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Original Article

The Church of the Poor in the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II): Its Concrete Expression in Basic Ecclesial Communities

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Abstract

This study examines the vision of the “Church of the Poor” as articulated in the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1992) and its concrete expression through Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Philippine context. Grounded in the enduring realities of poverty and inequality, the paper situates the Church’s mission within the broader call to justice, solidarity, and integral human development. It draws theological foundations from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), particularly its vision of a renewed, participatory, and mission-oriented Church, alongside the principle of the preferential option for the poor. Employing a theological and critical interpretive approach, the study explores the nature, structure, and mission of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), grassroots communities characterized by communion, participation, and mission. It argues that Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) embody a participatory ecclesiology in which the poor are not merely recipients but active agents of evangelization and social transformation. Central to this dynamic is Renewed Integral Evangelization, which integrates catechesis, liturgical life, and social apostolate, fostering both personal conversion and communal renewal. The study concludes that Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) provide a vital and transformative model for realizing the Church of the Poor in the Philippines. By promoting lay participation, inculturation, and a socially engaged faith, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) serve as concrete expressions of ecclesial renewal, despite ongoing challenges in implementation across diverse local contexts.

Keywords: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), Church of the Poor, Ecclesiology, Inculturation, Lay Participation, Preferential Option for the Poor, Renewed Integral Evangelization, Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II)

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Introduction

Poverty continues to beset the Filipino nation. Preliminary results of the Family Income and Expenditure Survey conducted around 2023-2024 showed that 10.9 percent of Filipino families were registered in the poverty sector, while the individual rate was 15.5 percent. Today, about 21 percent of Filipinos, or 23 million people, experience poverty and vulnerability (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). While the Philippines has economically progressed, reducing the poverty rate from the past years, many Filipino families uncomfortably sit just above the poverty line.

Improvement in material conditions does not reach the poor and the marginalized, as indicated by unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition and poor health, lack of job opportunities, housing problems, and many other forms of deprivation. Consequently, this “situation where economic wealth and political power are concentrated in the hands of a few is judged to be an affront to human dignity and solidarity” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines [CBCP], 1991). Inequality still exists across different aspects of human life with visible effects such as powerlessness, despair, depression, and the like. Thus, a large number of people are still living in various forms of dehumanizing conditions (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016). While it is important to understand the root causes of poverty, it is equally important to turn our gaze toward those most affected by this problem. This phenomenon poses tremendous challenges and calls for a greater effort not just on the part of the poor, but also on the entire community. It challenges the Filipino nation to respond collectively to promote human development in the spirit of justice and solidarity, and to uphold human dignity, thus uplifting the very lives of the “least of our brethren.”

The Church is likewise aware of this reality and realizes the need to be responsive. As *Gaudium et Spes* declares, “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, par. 1).

The plight of the poor has always been a major concern of the Church. If we trace the foundations of why it has become an imperative part of the Church’s endeavor, it is because Jesus, whose identity and mission are the core of our being as a Church, has spoken loudly and worked tirelessly for the poor. His vision of the Reign of God, his life and ministry, as found in the Scriptures, is thus the root of our mission of preference for the poor. Since the vision and praxis of Jesus must be the vision and praxis of the Church, this preference for the poor that Jesus exemplified has been adopted by the Church and expressed in PCP II as the “Church of the Poor.”

Before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, John XXIII, on his radio message, said, “As it faces the underdeveloped countries, the Church presents itself as it is and wishes to be, as the Church for all, and principally, the Church of the Poor” (Lagarejos, 1999). In the attempt for *aggiornamento* (Gomez, 2013), the attention is directed to the renewal of our identity and mission as a Church. This term, “Church of the Poor”, inspired many Church leaders and pastors, especially those in developing countries, thereby highlighting the spirit of “option for the poor” in the documents they promulgated.

This was picked up by the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops in 1968, held in Medellin (Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, 1968, no. 9), strongly expressing its evangelizing mission and becoming those that “effectively give preference to the poorest and most needy sectors and to those segregated for any cause whatsoever.” This endeavor was further strengthened

when they met again for their third conference in Puebla in 1979 and used the term ‘preferential option for the poor’ as an overarching theme of the call to conversion in Latin America. Another was the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, held in Manila in 1970. The said conference envisions the Church in Asia as the “Church of the Poor,” a guiding principle to lead the people on the way of Christ amidst the growing challenges of the time (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, 1997). They wanted to intensify the call for the Church of the Poor as concrete expressions of justice and peace, and to defend the rights of people, especially those on the sidelines in this contemporary time (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, 1992).

