

# **TOWARDS RECONCILIATION AND REBUILDING OF OUR NATION PASTORAL LETTER ISSUED BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SRI LANKA**

1. *The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts*", declared the opening words of the Pastoral Constitution on the church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes* of the 2nd Vatican Council, echoing the concern the Church in the modern era faces in its mission; of witnessing to the redeeming love of God for humanity. It is this same concern which moves us, the members of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka, to address all men and women of goodwill and very specially the Catholic community in Sri Lanka, discerning, reflecting and resolving to act on the different challenges that stem from the perennial message of the Gospel, the good news announced by Christ, in the present day realities of our motherland. We are aware that as disciples we are called upon by Jesus, Our Lord and Master, to be "the salt of the earth" [Mt. 5: 13] and the "light of the World" [Mt. 5:14]. Yet it is our common experience that even though made in the very image and likeness of God we too are subject to sin and the attraction to evil. It is this which makes us all the more resolved to rise up to this call and to be of some service to our beloved motherland and its people in the joyful yet courageous witness of our faith. This we wish to do in all humility and in solidarity with all our other fellow citizens whose religious traditions too offer us a rich background for common action and commitment.

## **PART 1 – The Dignity of Man and Woman**

2. The Sacred Scriptures do tell us that human life is of a nobility which reflects God's own very image, [cfr. Gen. 1:26] that it is God's own breath which man received at creation [Gen. 2:7] and that he was placed at the pinnacle of all creation. And so that Psalmist sings

*“what is man that Thou are mindful of him or the son of man that Thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour: Thou has set him over the works of Thy hands, Thou hast subjected all things under his feet”* [Ps. 8:4-6].

Yet, in spite of such glory, human nature unfortunately rebelled against God abusing its freedom and experienced the destructive force of evil and death which muddled its life. The II Vatican Council teaches that because of this abuse of freedom *“man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains”* [G.S.13]. This ongoing struggle between good and evil is something we experience individually as well as collectively be it at the local or at the global level. It continues to cause pain and suffering as well as death and destruction at every stage of human history.

3. As Christians, that notwithstanding, we believe that God did not leave humanity in this state of subjugation to the overwhelming force of evil but did come on earth in the person of His only begotten Son Jesus who in a sheer act of love and self offering died on the Cross redeeming us from this misery and showing us the way to true freedom and fulfillment and the way to overcome evil and the power of death surrounding us. Commenting on this self-offering of Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI stated: *“His death on the Cross is the culmination of the turning of God against Himself in which He gives Himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form”* [Deus Caritas Est. 12]. For God, even though He is a God of justice, loves humanity immensely and thus cannot but be merciful. And so, this freeing of mankind from slavery to self through God’s total self giving on the Cross is the very path to true freedom and nobility; the way of the Cross.
4. For, Jesus did say so when He defined what it is to be His disciple: *“if anyone wishes to be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* [Mc 8:34]. What Jesus wanted His disciples to do was to give up the love of self and to discover in this way the liberating

and ennobling love of God and the commitment to work zealously for the creation of a new world of love through the opening out of our hearts to all our fellow human beings and indeed to all of creation. In this manner the community of disciples, the Church is called upon to be the Sacrament of salvation to all humanity. It has to do so, by not only celebrating but also living faithfully its call to give witness to the values of the kingdom of God, such as self denial and mercifulness, patience, tolerance and love which are the true ingredients of a transformation towards integral freedom and progress as well as true prosperity, justice and peace. Jesus called this a conversion from sin to the ways of the Kingdom of God [cfr. Mc. 1: 15].

5. For the Sacred Scriptures do tell us that God created mankind not just for a solitary life but for community. As *Gaudium et Spes* taught *“God did not create man as a solitary being. For from the beginning “male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.”* [G.S. 12]. Indeed the essential call of Jesus to His disciples, to deny self, accept the sacrifices of each day with joy and follow Him and His own example of life were meant to create a world based on true love and freedom for all. *“You have heard it said you shall love your neighbour and shall hate your enemy? But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you”* [Mt. 5:43-44]. And Jesus did show how to love selflessly by not only dying on the Cross but also praying for those who nailed Him to that Cross *“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* [Lc. 23:34]. The desire to be merciful and to forgive and forget evil committed by others is the highest expression of this freedom and dignity to which we are called.
6. The Sacred responsibility of us Christians then is to work for the betterment of humanity as a whole, which calling comes to us from the very life, teaching, the loving death and the glorious resurrection of Christ. And so, we cannot but be totally committed to the well being of all mankind and indeed of all creation. As disciples of Christ we belong to Him and become part of His very mission – ennobling and sanctifying human life – in every era and working to create “the

new heavens and the new earth” [2 Peter 3:13]. Such sanctification of humanity and creation is achieved through our constant struggle against personal and societal attraction to sin and evil and the inborn human instinct to dominate others and our commitment to ennobling humanity. It is in this way that we can restore all things to their perennial beauty and to their God given glory.

