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Discourse of the Catholic Church in the Philippines on the National Elections since 2009: An Analysis of CBCP Pastoral Statements

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要旨

本研究ノートはフィリピン・カトリック司教協議会（CBCP）による選挙政治に関する、既存研究では取り上げられていない2010年選挙関連以降の司牧声明の議論の展開を分析している。その際、「1986年の民主化政変の際にCBCPが示した『選挙政治への積極的な関与は信徒主導で行う』という方針が、民主化が軌道に乗ることで2010年選挙の際にはCBCPの司牧声明において選挙政治における情勢や候補者に関する『識別サークル』の導入と信徒主導の『原則を重んじた党派的な政治』への参加という2点の明確化に結実した」とするRivera(2011)の仮説を検証している。その結果、2010年代にこの二概念は継承されたが政教関係が不安定となり、その危機感が聖職者のより積極的な政治参加につながったのではないかと示唆している。

Summary

This research note analyzes the pastoral statements of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) for the past 10 years. It also checks the validity of Rivera (2011) that statements in 2010 are fruits of the vision of CBCP's statement in 1986 democratization about lay initiative in partisan politics, as a result of successful normalization of the democracy in the Philippines, by reframing the election discourse with two concepts as the key: "circles of discernment" of political situation and candidates, and "principled partisan politics" led by the lay faithful. It concludes that in spite of the continued acceptance of these concepts in 10 years, clergies may have been tempted to be involved deeper in politics, because the church-state relations are far from normalized.

Key Words

principled partisan politics, circles of discernment, pastoral statements

1. Introduction

Seen from the perspective of church-state relations in the Philippines, open support and active campaign of many clergies of the Catholic Church for a specific presidential candidate, Leni Robredo, in 2022 national election was unprecedented partisan political involvement in history¹⁾. Some Catholic universities and lay organizations also officially supported Robredo candidacy²⁾. The Church's policy is always made clear that clergies' involvement in politics is expected to be on moral principles and non-partisan, and they have been discouraged from taking part in the "partisan" politics like becoming candidates or campaigning for specific candidates, and even if there are not a few cases of personal support of specific candidates by the clergies, there have never been the cases of clergies' organizations to be involved in the political campaign itself. This seemingly irregular move of many clergies in the past is impressive and worthy to be analyzed so that we may understand the new trend of Catholic Church's involvement in politics.

At the same time, in order to fully understand the phenomenon, we need to do comprehensive analyses including Robredo's campaign features, her political style, relations between Robredo campaign and the church people, as well as the broader political moves during the campaign and beyond.

This is beyond the scope of this research note. Here, as preliminary research, we analyze the pastoral statements on electoral politics published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), which have been seen as the central source of the church's discourse – so that we may set up certain hypothetical interpretation on the implication of the Church's changing attitude on the election, by clarifying the development of the discourses of Church leaders on electoral politics in the Philippines. And as the next chapter explains more in detail, this research note does so by examining the basic hypothesis that the latest work on the development of church stance on the national election, Rivera (2011), and also fill the more than 10-year gap on this research theme.

2. Related Research on the Development of CBCP's Perspective on Electoral Politics

National media in the Philippines as well as Catholic ones have reported widely on the Catholic Church's involvement in electoral politics and their publication of related pastoral

1) CBCP News (2022d), Likas News (2022a), UCA News (2022a), CBCP Laiko (2022a)

2) CBCP News (2022a, b, c)

statements, especially in each national election season. As the national election nears, the Church authority repeatedly announced their intention on their statements, especially about the justification of their involvement in the context of constitutional separation of church and state, moral authority of the church leaders, importance of election watch by the church-sanctioned lay organization (like Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting, PPCRV), and so on.

On the other hand, there are very few researches on how the church developed their discourse on election since 1986 democratization. Miyawaki (2019) is limited to the period till 2001, and the analysis is mainly on the structural discrepancies about Catholic Church's deemed spiritual leadership on the majority population of the nation and the people's voting behavior that remains terribly unsatisfactory for the church leaders despite the repeated pastoral intervention through official statements. It doesn't delve into how the Church's analyses of the electoral politics, its policies and suggestions have developed since democratization in 1986.