In the same way, the vision of becoming the Church of the Poor has been stressed in the various social teachings of the Second Vatican Council and continues to be so. It continues to echo across theological and ecclesiological discourses on being the Church, anchored in the vision and mission of Christ. Although the Church has been strong in its desire to give special attention to and reach out to the poor, as emphasized in its themes, there were no specific guidelines or provisions to implement the “Church of the Poor.”

It was at the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), 30 years after the call for *aggiornamento* by the Second Vatican Council, that the Philippine Church sought to integrate and concretize that vision. In its attempt to understand the current situation, the Church examined the various spheres of society. Interestingly, PCP II highlighted the economic and political context that Philippine society faces (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 1992). And it felt the need to put greater examination on how it can enrich its involvement to alleviate the ever-growing problem of poverty in our country. Because the Church believes that this concern has deep moral implications for its identity as a community of disciples and its mission to evangelize.

Ever since the Acts and Decrees of PCP II were approved by John Paul II in 1992 and were promulgated, they have become obligatory (Dagmang, 2016). From the formulation stage down to the implementation phase, it underwent a conscientious process of producing acts and decrees whose direction is toward renewal, which suits the “conciliar framework whose focus is Christ, whose orientation is pastoral, whose spirit is evangelization, and whose context is the Filipino.” That is the definitive and distinct mark of PCP II: identifying the four directional areas that set the overview and mood of the entire document. This conciliar framework presents to the Filipino Catholics the “structural features” (Basas, 2019) on how to become a “visible sign of renewal in electing to be a Church of the Poor” Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1992). Being the local Church that it ought to be, the identity and direction must be in a symbiotic relationship to achieve the vision and the renewed Church it desires to be.

Following the conciliar document, PCP II introduced the expression of renewal of faith through the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). In other words, BECs are the concrete expression and manifestation of the “Church of the Poor” vision. As a result, many people are more attracted to parishes, including those from marginalized sectors of society (Dagmang, 2016). Consequently, the more marginalized people come to local churches to actively engage in building Christian communities, the more we see tangible manifestations of the vision of the Church of the Poor. To put it simply, the Church of the Poor finds its localization in BECs, and through it, the teachings of the Church are translated into reality. “It is in and through the BECs that the Church becomes a Church of the Poor. The BEC, as a basic assembly or unit of the local church, would not only be a living community serving the poor, but, most especially, a community formed mainly by the poor’s presence and

participation. Enactments fostering BECs produce empowering spaces that bring the poor together, unite the poor as shapers of worlds.” We now recognize them not just as recipients but also as active agents of concretizing the Church of the Poor. In the words of PCP II: “The circle is being broken. And it is being broken in those dioceses and parishes where the very ‘unchurched’ have been challenged to form themselves into little communities of faith, and they begin to respond positively...

The Church of the Poor dares to be inclusive, a model that shows all members of the Church, especially the poor, a shared responsibility to proclaim Jesus Christ across the different spheres of human life. That means the poor become agents of evangelization, too.

With all of these in mind, this study aims to provide an exposition and critical interpretation of the vision of the Church of the Poor articulated in the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, as a concrete response to the call to evangelization, embodying the spirit of renewal and conversion. Central to this vision is the recognition that the poor are not merely recipients of the Church’s mission but active participants in it. In this light, the study situates the Ecclesiology of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) as a concrete and lived expression of this vision. BECs manifest the Church of the Poor at the grassroots level, where faith is lived, shared, and inculcated within small communities.

This paper thus posits how BECs are indeed a concrete local expression of PCP II’s Church of the Poor. It discusses the emergence of the Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines and the pivotal role that it plays in the local, ecclesial grounds which fill the gap between theory and practice, of why it is often called the new way of being Church. The significance and purpose of BECs over the years of its implementation are briefly presented in order to give the readers a glimpse of BEC as a key factor in realizing the identity of the church as a community of disciples with its vision of renewal and mission of evangelization.

The nature of BECs highlights a participatory and communitarian Church, where relationships are characterized by a “subject-subject” dynamic rather than a hierarchical “subject-object” framework. As a sign of renewal, BECs embody the Church’s ongoing conversion by fostering active lay participation, co-responsibility, and a renewed sense of discipleship. Their missionary thrust further reflects the Church’s outward orientation, as members are empowered to proclaim the Gospel not only within their communities but also in wider social contexts.

Moreover, BECs draw their theological grounding from the lived experiences of the faithful, particularly the poor, recognizing contextual realities as a *locus theologicus*, a privileged place for encountering God and discerning His action in history. In this way, the paper underscores how BECs concretize the vision of PCP II by promoting a Church that is truly a “community of disciples,” where all members, especially the poor, are agents of evangelization who join hands and work together toward genuine social transformation.

