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subject memo

East Timor news

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SUBJECT MEMO

Subject: The pressures on Bishop Belo.

Sources: The international press and sources within E. Timor.
"A Paz é Possível em Timor Leste"

The Bishop's Christmas Pastoral Letter ... written by an Indonesian priest.

"Divine love calls on us to eliminate all kinds of difference between us. (...) This mystery (Christmas) invites us to pardon each other and forget the past, to put aside our unrealistic desires. (...) We must have the courage to cease all kinds of activities and initiatives which could cause disturbance... may we have the courage to avoid anything which could cause unrest, such as demonstrations, youthful revolt or the distribution of illegal pamphlets." (translated from Italian, the Osservatore Romano indicates that the original was written in Indonesian)

This Christmas Pastoral Letter, dated Dec. 14, is rather surprising in its tone when compared with the recent positions which Bishop Belo, the Apostolic Administrator of Dili, had adopted. But if the content of the letter gives rise to some questions, its form and the way in which it was made public can go some way towards answering these questions.

The original is written in Bahasa Indonesia, although Bishop Belo has always written his pastoral letters in Portuguese. It is known that there were problems raised by the question of what language the Pope would use in the liturgy and in the sermon he was to give in E. Timor, during his visit last year, because the Nuncio wished that these would be in Bahasa which the Timorese clergy would not accept. Indeed this question provoked a unanimous letter from the Diocesan Council and was finally resolved favourably for the latter: the Pope did not use Indonesian in E. Timor. Is it not surprising then, that Bishop Belo addresses the members of his diocese in Indonesian?

A pastoral letter is, by definition, a letter from a pastor to his flock, and it is certain that the clergy, with a few rare exceptions, would refuse to read to the faithful a letter written in the language of the occupier. If Bishop Belo wished his Christmas message to be transmitted to the faithful he would hardly have created such a strong motive for this not to happen as to write it in Indonesian. It then appears legitimate to deduce

that he did not, in fact, desire that this Pastoral Letter be read out in the churches of the diocese .

The letter became public outside Timor, not through the usual channels of information, but by its publication in the Osservatore Romano (Jan. 20 1990) and it has also been quoted at various times by Indonesian diplomats in their contacts with the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva (Feb. 1990). A source in Dili, close to the Bishop, has said that the author of the Pastoral Letter was an Indonesian priest living in Dili named Father Marcos and that Bishop Belo merely signed it.

This procedure would not be strange under normal circumstances: if the problem of national identity was not involved, if the cleric in question was close to the bishop and if the content of the letter represented his thoughts. This not being the case here gives rise to some further questions:

- What could be the objective of a pastoral letter which is not destined for the faithful of the diocese?

- Who ordered the letter in such a way that Bishop Belo felt he could not refuse to sign it?

Mgr. Canalini could undoubtedly supply the answers to these questions. The Papal Nuncio in Jakarta also knows, without any doubt, how this letter came to be published so promptly in the Osservatore Romano, when that journal has never published the previous pastoral letters referring to arrests and torture (Nov. 1988) or even to the Pope's visit (April 1989); nor indeed the letters calling for a referendum.

The pressures continue...

It was on the 6 of February last year that Bishop Belo, breaking a silence of more than three years, wrote a letter to the Secretary General of the UN to remind him that "the decolonization of Portuguese Timor has still not been achieved" and suggesting that a referendum be held. Some days later on Feb. 16 he wrote a long letter to the Nuncio in Jakarta to justify his position: "Every year we have been seeing the same abuses. I have, as always, already spoken with the authorities, but the result is always the same. This is a people that is suffering. That is why the holding of a referendum to ask the people of Timor if they accept integration, is urgent" On March 15, probably fearing criticisms that he was engaging in politics, he clarified: "My letter is the taking of a position by the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor regarding the conflict or problem of Timor. (...) The letter does not wish to speak in the name of the people. It only suggests that the opportunity should be given to the people of Timor to exercise their sovereignty, by means of a referendum, in a secret and universal vote." (Commenting on the letter to the UN Secretary General, 15/3/89)

