PCP II ECCLESIOLOGY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

An ongoing study and reflection on the ecclesiology of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) is an important task in charting the course of renewal which the Philippine Church should undertake. And if in fact PCP II is a “new Pentecost” for the local Church, it will be fitting to take the council’s document as a concrete point of departure, for “realizing” the renewal of the Church in our country here and now. To this end, it will be useful to test the validity of the conciliar text in the light of Church tradition, particularly the Second Vatican Council documents and the concrete human reality the Philippine Church finds itself in. This article will address itself to the PCP II’s notion of the Church — its strengths and limitations.

The starting point of this study is a critique written by Fr. Luis Antonio G. Tagle (LAT), “Discipleship in Community — the Church.”¹ We will, for the most part, review his commentary. LAT’s article is perhaps the first critical evaluation of the council’s ecclesiology, from a qualified “outsider” with the necessary credentials for such a task.

II. PCP II ECCLESIOLOGY

There are four key aspects of PCP II ecclesiology which are

contained in the conciliar document, "Envisioning a Church Renewed": the Church as discipleship in community, as communion, as participatory, and as Church of the poor. These key concepts derive their rootage from the ecclesiology set forth by the Second Vatican Council.

THE CHURCH AS DISCIPLESHIP IN COMMUNITY

The Church as discipleship in community sets the mood and model of doing ecclesiology here in the Philippines and at the beginning of the third millennium. The primary intention of this first section of the document is to look for a Church which would be able to respond to the pressing needs of our contemporary situation. At the outset, this model typifies the Church as people of God, a community of faith journeying in history. But according to LAT, the actual formulation of this model is unfortunate for the quality of this primordial discipleship is not clarified and explored in depth. Moreover, this original model of Christian community is not followed up sufficiently in the other sections of this particular document. If this model of Christian community is perceived as a unifying theme in PCP II, one wonders what sort of discipleship the council has in mind. It would have been rather desirable to describe and qualify the nature of, for example, the New Testament Church communities, citing concrete aspects of their ministry and life if only to give more concrete directions to the kind of discipleship which the council hopes to foster.

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION

One of the most important retrievals that Vatican II made is the ecclesiology of communion. For Michael A. Fahey, New Testament theology is particularly strong on communion be-

2. Ibid. 66.
3. Ibid. 46.
4. Ibid. 66.
tween God and the believer, the vertical relationship, in fact much more than the human or horizontal unity.\(^6\) By insisting on this ecclesiological insight, one sees that the human ecclesial communion in history is a divine communion as well.\(^7\) Unfortunately this divine communion does not stand out clearly in this particular section of the text. LAT correctly points out that the theme of divine communion, which is so beautifully expressed in 1 John 1:1-4, is regrettably missing in the document.

Another major inadequacy in this section, still according to LAT, is the virtual absence of the role of the Holy Spirit, especially in the local Church. This absence of pneumatology weakens the theological motivation to realize the local Church which is primarily the activity of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested in the community from which charisms and ministries emerge. The absence of a pneumatological base merely reinforces the already existing chasm between Filipino theology and spirituality.\(^8\)

By not treating the role of the Spirit in ecclesiology, mixed signals are given. On the one hand, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), discipleship in community and mission are prominent themes in the council. But on the other, the hierarchy does not seem to fully motivate the laity (whose baptism seals the presence of the Holy Spirit), like is the case in charismatic communities, to respond to the signs of the times. PCP II’s notable absence of treatment of the charismatic movement indicates a deficiency, and may show up a hierarchical bias.

There is also no mention of the role of the Eucharist, the summit and fount of Christian living, where the local Church is in the first place realized and nourished. Fahey holds that communion ecclesiology is akin to the Eastern Orthodox Church’s idea of eucharistic ecclesiology. In this perspective, local Churches are not merely parts of a larger Church, “but the ecclesial body of Christ is present in fullness in each local eucharistic commu-

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nity. In Filipino culture, the meal is a symbolic expression of solidarity and communion. The lack of a theology of the Eucharistic meal and the absence of pneumatology weaken the thrust to realize the local Church.