One exceptional case is Rivera (2011), which describes the historical development of their framework of discourse on electoral politics, beginning from "Post-Election Statement" of CBCP in 1986, established in the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-2) in 1991, with election watch by civil organization for clean and honest election at its center. He analyzes how the new concepts of **"circles of discernment"** and **"principled partisan politics"** were eventually introduced in 2009 and 2010 (in order to show that these two expressions are important, the author added bold to all of them below, including the quotation from Catholic official documents), which is explained as the eventual fruition of the vision shown in 1986 post-election statement that the clergies should give moral and non-partisan direction to the people on political matters, and it is mainly the role of the lay faithful to analyze the situation based on such direction, and with the principles they learned they should be involved in partisan politics. Rivera's research is supported by the past analyses, including Bacani's (1992) analyses of PCP-2 documents on political involvement of the church, especially in relation to the establishment of PPCRV as a response to PCP-2, and Moreno's (2006) analyses on development of election watch and voters' education with increasing involvement of church-related organizations such as PPCRV – though now these past works are somewhat out of date, when we think of the important development of the framework by the introduction of the new concept of **"circles of discernment"** and **"principled partisan politics"**.

We have several reasons why our analysis of CBCP documents is from 2010 election (including a related 2009 document).

First, we haven't yet seen academic analyses of the CBCP documents, especially on its

involvement in the Philippine national elections, since Rivera in 2011. This paper aims to fill that more than 10-years gap.

Second is that major crises caused by electoral anomalies since 1980s, especially since the extra-legal ouster of then President Estrada in 2001 and serious allegations of electoral frauds after that in 2004 and 2007, seem to have basically ended after the automation of vote counting was introduced nationally from 2010 election. Besides, in Presidential elections Benigno Aquino III won in 2010, Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, and Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. in 2022, overwhelmingly without dispute, unlike in 1992 and 2004 elections where the results were seriously contested.

Rivera (2011) shows his hypothesis that occasional cases of bishops' involvement in partisan politics since 1986 should be seen as exceptional, emergency measures, especially taken often by then charismatic Manila Archbishop Cardinal Sin, and thus came the non-involvement stance of CBCP in the political crisis in 2005 (Cardinal Sin had already been deceased), when then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's electoral scandal damaged her authenticity. He suggested that this change of attitude toward "every day, regular mode" led to the church leaders' clearer expression about the lay initiative on active partisan politics in 2009 statements. Here we can pose a question: if this hypothesis is right, how then, can we explain about the resurgence of the active involvement of the clergy in partisan politics in 2022? We seek to find some clue in making this point clearer as well.

And this leads to the third point. Church-state relations during the 2010s were far from peaceful, in spite of the regained relative stability of electoral politics itself. Aquino, a liberal and reformist President, with his Catholic Ateneo de Manila University background, seemingly a favorite of the Church, soon antagonized the Catholic Church by stepping forward to introduce Reproductive Health (RH) legislature that promotes reproductive education including the promotion of contraceptives, which was a nightmare for the Church³⁾. Duterte, known as anti-Catholic Church and for his authoritarian iron-fist policy of drug war, seems to represent what the President should not be from the church's perspective (Curato 2017). And Marcos, the son of the dictator, who has been already known for his long-time campaign for cleansing his family history, is the person the Church would never encourage to become a President of the Philippines (as we will see below). We suggest that, though CBCP pastoral statements are restraint about direct appraisal or criticism against incumbent President or candidates, Church leaders' reflection on the antagonistic political environment against the Church, can be seen in the devel-

3) And worse, though the bishops showed a clear stance against RH law, the church was divided, even to the point that a major local Catholic publication, Claretian Publications, published a book in favor of RH policies of the government (Claretian Publications 2014).

opment of the discourse. And even though they don't admit it squarely, Church leaders largely seem to recognize how these political leaders, who seem to be very unfavorable for the Church, are supported by the overwhelming majority of the citizens, most of whom are deemed Catholic laity as well.