Once the letter to the UN Secretary General became public, the pressures on Bishop Belo increased. Indonesian ministers and military chiefs criticised, and even threatened the bishop. The Papal Nuncio in Jakarta, Mgr. Canalini, indirectly supported them, saying that "He (Bishop Belo) wrote this letter in his own

name...as a Timorese citizen; that is his responsibility and the Catholic Church is not involved" The Jakarta Post, which reported his comments, further added that "Mgr. Canalini has given it to be understood that, although Ximenes Belo is the head of the diocese of Timor East, his letter to the UN does not reflect the views of the Catholic Church or of the people of East Timor on the subject". (Jakarta Post, 14/6/89)

In spite of these pressures Bishop Belo reaffirmed his position in his letter to the Bishop of Setubal on June 27 (See ETN MM 32). This letter shows very clearly the pressures to which he was being submitted.

The clergy of the diocese also reacted to these pressures: "The Dili clergy reject the biased opinions and suggestions...shown by certain ecclesiastical and lay personalities ..." (letter from the clergy, July 1989 ETN MM 26)

A latent conflict had existed between Bishop Belo and his clergy since 1983 when the Vatican dismissed Mgr da Costa Lopes, the former apostolic administrator of the diocese who was known for the courageous positions he adopted in defence of his people, and replaced him by a young priest only recently returned to the country and suspected of coming to facilitate integration with Indonesia. The letter to the UN and the attacks to which Bishop Belo was submitted on its account, brought about a change in attitude but one still notes a certain reserve in the support offered to the bishop: "The bishop is theologically, judicially and ecclesiastically, the representative of the local Church in all things, as long as he speaks for it, in line with the Church and with what is felt by the clergy and the people" (letter of July 1989, ETN MM 26)

Missionaries prevented from entering East Timor.

Since the invasion everything which is destined for East Timor has to be passed by the occupying power; this is as much true for personnel as it is for material resources. In reprisal for the letter of Feb. 6, Indonesia has been blocking the entry of missionaries to East Timor. Bishop Belo himself has said in an interview with Australian journalists (Australian Associated Press and The Age) that 8 missionaries, whose arrival had been expected, had been prevented from entering in reprisal. The military deny this, saying that the process is still under study and that such things take time. "But if he (Bishop Belo) asked for Indonesian priests it would be considerably easier" the authorities told the same journalists. The foreign missionaries working in the diocese who were due to come out on leave, have decided not to do so, for fear that they would not be able to re-enter.

Following the Pope's visit:

The Pope's visit, both in its organization and in its sermon of reconciliation which never once mentioned "human rights", also represented another pressure on Bishop Belo but he gave some indications that he would not succumb: "We are not of the same point of view. They are of the opinion that I am acting politically. If I was in Rome I would think the same as they do. But I live here, I see the suffering of the people and I share

them. It was my duty as pastor to write that letter". (Quest-France, 13/10/89) It will be remembered that his reaction to the demonstration by Timorese youth before the Pope was to ask for the Holy Father to intercede on their behalf because "they are only showing their discontent with the situation in Timor". The violent repression, the arrests and tortures in attempt to implicate the Church in the demonstration, the entry of dozens of refugees into the Bishop's house, the intervention by the military to get them out... all contributed to a growing tension. Many times, during this period, when journalists attempted to speak to Bishop Belo on the phone, they were connected to a Spanish Salesian priest, Fr Carbonell who normally lives in Jakarta and who is responsible for the relations between the order and the Indonesian Government. Fr Carbonell is also a personal friend of Yusuf Wanandi, director of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Jakarta, an organization which controls all entry into East Timor and which was responsible for blocking the entry of the missionaries referred to above. Even when Bishop Belo was with him when the journalists phoned, Fr Carbonell refused to pass the phone to him.

Some weeks after the Pope's visit, Bishop Belo made some trips to Indonesia accompanied by Fr Markus Wanandi, an Indonesian Jesuit who is the director of the São José Catholic secondary school in Dili and brother of Yusuf Wanandi. Little information has emerged concerning these meetings and the clergy know only that the bishop met with the Chairman of the Bishops Conference there.