Moreover, there is a notable absence of a Trinitarian vision of the Church. Thus a theological touchstone of communion ecclesiology drops out. Although there is a strong Christocentric theological base in the PCP II ecclesiology, hardly anything is said about the mystery of the Trinity both as immanent and economic: the three divine persons’ love for each other, their communion and intimacy, their participation in mission. A Trinitarian interpretation of the Church is a key insight which the Second Vatican Council has consistently underscored. Bruno Forte succinctly drives home this point:

The Church comes from the Trinity, goes towards the Trinity, and is fashioned to its image: everything the Council says about the Church is summed up in this remembrance of the Trinitarian origin, nature and destiny of the ecclesial communion.

By not using the Trinitarian framework explicitly for understanding the Church, the theme and purpose of history is not brought to bear clearly. For Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., Jesus’ intimacy with the Father is a central reality that grounds his Kingdom message and its concrete praxis. His relationship with ‘Abba’ is inextricably linked with the Kingdom. The Father-theme therefore opens up an important concern of ecclesiology: the theology of history and its correlate, the People of God.

Bishop Teodoro Bacani, however, claims that the inner life and mission of the Trinity is reflected in the council’s ecclesiology, e.g., unity in diversity, equality in dignity, communion and mission. But, as LAT mentioned earlier, nowhere is there any systematic Trinitarian grounding of PCP II ecclesiology in the conciliar text. Archbishop Orlando Quevedo also seems to raise

10. Forte, The Church, 38.
the same objection.\textsuperscript{12}

An important point that the council makes regarding the mission of the Church is the assertion that its existence is never purely for itself it is rather directed to the world.\textsuperscript{13} The sense of mission is an important dimension of "becoming Church." Nevertheless, for LAT, there seems to be an ambiguous understanding of the relationship between community and mission in the document. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of integration between the two; that is, not only is mission an offshoot of community but that the former is a constitutive dimension of the latter. That the mission is constitutive of becoming Church is not fully articulated in the document. It is not the case that the Church has to be formed first and then its mission will follow.

LAT sums up his critique of this section in this way: "An ecclesiology of communion cannot be constructed except on the synthesis of christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology."\textsuperscript{14} Another way of illustrating the problem is to note the three levels of communion which Bruno Forte suggests as key elements typifying an ecclesiology of communion.\textsuperscript{15} Forte's synthesis of the levels of communion can also help evaluate the notion of ecclesiology in PCP II.

The first level is \textit{communion with the Spirit, communio Sancti}. The Church is not merely a human invention; rather it originates from the Trinity in the action of the Spirit. The Trinity is the divine communion realized in human communion: the Church. The second level consists of the \textit{communion with the sacred realities} in Word and Sacrament, especially in the Eucharist: thus \textit{communio sacramentorum}. Here Forte insists on intimate inter-relation between the Church and the Eucharist. The Church is realized in the Eucharist, where the synthesis of Word and Sacrament not only occurs but is supremely actualized. The Eucharist in turn nourishes and builds the community of faith, the Church. The

\textsuperscript{12} Unpublished interview with Bishop Teodoro Bacani, February 21, 1993. For class use at the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. See also Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., "Notes on PCP II Ecclesiology," January 13, 1992.

\textsuperscript{13} Forte, \textit{The Church}, 40.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 48.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 75-84.
third level of communion is realized in the community of the faithful: *communio sanctorum fidelium*. The faithful gathered together not only experience this unity with the living but also with the dead and the saints in heaven. It is the Spirit that binds people together, continues to offer the graces and charisms so that no baptized person can be exempted from involvement and participation in the Church’s service of the Kingdom.

From the perspective of Bruno Forte’s synthesis, the PCP II doctrinal basis for constructing a systematic ecclesiology of communion suffers considerable deficiencies. What it has are rather elements which could potentially form a coherent and adequate ecclesiological base.

**THE CHURCH AS PARTICIPATORY**

The council reasserts here a fundamental recovery which Vatican II stressed regarding the role of the laity: their participation and coresponsibility in the life and mission of the Church. This insistence stems from the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. It should not obscure the role of the hierarchy. It is not meant to form “a ‘Church of the people’ where the hierarchy has no place at all.”

