

THE PAPAL VISITS TO THE PHILIPPINES AS A PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOOL OF THE HOLY SEE

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Papal visits are primarily a Petrine responsibility of uniting all faithful in Christ. Since Paul VI's first apostolic journey outside Europe in 1970, papal diplomacy has evolved, reached more audience worldwide, and become more personalized. The young Asian Church in the rich religious landscape of Southeast Asia is a papal concern shared by Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, and all turn to the Philippines as a potential game changer that will revitalize Vatican II's vision of a truly local Church. By prioritizing the Philippines in a string of papal visits to Southeast Asia, the popes imparted and helped the local Church in the Philippines remember her unique history and mission to Southeast Asian peace. Although the popes declared their papal visits to be pilgrimages and showmanship of oneness with the local churches, the author finds that the apostolic journeys to the Philippines have been mutually beneficial to raising the public image of the Philippines (both spiritually and politically). Through text-based analysis of the papal speeches and author-based analysis of the popes' practical gestures during the visits in 1970, 1981, 1995, and 2015, the author explores a side of the Philippine Church's potential game-changing witnessing to a region that hosts the powerhouses of ancient religious traditions and civilizations. She becomes the pilot test to the Holy See's continuously evolving diplomacy, which projects an ecumenical, synodal, and intercultural public image.

INTRODUCTION

The recently held virtual event last April 8, 2021, celebrated in retrospect the seventy years of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Philippines and, indirectly, the quincentennial

celebration of the Filipino Catholic faith.¹ The said event was capped off with a webinar and was participated by contemporary names in the Philippine Church: Fr. Gregory Gaston (Rector of the Rome-based *Pontificio Collegio Filipino*); Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples); Archbishop Charles Brown (Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines); Cardinal Jose Advincula (Archbishop of Manila); and Archbishop Romulo Valles (President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines).² It is a widely accepted custom between social actors³ to commemorate their continued cordial relations through the years. Whether digital or person-to-person communication, the twin objectives are forming and promoting the public images of the nation-states in partnership. Public diplomacy rightly refers to this custom.⁴ But in the case of bilateral relations

¹ Robin Gomes, "Holy See, Philippines Mark 70 Years of Diplomatic Relations," April 9, 2021, accessed October 1, 2021, Vatican News <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-04/holy-see-philippines-70-years-diplomatic-relations.html>.

² Ibid.

³ The term, "social actor," in the author's point of view, rightly characterizes the agents in bilateral relations. Contemporary bilateral relations remain predominantly an inter-state dyad due to it being the oldest form of diplomatic relations. However, international relations scholars have become receptive to a contextualist multi-level approach due to globalization. See Andreas Ludwig, "The Complexity of Bilateral Relations," *EInternational Relations*, March 25, 2021, accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/03/25/the-complexity-of-bilateral-relations/>. The Holy See is not a nation-state but a transnational actor that has obtained a legal personality in the international fora for modeling diplomacy since the 4th century. Furthermore, what makes it transnational is its constituents. See Cedric Ryngaert, "The Legal Status of the Holy See," *Goettingen Journal of International Law* (2011): 831 and Jodok Troy, "The Pope's Own Hand Outstretched: Holy See Diplomacy as a Hybrid Mode of Diplomatic Agency," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3 (2018): 526.

⁴ Beata Ociełka defines public diplomacy as the "bilateral, dialogue form of political international communication, addressed to the audience abroad, realized through the media and through direct channels. Its goal is to shape or promote a positive image of the country, the society abroad, to shape positive attitudes to the addresser." See Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, "Areas of Cooperation of Poland and the Holy See in the dimension of Traditional Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy," *Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna* (2016): 157.

between the Holy See and the Philippines, the Gospel inculturation precedes the formal establishment of ties.

What is the purpose of public diplomacy? To put it simply, public diplomacy is the means to the ends of foreign policy. The instruments change depending on the priorities “a.k.a. foreign policy realities” set by its chief agent. For the Holy See, diplomacy is only an extension of the Church’s spiritual mission.⁵ Whether the exchanges are political (drawing up concordant and agreements, see CIC, no. 365) or cultural/religious/moral (Gospel inculturation/interculturalization), they all point to the advancement of the sanctity of life and religious freedom.⁶ On a related note, the priorities or foreign policy realities of the Holy See are “the migrants and refugees, the sick, excluded, and marginalized, the imprisoned and unemployed, as well as victims of armed conflict, natural disasters, and all forms of slavery and torture.”⁷

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of the Philippines is a triad of “preservation and enhancement of national security; promotion and attainment of economic security; and protection of the rights

⁵ The position of peace in the mission of the Church is indicated in the Compendium. The Compendium states “The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church’s mission of continuing Christ’s work of redemption on earth. In fact, the Church is, in Christ, a ‘sacrament’ or a sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world.” See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Makati City, Philippines: Word and Life Publications-CBCP, 2004), no. 516. Hereinafter abbreviated as “CSDC.”