This research note is still tentative in nature, especially in that the analyses are limited to the CBCP documents, and not the various movements inside and outside the Church related to election campaigns, poll-watch activities, voters' educations, with development of seemingly traditional patronage politics demonstrated in the electoral process, which may be for the future analyses.

And based on the hypothesis of Rivera, we mainly examine two points: (1) whether the two concepts of **principled partisan politics** and **circles of discernment** continue to be among the Church's central ideas about electoral politics. (2) validity of Rivera that the clergies' active partisan involvement in electoral politics is no more relevant – and Church leaders' discourse related to the opposite phenomenon of clergies unprecedented political campaign in 2022.

3. Election Related Documents since 2009

The draft of the pastoral statements of CBCP is usually prepared, following either the decision of the plenary meeting (twice a year) or initiative of the CBCP president, with the help of the academic specialists in Catholic universities or seminaries. It is published in the name of the CBCP president, after examination and revision of the draft and approval by the majority of bishop members.

The number of statements listed in CBCP Online is 7 in 1940s, 32 in 1950s, 11 in 1960s, 34 in 1970s, 39 in 1980s, 59 in 1990s, 71 in 2000s, and 176 in 2010s (including translations into various national and local languages). Though many are statements related to church events and anniversaries, majority of the statements are about social and political issues. And the topics have been gradually diversified as the number grew. Since democratization in 1986, CBCP constantly publishes election related statements every election period, thus making it one of the major topics.

There are 3 documents for 2010 general election⁴⁾, 0 for 2013 midterm election (though there is one indirectly related), 2 for 2016 general election (though we deal with only one, as the

4) In the Philippine electoral system, elections of the President and Vice-President take place every 6 years, and the rest of national elective positions have elections every 3 years. "General election" is when there are elections of President and Vice-President together with other national elective positions, while "midterm election" is when there is none.

other one, a post-electoral statement has little to say about the electoral politics itself), 2 for 2019 midterm election (plus 3 diocese-level statements by individual bishops that are included in the list of CBCP website), and 1 for 2022 general elections (though one more is indirectly related). The special importance of 2010 and 2019 election (from the bishops' perspective) may be seen from the sheer number of documents. Let's check them briefly.

(1) 2010 General Elections

Pastoral Statement "Lay Participation in Politics and Peace" (July 12, 2009) should be seen from today's (2022) standpoint as a watershed about the discursive framework of CBCP on electoral politics, as Rivera (2011) suggests, because this is the very first official statement by CBCP about the active lay involvement in electoral politics beyond traditional expectations of participating in election watch volunteer or voters' education.

In the previous CBCP documents on electoral politics, criticism on political culture such as patronage and corruption, necessity of strengthening poll watch and voters' education, mobilization of national prayers for election, were repeatedly mentioned. And active participation of lay faithful in partisan politics, mentioned in PCP-2 documents, had seldom been pointed out. This 2009 statement is peculiar in that it clearly mentions that while the clergy limits themselves to non-partisan moral guidance, it is necessary for the lay faithful to be actively involved in "**principled partisan politics**" such as running as candidates for elective office and active support for specific candidates. Here is a part of the text of 2009 document, which gives us the certain definition of what it is all about:

1. We call upon those who are competent, persons of integrity, and committed to change to get involved directly in **principled partisan politics**, and become candidates for political election, aware that the common good is above the good of vested interests;
2. We remind the laity that it is within their right as well as their duty to campaign for candidates they believe to be competent, honest, and public-service minded in order to reform our country;
3. We enjoin all our parishes and educational institutions to cooperate closely and even volunteer to work with credible citizens' electoral monitors such as NAMFREL⁵⁾ and

5) The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections, a Church related civil organization for poll watch.