Methodology

This study employs a historico-theological method as its overarching approach. It integrates critical literature review and interpretive inquiry to examine the development, context, and implications of PCP II’s understanding of Basic Ecclesial Communities.

The paper analyzes the key points of why Basic Ecclesial Communities is an avenue toward concretization of the thrust of PCP II. This is mainly presented in the Discussion section of the article. Meanwhile, Results and Findings are integrated within the Discussion, consistent with theological qualitative research conventions.

Primary sources include the official conciliar texts and documented proceedings of PCP II. These are complemented by relevant secondary literature, both online and print, from various stakeholders who participated in or have critically engaged with the Council and its outcomes. The selection criteria for such secondary resources are based on their relevance to the theory.

Discussion

The Ecclesiology and Nature of BECs

Basic Ecclesial Communities have come a long way as an integral part of the church's life in the Philippines, influenced by cultures and traditions of different regions. But what makes BECs across the Philippines cohere with the Universal Church amidst their pluralities is the faithfulness of its nature, identity, and structure to the distinctive marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The words that make up the term “Basic Ecclesial Community” can serve as a point of reference to understand what it means: community, ecclesial, and basic. First, they are a community by virtue of having the nature of communion and participation. They live a shared experience of reality, mutually supporting and nurturing one another. They desire to improve interpersonal relationships within the community and encourage participation, especially in decision-making amongst the laity, and are not totally dependent on the clergy. The term “community” emphasizes BECs not only as ‘associations’ but as communities whose members live in close spatial and social proximity and who regularly interact with one another (Holden, 2009). Second, it is ecclesial. A living common faith is crucial, for it fosters internal growth and links it to the institutional church. The term “ecclesial” emphasizes the character of the BECs as a church-gathering in and around the person and vision of Jesus. “They are a way of being a church that is realized, located, and experienced at the grassroots and would not be ecclesial if it were not united organically with other BECs, with the parish, with the diocese, and with the universal church” (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1977). This involves the paramount significance of the Word of God and the Eucharist, which is directly given by the pastors. As Sullivan says, what makes the nature of the Church “ecclesial” are the things we hold in common: the sharing of the faith, baptism, and the sacraments, and our belonging to the community (Sullivan, 1988). Third, as a gathering of lay people, a basic community with a small number of people, enough to know and relate well with one another. BECs are at the “base,” where most members are at the grassroots, open to the grace of God in receiving the necessities of life and in maximizing their potential (Azevedo, 1985). The expression “grassroot community,” according to Power (1980), is a community that recognizes the baptized and their charisms and whose ministerial structuring is found on that basis. “Further, BECs offer a concrete way for the laity to live out their baptismal vocation and engage in the transformative mission of the Church” (Mutia, Jr. et al, 2023). Similarly, the base community is characterized as the basic cell of the Church, embodying the basics of Christianity, relating to the base of society—the poor, and empowering the base of the Church—the laity (Hebblethwaite, 1994).

In the Filipino context and to abridge this elucidation of the term, PCP II describes Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) as small communities of Christians, characterized as a domestic Church emerging from the grassroots, united with their pastors but ministered by lay leaders regularly. They gather around the Word of God and celebrate liturgical life, especially the Eucharist. They consciously integrate faith and daily life, guided by regular catechesis, and are concerned with the sharing of material and spiritual goods. They have a strong sense of belonging and responsibility

for one another, and they act towards justice. In the same vein, Gabriel identified four important components of the definition of BECs: rootedness in the sacrament of the Word; discernment and transformative action; active participation in the mission of Christ; and pastoral care of the parish. (Gabriel, 2008). Azevedo also notes the two-fold emphasis of the ecclesiology of BECs: First, that human beings are, by the saving power of Jesus Christ, an active party in carrying on the process of salvation and liberation in history; and second, BECs are communities of poor people who see themselves as the primary subjects in setting in motion and actuating this process of realizing salvation through the transformation of sin's consequences.

Accordingly, the ecclesiology of BECs is an interesting reality that does not, in any way, contradict the nature of being an institutional, universal Church. In fact, the flexibility of BECs justifies the Church's characteristic of being both diverse and united. Truly, BECs are a new way of being a local Church without deviating from the institutional or universal nature of the Church. For Kamonchak, on the other hand, generative principles such as the Word, Spirit, Eucharist, and apostolic ministry are what make the local church the Catholic Church” (Evans, 2002). Bausch also has a substantial thought regarding this matter. He harmonizes the pyramidal ecclesiology with the *Koinonia* ecclesiology. He argues that a community still has room for institutions. The church has levels ranked in the sense that pivotal people are pivotal in their function, serving as “conjunctors that hold the fabric of the Church together without necessarily implying trickle-down impositions or unilateral apartness from the Body of Christ” (Bausch, 2000). “It is the local churches and communities that can discern and work out the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church is set up, and the values of God's Kingdom are realized in their own place and time. This local Church, the acting subject of mission, is the people of God in each milieu: the whole Christian community, laity, religious, and clergy. It is the whole diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community, and other groups” (Kroeger, 2003). With the Church's openness to more inclusive participation, the faithful can find their place in the Church, where a genuine sense of belonging has taken shape. It becomes a space for acts of mutual giving and receiving.