The Second Vatican Council spoke of this struggle of man caught between the attraction for evil and the summons to a higher and nobler way of life when it stated that “as a weak and sinful being, man often does what he would not and fails to do what he would” [G.S. 10]

7. In this struggle against selfishness and evil we are indeed called upon to join hands with all our fellow citizens and the best of what their own religious and cultural traditions offer. It is a service of love for humanity which we as Christians need to render with selfless zeal. The words we thus address our own co-journers in life in this our beautiful homeland and all our fellow Christians, with goodwill to all, constitute a call to create and work for a true civilization of love, freedom, nobility and integral development with justice and fairness for all.

It is in this sense that we wish to reflect on the present situation of our country, Sri Lanka, calling upon all concerned to work towards the needed changes or improvements to what is happening and has happened in the recent past, especially since the Pastoral Letter issued by our Conference on 10th June 1984 entitled “towards the re-building of the Sri Lankan nation.....”. We do so also with utmost humility wishing only the well being of all and the prosperity and progress of our beloved motherland and with no vested interests whatsoever.

## **PART II: Sri Lanka, A Moment for Learning**

8. Sri Lanka is at the cross roads of a possible new beginning after a disastrous 30 year conflict which did bring much suffering and pain to all our people of every race and religion, the effects of which are still being felt and causes the emergence of many new challenges. In post

independence Sri Lanka a resurgence of nationalism by a legitimate desire to redress peacefully, historical wrongs done especially to the Sinhala Buddhist majority under the long colonial rule resulted unfortunately in the failure to address issues affecting the Tamil speaking minority for no fault of theirs. This situation led to repeated communal violence and finally rebellion and open warfare between the two parties of the Divide. The repeated failure of our political leaders, both Sinhala and Tamil, to be magnanimous towards the other community led to the accentuation of the conflict. A political will to settle outstanding issues and to search for a new national identity on the basis of the philosophy of unity in diversity was not to be found. Often times we did not hold out sufficiently our religious beliefs as indicators on the basis of which solutions to the problems that arose could have been found, and so, missed an opportunity. As it was once mentioned by one of our elder statesman, Dr. Colvin R De Silva: “two languages one nation; one language two nations”. This preference accorded to the Sinhala language and culture over the culture of the other minorities severely strained national unity. The sad result of all of that was a violent conflict which cost the loss of thousands of lives, the destruction of property, displacement of entire communities, economic stagnation and the wastage of a huge amount of resources of the country on a meaningless war.

9. In their Pastoral letter of 1984 the Bishops did state that *“the different peoples of this country can form one modern nation inspired by the best in all our religions and cultures”* [P3]. Infact the Bishops warned that *“conflict and division will be harmful to all, will invite foreign intervention, making all groups lose not only freedom but also our civilized and human way of living”* [ibid]. This, exactly is what happened.

### **Unity in Diversity**

10. It is our view that even though the war ended the terror activities of the LTTE , a satisfactory political solution to the issues facing the Tamil community in the North is yet to be found and a sense of simmering unease which continues to prevail needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency. It is true that all races and religions in this country need to live in harmony and peace with one another. Indeed in some areas like

the South and the hill country this trend is laudably visible. But that does not necessarily connote that integration requires abandonment of one's traditional territories or their organized colonization by others. Peace can also mean different racial and religious groups living in their own traditional areas of residence and still identifying themselves as part of one country. While it is true that anybody should be allowed to move in or move away from a given area in any part of the country, there is nothing essentially wrong if someone were to claim a given area as his or her own traditional habitation. The Muslim Community, for that matter, has lived in harmony with others in all these areas. Both options are possible. Human life could be very much linked to a given territory or occupational orientation which helps to cultivate a series of relationships and these become part of one's identity. Besides, such identity can be achieved in a mixed setting too. Neither of these options need be a cause of worry or fear. Once again the guiding principle in all of this should be "unity in diversity".

