

# The Bible vs. The Roman Catholic Second Plenary Council of the Philippines

The question we are trying to answer in this study is this: Is the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) really changing? *Is it headed toward a Scriptural direction?*

To speak against the predominant religion of this country is no easy task, especially when one considers that 82% of its population are Roman Catholics. But the truth needs to be told, or we allow our people to remain under a religion of good works, sacraments and rituals which offer no assurance of liberation or deliverance from the bondage of sin and hell. Rightly so, for only the one, true, gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to do this.

The Philippines had no Protestant evangelical mission work of any kind during nearly 400 years since 1521 that it was under Spanish rule. Dr. Harold Cummons narrates:

The colonizing agent in all of Spain's conquests was the Church of Rome. Shiploads of priests and nuns followed the explorers and attempted to Christianize the Filipinos. Customs from the raw heathenism of animistic worship came right into the church and were given Christian trappings. The Bible was a forbidden book. The priests virtually ruled the islands from the fortress-like churches, many of which had towers with narrow slits for gun windows. By the time of the Spanish-American War at the close of the nineteenth century, it was estimated that fully 90% of the population was Roman Catholic. The remaining 10% were animists, who worshipped forest spirits, and the Muslim Moros of Mindanao and the Sulu Islands in the extreme south. (Heritage and Harvest by Commons)

In recent years, the RCC in the Philippines has appeared more "evangelical." Last year, the RCC declared 1990 "National Bible Year." Their emphasis on Bible Study and evangelism; their being more informal, less ritualistic; their being more visible in media with more dynamism in their homiletical approach; their use of Christian jargon such as "Bible Study," "evangelism," "witnessing," and the like, which were formerly and noticeably heard only in fundamental and evangelical circles, have made it appear that we differ from them only on minor points of theology and practice. The further global emphasis on ecumenism in the last few decades has led some to think that we have a lot more to agree on than to disagree on. But is this really the case? Have we forgotten that in 1989 the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) released a pastoral letter in leading newspapers to counter and expose supposed "fundamentalist errors"?

The reasons why these questions should concern every born-again, blood-washed Christian are obvious. For one, true Christians are hungry for Christian fellowship. Thus, the question: Is it alright, Scripturally, for him to ally himself with and cooperate with the RCC in any Christian endeavor? The obedient Christian desires to uphold the truths of Scripture. Has the RCC shifted to the Biblical position, reckoning man's fallen, spiritually depraved and sinful state, his need for the Spirit's regeneration so he would be saved by grace through faith in the all-sufficient, atoning work of Jesus Christ, apart from any human merit, in order to enter the kingdom of God?

To answer these questions, we shall refer to the documents of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) to be more up-to-date. It should be noted, however, that as of this writing of this paper, documents forwarded from the PCP-II are yet awaiting approval from

the Vatican. It should also be noted that we are not sitting as judge on the intentions, motives, nor the sincerity of those behind PCP-II. As Bible-believing born-again Christians, we desire to be obedient to God, Who commands us in His Word to "... believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into this world" (I John 4:1). This is being written with the loving concern and prayer that people turn away from error and turn to "... the Way, the Truth, and the Life ..." –the Lord Jesus Christ—Who alone can give forgiveness of sins and the promise of everlasting life.

## **WHAT IS PCP-II?**

"Unite All Things Under Christ (Ephesians 1:10)" was the theme of PCP-II, which convened in Manila last January 20 to February 17, 1991, gathering 489 clerical, religious and lay participants. PCP-II, the first was in 1958, takes pride in being the first plenary council held in the Catholic Church after Vatican II (1962-1965). It was a "Filipino first." The Council was intended to "renew the Church and revitalize the Christian faith of Catholics" (Bacani, p. 2). The CBCP determined seven agenda topics based on five national surveys, namely: 1, Christian Life; 2, Religious Concerns; 3, Social Concerns; 4, Church and Society; 5, Laity; 6, Religious; 7, Clergy. Documents on each of these topics are now bound in what has been called the "Final Draft," which Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi feels might "become the Magna Carta guiding the evangelizing mission of the Church in the Philippines unto the third millennium" (Bacani, p. 3). Bishop Teodoro Bacani, Jr. is confident that this one-month gathering "... will deeply affect the future of the Church in the Philippines. What Vatican II is for the whole Catholic world, that the Second Plenary Council is going to be for the Church in the Philippines. One need not be a prophet to say this with assurance" (Towards the Third Millennium – The PCP-II Vision, Bacani, p. 1).