Participation consists primarily in this: the lay people are not merely objects of evangelization, but they are also *acting subjects* of this Church enterprise by virtue of their baptism. Although this insistence on active lay involvement is quite evident, LAT suggests sharpening its mission, focusing it on the two human aspirations made explicit by OA 22: “the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of man’s dignity and freedom.” This would give the text a consistent thrust following the social teaching of the Church.

Another difficulty with this particular section is the lack of mutuality at work between the priesthood of the baptized and the priesthood of the ordained. The text seems to indicate a

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17. OA 22.
18. PCP II, no. 118.
merely collaborative role on the part of the laity, whereas the ordained minister assumes a "constitutive and generative" role in the community.\textsuperscript{19} This difficulty is likewise evident in the formulation of Article 2 #2 in the General Pastoral Orientation/Principles decree: "dioceses and parishes shall be run as consultative bodies on the model of Community of Disciples."\textsuperscript{20} Some commentators are quick to point out a notable change of the original term collegial bodies to consultative bodies in the final document.\textsuperscript{21} This formulation seems to undermine the notion of lay participation to which the Second Vatican Council has given such a high premium.

THE CHURCH OF THE POOR

This is, for LAT, "the most original and powerful of the whole section."\textsuperscript{22} It begins by first recognizing that it is "God who calls us most urgently to serve the poor and the needy."\textsuperscript{23} By pushing the Church to become a Church of the poor, a clear demand is made for a prophetic solidarity, a way of taking the cause of the poor as its own The document then describes what this "Church of the poor" means.\textsuperscript{24} The length of treatment of the subject already manifests a deliberate effort to make this option a centerpiece of the community of disciples. And one may add, the phrase "Church of the poor" lends a corrective note to the more paternalistic approach of "Church for the poor" and the non-inclusive concept of "Church by the poor." The key concerns centering on the Church of the poor include evangelical poverty, love for the poor, solidarity, justice, the poor as subjects (not only objects) of evangelization, and following Jesus Christ through poverty.\textsuperscript{25} For LAT, however, there is insufficient focus and follow-up of the term "Church of the poor." The preceding texts would have led one to a fuller appreciation of becoming

\textsuperscript{19} Bernier and Gabriel, eds., Journeying, 52.
\textsuperscript{20} PCP II, Art. 2 #2. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{21} Bernier and Gabriel, eds., Journeying, x.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 52.
\textsuperscript{23} PCP II, no. 122.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. nos. 125-136.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Church of the poor if they were written primarily from that context. Thus he claims

that it is not utilized as that main interpretative key for understanding the church. If the preceding portions on Communion, Participation, Community-in-Mission and Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly People were to be recast from the mould of the ‘Church of the Poor’ a totally different text would have been produced.26

There is some validity in this particular observation, even if in the first part of the council document, “The Way of Jesus,” there already exists a solid Christological base for the Church’s mission concerning the poor.27 Mention is made of the mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19. In this passage, the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed are primarily objects of Jesus’ liberating word and deed. The text is followed by an affirmation of the centrality of the Kingdom of God as an expression of Jesus’ communion with the Father, salvation for the suffering and needy, love, justice, forgiveness of sin and fellowship with one another. Nonetheless, a fuller integration of the themes of Jesus, Kingdom, “Church of the poor” in the entire document still needs refining and sharpening.28 His paschal mystery is a “dangerous memory.” The cup which Jesus drank “was a non-negotiable element of the mission to liberate.”29 The council is therefore not totally oblivious of grounding the idea of “Church of the poor” in the biblical experience of solidarity and ministry to the poor.