11. And so, we feel that considering the North and East as the area in which traditionally the Tamil community has lived can be accepted and the administration through democratic structures of this area by their own leaders need not be considered a hindrance to peace and integration or unity. It has to be a two way track too which welcomes others while being linked to one another through family and other ties. What would cause a nagging sense of irritation on the Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim communities at that would be any attempt to change radically and substantially the ethnic composition of any area through organized colonization. Unfortunately the introduction of a large number of administrative and security personnel who have come from the other areas into the North and East seems to have been understood as that kind of attempted colonization by the Government. We feel that this policy could be counterproductive to true integration and unity and should be changed. If not, it could only lead to further tension and future violence. Such intermingling indeed should take place, but in a gradual and natural way as has happened in some areas in the South already.

### **A New Beginning**

12. In this sense, the proposals made by the Lessons Learnt Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) on the gradual integration of the different communities in the country as a whole, and in the North and East in particular, should be taken seriously.

It is important that in this matter, in order to achieve such integration the policy of trilingualism be introduced vigorously and all school going children and youth be encouraged and incentivized to study not only their own mother tongue at school but also the other major language of Sri Lanka in addition to the link language – English. It is also our conviction that trilingual capability should be made a necessary condition for the conferring of university degrees on graduates. Besides that, it is also necessary to ensure that the provisions of the National Languages Act are further strengthened and the public and private sector employment, especially in those positions that deal with people's day to day lives, is opened only to those who have mastered the three languages.

13. The Catholic Bishops sincerely believe that given the time period already lapsed after the end of the war, meaningful steps need to be taken to ease the political climate in the North and East, which would permit the early return to normal life of the war affected people. Delay and procrastination would only lead to irresolvable blocks to peace and good neighbourliness in these areas.

Among the steps we urge our political leadership to urgently implement are:

- a) The appointment of civilian Governors for the Northern and Eastern provinces, ensuring that there be no political interference on the freedom and responsibility of the people in this area to Govern themselves, as the other provinces do,
- b) We commend the Government for holding the Provincial Council elections for the North and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) for the positive gesture of willingness to collaborate with the Central Government. And we therefore call upon both parties to continue to work together for the restoration of true peace and unity in the Country while safeguarding the principles of justice and truth as well as the prosperity and social progress of the people in this area.
- c) We appeal to the Government to limit the activities of the security forces to the areas of internal or external security and related issues only,
- d) Expediting and streamlining the process of re-settlement

of the internally displaced people of all races and religions in their original habitats and returning to them the original places of their residence and employment. Meaningful and expeditious steps need to be taken to help them reconstruct their own houses and get back to the trade in which they were originally engaged, especially in the agricultural and fisheries sectors. While appreciating the efforts of the Government in matters like the re-construction of roads, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure such as power and water supply we call upon them to expedite the resettlement of the people as an even greater priority. In this matter the Indian sponsored Housing Construction Programme should be expeditiously implemented. Paying adequate compensation to the IDP's for the loss of house and property in their areas should also be seriously considered. Special programmes for the war widows and orphans, the war-disabled should be put in place.

- e) Being open to the idea of an honest and sincere assessment of what happened and what caused the conflict is also important. We feel that issues of accountability on disappearances and any cases on the violation of fundamental rights need to be courageously looked into and if there is any wrongdoing by anyone such should be rectified in the interests of justice. People of all races should be allowed to commemorate their dead ones and correct information on the war dead of both the soldiers and the rebels needs to be diffused. A special commemoration day celebrated both in the North and in the South to remember all those who died in the war, Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or others, would help ease tension and the traumas of the past.
- f) Any detainees held in prison on suspicion of being involved in terror activities should either be prosecuted or released expeditiously. We appreciate the fact that many such detainees have already been rehabilitated. This we state because we are aware of a significant number of prisoners being still held without proper trial and their case inordinately delayed. This kind of situation is a cause of much suffering to their families. Laws that permit the free use of detention merely on suspicion or torture should either be repealed or relaxed as the war situation is now officially over. Laws such as the



Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the emergency special regulations need to be repealed. Structures for the protection of human rights such as the Human Rights Commission (HRC) should be strengthened constitutionally. All forms of torture, abduction and disappearance of people should be banned and the provisions of the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or Act 22 of 1994 on the prohibition of torture should be carefully observed,

