



## RESTORING TRUST: A PLEA FOR MORAL VALUES IN PHILIPPINE POLITICS

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

### The Pastoral Situation

1. As a people we seem to have passed from crisis to crisis in one form or another. For many analysts, reinforcing these crises are ambivalent cultural values such as *palakasan*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, and *family-centeredness*. As Bishops we have long contended that the crises that we have suffered are basically moral – the lack of moral values in ourselves, in our relationships, in our social structures.
2. Today we are beset with yet another political crisis of such magnitude as to polarize our people and attract them to various options ranging from the extreme right to the extreme left. In this grave situation, various groups take advantage of one another, manipulate situations for their own agenda and create confusion among our people sometimes by projecting speculation or suspicion as proven fact, with the aim of grabbing power.
3. At the center of the crisis is the issue of moral value, particularly the issue of trust. The people mistrust our economic institutions which place them under the tyranny of dehumanizing poverty. They also mistrust yet another key institution – our political system. This mistrust is not recent. For a long time now, while reveling in political exercises, our people have shown a lack of trust in political personalities, practices, and processes. Elections are often presumed tainted rather than honest. Congressional and senate hearings are sometimes narrowly confined to procedural matters and often run along party lines. Politics has not effectively responded to the needs of the poor and marginalized.
4. This question of trust in national institution has taken a critical urgency with the resignation of some key Cabinet members, the realignment of political parties and the creation of new alliances. Amid this realignment of forces we commend the clear official stand of our military and police authorities who reiterated their loyalty to our Constitution that forbids them from engaging in partisan politics.
5. Moreover within academe, business, professional and civil society varied positions have been taken with regard to President Macapagal Arroyo. Some want her to resign; others want her to go through due process. Some want a Truth Commission. Others impeachment. Some want a constitutional process and others an extra-constitutional process. On the other hand there is also a wide manifestation of support for the chief executive by a cross section of society.
6. Today we ask ourselves, “As Bishops what can we offer to our people? Can we provide some clarity and guidance in the present confusing situation?” We can only answer these questions from who are. We are not politicians who are to provide a political blueprint to solve political problems. Rather we are Bishops called by the Lord to shepherd the people in the light of faith. With Pope Benedict XVI we do not believe in the “intrusion into politics on the part of the hierarchy.” But we are to interpret human activities such as economics and politics from the moral and religious point of view, from the point of view of the Gospel of Jesus and of the Kingdom of God. We are to provide moral and religious guidance to our people. This is what we offer in the present crisis. Not to do this would be an abdication of

our duty.

### **Our Pastoral Role and Our Stand**

7. In the welter of conflicting opinions and positions our role is not to point out a specific political option or a package of options as the Gospel choice, especially so when such an option might be grounded merely on a speculative and highly controvertible basis. **In the present situation we believe that no single concrete option regarding President Macapagal Arroyo can claim to be the only one demanded by the Gospel. Therefore, in a spirit of humility and truth, we declare our prayerfully discerned collective decision that we do not demand her resignation. Yet neither do we encourage her simply to dismiss such a call from others. For we recognize that non-violent appeals for her resignation, the demand for a Truth Commission and the filing of an impeachment case are not against the Gospel.**
8. **In all these we remind ourselves that a just political and moral order is best promoted under the present circumstances by a clear and courageous preference for constitutional processes that flow from moral values and the natural law. Hence, we also appeal to the people, especially their representatives and leaders, to discern their decisions not in terms of political loyalties but in the light of the Gospel values of truth, justice, and the common good. We urge our people in our parish and religious communities, our religious organizations and movements, our Basic Ecclesial Communities to come and pray together, reason, decide and act together always to the end that the will of God prevail in the political order. People of good will and credibility who hold different political convictions should come together and dialogue in order to help move the country out of its present impasse. We believe with Pope Benedict XVI that through prayer the Filipino people and their political representatives and leaders, guided by moral principles, are capable of arriving at decisions for the common good that are based not only on political realities but above all on moral precepts.**
9. Yet having said this we wish to subject specific situations to moral inquiry to guide our people in deepening their moral discernment.

