



VATICAN II AND THE MINISTRY OF THE PRESBYTERATE: THE CEBUANO EXPERIENCE

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After briefly comparing the theology of the presbyterate in the Council of Trent and in the Second Vatican Council, it investigates how a local Church, the Archdiocese of Cebu, has implemented the vision of Vatican II. The desire to implement the vision of Vatican II can be seen in two documents: the Archdiocesan Synod of 1984 and the Archdiocesan Priests' Congress of 2002. Moreover, there are policies and practices in the way the presbyterate has been lived that are clear attempts to en flesh Vatican II. These include the formation of BECs, and a more updated theological education. But still there are deficiencies in the implementation.

TRENT AND VATICAN II ON PRIESTHOOD

This paper is primarily concerned with the appropriation of Vatican II's theology of the presbyterate in one local Church, the Archdiocese of Cebu. But before one addresses this main theme, it is logical that we have to present, in an inevitably sketchy manner, how Vatican II looks at the priesthood and how it has moved forward from the Council of Trent.

Trent – An Answer to the Protestant Reformers

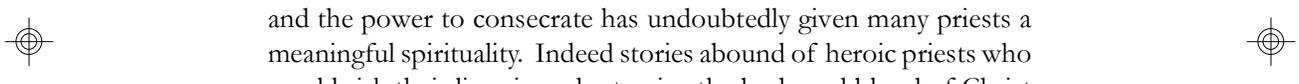
Responding to the polemics of the Reformers, particularly Luther who denied the sacramentality of the Holy Orders and who demystified the priesthood by positing a purely functional role to

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priests,¹ the Council of Trent proclaimed that the ordination to the priesthood imprinted a permanent character, “which neither can be erased nor taken away.”² Furthermore the Council of Trent insisted on the hierarchical structure of the Church, anathemizing those who hold “that in the Catholic Church, there is no hierarchy instituted by divine ordinance, which consists of bishops, priests and ministers.”³ More significantly, Trent follows the Scholastic tradition and sees the rationale for the institution of the sacrament of holy orders as “the power of consecrating, offering and administering His body and blood and likewise of remitting and retaining sins.”⁴ Since the power to consecrate the body and blood and to remit sins is not given to the faithful, Trent in effect emphasized the distinction between the clergy and the laity. To put it more generally, the agenda of Trent was limited since it was defined by the reformers. It was more concerned about affirming what many of the Protestants denied and thus it did not develop a more positive theology of the presbyterate.



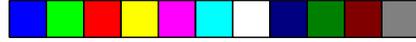
This traditional emphasis on the link between the priesthood and the power to consecrate has undoubtedly given many priests a meaningful spirituality. Indeed stories abound of heroic priests who would risk their lives in order to give the body and blood of Christ to the people. The patron of parish priests, St. John Mary Vianney, would spend hours looking at the sacred host and say, “*Je le vise et Il me vise.*” But this power to consecrate has also led to an understanding that priests are above the rest of the people (and even above angels who do not have the same power). In the words of St. John Chrysostom,

¹ For Luther, the only difference between a priest and a lay person is one of office and function. “Therefore a priest should be nothing in Christendom but a functionary, as long as he holds his office he has precedence of others. If he is deprived of it, he is a peasant or a citizen like the rest.” Cf. Martin Luther, “Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.”

² References to the Council of Trent are taken from Joseph Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982). ND 1710. Henceforth, this will be abbreviated as ND.

³ ND, #1717.

⁴ ND, # 1707



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For the priestly office is indeed discharged on earth, but it ranks among the heavenly ordinances; and very naturally so: for neither man nor angel, nor archangel, nor any other created power but the Paraclete Himself, instituted this vocation and persuaded men while still abiding in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels.⁵

It is no wonder then that people hesitate to criticize even priests who may be guilty of serious wrongdoing since these same priests have the power to effect *transubstantiation*. The words of Garry Wills may be a caricature but may still accurately describe how some people look at priests: “Get bread and wine to him in a prison cell and a priest can still make Jesus present there. That was why it was so hard to discipline pedophile priests.”⁶

Vatican II: The Missiological Context of the Priesthood.