THE BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., uses the growth of BECs as a

27. PCP II, nos. 39-43.
28. In a personal communication, Fr. C. G. Arévalo, S.J., claims that in the PCP II deliberations, some theologians have already noted that a “strong Christological base” was not sufficiently integrated with the rest of the unicum documentum. There was not sufficient time to take the themes of “the story of Jesus” and the “preferential love for the poor” and work them out consistently in the entire document.
29. PCP II, no. 56.
yardstick of a Church renewed.\textsuperscript{30}

The test of the council’s effectiveness will hinge on how the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are adopted as the approach — and end — of pastoral work in dioceses and parishes. For it is in the BECs that the three thrusts (Community of Disciples, the empowerment of the laity and the preferential option for the poor) of the council will find realization.\textsuperscript{31}

While there is a strong effort to foster BECs in the conciliar documents, LAT remarks that the text should have qualified and nuanced more its description of BECs. The text describes BECs as made up “usually of families who gather together around the Word of God and the Eucharist.”\textsuperscript{32} Apparently the description does not take into consideration some communities that celebrate life and their faith even in the absence of an ordained minister presiding over the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, this description is silent on sectoral efforts (not only of families) to build BECs among farmers, fisherfolk, workers and other groupings. BECs vary in form from a sacramental mold, to developmental type and to a liberational type, from more family-centered to sectoral-based grouping.\textsuperscript{34} Some BECs are even fashioned as if they were one of the many Church organizations existing. Hence a fuller description of BECs is called for at this point especially because this is a model of a renewal Church.

\textsuperscript{30} Archbishop Orlando Quevedo does not limit PCP II’s renewal in terms solely of BECs. Rather, PCP II ecclesiology also includes “small faith communities” like the charismatic groups and other revitalized communities. These are indications of a renewed Church. Cf. Quevedo, “Notes.” Bishop Francisco Claver seems to focus PCP II ecclesiology in terms of BECs. But a question can be raised: Do all communities of renewal have to be subsumed under the BEC rubric? Can a charismatic group such as ‘El Shaddai’ be classified as BEC? There is a theological import in maintaining other classifications (aside from BECs) as channels of Church renewal.

\textsuperscript{31} Bernier and Gabriel, eds., Journeying, 9.

\textsuperscript{32} PCP II, no. 138.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. no. 137.

\textsuperscript{34} Interview with Bishop Claver at San Jose Seminary, Ateneo de Manila University, March 11, 1993. Bishop Claver points out the different types of BECs: liturgical, developmental and liberational. He believes that the hardest part of the three is the transition from a developmental model to a liberational model. The third type is now getting considerable prominence and acceptance in the
To summarize, LAT concludes his evaluation of PCP II ecclesiology in this fashion:

There is no one synthetic ecclesiology present in the section analyzed . . . . there is no key insight that serves as a consistent reference point from which all others acquire a specific intelligibility. . . . The absence of an explicit treatment of foundational theological elements of the type of church that PCP II is looking for confirms the incompleteness of its ecclesiology. The Spirit, the eucharist, the local church, the kingdom, eschatology and history do not receive in the text the prominence that they deserve.35

EVALUATING THE LAT CRITIQUE

His critique in no way suggests that there is no ecclesiology in PCP II, or that this model of doing ecclesiology is not realizable. It is not intended to downplay the import of the council. Rather it is "to help generate more discussion and reflection on the gift of the Plenary Council and the living ecclesiological project that is its unfinished task."36

In general, LAT's theological comments have some validity especially if one puts PCP II as a local aggiornamento, a "reception," following the lines of the Second Vatican Council. But his critique is evidently confined solely to the section entitled: "Envisioning a Church Renewed." There is no attempt to relate it with the other sections of the entire document which also have a direct bearing on its ecclesiology. In the section on "Renewed Integral Evangelization," important considerations pertaining to its message of liberation (nos.165-166, 187-192, 238-329), the role of the Holy Spirit (nos. 212-215), and the agents of Church renewal, shore up the specific vision of PCP II: communion, participation, mission and community of discipleship. PCP II makes a bold advance to push for greater involvement in the lives of the poor and the reinventing of the local Church by way
dioceses, unlike in previous years when this particular type was branded as too political and too ideological, and overly identified with the Latin American model.