- g) It is also necessary to search for the whereabouts of all missing persons and where such persons are confirmed to be untraceable, "death certificates" should be issued to their families so that they may carry on with their lives after a suitable period of mourning and a scheme to pay some reasonable compensation to them should be established.
- h) Without procrastinating any further the Government and the Tamil political parties should commence a dialogue in order to seek a politically acceptable yet workable solution for the problems affecting the people in North and East. Such a solution, we feel, should be on the basis of an effective and strong devolution of power to the provinces. We call upon the TNA to be flexible in this matter even agreeing to a process of stage by stage devolution with legal binding if necessary. As for the East, a solution that is acceptable to all communities, i.e. the Tamils, the Sinhalese, the Muslims and others, living in this area should be worked out. Whatever that solution be, it must ensure that a social, economic and cultural module which respects the dignity, the absolute equality and the unity of hearts is realized within this area as well as in the rest of the country. Any discriminatory approach which poses a threat to true progress and freedom should be willfully rejected.
- l) Most of these proposals are indeed found in the final report of the LLRC, the commission which studied issues of reconciliation in the aftermath of the war. The LLRC was truly a national process and as such it is our own analysis of the situation with suggestions for true healing. And so, procrastination in this matter would only lead to frustration and despair among the affected parties, the consequent internationalization of an essentially local issue, instability and perhaps a return to

violence which would be most unfortunate. The Government should take these proposals seriously and take steps to implement them with a sense of urgency and responsibility. A time frame should also be decided for such implementation. The publication and diffusion of the report in the public media and in the local languages and providing all the necessary authority to those responsible for the implementation of these proposals should be speedily and effectively done. Educating the public periodically on progress achieved in this matter would also be a way in which credibility on the process can be established.

### **The Constitution**

14. In this light it is our firm belief that Sri Lanka should shed off all those clauses or conditions in its constitution that could be interpreted or read to justify different forms of discrimination against its people. Discriminating practices only create suspicion and division. Indeed we are convinced that the present constitution which was initially introduced in 1978 and amended already 18 times and tends to absolutize power in the hands of just one person, the holder of the office of President, is not compatible with the requirements of a democratic state and so should either be abandoned and a new constitution adopted or totally amended with sufficient checks and balances on the authority of the Executive. The proper interpretation of the laws pertaining to the judiciary and the legislature as well as their relationship to the Executive should be well defined in the latter case. The recent impeachment debate on the Chief Justice has shown how much the actual constitution is weak and flawed and needs a thorough revision, or a total replacement. In the making or revision of a constitution the principle of a two thirds majority vote in parliament alone is weak and insufficient. And so, a broader consensus among civil society and religious leaders as well as the different ethnic or political groups should be sought and the constitution so drawn up should be approved not only by such a two thirds majority in parliament but also by the people at a referendum held absolutely devoid of all political interference. A constitution that ensures the principle of unity in diversity is that which would truly help the country to heal its past wounds and to move forward in unity towards

peace, justice and prosperity. Devolution of power to the provinces or the regions should also be considered important in seeking unity of hearts and providing a constitutional framework for such unity. Fear of accepting diversity is harmful to true unity. We call upon our leaders to be magnanimous and open to devolution especially if the constitution upholds the office of the executive presidency.

### **The Independence of the Judiciary**

15. In this exercise the independence of the Judiciary should be preserved and defended at all cost. The Judiciary which has the sacred role of interpreting and applying the meaning of a given law should be totally free from interference by the other stake holders of power, the legislature and the executive. The contention that the Legislature is above the Judiciary is seriously flawed and is untenable. It is true that the Legislature draws up or approves laws which enter into the statute books of a country but it is the Judiciary that applies such laws to a given context. And its independence is the guarantor of true justice. The Legislature should not assume the role of both framing the laws and then interpreting them which is an invasion of the role of the judiciary. Besides, no one should be placed above the laws of the country and no immunity from prosecution for anyone should be permitted in the Constitution as that would hinder any citizen from challenging any undemocratic or illegal actions of the executive. The cardinal principle in this matter should be that absolutely no one is above the law. All those who are elected to power are at the service of the people and are firmly bound to follow the laws of the country in an exemplary manner. The legislature should not usurp the role of the judiciary and if the constitution allows for that, such authority should be removed.

### **The Independent Commissions**

16. It is our firm conviction that in order to further strengthen the rule of law and Justice in Sri Lanka, constitutional provision should be made for a totally independent Elections Commission, Police Commission, Public Service Commission, Bribery and Corruption Commission and the Human Rights Commission as well as a Constitutional Council. These will ensure a totally transparent form of Governance which a

true democracy demands. This country has suffered much in the last few decades from political interference in these areas of public life casting serious doubts on the credibility and fairness of the public service.