Bishop Belo allows himself to be manipulated?

The people of East Timor notes that their bishop appears to hesitate. In January he is intervening publicly before the demonstrators to call for "order, discipline, an end to demonstrations". This, perhaps is justified by the desire to avoid a more brutal repression on the part of the Indonesians, but this intervention had disappointed those Timorese who, taking advantage of the presence of the US Ambassador, had succeeded in occupying the streets.

In February, the Lisbon weekly "Expresso" managed to contact the bishop on the telephone on the anniversary of his letter to the UN Secretary General. The bishop expressed his disappointment at not having received any reply from Mr de Cuellar and also at not having had any reply from the Portuguese president, Mario Soares, to whom he had written during the same period. This silence is due, the bishop considers, to the "the alignments of interests imposed by international politics". Speaking about 15 days after the January demonstrations, the bishop makes mention of special troops who "keep us under permanent surveillance", but reports that the military authorities had publicly apologised for the violence meted out during the US Ambassador's visit. He confirmed that all the youths detained during the demonstrations and "those who had taken refuge in my house" were by then at liberty. He added that "many of the checkpoints where we had to present a permit have been taken down" and that these measures formed part of "a new method to gain the sympathies of the population...It remains to be seen how far this goodwill will go" (Expresso, 10/2/90)

In March Bishop Belo accepted an invitation to make a speech to a group of 1350 Indonesian soldiers who were being sent out into Timorese towns and villages. He counselled them not to "use your guns or violence against the East Timorese..." The Indonesian newspaper which reported this speech takes the opportunity to claim that the troops are in East Timor "to help implement development" and implies that Bishop Belo recognises and supports this action. (Jakarta Post, 19 March 1990)

On March 20 Bishop Belo was in Jakarta, again accompanied by the Indonesian Jesuit Fr Markus Wanandi to visit the Interior Minister, General Rudini - one of those who had issued threats after the letter to the Secretary General of the UN.

The newspaper Kompas of March 25 carried an article which quoted the conversation between Bishop Belo and Fr Markus Wanandi, who a recent foreign visitor to the bishop has confirmed to be working as the bishop's secretary, which could well explain the Pastoral Letter in Indonesian reputedly written by an Indonesian priest named Fr Marcos.

The role played by this Jesuit becomes clearer in the Kompas article (see appendix).

Of particular note is the appeal for reconciliation, to forget the past in the penultimate paragraph. This is couched in exactly the same way as in the Christmas Pastoral Letter. Located (intentionally?) after a brief quotation from Bishop Belo on the process of development and before one from Fr Wanandi on the difficulty of reconciliation, the sentence could easily be attributed by the reader to the bishop, but is more likely to have come from the Indonesian.

When questioned as to the authorship of the Pastoral Letter by a Portuguese journalist in a telephone interview, Bishop Belo claimed it as his own, but could he be expected to do anything else? We include a translation of this interview in the appendix.

East Timor News is a service which publishes information in three forms - the Monthly Memo (MM) and the occasional publications, Subject Memo (SM) and Urgent Communiqué (UC). It can also make available, on request, copies of all documents mentioned in these publications.

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APPENDIX

Telephone interview with Bishop Belo by a journalist from the Lisbon newspaper "Publico" :

Publico:

Are you aware that President Mario Soares will be in the Vatican this Friday? Had you heard about this?

Bishop Belo:

It's the first I have heard of it.

P: Does this news merit any comment from you? What would you like Mr Soares to say at the Vatican about the situation in East Timor?

B: Well, I would need to speak to the President and not to the "Público" newspaper.

P: But do you think that the President could...

B: It's not worth giving my opinion to a newspaper if the President is off in Italy.

P: No, the President hasn't gone there yet. He's going on Friday. You could get your message to President Soares through us.

B: Well, if you gentlemen have access to Belem Palace, you could ask him to think of us.