35. Bernier and Gabriel, eds., Journeying, 56.
36. Ibid. 57.
of the BECs. This significant advance is not merely a duplication of what Vatican II taught almost 30 years ago, but a decisive local reading and appropriation of its ecclesiological project which will bring about a meaningful renewal for the Church here.

Bishop Claver, however, seems to hold a different view concerning PCP II ecclesiology. For him, the burden of testing the gains of the council lies in the hands of the pastor.

A professional theologian fine-combing the written output of the PCP II in its christology, missiology and ecclesiology can easily come to the conclusion that theologically there is little advance over Vatican II. Possibly. A pastor, however, who approaches his task of shepherding wholly from the perspective of that same Vatican II, will not be overly anxious about that fact, if fact it is especially if he is also one who is immersed in the work of promoting and fostering BECs.37

The heart of the matter for the pastor is how to implement this ecclesiological orientation (considering its incompleteness) and insert it in the Filipino enterprise of "becoming Church." Although there is still a need for a theologically systematic and complete ecclesiology, a partially inadequate theological basis for such an ecclesiology should not prevent the pastor and the faithful from implementing the basic directions the council has charted for the Church. To take these basic directions, namely, communion, participation and Church of the poor, to a test of praxis is what needs to be done. Bishop Claver is correct in emphasizing the importance of pastoral praxis in implementing PCP II, but one cannot just simply leave aside its theological grounding. The lack of theological theory may not alter substantially the direction which the council has resoundingly taken, but it could weaken the motivation of its thrust. Thus the LAT critique could well be signposts for the implementors to bear in mind.

37. Ibid. 21-22. Archbishop Quevedo seems to agree with Bishop Claver on this point. From his notes we read: "The Acts and Decrees of PCP II are not the work of systematic theology. They are fundamentally pastoral in nature, in orientation, and in objectives. . . . Therefore PCP II was not meant to give a fully developed ecclesiology for our situation. It would not be proper to critique the ecclesiology of PCP II for something it did not scientifically attempt to do." Cf. Quevedo, "Notes."
as they put to practice the vision of the council. In this sense then PCP II ecclesiology is still, by and large, an unfinished project.

III. TESTING THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF PCP II ECCLESIOLOGY

A. STRENGTHS OF PCP II ECCLESIOLOGY

BECOMING CHURCH OF THE POOR

First, it is important to remember that the council’s battle cry to become a Church of the poor is a major prophetic breakthrough in the history of the Philippine Church. Although concern and care for the poor are by no means a novelty in Philippine Church history, thus far no other Church pronouncement can equal the extent and force with which PCP II has committed itself: to become a Church of the poor. In a real sense, this vision is borne out of the experience of an impoverished nation, not something which is simply culled uncritically from the Church documents of Latin America. No doubt, this desire to become authentically the Church of the poor will resonate positively with the hopes and aspirations, the griefs and anxieties of the poor, struggling and exploited Filipinos. But this strength has to be qualified further because, while there is a strong insistence in this section, the same vision apparently lacks a follow-through, as will be shown later, in the workers of renewal, particularly in the laity, the clergy and other communities of renewal.

IMPORT OF BECs

Second, the construction of a given Church model, namely, a community of disciples spelled out in terms of the BECs, is laid down as imperative for the Philippine Church. The formation of BECs is “canonized” in the council. Bishop Claver claims that there is an increasing acceptance of this model in the Philippine Church.38 In PCP II, an overwhelming endorsement puts BECs

38. Same interview with Bishop Claver.
as the pathway of a Church renewed in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{39} Thus it would seem that the trend is moving increasingly and perhaps irreversibly in this direction.