17. The Elections Commission should have total independence of action at all times especially during elections as the past record of Sri Lanka on this matter has left much to be desired. Once elections are declared officially in a given area or nationally in the matter of the Presidential or general elections or even local Government elections, the incumbent office holders whether it be the President, the Prime Minister and his or her Government, the Provincial or Pradeshiya Councils or Municipal Councils should cease their administration and an alternative Council of independent state officials like the Chief Justice, the Speaker of Parliament and the Elections Commissioner as well as the IGP and the Secretary of Defence, the Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs should take over the administration of the State or the Governor of a given province or the Secretary of a Pradeshiya Sabha of a given area or the Municipal Commissioner should take over the care of these bodies and man the day to day administration until the newly elected office bearers take their respective oaths and are installed in office. This alone would ensure a free and fair election. The elections should be conducted in every case, freely without violence and above all allowing for total independence from State or other political manipulations. During this interim period the normal administrative matters should be handled by that caretaker administration or caretaker Government. The people should be allowed the fullest freedom to exercise their sacred duty and democratic right. If this principle is not maintained strictly the rule of law itself would suffer. The need for an independent elections commission is absolutely vital not only in order to ensure the credibility and the moral authority of the elected persons but also as a requirement of justice and fairplay. The Machiavellian principle of "might is right" should be shunned altogether in this matter.
18. The Police Commission should ensure that all the officials in the service of peace, justice and the fair implementation of such justice to all, carry on with their duties impartially, honestly and in keeping with their dignity and that there be no political interference in this service, keeping upto the highest standards of fairplay for everybody. This

Commission should also ensure that elections are conducted freely and fairly rendering vital assistance to the Elections Commission in this matter. Police officials should be adequately compensated, rewarded and promoted strictly on merit and on the principle of efficiency, people friendly attitudes and fairness. All law enforcement authorities should be free of corruption or abuse of power and any person resorting to such behaviour be brought to justice and dealt with according to the law of the land. No political or other interference should be allowed to tarnish the role of this all important component of a true democracy.

19. The role played by the Public Service in any country determines not only the efficient functioning of its system of Government and Administration but also ensures its smooth running and people friendly attitudes. It also enhances transparency and public trust. Political interference in the public service oftentimes renders it a stumbling block to progress, kills efficiency and initiative, leads to corruption and lethargy and scuttles appreciation of service and promotions on the basis of merit.

We call upon our political leadership to take steps to ensure that the dignity of this all important component of public life is maintained, rendering it the subject of an independent commission.

20. One of the disastrous consequences of political bungling in this country, in its post independence history, has been the gradually increasing and endemic orientation towards corruption in all strata of political life and in the public service. This has become even worse with the introduction of free market policies. All efforts to stem the tide in this national malaise had been weakened largely by political interference and the watering down of the structures that could effectively control and completely eradicate this cancer.

There was a time when even members of Parliament found guilty of corruption were removed from office but this process too had been reduced to ineffectivity through the different constitutions introduced lately. Political interference has destroyed the credibility even of the existing structures for the eradication of corruption. And so it is necessary that a sufficiently strengthened Bribery and Corruption eradication commission be established in Sri Lanka. It should be

guaranteed freedom from political and other interference, be established with the necessary legal and punitive authority in order to eradicate this malaise nationally and should also be called upon to carry out a nationwide campaign against corruption at all levels.

### **Human Rights**

21. With increasing political control over peoples' lives and the disastrous basis on which constitution making has been carried out in Sri Lanka there has been a gradual but sure increase in the violation of fundamental rights of people. Due to inherent weaknesses appearing in the constitutions of 1972 and 1978 specially through the removal of constitutional safeguards guaranteeing equality which were enshrined in the earlier constitution, carried out to satisfy the hunger for power and supremacy of some sectors of our society and its political leaders, the basic rights enshrined in the International Human Rights Charter have continued to be eroded in the past forty years or so. The draconian laws like the PTA and the continuous use of emergency or special powers to face up to the challenge of overcoming different politically motivated conflicts have worsened the situation. The thirty year war as well as the rebellions of 1971 and 1988-89 are some such situations. Abductions and disappearances have been one of the worst forms of such violations that have taken place from the 1971 conflict even upto recent times. Accountability too has suffered much. Different Governments have been in place during this period and the reports of the commissions appointed to investigate cases of assassinations and disappearances of people have not seen the light of day. The local human rights commission has, so to say, no teeth or sufficient independent authority to act on these cases and has lost its effectivity in bringing to book those who have engaged themselves in such acts of violence.