⁶ The rights to life and religious freedom are the “ends” to the “means” of the Holy See’s public diplomacy. These are openly declared as a mission statement of the Holy See in its permanent observer to the United Nations microsite. In the optic of the sacred, the “transcendental nature” of the human person forms the basis of the rights above and solidifies evermore the mission of the Church in Gospel inculturation. See Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, “Discover the Mission,” <https://holyseemission.org/contents/mission/discover-the-mission.php> (accessed October 8, 2022) and Federica Genovese, “Politics Ex Cathedra: Religious Authority and the Pope in Modern International Relations,” *Research and Politics* (October-December 2015): 3.

⁷ Francis, “Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio: Instituting the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development,” (*Humanam Progressionem*) August 17, 2016, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/il-dicastero/motu-proprio.html>.

and promotion of the welfare and interest of the Filipinos overseas;”⁸ while its priorities are improved relations with China, Japan, and the United States; the ASEAN, the international Islamic community; the defense of the nation’s sovereignty and protection of the environment and natural resources in the maritime territorial context; domestic and foreign direct investments; and Overseas Filipinos. These objectives shall be carried out through public (multilateral, regional, and intergovernmental cooperation) and cultural⁹ (tourism) diplomacies.¹⁰

As there are more common points than differences in policies and priorities, the author shall take advantage of those commonalities in her theological investigation of papal visits to the Philippines and establish a claim on the role of the Philippine Church in Southeast Asian¹¹ peace. The theological sparks are endless, from the Philippine Church’s 85 million Catholics¹² to the assumption of crucial positions in the international fora by her leaders: Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (Prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples); Archbishop Bernardito Auza (Former Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations); Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia (Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations); and Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales (Papal Legate to the Tenth Plenary

⁸ Philippine Foreign Service Act of 1991 or Republic Act no. 7157.

⁹ Former Senior Affairs Research Specialist Andrea Wong sees the relevance of cultural diplomacy in the aftermath of globalization. She writes that cultural diplomacy creates an atmosphere of trust between nation-states and partner intergovernmental agencies. See Andrea Chloe Wong, “Philippine Cultural Policy: Unraveling its Full Potential,” *FSI Insights* 3, no. 2 (2016): 2.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs, “Philippine Foreign Policy,” accessed October 8, 2022, <https://dfa.gov.ph/80-transparency-category/75-philippine-foreign-policy>.

¹¹ The Southeast Asian countries are Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. See World Population Review, “Southeast Asian Countries 2021,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/southeast-asian-countries> (accessed October 26, 2021). The author limits the scope to Southeast Asia since one of the priorities of the Philippine foreign policy is the ASEAN.

¹² World Population Review, “Highest Catholic Population 2021,” accessed October 26, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/highest-catholic-population>.

Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference). Towards the conduct of this modest research, the author will investigate a few verbal and practical communications of the popes during their papal visits to the Philippines in 1970, 1981, 1995, and 2015.

THE GLORY OF THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH IS THE GLORY OF THE MOTHERLAND

THE FIRST PAPAL VISIT (NOVEMBER 27-29, 1970)

For the first time in the Universal Church history, a pope visited Asia and selected the Philippines as the first item on the agenda. During this time, the nation's capital (Manila) had witnessed a prelude to what Robert Tilman dubbed as a "difficult decade"¹³ characterized by several human-made and natural catastrophes. The former (human-made) was a series of student-led protests against the reelection of former president Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and to appeal for the conduct of a non-partisan constitutional convention in 1971. Apparently, the late president pointed to members of *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) as "probably" affiliated with either the Communist Party or Christian Social Movements;¹⁴ he even expressed in his 1971 State of the Nation Address (SONA) that communism "is the principal enemy that slowly saps the vitality of our nation."¹⁵ On a not-so-related note, James Kroeger writes that Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), which provided for the spiritual, catechetical, and ministerial needs of the grassroots, flourished around this time. At the same time, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)

¹³ Robert Tilman, "The Philippines in 1970: A Difficult Decade Begins," *Asian Survey* 11, no. 2 (1971): 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 143-44.

¹⁵ Ferdinand E. Marcos, Sr., "Sixth State of the Nation Address," January 25, 1971, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1971/01/25/ferdinand-e-marcos-sixth-state-of-the-nation-address-january-25-1971-2/>.

assumed a monitoring role through the issuance of pastoral letters.¹⁶

Several fragmented distrusts and fears occurred in both the local and regional contexts. To this, papal visits or apostolic journeys would have to be “strategic.”¹⁷ One of the ecclesial reforms of Vatican II that proved to be helpful against distrust and fear was “collegiality.” As a skilled diplomat that received training from the Academy, convening with the Asian bishops in person would make this ecclesial reform a reality. In Paul VI’s address to the bishops, he said, “None better than an Asian can speak to Asian. None better than he should know how to draw from the treasures of our rich cultures the elements for building up in Asia of a Church which will be one and catholic, founded upon the Apostles and yet different in its lifestyles.”¹⁸ The choice of words was plausibly rhetoric in its emphasis on collegiality and the local churches’ giftedness.

The highlights of Paul VI’s papal visit to Manila were meetings with consultative groups such as 1) the diplomatic corps

¹⁶ James H. Kroger, *Becoming Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2003), 19.