In the course of reading PCP-II materials, this writer has seen a number of complex issues raised that need to be addressed. However, rather than looking from the issues to the Bible, we shall take the direction of looking from the Bible to the issues at hand. Let us put on our Biblical spectacles first, state what is Scripturally true, and then use the Bible as a screen to expose the misleading statements of PCP-II.

Roman Catholicism and Fundamental Bible Christianity differ on at least two foundational doctrines – the doctrine of the Bible and the doctrine of Salvation. All other differences stem from the recognition or non-recognition of these. For instance, the RCC believes in papal infallibility, man-made church traditions (e.g., Mariolatry, the Mass, canonization of dead saints, praying for the dead, etc.) and the Apocrypha (additional books in the Bible) and puts them on par with the authority of the Bible. This is so because, although they claim to believe the Bible as the inspired Word of God, to them, it is not all the written Word of God there is. Even when these other bases of authority conflict with the plain teachings of the Word of God, the former is regarded as the one binding in actual practice. Further, while RCC, like Biblical Christianity and unlike most cults, believes Jesus Christ to be the Second Person become incarnate of the Triune Godhead, they belittle His work on Calvary and "... frustrate the grace of God..." (Galatians 2:21) by their teachings such as Purgatory and Transubstantiation; because these deny the Biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith apart from any human merit or good works in the once-and-for-all atoning work of Jesus Christ (I Peter 3:18).

Let us see how this is reflected in PCP-II.

## PCP-II's TEACHINGS EXAMINED

**On the Bible** The Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God written by "...holy men of God... as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:20-21, II Timothy 3:16). This being so, it is therefore inerrant, for the Holy Spirit is God, Who cannot lie and does not commit error. It is therefore our final and authoritative rule for faith and practice, belief and behavior, creed and conduct. The Bible is all the written Word of God there is and is also sufficient to make "... the man of God... thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:17). We are not to add nor subtract from it, for to do so is to invoke God's judgment or misunderstand the message of God's Word (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-7; II Thessalonians 2:2).

As pointed out earlier, the RCC regards man-made tradition as being on par with the authority of the Scriptures, thus also implying its insufficiency. The document on "Religious Concerns" says on page 7: "The person who believes accepts the person of Christ, yes, but he also accepts his teachings. These teachings are contained in the Scriptures and the living Tradition of the Church." (emphasis mine)

In their emphasis for catechesis to be systematic, they specify the limitations and qualifications of the content of their teachings on page 9 of the same document:

"Finally, catechesis must be systematic, i.e., it must present in an ordered and programmed way the whole of the Good News from the Bible and sacred Tradition, and as taught by the Church – without distortion or diminution, but always taking into account the circumstances of the catechized. This systematic catechesis must highlight the basics of Catholic belief and practice." (emphasis mine)

This means catechesis will be taught not by teaching the Bible and letting the Bible speak for itself. Instead, it will be taught according to Roman Catholic belief and practice. It is clear here that the RCC is not going to change her message, only her approach. Generations ago, the Bible was a forbidden book for laymen to read. Today, we hear of Bible Studies being held in RC circles, which they call base-level ecclesial communities. The shift in approach makes RCC a more deceptive enemy of the gospel since their ongoing Bible Studies are designed to twist the Scriptures to fit their preconceived and biased heretical (and sometimes blasphemous) teachings. We maintain that all teachings and traditions should conform to the immutable doctrines and pronouncements of the authoritative Word of God. When they conflict, the latter should be obeyed.

**On Salvation** The Bible teaches that all men are sinners and that the only way we can be saved from the wrath of God is through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ apart from any human merit (Romans 3:23, Acts 20:21, Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16, John 5:24). No church, no sacrament, no human sacrifice, no amount of good works combined, can in any way satisfactorily atone for man's sin before the just and holy God. Nothing but *"...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (I John 1:7). But is this what PCP-II teaches? Let us quote at length and allow their documents to speak for themselves. On page 8 of the document on "Christian Life," we read:

B. Christian Life Initiated Through Sacraments 1. The Sacrament of Baptism God did not only share divine life to man. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, He provided man the means that will sustain his life and strengthen him in the fact of adversities, manmade and Satan-influenced. *The sacraments are entrusted to the Church, so that man will not go wanting.*

*Born to this world, man receives baptism through which he is joined to Christ on the paschal mystery of His death and resurrection. (emphasis mine)*

2. Two Other Sacraments *To complete a person's initiation to the Christian life, man avails himself of the sacraments of confirmation and eucharist. When a person is confirmed the Holy Spirit conforms him more perfectly to Christ so that he may bear witness to Him (Acts 1:8) in building up His Body, the Church. Man, therefore, become Christ's soldier on earth, ever vigilant of life and faith, all lived and practiced for God and fellowmen. (emphasis mine)*

This is entrance into the Christian life by, or salvation by, sacraments, not by faith in Christ as the Bible teaches.