On the one hand, we cannot really speak of a break from the Council of Trent, in the sense of a total rupture. However, we can say that Vatican II, no longer burdened to prove the unacceptability of the position of some Reformers, understood the priesthood more as part of the mission of the whole Church, which is a sharing in the mission of Christ.⁷ It situates the ministerial priesthood in the context of the priesthood of the faithful who “should present themselves as a sacrifice, living and holy, pleasing to God.”⁸ It did

⁵ John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 3.4, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 9 edited by Philip Schaff (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). In fairness to St. John Chrysostom, he would point out the dignity of the priest in order to emphasize the duty of such person to be above others in terms of integrity. But our main concern here is that such understanding can lead to clericalism.

⁶ Garry Wills, *Why Priests? A Failed Tradition* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013), 24.

⁷ Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 1. All references from the Second Vatican Council are taken from Austin Flanery, ed. *Documents of Vatican II*, New Revised Edition (New York: Dominican Publications, 1992). Henceforth, we will be using standard form of abbreviating the different documents.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 10. Henceforth, *LG*.



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not abolish the distinction between the clerics and the laity⁹ but Vatican II would then explain that this is not that they should be separated from the people but that priests must be completely consecrated to the task for which God has chosen them. Indeed, it describes the priest as “taken from among human beings ... and to live with the rest of these human beings.”¹⁰ But more than just living with fellow men and women, priests are exhorted to “live with those of the lay faithful and conduct themselves among them after the example of their master who came not to be served but to serve.”¹¹

Vatican II did not define the priesthood exclusively in terms of the sacraments, even though it also continues to look at the administration of the sacraments as part of the priestly functions.¹² Rather, the presbyters are consecrated “to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful and celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament.”¹³ Moreover, the eucharist that is presided by the priest is related to the offering of one’s whole life: “Hence priests teach the faithful to offer the divine victim to God the Father in the sacrifice of the Mass and with the victim to make an offering of their whole life.”¹⁴

There are other themes developed by Vatican II which have not been treated in the polemical context of the Council of Trent. Vatican II urges priests to serve the poor and the weak in a special way.¹⁵ Aside from the poor, the youth, the sick and the dying, are sectors of the Church which Vatican II wants the priests to give special attention to.¹⁶ Priests are also seen as indispensable helpers of the bishops in the ministry “of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding the people of God.”¹⁷ Bishops are urged to listen to priests and one of

⁹ *LG* states that the difference between the two states are “not only in degree but also in essence” and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (henceforth *PO*) affirms that priests, by their vocation to ordination are set apart, in the midst of the people of God.

¹⁰ *PO*, # 3

¹¹ *PO*, # 9.

¹² *PO*, # 5.

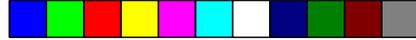
¹³ *LG*, # 28.

¹⁴ *PO*, # 5.

¹⁵ *PO*, # 6

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *PO*, # 7



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the mechanisms suggested is a Senate of priests. On the other hand, priests have the obligation to attach themselves to their bishops in charity and obedience.¹⁸

Among themselves, or the *ad intra* dimension of the presbyterate, priests are asked to practice brotherly bond even if they may be doing different ministries for they all contribute to the building of the body of Christ.¹⁹ Some kind of community life is called for and the sharing of goods is seen as a concretization of this brotherly bonding.

Training of Priests

Since presbyters do not come straight from heaven, it is but logical that Vatican II also treats the question of priestly training. It does so in the document *Optatam Totius*. For the sake of brevity, we focus more on points which would be relative novelties in comparison to prevailing theologies or practices prior to Vatican II. This document first recognizes that the renewal of the Church depends to a large extent on priestly training²⁰ which cannot be limited to seminary formation since the promotion of vocations is to be situated in the whole Christian milieu. Indeed, it calls the home as the first seminary.²¹

The document commends interdisciplinarity in seminary education, commenting that while the standards of education must be maintained, it should be supplemented by the latest findings of sound psychology and pedagogy.²² It also calls for effective coordination between philosophy and theology.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *PO*, # 8.