PPCRV especially in safeguarding the integrity and sacredness of the ballot;

4. We commit our church personnel to the indispensable task of raising social awareness and forming social consciences through political education. We cannot say that we have done enough to educate our people in the social teachings of the Church.
5. We call upon citizens to be vigilant and to safeguard the entire system of automated election, before, during, and after the electoral process; we strongly urge that any new electoral system ensure secret voting and open public counting... (CBCP 2009)

Here, the definition of “principled” is “based on the moral teaching of the Church authority”, and partisan politics is explained as either becoming a candidate or campaigning for a candidate. It is separated from “non-partisan” political involvement, such as more traditionally encouraged role of voters’ education and poll watch (like PPCRV). Statement of clergies that implicitly suggest negative opinion against certain political leaders or their policy choices is not interpreted by the Church authority as “partisan politics”, as long as the vocabulary is carefully chosen to avoid raising specific names and to keep them as “moral” statement (even if they are often criticized for their “violation of the separation of church and state” because of this).

Then, in the document next year, “A Call for Vigilance and Involvement” (January 24, 2010), organizing the “**circles of discernment**” is mentioned for the first time:

In this situation we urge once more all Filipinos to form **circles of discernment** so that they can see, judge, and act together on issues of public concern according to moral values. Moreover, we remind once again the Catholic laity that it is their right and duty to support candidates that are qualified and have a record of striving for the common good. They should not hesitate to engage in **principled partisan politics**. (CBCP 2010a)

Circles of discernment is thus defined as to collectively meditate on, learn about, evaluate and educate on the moral and social teaching of the Church as well as present political situation and the candidates. The Catholics are expected to go through with this process repeatedly so that they understand the teaching of the Church as well as present situation better, and decide, especially on whom to choose in the coming elections, or on more direct involvement in politics.

And especially these two vocabularies, “**principled partisan politics**” and “**circles of discernment**” not only appear here, but they would appear again repeatedly, as we will see below. Here is the quotation from the next document, “Transforming Election Through a Solidarity of Consciences” (May 4, 2010), where these two concepts appear again.

This work calls us to infuse morality and spirituality in our politics and electoral process through lay involvement in non-partisan work, like voters’ education and poll automation, as well engage in **principled partisan politics** by running for office and participating in **circles of discernment**, and for men and women in uniform to keep the peace.

... Let **circles of discernment** multiply and continue to be guided and strengthened by the Church’s spiritual resources and ethical teachings, and let them share the fruits of their discernment. (CBCP 2010b).

(2) 2013 Midterm Election

There is no pastoral statement directly dealing with the election, but “Proclaim the Message, In Season and Out of Season” (January 28, 2013) (with a Tagalog version “Ipangaral and Mensahe, Napapanahon man o Hindi”⁶⁾) relates the main issue of the statement, critique of the social moral issues including reproductive health issues and legalization, in response to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004), and partly in relation to the coming election:

We support and encourage the participation of the laity in electing competent and morally upright candidates who are faithful to their correct and informed conscience.

We commend and support lay initiatives to form **circles of discernment** to choose worthy candidates and even to run as candidates in order to bring values of God’s kingdom in the public discourse. We will help the people to know the stance of those who run for office on important issues of the country⁷⁾.

6) Most CBCP pastoral letters are published (now mainly through official websites) only in English. Having Tagalog/Filipino version together with English may suggest the CBCP’s intention for wider circulation. Recently some important documents are published in several local dialects as well even on CBCP Online website.

7) In Tagalog, “Kinikilala namin at sinusuportahan ang mga pagsisikap ng mga layko na bumuo ng mga **circles of discernment** upang pumili ng mga karapat-dapat na kandidato, at sukdulang tumakbo bilang kandidato upang dalhin ang mga pagpapahalaga ng Paghahari ng Diyos sa pampublikong larangan.” A point of interest is that even in Tagalog version, English expression “circles of discernment” is kept English, probably as a jargon, which suggests that the readers are expected to be familiar with this expression, which may alienate audience who are not familiar with such

Here, only **circles of discernment** is mentioned, but **principled partisan politics** is also clearly implied if not directly mentioned.