Further, the Bible teaches that sinners need to receive Jesus Christ by faith, that is, by trusting Him in order to become one of God's own children (John 1:12-13; 3:16, 18, 36). Page 9 of the same document says:

By partaking of the eucharist, the memorial of Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples, and of His death and resurrection anticipated in that meal, man is joined to the Body of Christ and becomes a living member of the People of God, in the New Covenant. Man's regular encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, brings him closer to his Lord and reaffirms his membership in the Mystical Body of Christ.

This is nothing but a reaffirmation of the false doctrine of Transubstantiation, which says that the priest is endowed with power to change the bread and wine of the Mass into the literal body and blood of Christ. Further, while the Holy Scriptures give place to ordinances in the local New Testament church (e.g., Acts 2:41-47), unlike the RCC, the ordinances are to be partaken of by the partaker not as a means to be saved but because he has been saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ. To the RCC, partaking of the sacraments is an "initiation to the Christian life." To them, it means to be "joined to Christ" and become "a living member of the People of God." This is again a teaching that encourages people to merit God's unmerited favor. It frustrates the grace of God, for it implies the insufficiency of Christ's finished work. Remember, the Biblical passages that give instruction regarding Baptism (Romans 6) and the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11) were addressed to saved people, not to people who needed to be saved.

## **AFTER PCP-II, WHAT?**

Time and space constraints do not allow us to address the many other unscriptural teachings of this religious system, such as the confessional, the Mass, the papacy, and the like. But what we have is enough to clearly show us that the RCC is not "evangelical," nor is she going to change her teachings.

### ***What can the Christian/evangelical community expect from her after PCP-II?***

**First, MORE DISTORTION of Biblical truth.** Their recent emphasis on evangelism with the goal of reaching the world by the year 2000 has misled many in neo-evangelical and ecumenical circles to think that the RCC preaches the one, true, Biblical gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Many, even believers, fail to realize that the RCC is using evangelical terms baptized with different meanings. We have seen earlier that the gospel they bring offers a salvation earned by sacraments and good works. It does not lead souls to rest in Christ's finished, substitutionary, saving work. The Bible explicitly condemns

anyone who preaches another gospel other than that which the New Testament teaches – see Galatians 1:6-9. In other words, the RCC has God’s anathema upon it.

Further, Bishop Bacani states on page 74 of his book, *Towards the Third Millennium – THE PCP-II VISION*:

The evangelical and the evangelizing character of religious life is expressed in a special way by missionaries who reach out to other nations to proclaim the gospel (writer’s note: But what is RCC’s “gospel”?). The Philippines today has more than a thousand religious missionaries abroad.

Here in the Philippines that evangelical and evangelizing character shows itself in a preferential option for the poor characterized by passion for justice and compassion for the poor, the weak and the sick. It shows itself in educational and charitable, and pastoral works. But even those who spend their lives in cloistered contemplation and penance likewise make their important contribution to the Church’s evangelizing mission.

So this is what RCC calls evangelization. It is not the proclamation of the good news to hell-bound sinners that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins and was raised for our justification, Romans 4:25.

**Second, we can expect MORE DELUSION.** The Book of Revelation clearly predicts a coming one-world church and one-world government that will eventually be spearheaded by the Anti-Christ. Today, the recent emphasis of the secular media in mobilizing people to achieve the unity of all mankind is getting more and more pronounced. According to pages 62-63 of Bacani’s book, *PCP-II* has expressed, as one of the “goals of holistic evangelization,” the transformation of society. We read:

And the transformed society we look forward to and wish to create by God’s grace is ...a free nation where human dignity and solidarity are respected and promoted where moral principles prevail in socio-economic life and structures; where justice, love, and solidarity are the inner driving forces of development.

We shall have to build a sovereign nation: Where every tribe and faith are respected; Where diverse tongues and traditions work Together for the good of all; Where membership is a call to participation And involvement And leadership a summon to generous service.

Ours will have to be a people: In harmony with one another Through unity in diversity; In harmony with creation, And in harmony with God.

Ours shall be a civilization of life and love.