²⁰ *Optatam Totius*, Introduction. (Henceforth, *OT*)

²¹ *OT*, # 2.

²² *OT*, # 11. Cf. also *OT*, # 20, where in the context of pastoral training, it is stated that students for the presbyterate are to be taught to use correctly the help given by pedagogy, psychology and sociology. Interdisciplinarity, of course, is not just emphasized in *Optatam Totius*. It is implied when *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided that it does not override moral laws, does not contradict the faith. (*GS*, # 36). Moreover, the same *Gaudium et Spes* states that recent findings in other sciences bring up new problems which should be scrutinized by theologians (*GS*, # 62).



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Whereas seminary philosophy education has been traditionally scholastic and western, *Optatam Totius* encourages seminaries “to take account of modern philosophical studies, especially those which have greater influence in their own country, as well as recent progress in the sciences.²³ The same paragraph calls for rigorous investigation and asks that philosophy be related to real life problems.

Scientific study of Scriptures in Catholic theology received impetus in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pope Pius XII but somehow, the historical-critical method remained something foreign in seminary education. Vatican II gave further impetus to such method.²⁴

THE 1984 DIOCESAN SYNOD OF CEBU AND THE 2002 ARCHDIOCESAN PRIESTS’ CONGRESS

On January 15, 1984, nineteen years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, and seven years prior to the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, on the feast of Santo Nino de Cebu and before the usual throng of devotees to the Holy Child, Ricardo J. Cardinal Vidal made public his intention to convoke the fourth Synod of Cebu.

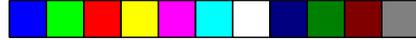
Although the printed excerpts of the homily wherein Cardinal made the announcement do not mention the Second Vatican Council, – they do mention the 1983 Code of Canon Law –still the references to the last ecumenical council are numerous. The message of the Synod to the people of God, written after three sessions each lasting a week, says that the event was an occasion to read the signs of the times.²⁵ The most explicit and categorical attempt to make the connection with the Vatican II comes from Cardinal Vidal himself at the eucharistic celebration on the first day of the Synod:

²³ *OT*, # 15

²⁴ *OT*, # 16. Cf. also *Dei Verbum*

An important post-Vatican II document on the formation of priests is the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. But it is beyond the scope of this paper to treat this document.

²⁵ Synodus: “Disciples on the Road Together” Fourth Diocesan Synod of Cebu (Cebu City: Cebu Star Press), xiv.



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At the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome, we were asked “to put more deeply into practice: in communion with Christ present in the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) in listening to the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*) in the holy liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) in the service of mankind, especially the poor (*Gaudium et Spes*). The message of Vatican II, like that of the Councils which have marked the history of the Church, cannot bring forth its fruits except through a sustained and persevering effort.”²⁶

True to these words, the Synod tackled various issues which are classified under the following headings: worshipping community, Christian formation, youth in the Church, Catholic education, servant Church, pastoral administration, social communication, mission, ecumenism. But for our purposes here, we focus on what the Synod teaches about the presbyterate and the formation of the presbyters.

The most explicit statement on the presbyterate is found on Pastoral Administration. Thus the Archdiocesan Synod is unlike the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines where the discussion on the priesthood is situated within the whole context of the community of disciples. This whole section in PCP II²⁷ includes a discussion on the priesthood of the faithful, lay spirituality, the religious life, and the clergy. Perhaps, one distinctive mark of PCP-II’s understanding of the presbyterate is the description of the priest as a servant leader. In contrast, there is no specific theological treatment on the meaning of the priesthood in the Archdiocesan Synod. This in itself does not necessarily mean a reduction of the ordained ministry to pastoral administration. It can mean a more pastoral approach to the theme. This interpretation is supported by a statement from Cardinal Vidal in the same homily cited above, “The accent is on ‘pastoral’, the emphasis is on needs... the pastoral formation of the community of faith in the Archdiocese of Cebu according to the Gospel message

²⁶ “Appendix I, “Homilies by Ricardo J. Cardinal Vidal” in *Declarations, Observations and Statutes: The Fourth Diocesan Synod of Cebu* (Cebu City: Cebu Star Press), 245. The importance of this statement can be seen from the fact that it is repeated at the beginning of the second session. Cf. 247.