In fact, BECs reverberate not just the communion nature of the Church but also its apostolic character. Schillebeeckx claims that the church must maintain its apostolic origin, and this orientation speaks to the ministry embedded in the totality of services needed to build the community of God. Those who hold the office, in solidarity with the whole community, have their own “unalienable responsibility for preserving the community in its apostolic identity and the authenticity of the Gospel. Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy, and *diakonia* are then apostolic characteristics of the ‘community of God. Further, Schillebeeckx relates the apostolic nature of the Church with the presence of the poor and said, “Ministry in the Church is not a status or state but a service, a function within the community of God and therefore a gift of the Holy Spirit. Suffering solidarity with the poor and insignificant is an essential mark of the apostolicity of the ministry, since it is an apostolic mark of the whole community of Jesus” (Schillebeeckx, 1986).

Thus, the local church characterizes the catholicity and apostolicity of the church. Such characteristics, which embody the spiritual reality of the whole people of God, confirm and resound the observance of BECs to the ecclesiological character of Vatican II's call for renewal.

BECs as Signs of Renewal

This holistic vision of Church renewal, according to PCP II, is concretized through Basic Ecclesial Communities. It declares: “Our vision of the Church as

communion, participation, and mission, about the Church as priestly, prophetic, and kingly people, and as a Church of the Poor, a Church that is renewed, is today finding expression in one ecclesial movement. This is the movement to foster Basic Ecclesial Communities” (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 1992). Analyzing the vision of PCP II reveals that the description of BEC aligns with its ecclesiological theme. Moreover, one can affirm that BECs substantiate the Church’s teachings and translate them into reality while animating the social values espoused by Jesus Christ in our time. As such, faith becomes more relevant in one’s life, especially for the poor. At the marrow of BECs is the dialogue of faith and life. Living the faith and critical reflection of societal issues, as constitutive elements, become instrumental to fully achieve the goal of the Church’s renewal through BECs. In this dialogue, BEC formation entails a multidisciplinary approach that considers other fields of social sciences as partners in understanding the ecclesiology of the Church; for they employ tools to comprehend the humanity of the Church, provided that these tools are open to the truth of God (Tagle, 2000, January 3–12).

Thoroughly, “BECs take people where they are, understand their needs, and identify their resources. All this is done not to satisfy purely sociological curiosity but to discover the above ‘within’ the below” (Gabriel, 2008). As some would say, BEC becomes a way of “doing theology” in the context of the poor's situation. FABC notes: “From our experience of dialogue emerged the conviction that dialogue was the key we sought not dialogue in the superficial sense in which it is often understood, but as witnessing to Christ in word and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their daily lives, in their particular cultural context, their own religious traditions, their socio-economic conditions” (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1999, April). People's responses shape BECs, especially how they approach life. This affirms the dialogue of faith and life. In fact, community lay leaders, for example, testify that the closest way for them to experience and express their faith was through church activities, such as the BEC (Tutor & Gambong, 2023).

Accordingly, BECs emerged as a palpable current for the poor amid their seemingly hopeless or impoverished situation. It is not merely a socio-political movement; it is ecclesial and an expression of becoming the Church of the Poor. In fact, BEC is a “new” way of being Church (Azevedo, 1985), as contemporary missiologists describe it. This ties well to what FABC recognized as a sign of renewal in doing mission in Asia, noting that in some countries the multiplication of grassroots ecclesial communities enfold genuine Christian fellowship amidst diversity in charism and ministry. And these are the “new missionary activities” (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1999).

The newness that BECs bring to the Church’s ecclesiology and the mission does not abandon the old ways or call for their total abolition (Gabriel, 2008). For Tagle, BEC as a “new way” of being Church possesses three elements: first, it is the realization of Vatican II’s vision of a Church that listens to the Word of God. It teaches the Church to listen to the Word of God found in scripture, tradition, sacraments, creation, human history, cultures, and the poor; second, BEC calls for a church of communion-in-mission, which requires participation and responsibility. This gives special emphasis on the Sacrament of Baptism, which calls for the sharing of charisms by every baptized Christian, especially the laity; and third, it calls for a renewal of the ordained ministry. The integral role of the clergy in forming BECs needs to be reaffirmed so that they rediscover their role in the Church they minister to (Tagle, 2000). In so doing, BECs become an avenue for the Church to do its mission.

