

LET THE STONES SHOUT!

1st of the Series of Pastoral Letters of His Grace,
the Most Reverend Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D., Archbishop of Caceres,
*On the Right of the Church to Proclaim the Truth
and Her Duty to Lead the Faithful
to True Freedom in and for the Truth*

Introduction

The tercentenary of the gift of devotion to Ina, Our Lady of Peñafrancia, has brought us together to celebrate as a community and as a Church. The celebration has offered us great joy to remember with gratitude the many blessings that God has bestowed upon us through Ina, and has given us hope to share this gift of devotion with loving concern to those in need especially the poor.

Recently, however, when the issue on Reproductive Health Bill sprung up, it scattered along with it the seeds of division, cynicism and animosity among us. Malicious and tasteless name-calling and criticism hounded the Church's stand on responsible parenthood. The prophetic role of priests and bishops were challenged on the basis of their "inexperience" on matters like family planning. Some politicians even argue that the Church does not have the right to intervene in political affairs since this is not her field of competence. Likewise, they say that the right of the Church should only concern the saving of souls rather than meddling in the affairs of the state. If the Church truly has concern for the poor, why does she oppose the seemingly noble and well-meaning RH Bill, which according to its proponents, is a potent solution to poverty?

My brothers and sisters, are all these: division, animosity, wavering faith, vague understanding of the mission of the Church, the fruits of the three hundred years of the gift of devotion to our Ina, here in Caceres?

Objective of the Pastoral Letter

It is obvious that the issue at hand is complicated. A thorough discussion of the specific issues cannot be carried out by a homily. It requires a series of "feeding the lamb." I intend to develop the different themes but for this Sunday, I wish to clarify the following:

1. The Right of the Church, through her ministers: the Bishops, together with the priests, to proclaim the Gospel of Life and Truth and thus permeate the socio-political arena with the Gospel values.
2. The Duty of the Church to lead the faithful to true freedom in and for the truth that leads to integral salvation.
3. Reproductive Health as a Constitutional and Moral Issue

The Right of the Church to Proclaim the Truth

Why does the Church have the right to speak about social, economic, or political issues? First of all, the Church is a mother and teacher. As a mother, she has the heart of Christ, who calls her to preach with fidelity the Gospel of Life and Truth!¹ As the Church proclaims this Gospel, which she has lovingly received from Christ, to the people, who are constantly barraged by social, economic, and political problems,² her preaching serves as: 1) a light that illumines, 2) a spiritual force that needs to critique the social and political affairs,³ 3) the leaven that renews and empowers⁴ the society and 4) the good news to the people of every age and culture.⁵ Since the Church has been entrusted by the Lord with the mission to proclaim the Truth and abide by the Truth, she speaks and must always speak about it with clarity, firmness, and consistency, whereby she can never agree to call good evil and evil good.⁶

The Duty of the Church to Lead the Faithful towards True Freedom

Every right has a corresponding duty or responsibility. What then is the sacred duty of the Church, which impels her to address the problems of our society? The Church as a herald of the Gospel of Truth aims to bring the Filipino Catholics to their true destiny.⁷ And what do we desire as a nation?

The Preamble of our Constitution expresses this national aspiration: "We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society and establish a Government that

shall embody our ideals and aspirations, promote the common good, conserve and develop our patrimony, and secure to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of independence and democracy under the rule of law and a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace, do ordain and promulgate this Constitution.” This reinforces even more the duty of the Church to remind the government of her constitutional mandate to protect this aspiration. And what does the Church desire for us?

The Church desires that all of us may have life, that we would be able to establish 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.”⁸ Is this not the same aspiration written in our Constitution?