(3) 2016 General Election

The statement “Prophets of Truth, Servants of Unity” (May 1, 2016) (Tagalog version: “Tagapagpahayag ng Katotohanan, Lingkod ng Pagkakaisa”), gives a more traditional discourse on the national election, when we find no reference to “engagement in **principled partisan politics**” nor “**circles of discernment**”. On the other hand, the passage quoted below clearly indicates the anti-Duterte stance (though with generally moral/religious vocabulary and avoiding “partisan” expression). Duterte, already well-known for his anti-Church and vulgar casual talk⁸⁾, promised a drastic change of policies, and was to become the next president:

A choice for a candidate who takes positions that are not only politically precarious but worse, morally reprehensible, cannot and should not be made by the Catholic faithful and those who take their allegiance to Christ and his Kingship seriously. One cannot proclaim Christ as King and at the same time accept the governance of one whose thoughts, speech and demeanor are diametrically opposed to the demands of submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The desire for change is understandable. Our people have suffered from incompetence and indifference. But this cannot take the form of supporting a candidate whose speech and actions, whose plans and projects show scant regard for the rights of all, who has openly declared indifference if not dislike and disregard for the Church specially her moral teachings. (CBCP 2016)

(4) 2019 Midterm Election

The statement “Seek the Common Good” (January 28, 2019) basically repeats the discourse and standpoints in 2010. Besides, it makes clear the stance against postponing 2019 election for the preparation of the amendment of the Constitution that was repeatedly mentioned by politicians, though denied by Duterte himself (Inquirer 2018a).

English vocabularies.

8) Duterte’s anti-Church religious discourse, with his own “spiritual leaders” around him, is another important topic, in relations to Church’s counter-discourse, and popular acceptance of Duterte’s vulgar talks, as well as in the context of the Duterte’s whole political discourse as a Philippine President, which are all worthy of further research.

We encourage voters to be very discerning in their votes. Let the lay groups engage in **discernment circles** to help one another know the candidates well and choose the candidates with the common good of the whole country in mind and not according to what the candidates promise, much less according to what voters have received from these candidates. Participation in politics for Christian lay people is not just to be limited to non-partisan involvement. Christians are also encouraged to engage in **principled partisan politics**. This means that they can campaign for good candidates as an exercise of their Christian faith. (CBCP 2019)

Curiously for 2019, “CBCP Statement” section of “CBCP Online” website includes statements by 3 individual bishops on national election for each diocese (they are not really among the CBCP statements themselves) ⁹⁾.

The statement “Don’t leave God when you vote” (April 28, 2019) by Archbishop Socrates Villegas for the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan stresses that it is the nature of Filipino to fear God, to value human dignity, and not to be afraid of the threat of the powerful – implying (but indirectly because of non-partisan vocabulary) the criticism against President Duterte and broad support by the citizens on his authoritarian inclination (as if to say they are not actually Filipino-like):

We have five primary concerns. Some of you might want to add or remove. Consider KAMATAYAN, KABASTUSAN, KORAPSYON, KAHIRAPAN, KASARINLAN and KASINUNGALINGAN...¹⁰⁾

If you agree that the six primary concerns need our attention, look at the candidates and ask:

Have they given the orders to kill? Have they protected liars? Truth is not a political issue; it is a moral issue. Human dignity goes beyond political coalitions. It is a godly concern. Sila

9) This kind of inclusion hasn’t happened so often, meaning that there is certain decision by the CBCP to dare to include them, possibly suggesting the relative importance of the 2019 election, in spite of midterm election, where there is no presidential election.

10) English translation is: KAMATAYAN(death), KABASTUSAN(vulgarity), KORAPSYON(corruption), KAHIRAPAN(poverty), KASARINLAN(autonomy (presumably from appropriate moral authority, according to the context)) and KASINUNGALINGAN(lies). I appreciate the suggestion of Associate Professor Frieda Ruiz about the meaning of *kasarinlan* in this particular context.

ba ang TAGA-UTOS?¹¹⁾

Have they contributed to the current problem of 5 Ks? Have they actively cheered and encouraged, enabled and supported the purveyors of the 6 Ks? Sila ba ang TAGA-SULSOL?¹²⁾

Have they been quiet fence sitters who just allowed the 5 Ks to turn from bad to worse? Silence in the face of evil is itself evil (Bonhoeffer). Sila ba yong mababait pero TAHIMIK sa masama? Walang paninindigan?¹³⁾