The Missionary Thrust of BECs

As a community of disciples, the church's mission has always been linked to evangelization. *Redemptoris Missio* encapsulates this thrust, which firmly characterizes BECs as a mirror of fraternal communion (*Koinonia*), which means to be of one heart and soul (Acts 4:32). Further, the document speaks, “Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990). As Jamison et al. put it, “the importance of BECs lies in their ability to create a sense of belonging and community among their members, as well as foster a deeper understanding of the church's evangelization mission.” (Jamison et al, 2024). It is the central task of the Church to proclaim the Gospel message to all people and unite all things in Christ. This mission of proclaiming Christ is an urgent task that demands to be shared in every aspect of human life. This is evangelization. But evangelization can only be realized when placed in the context of the challenges the world faces today—tremendous shifts and problematic issues across different areas of human activity. As Ilo appraises, the Gospel is more than just a heaven, light, or news. It is a powerful force that connects people and shapes society. It leads the poor to hope, healing, and a dignified life. It empowers them, helps them build their identities, and enables them to pursue a better life (Ilo, 2014).

This suggests that the Church finds appropriateness of her missionary endeavor in the formation of BECs, as it promotes a transformative mission through evangelization. Following the previously mentioned idea that BECs emerged in the grassroots, poverty centers people to commitment and shared responsibility. Their material deprivation, to a certain extent, coals spiritual hunger. And it is in BEC where they find the means, if not the solution, to address their concerns. The communities are formed and organized to respond to issues and problems affecting the exercise of faith and the demands of the Gospel. There is a conviction that faith is in communion with life, that is, the interplay between them makes the communities both evangelized and evangelizing (Gabriel, 2008). A Basic Ecclesial Community exists to proclaim the Gospel, especially to the poor, and to become a local base in doing the Church's mission. FABC, from an Asian region's perspective, also echoes the primacy of evangelization: “Our proclamation of Jesus must also be urgently directed towards the workers, the poor and needy, and the oppressed. However, here, it is not so much the words as the actions that count most. It is our preferential love and service for workers, the poor and needy, and all the oppressed, our standing with them, listening to them, and our efforts to help them speak out for themselves as they strive for development and for a just society, which will tell them best about the presence of Jesus in their midst” (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1999, April).

In the Philippine context, PCP II likewise remains steadfast in maintaining the missionary thrust of the Church, ardently thriving in our country. CBCP (1984) defines evangelization as “the proclamation, above all, of salvation from sin; the liberation from everything oppressive to man; the development of man in all his dimensions, personal and communitarian; and ultimately, the renewal of society in all its strata through the interplay of the Gospel Truths and man's concrete total life.” The abovementioned descriptions of evangelization prove three points: it must be Christ-centered; the recipients must be evangelized and be evangelizers themselves; and it must bear fruits of conversion and social transformation. Any form of evangelization must be centered on the person of Jesus Christ, without which all elements lose meaning. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the central piece of the evangelization process. But such a proclamation entails conversion. A credible preaching only happens when there is personal conversion. In becoming evangelized by the message, can the evangelized become an evangelizer? Such a dynamic process

helps a Christian become an agent of social transformation and a truly authentic witness of the Gospel.

On a communal level, the Gospel must also remain as the measure to which all activities flow, “the source of inspiration and conversion of BECs” (Gabriel, 2008). The goal of evangelization, which is Christ-centered, is to develop a spirituality that begins with conversion (Dulles, 1981). Dulles defines conversion as “a radical shift in a person's apprehensions and values, accompanied by a similar radical change in oneself, in one's relations with other persons, and in one's relations to God” (Kroeger, 2003). Accordingly, Gabriel explained that societal conversion is not limited to its religious dimension. It ought to be a paradigm shift in which grassroots people experience their faith in Jesus as they cope with and act on social issues affecting their lives, toward having a more dignified quality of life, one that reflects self-development and freedom from an oppressive level of human living (Gabriel, 2008).