¹⁷ Papal diplomacy is strategic for its personal appeal. Furthermore, 1970 was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the new way of being Church (as expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 76: “The Church herself makes use of temporal things insofar as her own mission requires it.” alongside the success of formal colonies transitioning to self-determination. See Angeli Francis S. Rivera, “The Practical Implications of Pope Francis’ Culture of Encounter and its Objectives of Establishing and Maintaining Peace in East Asia,” *MST Review*, 23, no. 1 (2021): 95; United Nations, “International Trusteeship System,” accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/history/international-trusteeship-system-and-trust-territories>; Jodok Troy, “The Papal Human Rights Discourse: The Difference Pope Francis Makes,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 41, no. 1 (2019): 72. DOI: 10.1353/hrq.2019.0003; and Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 7 December 1965, no. 76. In this paper, the version of *Gaudium et Spes* will come from: *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Vatican Collection, vol.1, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 1984). Herein abbreviated as GS.

¹⁸ Paul VI, “Address of the Holy Father Paul VI to all the Bishops of Asia,” *Vatican Archive*, November 28, 1970, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701128_vescovi.html.

(from which papal nuncios assume the deanship of the diplomatic corps in Catholic countries); 2) the Asian Bishops; 3) the youth and the young professionals; and 4) the urban poor. These sectors have become papal visit staples ever since. Whether it is the Paulinian effect or the grace of the visits, papal visits are strategic public image tools. Agnieszka Orzelska Stączek interprets them as formal fora for cooperation between the Holy See and the host nation-state.¹⁹ For them to be strategic, papal visits must be carefully crafted to advance the perennial foreign policies on the rights to life and religious freedom. When foreign policy priorities change, it only means structural changes to peace have occurred (at least in the Philippine setting). Hence, the original itinerary of meeting only with the bishops have expanded to strategically include those in the BCCs like the youth and the poor.

It was this two-liner excerpt from an address to the BCC that firstly unveiled the important role of the Philippines to peace in Asia (specifically Southeast Asia, the context of this study). She was given a vocation: “This land has a special vocation to be the city set on the hill, the lamp standing on high giving shining witness amid the ancient and noble cultures of Asia. Both as individuals and as a nation you are to show forth the light of Christ by the quality of your lives.”²⁰ “Amid the ancient and noble cultures of Asia” clearly highlighted the uniqueness of the Philippines vis-à-vis her neighbors. In Southeast Asia alone, her counterparts are

¹⁹ Agnieszka Orzelska Stączek quotes former Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano on the perks of the papal diplomatic enterprise, “A papal diplomat cares about spiritual matters, which include matters concerning the Church, human rights, moral problems, universal values. His essential task is to contribute to the expansion and implementation of the Gospel message, while protecting the interests of the Church but also the state in which he is accredited. Taking care for the development of human and religious values, he serves all citizens of the country,” in Orzelska-Stączek, “Areas of Cooperation of Poland and the Holy See in the dimension of Traditional Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy,” *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna* (2016): footnote no. 5.

²⁰ Paul VI, “Address of the Holy Father Paul VI to the Members of Various Communities,” *Vatican Archive*, November 29, 1970, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701129_enti-sodalizi.html.

Indonesia, and Thailand, which are frontrunners of Islam and Buddhism, respectively.

On the other hand, “to witness or be the light of Christ” means to give ecclesial and moral support to Catholic and Christian minorities and to foster dialogue with other faiths and peoples of goodwill. From a theological standpoint, Paul VI could only be executing the infant Vatican II reforms, like *Missio ad Gentes* articles 1 (Christian witnessing) and 3 (forming Christian communities). Douglas Johnston and Brian Cox would call actions as these as “diplomacy that integrates the dynamics of religious faith with the conduct of international peacemaking.”²¹ But from the side of international studies, tapping on the religious heritage would be the same as getting support to advance the rights to life and religion in Southeast Asia, especially with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which had been a constant subject of Paul VI’s World Day of Peace messages. Showing the strong relations between the Holy See and the Philippines would be akin to, “the Vatican is our friend, not our enemy.” After all, the geographical location of the Vatican City-State and the nationality of Paul VI totaled to additional efforts to promote the spiritual mission of the Church to former colonies in Southeast Asia. Insofar as “additional efforts” are concerned, the only Southeast Asian nations that have diplomatic relations with the Holy See back then were the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Did the public image of the Philippines improve in the aftermath of the first papal visit? If the context is the Philippines to Holy See, the answer is YES. Amid the assassination attempt (which, if successful, could harm the public image of the Philippines in general), Paul VI had nothing but amiable words and praises. Before leaving for Oceania, he said, “the Catholic Church has for centuries been fully at home.”²² Whether it was the famed

²¹ Douglas Johnston and Brian Cox, “Faith-based Diplomacy and Preventive Engagement,” in *International Relations and Religion*, Vol. 3, eds. Ron E. Hassner and Isak Svensson (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2016), 183.

²² Paul VI, “Radio Message of the Holy Father Paul VI to all People of Asia,” November 29, 1970, *Vatican Archive*, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701129_popoli-asia.html.