Accountability issues affecting the war in the North, the July 1983 riots and the conflicts that exploded in the South in 1971 and 1988-89 resulting in excesses on both sides of the divide each time, need to be sufficiently addressed. For example, an alarming number of assassinations of political leaders and media and civil society personnel in these past 40 years have not been seriously inquired into. We do not understand why such inquiries were not put in place which would surely have helped clear the doubts. Such acts of

violence have happened during the terms of different Governments. We also do not understand the inordinate delays in the publication of the reports of such inquiries. Reluctance to study these and other issues courageously and honestly could only strengthen the hands of those who keep on denigrating our motherland, here and overseas. It is our conviction that a stronger and effective national body as well as programmes of formation of the general public on fundamental rights and their inalienable value should be priorities for Sri Lanka. Our country stands to gain by a more pro-active and open mindset in this matter and it would help restore the rule of law. If the Constitution of the land and the structures that guarantee the fundamental rights of the individuals and of all communities are not effective, it is inevitable that resort will be made to international fora, which would be a serious threat to the sovereignty of the country.

22. A constitutional council which would approve the appointment of some of the statutory office bearers or propose names for such appointments to the executive and interprets the compatibility of laws to be presented in Parliament with the constitution of the country or the existing basic laws, is a necessity for a truly transparent and credible democracy. Sri Lanka too should make constitutional provisions for such a statutory body.

### **PART III: The Open Market Economy**

23. The open market economy introduced in the late seventies has brought with it indeed some improvements to the standards of life of the people on the whole. This can be seen in the increasing use of modern technology and successes of human endeavour in all spheres of life especially in the areas of communication, education, economic life, standards of life style and greater participation in public life by the people. Sri Lanka has improved its quality of life on the whole in this regard.
24. Yet, the open market economy has also caused many negative effects, such as increased consumerism, waste, secularization of life and its inherent values, an increasing sense of individualism, moral and spiritual degradation, serious threats to family life and increasing recourse to phenomena such as divorce, birth control and abortion, drug and

alcohol addiction especially among the youth, commercialization of almost every aspect of life, corruption, the underworld, breakdown of law and order and violence and above all the increasing gap between the rich and the poor and the marginalization of many types of people whose life becomes unbearably difficult. The open market economy has also intensified the debt situation of the country. Successive Governments have continued and even increased the ratio of borrowing, that Sri Lanka has now become a debt servicing country without a proper vision or plan for economic freedom. The result of all of that is the tremendous financial burdens that are being heaped on the vast majority of the people of this country. Development is indeed much needed yet it should not be achieved at the cost of leaving even the future generations in debt to the international and national money lending institutions.

25. Even though exact statistics may vary and maybe disputed, malnutrition does exist in Sri Lanka. There are many families who just cannot manage even one proper meal a day. And among the working classes there are many who are unable to ensure decent living standards for their families. The living conditions especially of the plantation workers and the fishermen need to be improved and urgent attention should be given to this. Trade Union action has been at times put down ruthlessly and since most of the Unions are politically controlled the workers have remained subservient to their political masters and muted in spite of the many difficulties they have to wade through. Among special categories of such workers are those in the Economic Processing or Free Trade Zones and the Estate workers. The status of the fishermen and the daily paid labourers is even more difficult. Poverty also has made hundreds and thousands of our people to seek better prospects overseas and most of these engage in menial jobs. Sadly such categories of workers are increasingly subjected to inhuman treatment and exploitation by their foreign masters. This has become a new form of slavery. The Government should through negotiations with such foreign Governments ensure that the sons and daughters of Mother Lanka are treated with dignity whatever their work be and that job agencies, local and foreign, are monitored to prevent them exploiting our workers for meagre profit.



Poverty also seems to strike those who do white collar jobs. Many of these families find it difficult to make ends meet each month on their salary day. The gap between the rich and the poor tends to widen in this scenario in the pursuance of the actual economic policies.

Besides, the choice to move ahead rather ambitiously in the areas of tourism and of the modernization of industries as well as certain mega development projects like the construction or expansion of airports, harbours and projects connected with urbanization and infrastructure is commendable indeed. Yet, these should not hurt and disturb or cause large scale displacement of people out of their areas and their means of employment or damage to the environment. We are particularly concerned about the situation facing our fishermen, especially those who have been engaged in this activity over many decades in the Islands off Kalpitiya. The drive to provide greater facilities in this area for tourism is causing much consternation among them. Their concerns too should be attended to.