P: To think of you. How is the situation?

B: It's normal

P: There haven't been any demonstrations or tensions recently?

B: It's calm. The last ones were on 17, 18 and 19 of January.

P: That was during the visit by the US Ambassador?

B: Yes

P: In relation to the possibility of Portuguese MPs visiting East Timor, what do you think Portugal ought to decide?

B: I would like to know first if they are coming or not

P: Did you know that Indonesia has been raising some difficulties in relation to the finalization of that visit?

B: All visits are important

P: Do you think it is important that Portuguese MPs should visit East Timor?

- B: Well, that depends on the MPs. We would like to know if they are coming this year or next year.
- P: Do you see it as important that this visit take place as early as possible?
- B: It depends on who comes and on how things work out, doesn't it? Portugal is the administering power and I believe that it has the power to decide.
- P: And so you think that the visit must also take place without any restrictions on the activity of the MPs...
- B: That I can't say. That is for the Portuguese themselves to say because it's they who are making the visit.
- P: Regarding the petroleum exploration agreement between Australia and Indonesia for the Timor Sea, does it appear to you to have harmed the Timor cause at international level?
- B: Well, we here, amongst the people, there was a bit of a feeling of disillusionment. Seeing as it ignored international laws the way it did, the agreements they make ... people were not at all happy.
- P: Do you think Portugal should have done other things which it did not do?
- B: I would like to ask, how did Portugal react, because we don't hear anything, we didn't hear what Portugal's position was in relation to that agreement.
- P: You think, therefore, that Portugal should have been more active on the issue?
- B: I'm asking you, to at least tell us what the Portuguese reaction was.
- P: OK. The Portuguese reaction was, let me say, not at all productive, because, there was very little talk of it here and later the matter was practically abandoned at international and diplomatic level. Do you think that it should have been more forceful?
- B: Well, seeing as we here don't know anything, don't hear anything, we can't say more forceful or less forceful.
- P: And in general terms, do you think that the actions of the Portuguese authorities on the Timor question have been the most correct, or do you think that they still leave a lot to be desired? Should they have been more intense and more permanent?
- B: From 75, 76, 78 up to the present, they have been vacillating. The matter is very little visible, let us say, in terms of Portuguese diplomacy. That's my understanding, you know? There are others who understand these things more than me.

P: And in relation to the Church? The Church, at the level of the hierarchy, especially the Vatican, has been accused of not giving the cause of Timor the support it deserves. How does it seem to you?

B: What Church?

P: The hierarchy, specifically some sections of the Vatican, the Papal Nuncio in Jakarta. How does it seem to you?

B: For that, you need to ask them. They know better than us, they have a greater vision than we have.

P: Anyway, regarding the results of the Pope's visit, do you think that the results were positive for the Timor cause or that the visit aggravated the issue?

B: I can't say positive or negative, you know? For the Church the visit was positive, extremely positive. Now, as to the other perspectives, it is you out there who could say positive or negative. For us, being the Catholics that we are, it was positive.

P: While we are on the subject, there has been a certain amount of confusion as to whether there were casualties or not there, at the end of the Eucharistic Mass in Dili. Could you confirm whether the Indonesian police indeed killed anyone, or just imprisoned people, what information did you get?

B: No, they didn't kill anyone, there weren't any casualties. After the * of the demonstration, nobody died there.

P: So there were only imprisonments at the time.

B: There were imprisonments afterwards, but they are all free now. It wasn't exactly imprisonment, after 3 or 4 days of interrogation the matter was finished.

P: Do you remember that about 4 or 5 years ago you met President Soares? At the time, it appeared that your conversation, according to some people here in Portugal, had been a decisive one. What were your impressions and what did you take away from that meeting with President Soares?

B: Well, at that time Dr Mário Soares was the Prime Minister. What conversation was it?

P: It was one you had here in Lisbon in '85 about Timor.

B: Lots of things were discussed. I don't remember exactly what.

P: But you met him at that time, didn't you?

B: I did, not on my own privately, it was during a dinner.