Filipino hospitality or the success to prevent the assassination, two objective outcomes to the public image of the Philippines are worth mentioning. First, the FABC founding fathers (which included the Philippines) received Paul VI's support to create a regional conference in Southeast Asia. Second, the FABC founding father's brainchild, Radio Veritas Asia (RVA), obtained a papal blessing. It was successfully handed to FABC when the conference was fully instituted in 1974.²³ On the opposite side of this regional success in new media, the mass media in the Philippines was heavily regulated by the Marcos regime while scattered faith-based protests came from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Catholic hierarchy, and a few Protestant leaders from the National Council of Churches (NCCP).²⁴

THE SECOND PAPAL VISIT (FEBRUARY 17 – 22, 1981)

In Southeast Asia, proxy wars between the capitalist and communist ideologies were prolonged; while the ASEAN dropped its former anti-communist stance and thought of strengthening its collective security mechanism (against foreign conquests) through the membership of the countries from Indochina. Among the contested, Vietnam remained a country of interest to the US and USSR since it had strong military influence over Laos and the then People's Republic of Kampuchea.²⁵ Meanwhile, in the Philippines, a second oil price shock, increase in the world interest rates, a prolonged martial law, capital flights, low investment returns and debt crisis (majority were from public and quasi-public projects)²⁶—all which took place in fragmented periods from 1974 to 1980 led the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 5.92 (1971-1980) to 1.80

²³ Radio Veritas Asia, "About RVA," accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.rvasia.org/about-rva>.

²⁴ Rolando Del Carmen, "Philippines 1974: A Holding Pattern ~ Power Consolidation or Prelude to a Decline?" *Asian Survey* 15, no. 2 (1975): 136-139.

²⁵ Thomas W. Robinson, "The Soviet Union and Asia in 1981" *Asian Survey* 22, no.1 (1982): 21-22.

²⁶ Robert S. Dohner and Ponciano Intal, Jr., "Debt Crisis and Adjustment in the Philippines," in *Developing Country Debt and the World Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 174 and 177.

(1981-1990).²⁷ Then on January 17, 1981, martial law was momentarily lifted.

Reasons for the sudden lifting of martial law a month²⁸ before the scheduled papal visit remained classified up to the present. Could it be the annunciation by John Paul II or the resumed talks between the Reagan and Marcos administrations that led to the unexpected demonstration of democratic leadership? Nothing was set in stone. Jesucita Sodusta and Artemio Palongpalong stipulate that although martial law was lifted, it did not restore essential political and civil liberties such as expression and political participation.²⁹ Hence, from an outsider's point of view, it was a roller coaster ride for the public image of the Philippines. If not for the global attention on Vietnam and Cambodia, the public image of the pearl of the orient might have suffered plentifully.

Since the last papal visit was a decade and a year ago, it was timely for a trusted moral authority to reinstate its interests and concerns for the Philippines and Southeast Asia. The papal visit itinerary published at the official Vatican website disclosed that the purposes of John Paul II's visits were to beatify the first Filipino saint, Lorenzo Ruiz, and the other fifteen Christian martyrs³⁰ and to express solidarity with the local Churches of the region³¹. While the purposes were religious and pastoral in nature, the message of John Paul II to the former president and the Filipinos deserves a read between the lines. He said, "In my desire to know personally the peoples of Asia, I wanted my first papal visit to be the

²⁷ Asian Development Bank, *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints, and Opportunities* (Mandaluyong, Philippines, 2009), 39.

²⁸ Proclamation No. 2045 s. 1981 was signed on January 17, 1981.

²⁹ Jesucita Sodusta and Artemio Palongpalong, "The Philippines in 1981: Normalization and Instability," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1982): 285.

³⁰ John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness John Paul II to the President and to the People of the Philippines," *Vatican Archive*, February 17, 1981, accessed October 8, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810217_manila-presidente.html.

³¹ John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II During His Visit to the Auditorium of Radio Veritas Asia," *Vatican Archive*, February 21, 1981, accessed October 8, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810221_manila-auditorium.html.

Philippines.”³² From the optic of international studies, this is comparable to the idiom, “You [Philippines] are the face of something [Southeast Asia].” In the online Cambridge dictionary, this idiom means “What you can see of something.”³³ In other words, there are two underlying messages here. First, the Philippine situation reflected the Southeast Asian situation. Second, the Philippines can do *something* that would also benefit the region and the continent where she belongs. At this moment, John Paul II utilized tracks I and II diplomacies at its best³⁴ by making a Filipino the center of beatification alongside local Church representatives from Taiwan, Macau, and Japan. In this way, the beatification contributed to the positive public image building of the Philippines. This is counterchecked with Thomas Diez’s analysis on religious diplomacy, which states that even though the Holy See lacks sovereignty, it has *full* status in international society; it can speak for its transnational constituents and bridge for state and non-state actors without being geopolitically interested.³⁵ This is the same pope who established the Office of Papal Mediation, which ended a century-old war between Argentina and Chile³⁶ after all.

The highlights of John Paul II’s first papal visit to the Philippines were meetings with consultative groups such as the 1) diplomatic corps; 2) bishops, members of religious congregations, Catholic organizations, and movements; 3) youth and families; 4)

³² John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness John Paul II to the President...”

³³ “The Face of Something,” *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/face-of>.

³⁴ Track 1 diplomacy is the official or the primary peacemaking tool in delivering a sovereign’s foreign policies in the bilateral and multilateral levels. Whereas Track II diplomacy enables transnational actors to use moral authority and influence to consciously stimulate public opinion and hasten the official peace process. See Jeffrey Mapendere, “Track One and a Half Diplomacy and the Complementarity of Tracks,” *Culture of Peace Online Journal* 2, no. 1 (2008): 67 and Anne Stensvold and Ingrid Vik, “Religious Peacemakers on the International Scene: Hopes and Motivations,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 3 (2018): 10.