Now we have a concrete and overwhelmingly acceptable model of becoming Church which is typically both Christian and Filipino. But as it was pointed out earlier, there is still room for sharpening this model of BECs especially in areas where there is no ordained minister to preside at the Eucharist, and in areas where sectoral grouping is more feasible rather than the neighborhood or family-rooted grouping. It is also important to explicitly clarify which of the BEC "models" the council promotes: the liturgical, the developmental, the liberational or a combination of all. Regarding the three kinds of BECs, Bishop Claver sees the most difficult part as the transition from developmental to liberational.\textsuperscript{40} A further challenge is the formation of BECs in an urban set-up, a relatively more difficult project compared to BEC efforts in rural areas. All these unsettled issues only point to the fact that the crux of the matter lies on the doing, the concrete praxis of a model which is already conceived and chosen. But the Philippine Church is no longer in limbo as to what Church construct is desirable and even imperative in this day and age.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Third, \textit{dialogue of life} as a missionary thrust has gained a wider acceptance in the Philippine Church. Inter-religious activity is a fairly acceptable missionary thrust in non-Christian nations; but in places where Christians are the majority, like the Philippines, there is often a tendency to impose religious practices and beliefs on the non-Christians. The present Southern Mindanao peace and justice issue between Muslims and Christians cannot be resolved by force, but perhaps by way of continuous \textit{dialogue of life}. PCP II makes an extra effort to be sensitive to the Muslims in particular, and urges embarking on a \textit{dialogue of life} with them. The council exhorts the Church: "We in the Church must

\textsuperscript{39} See PCP II, nos. 109-112, 137-140.
\textsuperscript{40} Same interview with Bishop Claver.
be the first to start undoing past effects of our mutual grievances.\textsuperscript{41}

"FOREIGN" MISSION

Fourth, is an affirmation of the missionary vocation that the Philippine Church is tasked with.\textsuperscript{42} This is a relatively new awakening for the local Church in the Philippines. This missionary vocation reveals the two-fold thrust of the Church: an evangelized and evangelizing community.

Another dimension of this missionary outlook is the fact that the council not only singles out the religious and clergy as the prime movers of foreign missions, but also the Filipino migrant workers who in their own ways can be missionaries of the faith we received. This is a reaffirmation of the council’s accent on lay participation in the context of “foreign mission.” By witnessing to their faith, these workers become authentic subjects of evangelization in foreign lands.

B. LIMITATIONS OF PCP II ECCLESIOLOGY

Notwithstanding the fact that the council made remarkable inroads in Church renewal, there are certain limits of its ecclesiology. These limits are primarily drawn from LAT’s critique.

LACK OF SYNTHETIC ECCLESIOLOGY

LAT holds that “there is no one synthetic ecclesiology present in the section analyzed. What we have are elements of a possible response which have not been knitted together to form a coherent unified vision.”\textsuperscript{43} There are elements that can form a coherent and systematic view of communion ecclesiology along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, but the key concepts

\textsuperscript{42} PCP II, nos. 106-109.
\textsuperscript{43} Bernier and Gabriel, eds., \textit{Journeying}, 56.
are not sufficiently woven together to form a synthetic view. The inadequate treatment, or even absence, of pneumatology, of a Trinitarian reading of the Church, of a Eucharistic and Kingdom of God theology in the section “Envisioning a Church Renewed” are less than fortunate. The deficiencies, particularly the absence of pneumatology, enhance a “hierarchical bias.” Thus one can validly claim that PCP II has not yet fully appropriated key notions of Vatican II ecclesiology. The strong Christological base noted earlier gives more clarity to the “visible” aspects of the Church, namely, the hierarchy, but the “people of God” dimension is not equally stressed. Bruno Forte sees the predominance of this sort of ecclesiology before the Second Vatican Council. The vision then of a renewed Church is at once crippled by an incomplete ecclesiological construct. The local Church theology is therefore also adversely affected. Thus, on a theological level the inadequacies do have serious practical consequences which could undermine the very thrust that PCP II seeks to foster. The implementation phase should not be blind to these deficiencies. Unless there are considerable efforts to complete its incomplete ecclesiology, the intent of PCP II will not be realized fully.

WEAK “CHURCH OF THE POOR” FOLLOW-THROUGH

There is a relative lack of follow-up of the key insight of PCP II’s “Church of the poor ecclesiology,” as can be seen in the section “Agents of Renewal.” If becoming a “Church of the poor” is a central pre-occupation in the council, can it be said that the agents of renewal in the document, namely, the laity, the religious, and other communities are asked to have the same preoccupation?