The Church envisions that we don’t just have life but eternal life.⁹ This desire of the Church regarding life urges her to remind the faithful through her teachings that real concern for our fellowmen, most especially for the poor, begins with the respect for human life,¹⁰ respect for human dignity and freedom.¹¹

The journey to eternal life begins with the encounter with Christ. The Church helps the person encounter Christ who will accompany him in this journey of life.¹² As the “pillar and bulwark of truth”¹³ the Church helps us to walk in truth and freedom by forming our conscience through the moral principles that she proclaims.¹⁴ In the midst of growing voices that call for absolute freedom or right of choice, let us not harden our hearts so as to also hear the voice of truth coming from the Church: “The freedom of man is the acceptance of Truth which leads the human person to his true good: to live in Truth and to live for Truth.”¹⁵ This duty of the Church to lead the people to genuine freedom in and for the truth is her faithful obedience to the Word of God, “which must be free of intellectual conformism or facile accommodation to the spirit of the age.”¹⁶

The Reproductive Health Bill as an Issue

Why does the Church oppose the passing of the RH Bill into law?

1. The RH Bill is not just a legislative but a constitutional issue.

We have cited above the Preamble of the Constitution that enshrines our aspiration as a people desiring to live under the providence and aid of God, in a nation where the regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace reign. Does the RH Bill respect or violate this spiritual aspiration of the people?

Only in an environment of dialogue are we able to uphold this constitutional aspiration. It was along this same line that our bishops before sought to clarify the same concern with the cabinet members of then President Corazon Aquino on the issue of Population Control.¹⁷

2. The RH Bill is a moral issue.

As a moral issue, RH Bill engages all of us to know the issues contained therein. RH Bill is not just about family planning. It includes among others the issues on development, sexual health, rights of women and children. These issues require a thorough study and careful analysis.

Conclusion

The teachings of the Church concerning prevailing social issues that affect people are not merely limited to renunciation of immoral acts, but in a more positive light, these teachings seek to form and illumine our conscience to enable us to choose the good and to genuinely decide in accordance with what is true.¹⁸ In this sense, the Church is a vital contributor in the political debate, a transformative resource¹⁹ insofar as she helps in purifying and shedding light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.²⁰ Ultimately, the right and duty of the Church to speak about the Truth and to form conscience in the Truth is rooted not so much in her doctrinal statements and pastoral letters but in her fidelity in following Jesus.²¹

Let the stones shout! Let the Church built upon the solid rock of faith of the Apostles, fulfill its task of proclaiming the Truth for it is the truth, which sets us free! The truth will bring us freedom if this truth is founded on the Rock of Truth, who is Christ!

Given this 9th of October 2010 in the Year of Our Lord from the Office of the Archbishop, City of Naga.

+Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D.
Archbishop of Caceres

- ¹ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 1, nos. 80-82.
- ² Cfr. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 33.
- ³ See, PCP II, no. 248.
- ⁴ See, PCP II, nos. 238-243.
- ⁵ Cfr. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 1, 29-30, 78.
- ⁶ Cfr. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no.34; *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 43-44.
- ⁷ Cfr. PCP II, nos. 250-255.
- ⁸ Cfr. PCP II, no. 253.
- ⁹ Cfr. *Evangelium Vitae*, no.2
- ¹⁰ Cfr. *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 32, no. 38, nos. 60-61.
- ¹¹ Cfr. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 95-96; *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 81.
- ¹² Cfr. John Paul, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 13.
- ¹³ Cfr. 1 Tim 3:15
- ¹⁴ Cfr. Declaration on *Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 14.
- ¹⁵ John Paul II, Address to those taking part in the International Congress of Moral Theology (10 April 1986), 1: *Insegnamenti IX*, 1 (1986), 970.
- ¹⁶ Cfr. Pope Benedict XVI, Address at Evensong Westminster Abbey, London (17 September 2010)
- ¹⁷ Cfr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, "Guiding Principles of the CBCP on Population Control," (10 July 1990).
- ¹⁸ Cfr. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (22 May 1990), no. 16; *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 110.
- ¹⁹ See, PCP II, no. 250.
- ²⁰ Cfr. Pope Benedict XVI's Speech to the Representatives of Other Religions (Waldegrave Drawing Room, St. Mary's University College, Twickenham, September 17, 2010)
- ²¹ Cfr. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 85; PCP II, no. 262.