



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE PHILIPPINES
GATHERED IN THEIR PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

*To my Venerable Brothers
the Bishops of the Philippines*

The forthcoming Plenary Assembly offers me the welcome opportunity to address you once more, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in order to manifest to you my most lively affection for yourselves and for the communities entrusted to your pastoral ministry, and in order to share some reflections with you, thus accepting the hope expressed to me by Cardinal Ricardo Vidal. To him I offer a special greeting, as he has been called to assume the task of President of the Episcopal Conference at a difficult moment for the history of the country and for the Church which fully shares the joy and hopes, the sorrows and difficulties of its inhabitants.

At this moment of transition, marked by serious and complex problems of different kinds, I wish to send a word of encouragement to all of you, and in the exercise of the mission entrusted by the Lord Jesus to Peter and his Successors to confirm his brethren in the faith, I invite you to place all your trust in Christ, who is our strength and salvation.

The political events which in the recent months have profoundly modified the public life of the Philippines have been the object of my attention and indeed apprehension, as I have had the occasion to express publicly in this regard, inviting our brethren in the faith

other countries to be united in prayer with the Filipino people.

It is thanks to the divine protection and the deep Christian spirit of your people – well known for their cordial, welcoming and peaceful openness to all – that during the grave tensions there was no recourse to violence, as had been feared.

Only a short time has since passed, and there are numerous and impelling social, economic and political problems that await a concrete and effective response. I therefore understand your anxiety and desire as Pastors to express more explicitly your communion with the people entrusted to you, and to offer them serious and attentive moral guidance.

The Church in the Philippines cannot forget that a large portion of the population finds itself living in economic and social conditions that are extremely difficult and at times unbearable, and they demand a more human life, one more in harmony with the dignity of children of God.

Preferential love for the poor, which already in the past has not failed to inspire your pastoral ministry, must become one of the principal lines of action of that ministry, in the context of solidarity with all human beings and their history.

This service of love and fidelity to man must however be in conformity with the nature of the mission of the Church, which is not of the temporal but of the spiritual order, not of the social, political or economic order but of the religious one . This means, then, that the Church is called not to take positions of a political character, or to take part in partisan conflicts, but to give society the expert contribution which is proper to her, as the spiritual light and strength that can contribute to building and consolidating the human community. This service to man will demand an intense evangelical effort, which is the proclamation of God's salvation, in every context where people live and work. It will thus be faithful to an integral proclamation of the Gospel that must spread its light upon earthly realities, in such a way that man may be helped to free himself from everything that oppresses him and alienates him, so that he may be enabled to travel the path to his full self-realization, both earth and transcendental.

At the present time, when the country seems to require more than ever the contribution of a disinterested service of the common good, and to demand an example of great moral integrity and social virtues, your efforts must seek to ensure the necessary formation of the consciences of the faithful at all levels of responsibility in society.

In this way it will be possible for you to stimulate the preparation of the laity to assume their responsibilities, as Christians and citizens, in the political construction and organization of social life. The Second Vatican Council itself has clearly stated that "the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which a person lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be properly exercised by others" . There is no doubt that it is a question of a task that calls for the support of the spiritual guidance of the Bishops and priests.

In this ministry of teaching and guidance, at the service of truth and justice, no pastor can forget that he is also called to be an instrument of reconciliation and communion.

To you who are consecrated to have the care of the whole flock, without exclusions of any sort, there is entrusted the promotion of effective and concrete national reconciliation. You have the mission not to provoke or to deepen divisions, but to help in overcoming urgently and with decisiveness those that have been created or that at least have emerged among the population during recent events. This peacemaking activity too will, however, produce the desired results only to the extent that it is based upon an intense evangelizing activity.

The proclamation of the Good News that must be carried out – of course in the concrete context of the life of the people and as a response to their most serious problems – will produce a profound unity that is not affected by the different political or socio-economic options.

Every Filipino will then, in a rediscovered sense of solidarity – the concrete consequence of human and supernatural fraternity – feel involved with the brethren in the faith and with all people of good will in the solution of the difficulties of the country.

The expectation of unity and increased solidarity includes solicitude for the present drawing up of the new Constitution.

I trust that all those who have been given this task will make their expert contribution and be vividly aware of the dignity of man and of his profoundest aspirations.

Aware of the sensitivity of the Filipino people to everything that concerns religious life and of your care in this particular sector, I am sure that the new Magna Charta will restate in an adequate manner the right of all citizens to religious freedom and will ensure the Church's liberty to carry out her mission, also in the spheres of teaching and assistance.

At the end of this letter, I wish to repeat to you that I am following with constant attention and deep affection your difficult ministry. I am accompanying the work of your Plenary Assembly with my prayer, and I send my special Apostolic Blessing, which I would like to extend to every diocesan community.

I cordially entrust you to the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Church.

From the Vatican, June 28, 1986.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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