The section on the lay faithful (nos. 404-447), by and large, simply interprets the mainline teachings of the Vatican II. The only section which seems to refer to the notion of Church of the poor is “Called to Social Transformation,” a fourth aspect of the laity’s role. Although there is an awareness of the need to be in solidarity with the poor, the formulation of this section

44. Forte, The Church, 17.
does very little by way of insisting that the role of the laity consists in fashioning, reshaping and reinventing the present ecclesiological mold to becoming more a Church of the poor.

In the section on the religious (nos. 448-506), there is a forceful note sounded on promoting justice and solidarity with the poor (nos. 461-463, 478-482). Religious vows are properly placed in the context of the Philippine situation where there is widespread exploitation of the poor, where people, especially women and children, are abused, and where there is imposition of force by the strong over the weak. The renewal of religious apostolic communities is directed towards preaching the gospel of Christ effectively, devoting efforts to tasks of justice, and attacking the roots of oppression by changing attitudes that foster injustice.45

In the section of the clergy (nos. 507-573), the model of servant-leader is adopted as the role of the priest who is ordained for the community and is within the community. There is also a recognition of the plight of the poor and the need to manifest compassion for them.46 Although his leadership is Eucharistic-centered and community-centered, it is not easily evident in the text that the priest as servant-leader should promote the building of a Church of the poor and how he is to do this. In the decree concerning the formation of the clergy, there is hardly any recognition that the poor are “essential formators” even of the ordained in the sense that they are not merely objects but also subjects of evangelization. There is a passing remark that “relevant formation. . . should take into account the depressing poverty of large portions of society. . . .”47 But this fleeting remark does not seem to do justice to the thrust which the council has made as its central vision. The council could have stressed further the orientation that these priests-to-be are to be “priests of the poor” in the manner that the Church should be. This seems to us a notable lacuna, which can have serious consequences.

Concerning the other agents of renewal, viz., the family, the parish, lay organizations, centers of formation, educational institutions and so on, there is in general little orientation to

45. PCP II, no. 481.
46. Ibid. no. 527.
47. Ibid. no. 568.
promote the concept of Church of the poor. The Catholic schools recognize the import of exposure to the poor, although more could have been said regarding education for justice, the formation of students along the lines of total evangelization and liberation where the issue of poverty will be addressed head-on.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Second Plenary Council can be given credit, and great credit, for various reasons, but at the same time, an on-going critical dialogue and application of its vision must be done to test its pronouncements.

DOCILITY TO THE SPIRIT

Based on the composition of the members of PCP II, Bishop Francisco Claver states two observations. One is the clerical character of the participants: the fact that 65% of them were bishops, clergy and religious. Second, the lay representatives were heavily drawn from mandated Church organizations, which in general are traditional and "elitist." From these observations, it would seem obvious that the outcome of the council would also be clerical, traditional and elitist. The council instead came up with something which was unexpected: an outward-looking mission and vision for the Philippine Church. Given the composition of its members, it seems the council could not have done anything better than its present output. In this way, the council has shown its docility and alertness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

A NEW CHARTER FOR THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH

The key aspects of its ecclesiology such as discipleship and communion, participation and Church of the poor are local appropriations of the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology. The council’s pronouncements are not entirely new nor completely

original. Bishop Claver sees the novelty in this way: “What is ‘new’ in the thrust is its explicitation and, presumably, wider acceptance as the common direction of the whole Church of the Philippines.” The fact that there is a concrete model of doing ecclesiology should alert the entire Church that there is a Filipino way of becoming Church, a rich tradition which should propel everyone to make the Kingdom of God more present in our midst. Theologians and pastoral leaders should work towards “fleshing out” a more adequate ecclesiology to undergird PCP II; this is a work still to be done in the future.

The council’s docility to the promptings of the Spirit and the firm commitment to become a Church of the poor are truly gifts to the Philippine Church. At the same time, it is the task of a people moving onward to becoming an authentic community discipleship. This is a long and laborious journey and a struggle of a people whose eyes of faith are fixed on the Kingdom. And the journey has just begun.