³⁵ Thomas Diez, “Diplomacy, Papacy, and the Transformation of International Society,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 4 (2017): 32-37.

³⁶ “Argentina-Chile: Agreement to Accept Papal Mediation of Dispute Involving the Beagle Channel Region,” *International Legal Materials*, 18, no. 1 (January 1979): 1-3.

Islamic and Christian communities; and 5) Tondo urban settlers, landowners and workers from Bacolod sugar cane plantations, Morong refugees, lepers, and Baguio indigenous tribes. There are many things to be said here. First, there was a scheme behind the groups/sectors that he met; it was in fact, consistent with FABC's triple dialogue with the poor, cultures, and other faiths. For instance, "In the same way, I wish, through this apostolic trip, to express my respect and consideration to all Asia, to all the countries that are neighbors in this part of the world. To the members of the Christian Churches, whom I have the joy of calling also brothers and sisters of Christ...and to those who belong to non-Christian religions, I want to extend a sincere greeting as a friend and brother within the only family of humanity."³⁷ Second, his itinerary included groups primarily affected by the domestic problems stated above. Inasmuch as tremendous efforts were done to conceal extreme poverty, the pope was well-aware with what was happening. At one point, he even had to dismiss the first lady's offer to stay at the Coconut palace³⁸ that was prepared exclusively for him. Third, his choice of words illustrated to a greater extent that as a pastor, he is obligated to tell the truth, even if the recipient of the message is the head of the state. He said, "Legitimate concern for the security of a nation, as demanded by the common good, could lead to the temptation of subjugating to the state the human being and his or her dignity and rights. Any apparent conflict between the exigencies of security and the citizens' basic rights must be resolved according to the fundamental principle—upheld always by the Church—that social organization exists only for the service of man and for the protection of his dignity, and that it cannot claim to serve the common good when human rights are not safeguarded."³⁹ Similar to any statesman on an official tour, a pope must pay

³⁷ John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness John Paul II to the Authorities and the People of the Philippines," Vatican Archive, February 17, 1981, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810217_manila-arrivo.html.

³⁸ Official Gazette, "Papal Visit Trivia," *Official Gazette*, accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/state-visits-ph/popeph/papal-visit-trivia/>.

³⁹ John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness John Paul II to the President..."

courtesy to the chief of a host country before he resumes the rest of the items in his papal visit agenda. Since meeting with the head of a state is first in the protocol, first impressions are important in creating and forming public images. John Paul II gave the impression of a moral force, and it is likely that there is no single subject in his criticism. In other words, the message could target not only the former president but other heads of states that have been unsuccessful in protecting the fundamental human rights of their constituents. Papal visits could be used as platforms for conscientization, especially that the “whole world is watching.”⁴⁰ The first in the protocol concluded with a call to action, which appeared to be a reawakening of the country’s mission in Southeast Asia: “Although small in size of land and population compared to some of its neighbors, the Philippine nation has undoubtedly a special role in the concert of nations, to consolidate peace and international understanding, and more particularly in maintaining stability in South East Asia, where it has a vital task.”⁴¹

Fourth, meeting the groups of prime pastoral concern was courageous; with a herd of national and global media representatives documenting every action and gesture, John Paul II had carefully projected himself as a pastor than a statesman. This public image is extremely crucial in dealing with countries that have been colonized in the past. For this reason, the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz was an “ace in a hole;” for the saint’s martyrdom was a powerful memory that successfully evoked national sentiment and unity. Furthermore, there is nothing more intercultural than trying one’s best to communicate in the vernacular of the host country.⁴²

⁴⁰ Apparently, this phrase was used by anti-Vietnam War protesters during the 1968 democratic convention in the US. See Zach Goldhammer, “The Whole World is Watching, Ferguson,” *The Atlantic*, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-whole-word-is-watching-ferguson/378729/>.

⁴¹ John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness John Paul II to the President...”

⁴² John Paul II’s artistry proved to be useful in evoking national sentiment by citing St. Lorenzo Ruiz’ famous line in Filipino: “*Kahit maging sanglibo man ang buhay n’yaring katawan pawa kong ipapapatay, kung inyong pagpipilitang si Kristo’y aking talikdan.*” See John Paul II, “Holy Mass for the Beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz,” *Vatican Archive*, February 18, 1981, accessed October 26, 2021,

In actual fact, papal visits speak for the credibility and moral effectiveness of papal diplomacy (and religious diplomacy for that matter) to whichever context it may deem appropriate: The Roman Pontiff, the Successor of St. Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both bishops and the faithful.”⁴³

Did the public image of the Philippines improve after the second papal visit? It was religiously and culturally affirmative. But as of the special task to peace and stability in Southeast Asia (that popes Paul VI and John Paul II had conveyed to be the special role of the Philippines), an excerpt from the sixteenth State of the Nation Address of the former president might give a hint of utilizing the improved public image to a confident declaration of shift in the Philippine foreign policy priority:

This has been made possible by a foreign policy that again during this period irrevocably broke our long confinement to a vision of the world in Cold War terms and opened us to the exploration and discovery of ties with Socialist countries, to our making’ common cause with the whole of the Third World, and to the forging of community ties with our ASEAN neighbors. **We have attained a voice and influence in the councils of nations unheard of during the time when we were habitually mistaken for a surrogate of a global power.** We have advanced our interests, and we believe the interests of peace and progress in the world, by steadfastly looking to the ideals of cooperation among nations and of interdependence in the cause of meeting problems writ large on the global scene.⁴⁴

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1981/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19810218_beatificazione-ruiz.html.