²⁷ Part IV of PCP II is entitled “The Community of Disciples: Workers of Renewal.” Cf. *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, (Pasay City: St. Paul’s Publications, 1991).



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and the Magisterium of the Church is the main thrust of our ministry.”²⁸ Nevertheless, one can discern a theology of the presbyterate on this chapter on pastoral administration.

But before we go to the presbyterate, it is instructive to go to the Synod’s understanding of the Church for the structures of the Church are to serve the Community. Following Vatican II, the Synod sees the Church’s role as the continuation of the redemptive mission of Christ.²⁹ In the sub-section on Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), the Synod takes the model of “small communities of the disciples of Jesus Christ” or communities of small disciples.³⁰ It takes pain to qualify that smallness is not to be understood in the physical sense but in terms of their being from the grassroots. This BEC is the most fundamental ecclesial reality. However, the Synod calls for the BEC to be “firmly attached to the local Church in which it exists.” It defines the concern of the bishop as eminently pastoral rather than administrative. The bishop serves as the rallying point by which the local community becomes a local church.

The function of the presbyter, on the other hand, is to be a unifying spiritual leader. In this function is concretized in the proclamation of the Word, his presidency in liturgical celebrations, most especially the eucharist, and in his pastoral care and concern.³¹ In the next paragraph, the function of the presbyter as called to be sensitive to the needs of the underprivileged and the poor is emphasized.

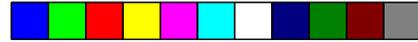
One can readily see here affinities to, if not direct influences from Vatican II: the basic similarities would include contextualization of the presbyterate within a community of disciples, the missiological context of the Church, and the broadening of the ministry of the presbyter beyond the purely sacramental apostolate.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ But it is surprising that on this point, the footnote would refer not to Vatican II but to First Plenary Council of the Philippines (1957) and the First Provincial Council of Cebu.

³⁰ Cf. Pastoral Administration, no. 23. Cf. also the same document on pastoral administration nos. 1 and 2.

³¹ Ibid., no. 8. Here the synod cites *PO*, # 1-2.



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The Synod however, would go to the nitty-gritty of these themes whose implementation, or lack of it, we will dwell on in the next section.

It is the Archdiocesan Priests' Congress of 2002 that developed a more thorough theology of the presbyterate even as it also contains concrete provisions on priestly life. It articulated a "spirituality of a Cebuano diocesan priest" although the description would fit a diocesan priest of any diocese. The elements of this spirituality would combine ministry with the people, relationship with bishops and brother priests, and personal prayer. The sentence that actually uses the term diocesan spirituality deserves to be quoted:

It is through generosity in rendering service to the people and involvement in the life of the community that our spirituality becomes incarnate. Through this involvement, we find meaning in our priesthood, we translate prayer into action, we radiate our prayer life to others. Diocesan spirituality therefore is a "shepherd spirituality", that is, marked by a service to the people. It is rooted and centered on Christ as incarnated in the community.³²

This archdiocesan congress continues to describe the priest as an *alter Christus*, a description which actually cannot be found in contemporary Church documents.³³ But it admirably describes the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience as not to be sought in themselves but for the service of the reign of God.³⁴

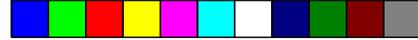
The Financial System of the Church and the Remuneration of the Clergy

The Synod would touch on the related and equally sensitive issues of the source of funds for the Church and the remuneration of priests. It calls for a reorientation of the faithful for a possible

³² Proceedings of the Cebu Archdiocesan Priests' Congress, (privately published), 39.