26. The different systems tried out in the past by different Governments to help the poor and those in real need have all been failures due to the fact that such help has been heavily politicized. Schemes such as Jana Saviya and Samurdhi have been, by and large, run by politically motivated administrations and have, often enough, ended up in discriminatory practices and have not been able to cushion the ill effects of the economic, free for all, on the poor. The latest of these, the Divi Naguma scheme too runs the risk of being an instrument of the present Government for its own political posturing. The Government should strive to help the poorer sector of the country without any discrimination by protecting them from the ill effects of the open market system which often protects only “the haves”. This latest scheme should preferably be totally freed from political interference.
27. The free market type of economy often opens the way to moral degradation for it tends to exalt individualism and give a wrong interpretation to freedom. It also places money and profit at the helm of everything. Thus spiritual and moral values get relegated to the backyard. Everything becomes a matter of profit and earthly happiness which, as we know, does not really last and often causes

greed and anxiety. It also tends to weaken the moral conscience of humanity leading to a confusion on what is really good or what is really evil. It is clear that the moral conscience of a nation cannot be left to the free fall of the open economy and should be protected and safeguarded as a priority.

28. And, true development is not just a journey towards wealth and prosperity without the development of the inner life of man – his conscience, his relationship with the others and with God or the religious principles he believes in. Blessed Pope John Paul II stated so; “development must not be understood solely in economic terms, but in a way that is fully human, it is not only a question of raising all peoples to the level currently enjoyed by the richest countries, but rather building up a more decent life through united labour, of concretely enhancing every individual’s dignity and creativity as well as his capacity to respond to his personal vocation, and thus to God’s call” [Centesimus Annus 29]
  
29. Thus it is necessary that ethics and spiritual values be sufficiently insisted upon in our pursuit of material development and prosperity. The state should encourage such a process of adequate spiritualization of Sri Lankan society. The support of the religious and civil society leaders and their guidance should be obtained in this kind of process. In this light it is also necessary to ensure that freedom be not interpreted to mean, space to do anything one wishes for oneself. Such evils which militate against the sacredness of life such as violence, the activities of the underground, pornography and abortion should not be tolerated. These demean human dignity. True development, it must be always remembered, “consists in the priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of the person over things and in the superiority of spirit over matter” [Pope John Paul II: Redemptor Hominis 16]
  
30. It is also because man is not just an object of development. He is the master of this process of development, its true subject. Thus the dignity of man stands at the base of all development. For as, the Sacred Scriptures stated, man’s unending dignity stems from the fact that he was created by God, in His own image and likeness, carries

God's own breath in him, has been redeemed from sin through the sacrificial death of His only begotten Son and is called to a totally ennobling and glorified eternal existence in communion with God. Thus each human being is more important and valuable than all the rest of creation. This dignity, he carries within himself, irrespective of all differences.

### **Pluralism**

31. It is for this same reason that pluralism which adorns the social fabric of our nation needs to be accepted, respected and safeguarded. No one is essentially more important than the others. Acceptance and learning to associate such differences positively in the pursuit of prosperity is important. Pluralism which is inclusive is the healthy way to build unity and prosperity in any given society. Sri Lanka is no exception to such a vision. And so, it is the responsibility of the State and of all citizens to respect, protect and enhance the different cultures and religions of this nation allowing these to co-exist peacefully and find their own sense of balance in the bigger picture.
32. And so, all forms of divisive thinking or of hegemony and dominion either in any given area or in the nation as a whole should be shunned. It is our firm conviction, especially in the light of the tragedy that struck us in the past 30 years, that Sri Lanka should learn to seek unity in diversity and never be allowed to slide back into an era of suspicion and hate as that could once again lead us to destruction. Some of the present trends of certain extremist racial or religious groups instigating hate and suspicion within the public in Sri Lanka against others should be firmly put down by the Government. We appeal to all concerned to be extremely cautious in this matter and to refuse to be drawn into such hate campaigns easily. It is only mutual acceptance, respect and trust that would ensure peace and prosperity for all and avoid further disaster.
33. Last but not least, a true democracy necessarily connotes a strong and sturdy media. It means the recognition of the right to information on the part of the people as well as the duty of the Media to provide such information to them as truthfully and as responsibly as possible. And so, media freedom should be accorded the highest consideration by the State as well as by all our citizens. Recent trends however are worrying in that we have heard of assaults, abductions and attacks on

journalists as well as attacks on media institutions themselves. We call upon the Government to be more vigilant in this matter and to curb such activities of certain unruly elements.

34. The concerns we have voiced above are those that have been the result of our own reflection in the light of not only the message of the Sacred Scriptures and the social teachings of the Church, but also of our own interactions and common sharing with leaders of other religious persuasions as well as of civil society leaders in Sri Lanka. We have sought to share these concerns with all our fellow citizens and specifically with our brethren in the faith out of a genuine love for our beloved motherland Sri Lanka and her future progress and prosperity as well as unity. We do so with utmost humility and in no way do we wish to gain anything for ourselves but only to be of some service to all our fellow citizens.