⁴³ Vatican II, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, 21 November 1964, no. 23. Herein abbreviated as LG.

⁴⁴ Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr., “Sixteenth State of the Nation Address,” *Official Gazette*, July 27, 1981, accessed October 8, 2022 <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1981/07/27/ferdinand-e-marcos-sixteenth-state-of-the-nation-address-july-27-1981/>. Emphasis mine.

Regrettably, the reputation and contribution of religious diplomacy (not only of the papacy but also of faith-based transnational organizations) were affected when Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations paradigm was believed to be the direction of global politics in the Post Cold War 1990s.⁴⁵

THE THIRD PAPAL VISIT (JANUARY 12-16, 1995)

The Holy See improved its public image in Southeast Asia between the first and second papal visits of John Paul II to the Philippines. For instance, the apostolic delegation to Singapore was raised to nunciature status in the midyear of 1981 and Cambodia in 1994, while apostolic delegations were sent to Laos in 1983, Myanmar in 1990 and Malaysia and Brunei in 1993.⁴⁶ In short, the Holy See had successfully established its presence in Southeast Asia, from which most of the credit goes to public diplomacy.

On the other hand, the Philippines' public image staggered to new and renewed challenges locally and abroad. As the country returned to democracy in the late 80s, much work had to be done in all angles of human development. Under the leadership of former president, Fidel V. Ramos, the government responded to prevailing economic problems through largescale industrialization. However, it did not do much to attract growth and investment returns as former political woes have resurfaced. Insurgents and secessionists aligned with communism and fundamentalism provoked the government to offer appropriate channels for peace

⁴⁵ Samuel Huntington mentions in his book, *Clash of Civilizations*, "Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations." Mentioned in Jeffrey Haynes, "Introduction: The Clash of Civilizations and the Relations Between the West and the Muslim World," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 17, no. 1 (2019): 2, DOI: 10.1080/15570274.2019.1570756.

⁴⁶ Data collected from the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to United Nations, "Diplomatic Relations of the Holy See," accessed October 28, 2021, <https://holyseemission.org/contents/mission/diplomatic-relations-of-the-holy-see.php>.

talks and amnesty.⁴⁷ The efforts, however, were far from the objective of national reconciliation. On a different note, the local Catholic hierarchy responded to Vatican II and FABC's call to reforms *ad intra* and *extra*, through the Second Plenary Council (PCP II) in 1991.

Amid the changing peace priorities, 1995 was a monumental year for the public image of the Philippines. She was chosen to host the 10th World Youth Day (WYD) and the 25th founding anniversary of the FABC. Furthermore, accompanying these joyous celebrations was the celebration of the 400th year of the Archdiocese of Manila and the Dioceses of Cebu, Caceres, and Nueva Segovia. A papal visit would positively benefit the public image of the Holy See and the Philippines in Southeast Asia and the whole world.

John Paul II's second papal visit highlights meetings with consultative groups such as the 1) diplomatic corps and civil authorities; 2) the youth; and 3) the bishops of the Philippines and Asia. Thus, few insights can be made. First, John Paul II once again used his art of conscientization by reminding the Filipinos of their role to peace: "Go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth—your own world first, our families, your communities and the nation to which you belong and which you love; and the wider world of Asia, towards which the Church in the Philippines has a special responsibility before the Lord."⁴⁸ As it was known, this special vocation did not only evoke national sentiment in the last two papal visits but also promoted the public image of the Philippines in Southeast Asia and the whole world. The impact of the 1981 papal visit to the Universal Church led to the naming of the WYD international youth center to Filipino saint, Lorenzo

⁴⁷ Carolina G. Hernandez, "The Philippines in 1995: Growth Amid Challenges," *Asian Survey*, 36, no. 2 (1996): 1.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, "Solemn Eucharistic Concelebration Homily of the Holy Father John Paul II," Vatican Archive, January 15, 1995, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19950115_manila-gmg.html.

Ruiz.⁴⁹ Second, there is a pattern/theme in the groups that he had consulted. In the first papal visit, the lay people dominated John Paul II's areas of concern. Whereas in the second papal visit, the lay and the hierarchy/religious were equally represented. The probable reason for this could be the FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, which sought to provide a synthesis for the previous plenary assemblies. For instance, the first and second plenary assemblies focused on ecclesial reforms *ad intra* and dialogue with the religions and cultures of Asia. In contrast, the third to the fifth plenary assemblies aimed social transformation and lay empowerment.