³³ Contemporary Church documents would say that a priest acts in the person of Christ, which can be less bombastic compared to the term *alter Christus*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.



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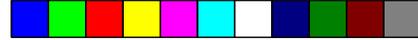
alternative to the traditional *arancel* system.³⁵ Coming from the Spanish word for tariff or rate, the *arancel* system calls for specific amounts in each parish for the administration of sacraments and sacramentals. The synod says that this system can continue until another means can be found viable. Within the documents of the Synod, we can deduce at least two reasons why the Synod calls for an alternative system. First is the dilemma that while people are suffering from an economic crunch, the present rates of the *arancel* are also unrealistic. The second is that the system itself is seen as a scandalous commercialism by the people.

The Synod also calls for an equitable remuneration of the clergy through a collection of the offerings of the faithful to be called Common Diocesan Fund. The Synod observes that priests assigned in bigger parishes are better supported while those assigned in poor parishes “could hardly secure the minimum for their expenses.” The Synod here does not cite Vatican II’s call for solidarity among the presbyters. It instead refers to the account in Acts where the community of believers shared all things in common so much so that there was no needy person among them. Later on, this system was referred to among priests as a standard living allowance.

It is to be noted that while discussion on a remuneration system may appear petty for some, it can also be an instrument for the propagation of important Christian values. For instance, it is possible that an alternative to the *arancel* system can be more conducive to values like simplicity of lifestyle for priests, transparency of church finances, and option for the poor parishioners who may not be able to afford the fixed rates for the sacraments, and less commercialization of rituals. At the very least, a system that avoids the scandalous competition for bigger parishes is most welcome.

But the hoped-for alternative never came to a permanent fruition. At least three priests came up with novel alternatives but these were not continued. In an interview this researcher has conducted, one priest said that he was entirely dependent on donations and he did not impose fixed rates for the administration of the sacraments. He

³⁵ The Synod refers to Canon 1264.2 as speaking about the *arancel* system. But this particular provision simply states that the provincial bishops’ meeting determines the offerings on the administration of sacraments and sacramentals.



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claims that the offering within the mass and the donations for sacramental and liturgical services were more than enough for the sustenance of the parish. Indeed, he was able to turn over thirty thousand pesos to the next parish priest who took his place. However, at least one priest openly complained that this new system has driven away his parishioners from his parish and unto the priest who is not imposing fixed rates. The latter cited the statement from the Synod when the former confronted him. But when he was transferred to a bigger parish with fellow priests with him, he decided not to continue the system. For him, it was a personal option that he could not impose on other priests who may not be ready to take a cut in their personal finances.

Another priest asked each parishioner a tithes of thirty pesos a month. A faithful payment of tithes would entitle a parishioner to a free administration of baptisms, marriage solemnization, and celebration of the funeral mass. But probably because there was lack of an accompanying formation of the parishioners, they vehemently objected to this new system and the next parish priest did not continue the program.

A thorny issue among clergy, which is also treated by the Synod is the Common Diocesan Fund. This too was never implemented. While the ideal of a common diocesan fund was explicitly invoked in the synod of 1984, the Cebu Archdiocesan Congress of 2002 was still calling for its implementation, after a thorough study, in 2003.³⁶ This provision was hotly debated during the congress. While there is no record of the vote of each priest, it was observed that though there are some notable exceptions, the senior clergy voted against the provision while the younger clergy would be in favor of it. But since the younger and junior clergy would outnumber the senior clergy, the provision was approved in a show of hands. Up to now however, despite what the synod and the priests' congress concluded, the standardized living allowance exists only on paper. It

³⁶ Aside from invoking the idea of priestly solidarity, the Archdiocesan Priests' Congress adds a specific timetable: that the standardization of remuneration of priests is long overdue, that a committee be formed to study it, and the result of the study be finalized within 2002 for it to be implemented in 2003. Cf. "Proceedings of the Cebu Archdiocesan Congress (privately published), 65.