Indeed, we assure all that along with them and with God's help we too as fellow citizens will work to make this nation the pearl of the East and the joy of the nations.

#### **PART IV: Conclusion**

35. And finally, beloved brethren in Jesus, the Lord told us: You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. 'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven'. (Mathew 5:13-16)
36. On the day of our baptism, each one of us was presented with salt and a candle, to instil in us the call to be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world'. This, except in cases of adult baptism, was done on our behalf by our God-parents. However at the Sacrament of Confirmation, each one of us was invited to make a conscious commitment to the believing community and the society at large. In the introduction to the Rite of Confirmation it is stated: "By the

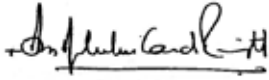
sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit". We are also invited to the table of the Lord as a peace loving community ready to sacrifice oneself for the good of others following the example of Jesus who gave the new commandment of "love one another as I have loved you" [Jn. 13:34-45]

37. And so, as a believing community imbued with the strength of the Spirit, let us reaffirm our faith in the God of history who continues to labour along side of us and resolve to do all what we can to continue to spread the values of the Kingdom. Let us work to safeguard the moral and spiritual wealth of our motherland without being slavish to the pursuit of material well being, especially becoming conscious and responding to the needs of the poor and the marginalized in the consumerist and secular economic set up that has emerged lately in Sri Lanka.
38. Let us safeguard by all means the dignity and right of every human being, including the unborn. As God has created us all equal with diverse talents and gifts and continue to preserve us all, let us collaborate with God in preserving the dignity and the rights of all and especially of life.
39. As Christian people let us eschew all forms of violence and hatred and promote a culture of peace and reconciliation where all peoples of our land can live with dignity and honour. As a civilized nation let us strive to settle all disputes by peaceful means of negotiation and better understanding of the points of views of others.
40. Owning our own personal and collective sins of omission and commission let us publicly ask pardon at services in churches and seek remedial action. Visits from the parishioners in the north and the south can be organized in small numbers to pray together and to seek practical ways of being neighbours, to each other, in the Gospel's sense of the word. We need to be forgiven by each other and let us walk with each other to build anew the face of the earth with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

41. Let us, as Christians called upon to follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who out of His unending love for mankind became the finest expression of God's infinite mercy for humanity, commit our lives totally for the creation of a just and fair society in Sri Lanka which is based on mutual respect, love, joy, harmony and peace. Let us work unceasingly and in union with all our brothers and sisters of the other religious traditions for a truly spiritual and noble transformation of this country into a haven of brotherhood and true progress and prosperity for all.
42. We pray unceasingly to Mary, our Blessed Mother, our Lady of Lanka to protect this nation from any further racial or religious conflicts, as she interceded so powerfully for it during the II world war, and protected it from being drawn into that disaster. May Blessed Joseph Vaz, the Apostle of Sri Lanka pray for his beloved adoptive land and obtain for all our Sri Lankan people true peace and joy which flows so generously from the pierced heart of Jesus, a heart filled with love for us.

**Given On: 8th December 2013**

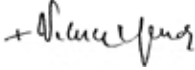
***On the feast day of:  
The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary***



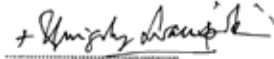
✧ His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith  
President of the C.B.C.S.L.  
Archbishop of Colombo.



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph  
Vice President of the C.B.C.S.L.  
Bishop of Mannar.



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Valence Mendis  
Secretary General of the C.B.C.S.L.  
Bishop of Chilaw



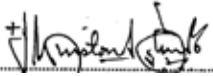
✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Kingsley Swampillai  
Bishop of Trincomalee



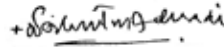
✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam  
Bishop of Jaffna



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Vianney Fernando  
Bishop of Kandy



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Winston S. Fernando, S.S.S  
Bishop of Badulla.



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Norbert M. Andradi, O.M.I  
Bishop of Anuradhapura



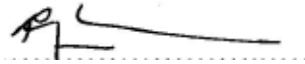
✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Harold A. Perera  
Bishop of Kurunegala



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Cletus C. Perera, O.S.B  
Bishop of Rathnapura



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Ponniah  
Bishop of Batticaloa



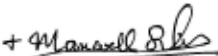
✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Raymond K. Wickramasinghe  
Bishop of Galle



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Marius Peiris  
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. F. L. Emmanuel Fernando  
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo



✧ Rt. Rev. Dr. Maxwell G. Silva  
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE  
CONCEPTION OF OUR LADY  
8<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2013

