand, too little controversy may have had no effect on the political situation.

The data reflects the complexity of relationships among the three survey vari-

ables. Some letters with which the bishops strongly agree were neither highly acceptable to their flock nor politically effective. Other documents acceptable to the flock had no effect on the Marcos regime. In fact, the top three letters in the list of dioceses' agreement are the last three in terms of weakening Marcos' hold in the Philippines.

This minimizes the probability of any simple relationship between acceptance and political effectiveness of the letters.

#### *Relation of Themes and Perceived Socio-Political Effects of Letters*

Content analysis looked into the themes in each pastoral letter. The survey evaluated the socio-political effects of the documents from the perspective of the bishops. This section examines the complex relationships between document themes and the consequences of letters on the social environment.

The raw data matrix of this section consisted of 13 pastoral letters in the rows (i.e., each letter is treated as a case). There were 10 columns: 7 themes and 3 survey questions. The theme columns contained the number of paragraphs per theme per letter. The survey columns contained the mean Likert-scale scores of the bishop respondents per question per letter. Each theme was then correlated with each survey item.

The result is the correlation matrix presented below, with themes in the seven columns and survey items in the three rows. The research set .60 as the cut-off point for high and low correlations. The critical value for a 2-tailed test is around 0.50. Only descriptions of "high" and "low" are made.

Table 6 below lists the message themes that are highly correlated with socio-political effects. Some themes have high positive correlations while others have high negative

Table 5. Partial Correlation Matrix of Pastoral Letters' Themes and Perceived Sociopolitical Effects

Perceived Socio-Political Effects Based on Survey	Message of Letters Based on Content Analysis						
	Pure Rel	Pure Pol	Pure Mor	Mixed Mor-Rel	Mixed Rel-Pol	Mixed Mor-Pol	Mixed Pol-Mor-Rel
Bishops Agree	-.09	.20	.54	.66*	-.30	.22	.36
Flock Agree	.72*	-.45	-.43	.19	-.07	-.56*	-.49
Topple Marcos	-.73*	.43	.43	-.32	.16	.60	.50

\* High correlations

Table 6. Pastoral Letter Themes Highly Correlated with Perceived Sociopolitical Effects

Perceived Sociopolitical Effects	Pastoral Letter Themes	
	High Positive Correlation	High Negative Correlation
Bishops Agree	Mixed Moral-Religious	
Flock Agree	Pure Religious	
Topple Marcos	Mixed Moral-Political	Pure Religious

relationships.

The moral factor is crucial. However, its potency activates for as long as the moral messages blend with other themes. The bishops tended to agree with moral messages mixed with religious imagery. Anti-Marcos effectiveness occurred only when moral themes combined with political statements. Pure moral messages and pure political notes appeared to be socio-politically impotent.

Mixed moral-political communications may have had a special effect on churchgoers. Such messages did not change their attitudes nor "win them over" from an original state of non-agreement to acquiescence. Rather, the pronouncements may have activated and channelled confused but potent sentiments. Such feelings about morality and politics may have been extremely powerful within Filipinos, considering the long years of political abuse during the dictatorship. This may

have been especially true for the liberal-minded middle class traumatized by the brutal assassination of Senator Aquino in 1983 and revolted by the blatant cheating in the 1986 elections.

What about purely religious messages? The local diocesan community tended to agree highly with religious letters, while these same documents had the least effect on the Marcos regime. The reason for this statistical pattern may be that religiosity is noncontroversial. It fits right into the current belief system of ordinary churchgoers and is easily approved by them. But because of its noncontroversial nature, it has no capacity to transform political (oppressive) circumstances.

There is a difference between powerful messages and popular ones. The first may appeal to relatively fewer people, but may have more power to produce political effectiveness. The second may be highly acceptable

but may fail to transform social circumstances. The research indicates that moral-political messages were psychologically powerful, whereas purely religious messages were more popular.

### SUMMARY

This study described religious imageries and themes in the bishops' pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period. It also looked at the personal opinions of some bishops regarding the Church messages.

Data came from two sources. First a detailed content analysis of the 13 letters from 1983 until 1986 was carried out. Next, a survey of 34 Philippine bishops gathered information about the letters from the viewpoint of the Church leaders themselves.

The common imageries mentioned in the letters referred to traditional biblical imageries like God the Father, Christ-Lord, the Holy Spirit and Mary. The more fiery imageries often cited by Philippine underground movements (e.g., the Exodus and the "angry" Jesus in the temple) were not dominant messages in the pastoral letters.

Content analysis findings showed that purely religious paragraphs far outnumbered the other paragraph types. Moral statements occurred quite frequently, but often in combination with other themes. The above theme patterns suggest that the pastoral letters during the Marcos-Aquino transition period were primarily religious messages backed up by strong moral commentaries on Philippine contemporary politics.

The "attitude change" explanation of the social function of Church documents is put under fire by research findings. The pastoral letters apparently did not weaken the Marcos government by changing the attitudes of a

majority of the Filipino people. This is seen in the fact that documents with the least anti-Marcos effects were the ones that garnered the highest agreement scores among the diocesan flock, as perceived by the bishops.

Instead of attitude change, "articulation of unfocused but potent sentiments" may have operated to explain the social effects of the letters. Church letters, especially those that mixed moral and political statements captured the powerful feelings of a nation long burdened by an abusive dictatorship. This may have been especially true for a segment of the Filipino population: the middle class. They may have been fewer in number, relative to the total nation's body count, but were politically aggressive, socially influential and organizationally efficient. They eventually massed in EDSA during those crucial days in February 1986.

### *Final Words*

Third World freedom movements have been deeply affected by Vatican II. This is especially true for nations that were once colonies of Spain or Portugal (i.e., the Philippines and Latin America). In most of these countries, approximately 90% of their populations are Christian. They have deeply Christian orientations and church networks organized on a nationwide scale.

Aside from being predominantly Christian, these nations share other characteristics. In the early 1970s, they became subjugated to dictatorships often propped up by American military firepower. The latter half of the 70s and the decade of the 80s opened up new democratic space in nations like Argentina, Peru, Brazil and the Philippines. These countries are living witnesses to the continued social crucifixion of millions of peasants and workers who are burdened by unjust politico-economic structures.



The Philippine struggle for freedom and justice is not over. Although power has been distributed to more people with the rise of the Aquino presidency, the government may still be unstable. Economic inequalities remain chronic. Twenty years of authoritarian rule have wreaked havoc in the Filipino social arena.

Christianity's presence in the Philippines has indeed contributed positively to the success of the nonviolent anti-dictatorship movement. But to remain effective, it is important to understand the sentiments and imageries that "fit" into the cultural temperament of ordinary Third World Christians. May the Church continue to speak with the people, suffer with them, and rejoice in their victories, for the sake of lasting peace.

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