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is surmised that though the idea is found in the documents, the implementation depends much on the senior clergy who resist such idea. The resistance can also come from the all too human fear of whatever is new and the impression that the old system can provide the priests more financial security and independence. However, the new Archbishop Jose Palma appears to be moving towards the implementation of the pertinent provisions on the standard living allowance.³⁷ The implementation would depend much on the political will of the hierarchy, the good will of the parish priests, and even the cooperation of the laity.

Training of Future Priests

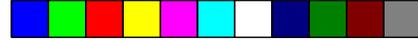
How did Vatican II influence the formation of priests in the seminary? We may recall that one of the great contributions of the Council of Trent was seminary education for those aspiring for the priesthood. Prior to this Council, even while there were great Catholic educational institutions from which some priests and bishops got their education, they were not seminaries in the sense that we understand the term today. The training of priests before Trent was more practical: young men would get educated by priests or bishops outside the context of formal education. Thus, it is interesting to ask whether Vatican II created a heavy impact on clerical education.

In this regard, a helpful post-Vatican II document is the Updated Philippine Program for Priestly Formation issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' Episcopal Commission on Seminaries which came out in 2004. Two priests working in the Archdiocese of Cebu contributed to the draft of this document. This document, which quotes Vatican II often, will be cited in this section.

Academic Formation in the Seminaries

Today, almost all seminaries have educational curricula approved by the government. However, it cannot be said that Vatican II introduced this novelty. In the case of the Archdiocese of Cebu, the

³⁷ Cf. Bernadette Parco, "Palma open to SLA for Priests" *Cebu Sun Star Daily*, January 25, 2011.



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college curriculum got government recognition even prior to the opening of Vatican II. It can be said however that Vatican II at least gave impetus to a more interdisciplinary approach which could be guaranteed with a government recognition. After all, there was always the temptation to focus solely on “priestly courses” if education in the seminary is outside the control of a government body. In the Philippines for instance, prior to government recognition of seminary education, there was the insistence on the use of Spanish and Latin as the media of instruction whereas all other schools would now teach in English.³⁸ This resulted into a big gap between the education of the clergy and the education of the people of God that they are serving.

However, the government recognition did not change much the philosophical studies in the college seminary. Some professors would still use neo-Scholastic manuals, which were originally written in Latin, as textbooks.

It was the theology curriculum that got government approval of its Master of Arts programs in 1997, or more than three decades after Vatican II. However, only few priests would enroll in these programs. Many are contented with the priestly curriculum. Since the M.A. program was introduced, ten have finished the Master of Arts in Theology but only two of these are priests, and none of the three belongs to the diocesan clergy.³⁹ Most of the priests, numbering 88 to be exact, who finished their masteral degrees enrolled in a non-thesis Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry. The 88 who finished the M.A in Pastoral Ministry would be a mere 35% of the 251 who graduated from the priestly curriculum since the MA programs were introduced. The tendency of many seminarians to be contented with fulfilling only the minimum requirements of the priesthood seems to be the culprit here. In other words, if one can be ordained to the Holy Orders without entering into the difficulties of obtaining a higher academic degree, then there is less motivation to consider being part of the masteral curriculum. It is necessary to note, lastly,

³⁸ Cf. John Schumacher, *Growth and Decline: Essays on Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009). Cf. especially the essay “A Hispanicized Clergy in an Americanized Country”, 247-262.

³⁹ Not included in this count is one of the lay students who finished his masteral degree but who eventually applied for ordination.



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that in 2009, starting with the first year theology of that academic year, all have at least to enroll for the M.A. programs.

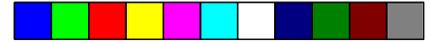
The theological curriculum prior to Vatican II and the one after it are not much different. However, we presume that the approach is where the difference lies. But since we cannot find a sample syllabus from the courses taught prior to Vatican II, this presumption cannot be formally validated. Yet, anecdotal accounts from senior clergy would show that a more dogmatic and apologetical approaches were taken, where those thinkers who opposed Catholic views were rebutted as purveyors of falsehood.