P: But after talking to him, do you think that the conversation was important for the development of Timor, for Portugal to act?

B: At the time, I came back from there a little bit disillusioned.

P: Disillusioned?

B: I did, because Dr Soares said, this was then mind you and not now as president of the Republic, that the case of Timor was like an inverted pyramid. Therefore, it was necessary to start from the bottom, by small *, that is to maintain the Portuguese culture and to call for the return of the Portuguese * functionaries, to maintain Portuguese citizenship. But, this was a problem, the problem of Timor, which they say is very difficult. So, at the time I came back very disillusioned. As to the later developments in the position of the President of the Republic, I don't know, I can't say, because we don't have media, we don't have newspapers, we don't have anything, I can't assess things right now.

P: Timor continues to be isolated, does it?

B: * open, but we don't have the means, we don't have the newspapers that you have out there. We hope that some well-wisher might send us some old newspapers, at least.

P: We received news here that you had met Xanana Gusmão. Rev Bishop, how many times have you met him?

B: Well, I only met him on the 25th of April, 1986.

P: What impressions did you take away from that conversation?

B: Good impressions.

P: The guerrillas have been carrying out some actions out there, have you had any news of this?

B: At the moment, recently, things have been, lets say, at a standstill.

P: But even so, has there been news of recent actions, even relatively small ones?

B: The other day, at the beginning of April, they went into 2 towns, to get things more or less, I wouldn't say to rob, but to more or less... bedclothes, clothes, because in fact it's the truth. They didn't kill anyone or burn any houses.

P: Rev Bishop, there are some sectors of opinion here, some people who also say that you are being manipulated. They cite specifically the letter which came out in February, in the Osservatore Romano about Christmas, in which you appealed for calm and agreement and reconciliation and which they interpreted as representing a certain giving way, in particular to the Nuncio and to the Indonesian authorities.

B: I don't feel any pressure and it was necessary to say that calm was needed, because if there isn't calm, we would have

demonstrations and beatings here every day. Also, it's * to call for calm from time to time, isn't it? Calm, reconciliation, and if this is manipulation, well so be it, we are "betraying" our duty and obligation to calm the situation in general and to call for peace. I don't know how this can be understood as manipulation.

P: You continue to call for a referendum for the population?

B: The law is that "above all, it's the people who command". We sing "Grandôla, Vila morena" (the anthem of the 1974 overthrow of fascism in Portugal; - BW), above all, it's the people who decide.

P: So, in your opinion, the letter which you wrote last year to the UN is still valid?

B: At least it hasn't yet been withdrawn, has it? * * * The letter is still out there, for the world's consideration.

P: For you, for your conscience, the letter is still current, is that so?

B: Absolutely.

P: Rev Bishop, is it true that your Pastoral Letter was written by an Indonesian priest, and not by you?

B: I didn't write it * *. I always write my own letters and when, for instance, I need to translate something I sometimes ask someone else to translate.

P: But the Osservatore Romano said that your original letter was written in Indonesian. You don't usually write your pastoral letters in Indonesian.

B: I write in Portuguese and get them translated into Indonesian. I do the same with my sermons here. I write in Portuguese and get them translated into Indonesian or Tetum.

P: In that case, the original of that letter was in Portuguese and not in Indonesian?

B: That is to say, the original I have here is in Portuguese. Afterwards when it goes out to the public, to the public at large, it's in Indonesian. That doesn't mean that it was written by a priest.

P: And when you say that Christmas invites us to pardon each other, to forget our bitter past and to give up unrealistic desires, does this mean that you are taking back some things, or not?

B: No, I'm not taking things back. I only call for reconciliation and mutual forgiveness.

P: And, what, for you, are these unrealistic desires which you mentioned?

B: I mean, they are always saying that delegations are going to arrive, delegations are going to arrive... Here, also, people live very much up in the air, they hear a lot of these rumours that go around. I refer more to the rumours.