The inseparable bond of evangelization and conversion is linked with social transformation. As Azevedo comments, “faith is a dynamic factor of personal conversion and societal transformation” (Azevedo, 1985). Conversion requires renouncing a sinful attitude, whether personal or communal. Because sinfulness is the root cause of problems at all levels of human life, it sets poverty and oppression in motion (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967). Naming and confronting sinful social structures is a task embedded in evangelization, because salvation and temporal liberation are linked. To achieve social transformation, we need to address sinfulness, the root cause of all sectoral problems in the community. The Gospel demands the need for “the transformation of a society whose organization is in itself unjust in many aspects and very much the source of their own poverty” (Azevedo, 1985). A well-thought-out remark of Maggay follows the same idea. She claims that there are human principalities that need to be confronted, because these life systems and structures cause the downfall of well-meaning efforts and devastate individuals who dare to transform them. Maggay went on and said:

“Some human institutions tend to develop internal contradictions and end up becoming the very opposite of what they ought to be. The reality of ‘principalities and powers,’ of complex social forces that perpetuate oppression and inequality, compels us also to deal with the structural causes of poverty. Subjective change in inner attitudes towards social status, wealth creation, and wealth sharing needs to be accompanied by objective changes in economic and social relations” (Maggay, 2008).

This will later imply the promotion of renewed relationships and social structures. Hence, only in forming a social conscience directed to the “struggle to build the Kingdom of God as a journey to truth and justice, to love and peace, a journey full of life” (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 1992) can social transformation be made possible.

This is what PCP II means by Renewed Integral Evangelization. PCP II believes that renewal can only transpire when the missionary thrust of evangelization is also renewed. There is a need to evangelize the immediate environment, the parish, and the wider communities (Ryłko, 2011) with new fervors, methods, and expressions. And for PCP II, this is done through the interrelationship of “renewed catechesis,” “renewed worship,” and “renewed apostolate,” which is consequently expressed in what we call Basic Ecclesial Communities:

- a. BECs pave the way for renewed catechesis. People from the grassroots develop a deeper love for Jesus Christ (inspired by the proclamation of the Word, aided by pastors) because instruction in the faith, through Bible study or the sharing of the Word, enables them to read, listen to, and understand the teachings of the Church. “It also enables the unevangelized and unchurched members of the laity to be actively involved in their own process of integrating faith into day-to-day living. They become ‘subjects’ and not just ‘objects’ of the Church’s missionary activity, and this happens in their own backyard, so to say” (Gabriel, 2008). As such, one becomes a reliable preacher of the Word not just in words but also in deeds. The laity, then, can weave the life and teachings of Jesus Christ into their respective socio-cultural, economic, and political setting, thus building a community where the values of the Gospel can permeate across spheres of human life, neither disintegrating pre-established set of beliefs in the community nor compromising the content of the Gospel message. It is the laity who can bring the Gospel to their concrete realities and announce liberation and denounce evil. This aspect aligns well with the Church's prophetic mission.
- b. BECs promote renewed worship. Through the celebration of the sacraments (with the presence of the pastors) and other liturgical rites, the people grow into a deeper appreciation of the Sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and they, too, become living and holy sacrifices pleasing to God. Through the gathering of the people before the Lord in the Eucharist, the glorification of God and sanctification of man are made real and visible. They also see the significance of the communitarian dimension of Christian life in their gathering at the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is the priestly mission of the Church.
- c. BECs serve as a means of social apostolate. Sustainable programs that best meet the needs of the people are proposed and implemented to help alleviate poverty. Moreover, necessary assistance in line with their fight for justice and aid for other temporal concerns are provided in the community through the help of other sectors of society. “The present Church’s mission transcends spirituality and guidance to encompass economic justice. Based on principles such as love, compassion, and justice, the Church should be able to fight against injustice and call for a just distribution of resources” (Ndzi, 2025). Although it is worth noting that programs must not be restricted to economic concerns, they should instead stimulate activities geared toward temporal and spiritual formation. The temporal affairs, then, become a leaven for social transformation to proclaim the Kingdom of God. In this light, the Church's kingly mission is promoted.

These three components of Renewed Integral Evangelization should be present and dynamically exercised for BECs to claim their success. As Gabriel reflects, “When people lack the basics of faith and know not the fundamental truths that they should live by, it is harder to tackle the problem of moral hunger and liberation. The truths about man, the Church, and our Lord Jesus Christ are the indestructible pillars that would support deeper beliefs and commitments” (Gabriel, 2008).

The reality of this missionary endeavor demands collective responsibility from both the institutional Church and the community of disciples. It is an incumbent task commanded by Jesus. Therefore, the local Church must be able to support the formation of BECs so that they continue to bring newness to the vitality of the Church

as a whole. FABC asserts that “the acting subject of mission is the local church living and acting in communion with the universal Church.