### **Restoring Moral Values**

10. On Moral Accountability: "Political authority is accountable to the people. Those who govern have the obligation to answer to the governed" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 408). *President Macapagal Arroyo has admitted and apologized for a "lapse of judgment" for calling a COMELEC official. The admission further eroded that people's trust on the already suspected electoral system and raised serious questions on the integrity of the elections. Beyond apology is accountability. Indeed, with forgiveness is justice. To restore trust would require a thorough, credible, and independent process to examine the authenticity of the so-called Garcillano tapes, verify any possible betrayal of public trust, and mete out due punishment on all those found guilty. Punishment should also be imposed on those duly found guilty of corruption and illegal acts, such as jueteng and wire-tapping. Moral accountability calls for radical reforms in various agencies of government to make them more responsive to the requirements of integrity as well as to the needs of the poor.*
11. On Constitutionality: In the present crisis some calls are being made for measures that are counter-constitutional. The Constitution enshrines cherished values such as human dignity and the common good, freedom, the rule of law and due process. On this basis, we reject quick fixes that cater to selfish political agenda and advantage rather than to the common good. We deplore the attempts of those groups who seek to exploit our vulnerable national situation in order to create confusion and social chaos, in order to seize power by unconstitutional means. We

reject calls for juntas or revolutionary councils. Our political leaders have to be the first to observe and faithfully implement the Constitution. Resolving the crisis has to be within the framework of the Constitution and the laws of the land so as to avoid social chaos, the further weakening of political systems, and greater harm in the future.

12. On Non-Violence: Violent solutions, as Pope Paul VI taught us, "produce new injustices, throw more elements out of balance, and bring on new disasters" (*Populorum Progressio*, 31). *There are today, on different sides of the social and political spectrum, those who would instigate violence in order to promote their own agenda or causes. We reject the use of force and violence as a solution to our problems. Such cannot be an option of the Gospel, for we know that Jesus the Lord taught a Gospel of love and non-violence.*
13. On Effective Governance: "Public authority in order to promote the common good... requires also that authority be effective in attaining that end" (*Pacem in Terris*, ch. IV). *Together with competence, personal integrity is one of the most necessary requirements of a leader. Ineffective governance may be due to a lack of personal integrity or lack of competence. It could also be the result of a confluence of factors that have eroded trust and credibility and hence effectiveness. In our present situation we recognize that blame could be attributed to many, even to all of us. Yet we would ask the President to discern deeply to what extent she might have contributed to the erosion of effective governance and whether the erosion is so severe as to be irreversible. In her heart she has to make the necessary decision for the sake of the country. We all need to do the same. Indeed, moral discernment is very difficult since it is not based on political allegiances and alignments but on moral considerations.*

### **Conclusion**

14. Dear People of God, sadness and anxiety were our feelings when we as Bishops first met to study the various aspects of the crisis. To confront the fears and hopelessness that at the daily companions of our poor is to realize that we of the Church likewise contributed to them by our neglect, our bias, our selfishness.
15. To respond to the pastoral situation we commit ourselves to a more effective evangelization in word and deed so that moral values might become dynamic forces of human life in economics, politics, and culture. We especially commit ourselves to the formation of men and women endowed with competence and integrity and empowered to effective leadership in the economic and political spheres. With the Gospel of truth, justice, peace and love in their hearts they might, indeed, be a leaven of social transformation for our country.
16. This Year of the Eucharistic reminds us of the abiding, loving and healing presence of the Lord Jesus in our midst. By the grace and mercy of God and the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we pray that a deep sense of hope will prevail in these dark moments of our history. Our loving God will not abandon us no matter what pit of evil have fallen into. We shall emerge stronger from this crisis. We shall rise endowed with greater integrity. We shall be witnesses to the power of God's grace to transform us into a noble nation, a holier Church, a united people.

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