P: And further on, you seem to say that each person must have the courage to avoid anything which could cause confusion, such as demonstrations, inciting the young people and clandestine distribution of leaflets. Is this a condemnation of the guerrilla activities or what is the meaning you intended this sentence to have?

B: It is as much a condemnation of one side as the other. At the time there were leaflets from all quarters, and agitation from as both sides. Condemnation of both sides.

P: Rev Bishop Ximenes, what is your greatest desire for your apostolic activity in Dili?

B: My greatest desire is that the Timorese should live in peace, that they become reconciled with each other and live united. This reconciliation is a long road to travel, and it is still a very difficult road for the Timorese to follow.

P: Would this also imply self-determination for the Timorese people themselves?

B: I will not say that. What I will say, first reconciliation between the Timorese.

Translated by Billy Williams from the original transcript of the interview, excerpts of which were published in the "Público" of 25 April 1990. Sections which were unclear are indicated by an asterisk.

Comment:

In reference to Bishop Belo's answer to the final question, it is worth mentioning that he appears to use the term self-determination in the sense of independence, perhaps because he feels that for most East Timorese the one would automatically imply the other. This can be seen more clearly in the excerpt reproduced below from the letter he wrote to the Bishop of Setubal last year (underlining not in the original).

It is probably for this reason that he, although he unequivocally called for the people to be able to choose their destiny in his letter to the UN, does not want to say here that he, as bishop, desires self-determination.

"If they (the people) want integration with Indonesia then let them come to say this through a plebiscite and not by way of force of arms, psychological pressure or fear as has been happening here since 1976.

If the People should choose to remain with Portugal, may Your Excellency's Government respect the moral and historical link with this people. If, should they be given the chance, the people choose self-determination then may this right be accorded to them. But to not allow the Timorese people to say what they feel is the most sophisticated form of slavery which can only generate discontent, injustice and slow death" (Letter to the Dom Manuel Martins, Bishop of Setubal, Portugal, 6 February 1989).

Things have changed

Comparing conditions in East Timor today with a few years ago, Mgr Belo said there had been many changes. The number of E Timorese who believe in the good intentions of the government has grown. For the vast majority of the people, integration is no longer a problem although there still are a few who are reluctant to accept integration with Indonesia as a fact. There is not yet a great enthusiasm about development of the region. They of course know who are the ones doing good and who have bad intentions.

When asked about the relation between Church and local government, he said that each has its own duty to perform. The government is in charge of social/political affairs while the Church works for the spiritual needs of the community. Hence, he said, the Church leadership will not want to be called upon to urge the community to do this or that. Their task is to provide material (information?) and direction on how the choices should be made; the choice must be left to the individual. The Church does not interfere in political matters. "In this question, there is a clear separation of duties and there is mutual understanding," said the Bishop, who was born in Baucau on 2 February 1948.

According to Belo, the first commitment of the Church is to upholding respect for the quality of people as human beings. This commitment to human beings was reinforced by Markus Wanandi, director of the Catholic Secondary School in Dili, who said this was the noble task of the Church. This is why the Church suffers when the standing the individual is not respected.

Speaking about E Timor's future, Mgr Belo said he felt optimistic that E Timor would surmount the fact that it lags behind. "But it will be a long and slow process," he said. What is needed is reconciliation, forgetting the past, forgetting past conflicts and facing the future. Reconciliation is indeed difficult, said Markus. With such specific problems, development in E Timor must give priority to raising the quality of education and this should be backed up by the investment of private capital in E Timor. "They are the ones who can provide work opportunities to the youngsters completing their schooling. If not, as the number of youngsters leaving school increases and the vacancies in the civil service remain limited, there will be large-scale unemployment in E Timor", said Belo.

With Markus expressing agreement, Belo hoped that private businessmen coming to E Timor would not only be interested in making profit; if they are only interested in profit, it will mean that they only employ skilled personnel and will do nothing about the transfer of skills. What is most needed at the moment is for people from outside E Timor to be willing to hand on their skills to the Timorese, in the same way that the transfer of technology is now under way in Indonesia.

Translated by C Budiardjo, TAPOL