Contextual Realities as *Locus Theologicus*

The primary consideration of making BEC happen in any parish or community is the culture of the people. The missionary activity, as everyone knows it, can only be effective when it permeates the culture without altering the content of the Gospel message. This is where contextual theology comes in. As the Church is the Sacrament of Christ, BEC must consider the most effective way to share the Truth of Christ with the community. As Dagmang notes, the Gospel will remain abstract if it is taken out of context, and culture will remain “native” without Christian principles. They must mutually support each other in such a way that the interaction clarifies patterns of living and characterizes the identity of the community rooted in the very life and teachings of Jesus Christ (Dagmang, 2016).

However, this is not just a simple matter of feeding the people with the Word of God since culture is a boundless and multi-faceted factor; not that we say culture is a hindrance for the growth of Christian life in a locality but more of understanding that any given community has pre-established beliefs, rituals, organization, practices, and spaces which in more than ways than one, affect the integration of the Gospel into the lives of the people. As a matter of fact, contextual realities, according to FABC, are resources of theology, for they contain cultural resources which are “constellations of collective symbolic values, worldviews that touch the totality of life, human relationships, community, people's relation to nature, and people's beliefs, customs, etc. In a sense, culture is a people's way of being human and inter-human. It embodies the values of the human person and the community, esteemed virtues such as hospitality, compassion, faithfulness, a sense of the sacred, and society's institutions. It includes people's stories, myths, folk wisdom, etc. These are gifts of God and fruits of the Spirit. They too contain ‘germinative seeds of the Word’ sown by the Spirit” (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2000).

Accordingly, Boff has the same line of thought and said that “human life is always cultural—just by being human; and human beings are no longer beings of nature because they become subjects “who have rights and duties, who originate practices that transform or conserve nature and society, and who originate symbols, significations, and values” (Boff, 1992). Based on this point, we see that culture should be given importance for effective evangelization. Boff considers this interplay of culture and Gospel as he presents four characteristics of evangelization: “to evangelize means to bear testimony to this vision of respect and acceptance of all cultures on account of God and the divine work within cultures; religion of the culture being evangelized must be accepted theologically; evangelization must produce, where it encounters cultures, that which its name proclaims: the good news; and to evangelize is to celebrate” (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1989).

On a document, FABC avers the importance of dialogue of life since the worldview of the poor includes the humanizing elements of religio-cultural heritage, such as “simplicity of life, genuine openness and generous sharing, community consciousness and familial loyalty, perseverance and constancy in struggle, all of which resonate with the Gospel values. This reality affirms that the Gospel of the Kingdom is reign-shaped and lived in the reality of their lives and the Spirit of Jesus, the Liberator, is alive and in the world among them.” Above all, an important note should be kept in mind: just as we evangelize the Gospel in the language and culture of people, the Truth of Christ must never be compromised or altered in any way. The Gospel takes precedence in the evangelization of culture and inculturation of faith.

The grassroots approach allows us to look into the concrete realities of people, rather than merely reducing our perspective to academic theologizing. A sound social analysis and theological reflection are required. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council highlights the importance of social analysis for understanding the Church's relationship with the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, nos. 63–90) to foster an objective yet faith-laden discussion of the matter. This pastoral way of being a local church considers culture, alongside various socio-political geographies, as necessary tools for effectively communicating the Gospel. Culture shapes the formation of BECs and, to a certain extent, directs its programs and activities. Moreover, it is a challenge to affect people's culture with the Gospel that speaks of the Truth of Jesus Christ.

Ministerial Roles in BECs

The mutually life-giving role of the clergy and the laity in BEC culture is crucial. In the homily of Archbishop Legaspi delivered during the opening of PCP II in 1991, he emphasized that “the dynamism of the church calls for the complementary presence and support of the institutional and charismatic aspects of tradition and prophecy. There is no room for the promotion of a grassroots church running parallel and independently of the institutional Church, for it is through her that we remain in continuity with the apostolic tradition and with the universal dimension of the Church” (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, PCP II, LXXVII-LXXVIII, 1992). As such, the symbiotic relationships of ministries are to be promoted.

On the one hand, it is to be affirmed that the Church remains an institution that needs a hierarchical structure and definitive magisterial teachings to govern and shepherd the People of God. Moreover, it is the clergy who fulfill such a task. The clergy acts on behalf of Christ, the head, in the community and before the community, with a special character configured to Christ (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 3, 1965). They act as servant-leaders in the community to which they are ordained. As such, they are to build and form a genuine Christian community rooted in the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist to which all other activities of the community are directed (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, nos. 519-524, 1992). It is the task of the clergy to make this Christian community a prophetic and serving community, to enliven the Good News in all aspects of human life, which requires critiquing attitudes and beliefs that oppose Gospel values. The pastor, who is a member of the clergy, leads the community to reach out with compassion to the marginalized and to exhibit preferential love for the poor. He is likewise commissioned to serve the community without favoring any party or ideology. His main role as a minister is to lead the people in performing acts of charity that foster the spiritual growth of each member of the community (Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, nos. 525-530, 1992).