Interestingly, the PCP II strategic directives and the five pastoral priorities of the sixth plenary assembly (family, women and girl-child, youth, ecology, and displaced persons)⁵⁰ precluded global politics' renewed attention to the human rights discussion. Whether it is the prompting of the Holy Spirit or a sound situational analysis, the world could no longer deny that the nature of conflicts has changed from inter-state to intra-state in the post-Cold War periods (1990-onwards). Regrettably, global peace and human rights discussions from 1995 to 2015 seldom included religions and faith-based transnational actors.

Did the public image of the Philippines improve after the third papal visit to the Philippines? The answer is YES. Most of the reports about the 10th World Youth Day in Manila emphasized the five million attendance (which surpassed the previous nine). But from the perspective of theology, the real fruit of the event is the shift from the "center" to the periphery—which the author of this paper believed to be taken up by Pope Francis. The Philippines was the first in the Asian continent to host the WYD, and John Paul II had triumphantly predisposed the global youth to this occasion. In his November 21, 1993 message, he said, "So, the young Church of Asia is called in a special way to give a lively and vibrant

⁴⁹ Eric Jacquinet, "A Short History of WYDs." Pontifical Council for the Laity accessed October 26, 2021, <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en/sezioni/giovani/storia-delle-gmg.html>.

⁵⁰ FABC. "Journey of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference" accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.fabc2020.org/timeline>.

testimony of faith at the appointment in Manila. My wish is that she will know how to receive this gift that Christ himself is about to offer her.”⁵¹ The Vatican II popes have always believed that the Philippines would live to its role of genuinely witnessing the Asian Church. During the WYD 2016 in Krakow, former Philippine Ambassador to Poland, Ms. Patricia Ann V. Paez, mentioned that John Paul II and Poland being the “most devout” Catholic country in Europe with shared faith connections⁵² improved the Philippines-Poland public image. But the author of this study would like to add two more connections: 1) special vocation to the continent (Poland to Europe and Philippines to Asia) and 2) Gospel inculturation/maturity (Poland – 1056 years and Philippines – 501 years).

THE FOURTH PAPAL VISIT (JANUARY 16-19, 2015)

Amid the rise in intra-state conflicts⁵³ and the twenty-year gap between the third and the fourth papal visits, the author claims that the public image of the Holy See vis-à-vis Southeast Asia fluctuated only a bit. The justifications for these claims are the following: first, the apostolic delegation to Malaysia was raised to

⁵¹ John Paul II, “Message of the Holy Father John Paul II For the 9th and 10th World Youth Day,” *Vatican Archive*, November 21, 1993, accessed October 8, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_21111993_ix-and-x-world-youth-day.html.

⁵² DFA, “Visit of Pope Francis to Poland Underscores the Bond of Catholic Faith Between the Philippines and Poland,” accessed October 8, 2022, <https://warsawpe.dfa.gov.ph/example-pages/news-press-releases/334-visit-of-pope-francis-to-poland-for-world-youth-day-underscores-the-bond-of-catholic-faith-between-the-philippines-and-poland>.

⁵³ Antje Wiener tributes the rise to intra-state conflicts to the lack of formal mechanism to implement the norms of the liberal order. He said: “Tensions have been identified as conflicts that emerge between the wider “civic” and the narrow “civil” spaces of the society, between everyday “ordinary” and “universal virtues” respectively.” See Antje Wiener, “The Contested Freedom of the Moderns Conceiving Norm Contestation as the “Glue” for Reordering the Globalized World,” in *Democratic Multiplicity Perceiving, Enacting, and Integrating Democratic Diversity*, eds. James Tully, Keith Cherry, Fonna Forman, Jeanne Morefield, Joshua Nichols, Palo Ouziel, David Owen, and Oliver Schmidtke (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 314.

nunciature status in 2011, and second, Brunei and Vietnam welcomed the apostolic delegations in 1998 and 2011, respectively. The aforementioned countries are crucial to the Holy See's foreign objectives on the right to life (and integral human development) and freedom of religion. In addition, an apostolic delegation is only a step away from making the relationship official.

From the domestic side, natural and man-made disasters characterized years 2013-2014. A 7.2 magnitude earthquake that hit Bohol and Cebu was immediately followed by a strong typhoon (Yolanda/Haiyan) that affected the islands of Luzon and Visayas. Leyte reported the most casualties out of these catastrophes. Meanwhile, some parts of Mindanao struggled against small and large-scale attacks from extremists and insurgents despite the signed Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in January 2014.⁵⁴ Adding to the domestic woes was the contested West Philippine Sea that tensed the diplomatic relations between China and Philippines. The latter had formally requested an arbitral tribunal under the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS).⁵⁵

Pope Francis disclosed that the Philippines is the first item in his Asian agenda. In this way, he continues the papal visit tradition of his predecessors. He also takes after Benedict XVI in maintaining a close eye on China, Vietnam, and Myanmar. It appears that Pope emeritus laid the foundations while the current pope actualized them through his Secretary of State Pietro Parolin. Anna Carletti writes that Cardinal Parolin (before his appointment as Pope Francis' secretary of state), was among those who worked for Holy See-Vietnam relations.⁵⁶

Pope Francis visited the Philippines to express his solidarity with the victims of typhoon Yolanda. Included also in his itinerary

⁵⁴ Julio C. Teehankee, "The Philippines in 2015: The Calm Before the Political Storm," *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 37, no. 3 (2018): 228.