In the Updated Philippine Program for Priestly Formation of 2004 it calls for the avoidance of purely abstract approach to the mysteries of faith which is devoid of personal experience (# 95). A high level of intellectual formation is called in view of new problems encountered by priests today (# 96). The document then elaborates that theology cannot be divorced from faith, the word of God and from its ecclesial, historical, cultural, and pastoral dimensions (# 99-104). Specific areas of theology are treated. The document calls for exegetical grounding in the study of Scriptures (# 111), the study of the different approaches in systematic theology (# 114), discernment of God's actions in the study of history (# 117), moral evaluation of contemporary issues in moral theology (# 120), holistic approach which is not reduced to rubrics in the study of liturgy (# 122), and a preparation for different tasks of a pastor in pastoral theology (# 123-130).

Human Formation

It is on over-all human formation that changes are even more evident. In the pastoral sphere, even though there are undoubtedly some exceptions, seminarians in the past limited their activities to parish work and catechetical instructions. In contrast, the seminarians today would be more exposed to the situations of different communities, most of which are poor. Specifically, the Spiritual Pastoral Formation Year, a year-long program that takes the seminarians away from the formal academic classroom settings to an exposure to different life situations was introduced in 1986.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The first seminary to introduce SPFY is San Jose Seminary which did so in 1974.



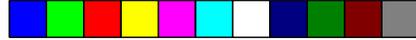
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On prayer, the 2004 document cites that spiritual advancement is affected by several factors like unresolved personal issues and materialistic and secularistic attitudes. Traditional practices are still encouraged like the use of scriptures in prayer, the liturgy of the hours, community retreats and recollections, devotion to the saints, and constant reception of the sacraments like the eucharist and reconciliation. Yet, some new aspects of spiritual life that may not have been given much emphasis in the past are now encouraged. For example, seminarians are encouraged to experience popular faith expressions of simple Catholics (# 81), and to see God in neighbors through the work for social transformation and one's option for the poor (# 83).

To conclude, let us go beyond what is written in official documents and describe the real situation on the ground regarding total human formation. The participation of future priests in the project of social transformation is most palpable in their involvement with the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) in the 1986 snap Presidential elections and with the Cebu Citizens Movement for Empowerment and Liberation (C-Cimpel) in subsequent electoral activities. The theology seminarians have also been involved in rallies related to the impeachment of former President Joseph Estrada, and the recent pork barrel scam. Their pastoral activities, especially during summer break, have also contributed to the formation of basic ecclesial communities. These communities that are under their care have also an opportunity to visit the seminary once a year.

The seminary structure itself is arranged in such a way that every class would constitute one BEC *selda*. This structure hopefully would inculcate in them the values of the BECs and would help them deal with the problems related to this ecclesial structure. This brings us to the next section.





The Presbyter and the Basic Ecclesial Community

At first glance, a discussion on the basic ecclesial community may be out of place in an article on the presbyterate and Vatican II.⁴¹ However, “BECs (do) not arise spontaneously but (are built) at the instigation of a pastoral agent, a priest, a religious woman, (even if) they are typically led by lay people once they are organized.”⁴² Thus, the presence of BECs can be a reflection of the openness of a priest towards this “new way of being Church” in this post-Vatican II era. In other words, the presence or absence of BECs would indicate whether a priest has gone beyond a priest-centered church.

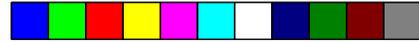
One hundred and twenty of the 149 parishes in the Archdiocese of Cebu would claim that BECs are actively present in their areas. However, in an interview conducted by this researcher to the Archdiocesan BEC secretariat, the interviewee said that parishes would always make this claim and unfortunately their office does not have the means of validating whether these BECs still regularly meet or are dormant and exist only in name. The interviewee then qualifies that basing herself not just on the statistical claims but on stories on the field narrated during meetings that the secretariat calls for, only about 94 parishes have active BECs. Still, this would constitute around two-thirds of the total number of parishes.