On the other hand, the secular world, which has become the arena in which BECs are established, organized, and formed, cannot deny the need for the laity's active involvement. It is through lay participation in BECs that the Church of the Poor—which PCP II envisions—becomes a more tangible representation of Church renewal. And proper to their belonging in the community of disciples, the world becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 15, 1988). Vatican II recognizes the essential role that the laity plays in the life of the Church as they are called to be a community of families, visible signs of Christian presence, instruments of service and evangelization, and agents of social transformation. They are to be provided with key leadership roles to empower them. Sullivan comments that, in realizing the true meaning of ecclesiology

of communion, the laity must not only be entrusted with ecclesial roles but also be considered as “full partners and not as hired help” (Sullivan, 1997).

Both ministerial roles, therefore, ought to realize that they are sent together as an integral part of the community of disciples, each fulfilling their vocation, grounded in their baptismal dignity.

Empowerment of the Poor

It is also essential to note that BECs, given their historical conditions, promote empowerment of grassroots participants. “The vision of BECs, as the Church of the Poor, emphasizes the call to empower the poor and enable them to actively participate in the liberating mission of the Church” (Picardal, 2008). With the supposition that BECs are mostly formed out of the wits of the lay faithful from the grassroots and supported by the institutional Church, empowerment of the poor becomes an essential dimension to solidifying active lay participation.

BECs become places for the faithful, especially those who are economically deprived, to fulfill their vocation, nourish their spirituality, and be assisted in their austere living conditions. We do not discount the fact that the poor have something to share in the community and are not simply recipients of the Church's aid. Simon suggests that, as a reflective activity, empowerment is initiated and sustained by the agents themselves, who seek self-determination while being aided by others who provide the climate, resources, and procedures to achieve such. It is respecting the potential of the agents—what they have and what they can produce from it (Simon, 1990). Recognizing that each member of the community has something to share, even the poor, invites them to participate actively and be empowered. The “activation of God-given charisms among the poor,” as PCP II puts it, elects them to be the modern workers of renewal. “The world of the poor,” according to Romero, “teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of handouts from governments or from the church, but when they themselves are the masters of, and protagonists in, their own struggle and liberation, thereby unmasking the root of false paternalism, including ecclesiastical paternalism” (Romero, 1985).

This boils down to subsidiarity, which largely characterizes empowerment. There can be no empowerment if the poor are not given the chance to participate in the Church. Stephen Pope insists that empowerment must be pursued so that all parts can participate properly in the life of the whole community—a moral commitment to the priority of their needs within an ordering of social priorities (Pope, 1993). It means moral inclusiveness of all people in all dimensions of local communities. It is not merely a form of adaptation to the environment but rather an increase in the capacity of individuals and communities to “ameliorate social problems” (Gutierrez, 1990), especially in the fight against complex forces that bind the majority of people to poverty.

Conclusion

PCP II marks a decisive moment in the Catholic Church's evolution towards authentic renewal in the Philippines. Drawing inspiration from the spirit of Vatican II's *aggiornamento*, it redefines the Church as a dynamic, contextualized, and participatory community of disciples. This initiative has equipped Filipino Catholics with a revitalized ecclesial identity that is firmly grounded in the Gospel and highly responsive to the nation's historical, cultural, and social contexts. The vision of the Church of the Poor boldly calls for spiritual renewal and tangible transformation within society. The Church of the Poor serves as a powerful ecclesiological model,

urging the faithful to embrace the true essence of Christian discipleship as exemplified by Jesus—solidarity with the poor, compassion for the suffering, and an unwavering commitment to justice. While the Church's complete realization of this vision is an ongoing journey, it continues to shape pastoral priorities and compel communities to act as effective agents of social change. Central to this movement are the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), which stand as living laboratories for this ecclesiology. They vividly showcase the Church's mission of communion-in-mission, where lay participation, shared leadership, and mutual care invigorate both faith and community life. By nurturing self-reliant and critically aware communities, BECs embody the spirit of PCP II and actively implement the Church's preferential option for the poor. Seen as a natural habitat where a conscious and collective effort is actualized among grassroots communities (the unevangelized, oppressed, poor, and marginalized) and other sectors of society, BECs become a breeding ground for authentic human development to come into fruition.

Declaration on the Use of AI

The researchers utilized the institution's Turnitin account to assess the similarity index and detect any AI-generated content. This was done to ensure that the manuscript is free from plagiarism and AI-generated text. In addition, the authors used the institution's Grammarly account to ensure accuracy in spelling, grammar, and overall writing quality.

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