Have they chosen to stay safe rather than stand up for truth, sovereignty and human dignity? (Villegas 2019)

Statement “Concerned Christian Citizens for Good Governance” (May 6, 2019) by Archbishop Antonio Ledesma for Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro quotes from CBCP (2009) , and especially stressing the **principled partisan politics**, with several exemplary cases of how Christian citizen groups get involved in partisan politics, poll watch activities, voters’ education, and election campaigns:

As we approach the coming day of elections for national and local candidates, it is good to remind ourselves of the three calls made by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines in their pastoral letter, entitled “Seek the Common Good,” last January 2019. The letter urges all of us to form **circles of discernment**, to engage in **principled partisan politics**, and to vote for candidates who will work for the common good. (Ledesma 2019)

Statement “Prepare for the Elections” (May 9, 2019) by Auxiliary Bishop of Manila Broderick Pabillo recommends wise usage of the list of trustworthy candidates prepared by the trusted lay leaders. He also shows his concern about propaganda and fake news, and urges not to vote the one who promotes killing (reminding us of Duterte and his supporters):

The list made by credible lay leaders such as the People’s Choice Movement and the Power

11) English translation: Are they the one to give commandments?

12) English translation: Are they the instigators?

13) English translation: Are they kind but silent about evil? Nothing to stand for?

of Purple who have the means to study well the candidates and who have vetted them on good criteria can be a useful help to the voters...

If we pray over our vote, will we include in our list a thief, a dishonest person, or one who promotes killing? If we pray over our vote, will we allow our vote to be influenced by money, or much worse, sell it? We are poor and people have already robbed us of basic services in life, of our environment, of our jobs. Let them not rob us of our dignity. Our one vote is our dignity. (Pabillo 2019)

(5) 2022 General Election

There is only one statement on the election itself. “Be Concerned about the Welfare of Others” (March 27, 2022, Tagalog version: “Pagmalasakitan Ninyo ang Kapakanan ng Kapwa”), which suggests that the voters should be involved in the **circles of discernment**, so that they may carefully choose the good candidate that serve for the common good of the people. Though without mentioning the **principled partisan politics** by the lay faithful, it still stresses that people should never be bystanders when it comes to the transformation of political culture. And it also clearly states that the good politicians are needed in the midst of difficult times:

We need competent leaders and lawmakers with sincere intentions to serve the welfare of our communities, i.e., municipalities, cities, provinces and the whole country. (CBCP 2022b)

Besides, the statement commemorating the anniversary of People Power Revolution in 1986 that brought about the restoration of democracy, “The Truth Will Set You Free” (February 25, 2022, Tagalog version: “Ang Katotohanan ang Magpapalaya sa Inyo”) is worth referring to, as it quotes from the post-election statement in February 1986 that Rivera (2011) interprets as the origin of the CBCP’s view on lay participation in electoral politics. It also clearly demonstrates its stance against “historical revisionism” that Ferdinand Marcos Jr. then presidential candidate and now (2022) the president has been notorious for.

The elections are fast approaching, and we wish to remind you: ‘All citizens, (therefore), should be mindful of the right and also the duty to use their free vote to further the common good’ (Gaudium et Spes¹⁴⁾, #75). But we are appalled by the blatant and subtle

14) “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” 1965, one of the Second Vatican Council’s official documents, seen as one of the authoritative documents on “Catholic Social Teaching”.

distortion, manipulation, cover-up, repression and abuse of the truth, like: historical revisionism – the distortion of history or its denial; the proliferation of fake news and false stories; disinformation – the seeding of false information and narratives in order to influence the opinion of the people, to hide the truth, to malign and blackmail people. There are troll farms which sow the virus of lies. (CBCP 2022a)

4. Implications and Reflections

As we have seen the discourse of CBCP on electoral politics from 2009 to 2022, one clear thing is that the new direction introduced in 2009 and 2010 seems to have taken roots in these years. Call for lay faithful to be involved in **principled partisan politics**, and creating **circles of discernment** so as to be able to analyze and decide on the political conditions and evaluate the candidates based on the bishop-led moral principles – this seems to be surely established. In this sense, Rivera is still relevant.