But when asked whether these BECs are traditionally oriented towards liturgy and worship, or are also engaged in development

⁴¹ We will not enter into the discussion on the relationship between BEC and Vatican II. For this discussion, cf. Amado L. Picardal, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: A Reception of Vatican II Ecclesiology” one of the papers of this Dakateo Conference of 2013. However, we find that Picardal is too hastily dismissive of the idea that BEC is inspired by Latin American Church and liberation theology.

⁴² Cf. Fe Mendoza, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: Context and Foundations of Formation* (Mandaue City: Printshop Corporation, 2005), 66.

⁴³ For a brief description of these typologies, cf. Christl Kessler and Jurgen Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand! Charismatic Christians: Populist Religions and Politics in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo Press, 2008), 70. “First, the traditionally oriented BECs focusing on liturgy, worship, Bible reflection, and lay involvement in Church ministries... Their theology was after-life oriented; the social life was viewed as given and Christian life as the perfection of personal character. Second, the



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and social action, or are engaged in social analysis,⁴³ the interviewee answered that the bulk of the BECs in the Archdiocese are of the first type. There are *seldas* of the second type and most of them are those under the guidance of some seminarians who conduct prayer reflections based on the Scriptures. *Seldas* of the third type usually do not have links with the parish and thus are not included in the count by the Archdiocesan secretariat.

The secretariat affirms that the younger priests, now trained within the BEC structure in the seminary, are more open, even more forceful, in the formation of BECs. The resistance, she adds, comes from the more senior clergy. But some senior clergy would simply give to their younger assistants the task of forming, or nurturing the BEC *seldas*. In cases where there is total neglect of the BECs, the *seldas* die a natural death.

The above statement may imply that some BEC *seldas* have not really outgrown its over-reliance on priests. Some priests indeed want that these *seldas* be constantly under their supervision.



CONCLUSION



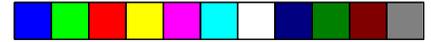
This paper has highlighted the lights and shadows of the implementation of the letter, if not the values, of Vatican II, focusing on the sacrament of holy orders.

Changes always meet resistance. People tend to prefer the familiarity and the security of the old to the uncertainty of novelties. This is most especially true if one has benefited from the old. Priests can be no exception to these human tendencies. The gap between official documents and implementation on the ground can be seen in part in this light. Thus, many would rather have a system which is pastorally easier and personally more beneficial.

This is true in the educational curriculum. The neo-scholastic method is all too familiar so why bother to change it? This is also

developmental BECs, which were influenced by liberal tendencies within the Church. For them, reflection on Scripture lead to social action and active engagement in development. Third, the transformative BECs, which adopted a socialist framework for analyses of the social order and in many cases were strongly anti-American.





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evident in the financial system being followed up to this time. Some priests do not see that the old system is broken and while those who realize that the old system needs fixing may find it too convenient already, thus turning a blind eye to change it. Or they may not know any alternative. No less is this true in the implementation of BECs. The presence of BECs, while more in line with what the ideal Church should be, can be more pastorally challenging.

When the proposed changes written on paper are to be implemented on the ground, it is necessary to have a leader who believes in the values behind the proposals and who has the strong will to implement them, and the craftiness to see all things through.

In 2010, Archbishop Jose Palma became the local ordinary of the Archdiocese of Cebu. Doctrinally conservative but very pastoral and pragmatic, he seems to be bent on implementing the 1984 Archdiocesan Synod and the 2002 Archdiocesan Priests' Congress. "Just wait and see. These provisions will be implemented," he once answered when asked about the lack of implementation of the provisions on the synod and on the priests' congress. He further said that it is unrealistic to expect unanimity when he wills to implement these changes. But the support of the majority would help push through the long overdue implementation.



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