What a nice dream – a dream shared by common humanity. These crusaders of Liberation Theology are deluded, however, and do not realize that this will remain a dream, for it neglects the reality of fallen creation and man’s sinful nature. It contradicts the inspired, prophetic pronouncements of the apostles as they describe the moral and spiritual declension in society and the world at large in the last days. The apostles Peter, Paul, and John all bear this out in their inspired writings (II Peter 2-3; II Timothy 3:1-7, 13; 4:1-5; I John 2:18). Contrary to public opinion, these Spirit-led writers did not see this world getting any better. Instead, they saw that things will get worse until it is ripe for judgment.

Unfortunately, the Christian Church has been infected by such thinking. Thus, we see that, because of unholy alliances, neo-evangelicals and pseudo-fundamentalists are being side-tracked from their God-given mission. There can be no peace until the Prince of Peace

personally intervenes in man's affairs. There can be no true unity and harmony unless purity is genuinely upheld. May God spare us from such a delusion.

**Lastly, we can expect MORE DECEPTION.** They speak of Christ being the focus of PCP-II and that "devotions to the saints or to the Blessed Virgin Mary were not to occupy the center of attention" (Bacani, p. 8). The council's theme further gives this impression. Yet, the fact remains that they continue to place Mary on a pedestal even higher than Jesus Christ by granting her the unscriptural title, "Mother of God" (Bacani, p. 81). Praying to her and other canonized saints is obviously endorsed and encouraged, although Scriptural teaching is against it (Matthew 6:7; I Timothy 2:5).

Further, the PCP-II emphasized to Roman Catholics that (Bacani, p. 65):

The goals of renewed evangelization are to be pursued with new methods, new expressions, and a new fervor. The proclamation of the good news must be characterized by newness. It is not the content of the good news that must be new, for the substance of the Gospel must remain the same till the end of time. We must proclaim the same gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles. But while remaining the same, it must really become news and news that sounds good to hear.

We have already given citations to expose the "content of the good news" or the "substance of the Gospel" according to the RCC. This they are determined not to change. It is their "methods," "expressions," and "fervor" that will change to make their "news" more appealing and "good to hear."

Dr. Bacani was right after all when he wrote: "What Vatican II is for the whole Catholic world, that the Second Plenary Council is going to be for the Church in the Philippines" (p. 1). Ex-Catholic priest Bartholomew Brewer (now a converted Christian) says, "the changes made by Vatican II were merely cosmetic" (p. 131). Rightly so, for at the opening of the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII explicitly stated this (as quoted by Wilson Ewin in *You Can Lead Roman Catholics to Christ*, p. 12):

The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously.... The salient point of this Council is not, therefore, a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has been repeatedly taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians ... as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and First Vatican.... The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary.

With this in view, PCP-II is nothing but a localized restatement of Vatican II. Unfortunately, many evangelicals all over the world have misinterpreted RCC's shift of approach, thinking she has turned evangelical. This has led to the breaking down of the walls of Biblical separation, resulting in cooperation with a religious system that preaches a false gospel.

Aware of the impact fundamental /evangelical groups have made in the local mission field, PCP-II is giving this challenge as they see the need for widespread catechesis and apologetics (from the Document on Religious Concerns):

Apologetics has always been part of the pastoral and theological tradition of the Church. *We must today be willing and able to defend our teachings in public fora, and we need to equip our faithful so that they may defend their faith. Parish priests must encourage and support the training of lay Catholic faith defenders.* (Emphasis mine)

While the first statement is true, the last two make it clear to us that they are preparing laymen skilled in apologetics to defend their teachings. This is understandable. And this is all they will defend – their faith, the Roman Catholic faith. But it is not “the faith which was once delivered to the saints” deposited, inspired, and preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures.

## **CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGE**

God’s instruction for the believer is clearly stated in II Corinthians 6:14-7:1. We are not to be “... unequally yoked together with unbelievers...” of the gospel, for two cannot “... walk together except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3). It is folly to go back to a divinely accursed system of sacramentalism/ritualism teaching a salvation that supposedly can be earned by good works.

Meanwhile, the challenge remains for us to win Roman Catholics to Christ. Remember, many of us – especially Filipino brethren – were delivered from that false religious system. This writer for one was a former altar boy who had his high school training and earned his bachelor’s degree from the prominent Jesuit University of this country; but someone cared enough to deliver the gospel message, which led to his trusting Christ for salvation. We need to bring them the one, true, liberating gospel of Jesus Christ so they, too, can be freed from their bondage.

Romanism is not changing her message, only her methods and approaches. No, she is not headed toward a Scriptural direction. Will you, Christian, heed these Scriptural challenges?

*-written in 1991 by Dr. Roberto-Jose M. Livioco*

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