⁵⁵ Thomas Lum and Ben Dolven, "The Republic of the Philippines and US Interests - 2014," *Congressional Research Service* (2014): 1.

⁵⁶ Anna Carletti, "Francis' Style: The Holy See and its New Role in the International System" (paper presentation, 9th Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Giardini Naxos, Sicily, Italy, 23-26 September 2015).

were the 1) the diplomatic corps and civil authorities; 2) clergy and religious; and 3) youth and families. The visit was also a premature celebration of the quincentennial year of the Gospel proclamation in the Philippines. With these, a few insights can be made. First, Pope Francis' signature style, culture of encounter, was evident. This style builds and sustains social bonds, recognizes, and learns from differences and stands by concrete and straightforward actions.⁵⁷ Contemporary politics since post-Post Cold War became "personality-driven." In other words, a leader's charisma significantly affects the receivers of his message.⁵⁸ Truth be told, the most documented parts of the fourth papal visit were those that unleashed the "Pope Francis effect," such as changing the itinerary to be close to the people, speaking in the vernacular and of the heart (than reading the prepared text), and expressing consistent, straightforward gestures.

Second, there is no trace of public diplomacy in his papal visit. There is no pattern other than the calls for respect for life and religious freedom. Yet, the impact of his presence has bolstered the public image of the Holy See.⁵⁹ A staff from the Center for Media and Freedom Responsibility analyzed the Manila broadsheets and concluded that the papal visit "attracted Catholics who admitted having fallen away. Others who were not Catholics and even those who did not have or belong to any religion proclaimed admiration for the man."⁶⁰ The Holy See public diplomacy had triumphed

⁵⁷ These are the author's interpretation of the four pillars to building a people of peace found in Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*. According to Anna Carletti, decoding pope Francis' diplomacy is easy because his apostolic exhortation has already declared the Holy See's future directions. See Carletti, "Francis' Style."

⁵⁸ Guy Golan, Philip Arceneaux and Megan Soule, "The Catholic Church as a Public Diplomacy Actor: An Analysis of the Pope's Strategic Narrative and International Engagement," *The Journal of International Communication* (2018): 16.

⁵⁹ Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility had gathered and analyzed Manila broadsheets and produced a comprehensive report detailing what happened from the first to the last day of the papal visit. See Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, "Reporting the Papal Visit: Transmitting the Charisma, Faith, and Spirituality," February 12, 2015, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://cmfr-phil.org/media-ethics-responsibility/ethics/reporting-the-papal-visit-transmitting-charisma-faith-and-spirituality/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

again in Pope Francis's agency. He spoke of the same Catholic social teaching principles as human dignity, integral human development, solidarity, common good, and subsidiarity. His charisma and spirituality combined made the Gospel ever new, accessible, and relevant.

With the public image of the Holy See made green, what becomes then of the public image of the Philippines? When the pope visited, it was the third year (year of the poor) of the nine-year new evangelization plan towards the quincentennial celebration of the Catholic faith in 2021.⁶¹ Some Filipinos had expressed hope for the new Philippines.⁶² However, the road to 2021 was tough for the Philippine Church's showmanship of discipleship. For one, the Filipinos voted for the man who "promised to bring change," According to Jan Robert Go, those changes brought new perspectives⁶³ that have challenged and collided with the values of truth, freedom, justice, and peace.

CONCLUSION

Article II, Section no. 7 of the Philippine constitution states, "The State shall pursue an independent foreign policy. In its relations with other states the paramount consideration shall be national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and the right to self-determination." The exercise of this independent foreign policy depends on the foreign policy priorities of the incumbent president. In 2017, former DFA Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano explained that it meant, "friends to all, enemies to none."⁶⁴ The new administration has also adopted the same foreign

⁶¹ See CBCP, "CBCP Pastoral Exhortation on the New Evangelization," July 23, 2012, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://cbcponline.net/cbc-pastoral-exhortation-on-the-era-of-new-evangelization-longer-version/>.

⁶² Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, "Reporting the Papal Visit: Transmitting the Charisma, Faith, and Spirituality."

⁶³ See Jan Robert Go, "Of Choices, Changes, and Challenges; the Philippines in 2016," *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 38, no. 1 (2016): 60. 48- 73. The War on Drugs was the beginning of the demise of the public image of the Philippines in the context of human rights.

⁶⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs, "PH Independent Foreign Policy Thrust Explained by Secretary Cayetano in NY Event," accessed October 8, 2022,

policy thrust, which as of this writing, will have no plausible foresight to the historical and cultural public image of the Philippines and, indirectly, to the special vocation entrusted to the Philippine Church. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of the eight priorities of the current administration are clear on the directions to political and economic growth, but investment in human capital appears to be unclear or missing. In short, the thrust and realities are only reactive; and expectations on health and education (two of the sectors greatly hampered by the global pandemic) shall remain bleak. Secondly, the ongoing pandemic might have made communications and services digitalized and more accessible, with Filipinos resorting to creative ways to survive the economic and social shocks. However, misinformation has widened divisions, success remains an ally of material prosperity, and worse, good people and institutions [even the Philippine Church] have been branded as public enemies.

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<https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/news-from-our-foreign-service-postsupdate/14065-ph-independent-foreign-policy-thrust-explained-in-secretary-cayetano-ny-media-event>.