Rivera demonstrated that 2009–2010 CBCP statements on electoral politics (2009, 2010a, 2010b) show a goal of CBCP’s 1986 post-election statements and PCP-2 in 1991. As already mentioned above, he interpreted the statements as development of the vision of the “active role of the lay faithful in evangelization and socio-political involvement”, especially by introducing these two new concepts **principled partisan politics** and **circles of discernment** as representative development. He sees this as an indication of the certain level of the stability of regular implementation of the national elections, and he also sets emergency intervention of the charismatic spiritual leaders like late Cardinal Sin as no more necessary. But when we go through with this development, things don’t seem to be going that way after Rivera published his paper – on seeing the resurgence of clerical involvement in politics, however in a different way from the past experiences of the cases of late Cardinal.

As we go through with the texts, “informed conscience” may also be seen one of the catchwords, and **circles of discernment** may be seen as a means to attain that. As we check “informed conscience” in the web search of CBCP Online, we find 28 documents, including CBCP (2009), CBCP (2013), and CBCP (2022b) that we have examined above. This is what we think Rivera missed.

Voters’ education continues to be seen as important. Judging from the warning against fake news and historical revisionism indicating the CBCP’s covert stance against Duterte and Marcos, who eventually became very popular and were elected to be Presidents, we can see the general distrust of the bishops about the political judgment of the general public, those whose

“conscience” seems to be desperately hard to be “informed” enough. This can easily lead to the perception of committed church people that people are easily deceived, and it is the role of the religious leaders to correct them. This type of mindset is easily observed in Villegas (2019) already mentioned above. The majority of the lay Catholic voters may be already very much involved in “partisan politics” but from the perspective of church leaders they don’t seem to be so “principled”.

This leads to a question. When lay people should be active in partisan politics, and if they are active in an “unprincipled” way, from the perspective of many clergies, can/should clergies themselves go beyond their general non-partisan role of moral guidance and support or even lead the “**principled partisan politics**” themselves? This may be what happened to many clergies in 2022, those who were involved in Robredo campaign.

Let us add one more tentative reflection on what Leni Robredo might have meant for many church leaders (admitting that there is political diversity even among clergies), though we need more comprehensive research for a thorough assessment.

Then Vice President¹⁵⁾ Leni Robredo, already known as a representative lay faithful (CBCP News 2019a) and also a well-known leader in civil society, seems to have appeared as implementing an ideal kind of **principled partisan politics** that the Church described in CBCP documents since 2009. When this unconventional type of political figure decided to run for president, those who are already familiar with the CBCP discourse on **principled partisan politics**, the answer to the practice of **circles of discernment** may have seemed too obvious. And she eventually gained quite an impressive fever among the volunteers for the campaign. Yet Ferdinand Marcos Jr., that son of the former dictator, the deemed mastermind of the project of historical revisionism in favor of his family, has always been reported as even more popular than Robredo – and this may be regarded as a serious emergency (like 1986 democratic People Power revolution), by many faithful – including many clergies.

On the other hand, as mentioned, election crisis is virtually over when introduction of automated counting of the votes was successful in 2010, and especially the leading presidential candidate won overwhelmingly. National election can generally be seen as peacefully implemented and as almost fully normalized (though never without problems). Involvement of clergies in partisan politics in time like this in the name of emergency - this demands alternative way of explanation beyond Rivera’s hypothesis. But in order to proceed, our research needs to

15) Incumbent from 2016 to 2022.

be broadened and to include research on the diverse political movements, especially connected to Robredo campaign.

Theologians such as Cartagenas (2014: 50–69) and Brazal (2015) point to structural weakness of what can bind between church leaders and the ordinary people, plus lack of design for renewal of the church. Church's endemic weakness in reaching out to the real fields of political participation of the ordinary people, and the fact that the "lay faithful" that responds sensitively to the challenge posed by the bishops are minority of people mainly composed of the intellectuals who are often clergies, may be related to the victory of Marcos and the defeat of the Church's seemingly ideal type of candidate Robredo¹⁶⁾.

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