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Episcopal Succession in the Philippines

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Episcopal Succession in the Philippines

DOMINGO ABELLA

WHOEVER undertakes to prepare an accurate catalogue of the Philippine hierarchy through the centuries from data supplied by the published chronicles available in this country is doomed to disappointment. He will quickly discover that there is little agreement among his sources of information. Episcopal lists differ substantially from each other. In a number of instances, one chronicler would name someone as the actual occupant of a see at a given time, while another chronicler would either pass him over in silence or aver that the see was vacant at that same time.

I found myself in this predicament when I took up historical research as a hobby during the years of enforced leisure imposed upon me by the Japanese Occupation. The more books I consulted on the subject the greater the confusion appeared to be. This in spite of the fact that the authors of many of these books were the official chroniclers of their respective religious orders, regarded as reliable on other subjects pertaining to ecclesiastical history. I could not see why their testimony could not be accepted without question in a simple matter like that of the chronological sequence of the bishops of a given diocese. But the fact stood out plainly: their witness did not agree. Whom to believe? Would I be justified in following one author and rejecting the others merely

on the basis of my personal preference? Common sense told me that such a course would be unfair to the chroniclers themselves as well as to historical truth. In desperation I gave up my project then to wait for better times. These came in 1951.

In the middle of that year I was admitted to the Vatican Archives, thanks to a letter of introduction from the Most Rev. Egidio Vagnozzi, then Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines. My self-imposed mission was not a difficult one, even for a person like myself with no special training as a researcher. It was simply to verify from the primary sources at the Vatican those facts regarding episcopal succession in the Philippines on which the secondary sources were at variance, thus removing once for all from our annals discrepancies which have been perpetuated for centuries.

Although the specific object of my search was the episcopal chronology of the See of (Nueva) Cáceres¹, a project which I had undertaken in connection with my studies on the local history of my own Bikol region, the temptation to take notes on the other Philippine sees was irresistible, since documents about them were continually showing up in my scrutiny of the consistorial records. It is thus, I believe, that researchers unconsciously expand the scope of their investigation beyond the limits they had originally set.

From the Vatican I transferred my activities to the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See in Rome. I knew that all the official communications from the Spanish crown to the papal court, including presentations of candidates for the episcopal dignity, were coursed through diplomatic channels and hence would have copies or minutes extant in the Embassy's archives. I had previously examined a printed catalogue of these documents published by Fathers Luciano Serrano, O.S.B., and José

¹ Although the present archdiocese of Naga is often referred to as the see of Nueva Cáceres, the earliest official documents refer to it simply as Cáceres, without the "Nueva".

M. Pou y Martí, O.F.M.² Not only are these documents invaluable as complementing the material I found in the Vatican, but their testimony threw much needed light on certain obscure or controversial topics: for example, the case of candidates for the episcopal dignity who had been presented by the King of Spain but did not receive the Vatican's *fiat*. Since these presentations had not been acted upon in consistory, they were naturally absent from the consistorial records in the Vatican Archives.

From Rome I went to Seville and my next objective, the *Archivo general de Indias*, that vast repository of Spanish colonial records. It occurred to me that I was actually retracing the course followed by the official papers in the making of a bishop of the Spanish empire. Now, in Seville, I stood before the original documents of the Supreme Council of the Indies, the instrumentality which generally initiated the steps towards the promotion of an ecclesiastic to the episcopate.³

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

These steps must be clearly distinguished and kept in mind if we are to follow the whole process. Much needless debate in the past and even in recent times on this subject might have been avoided if the terminology employed in designating these steps had been precisely defined. These were the steps:

1. RECOMMENDATION. When a vacancy occurred in a diocese of the Spanish empire, the Council of the Indies deliberated on the choice of a successor. Each member of the

² *Archivo de la embajada de España cerca de la santa Sede*, Rome, 1915-1921; Madrid, 1925. On my second visit to Spain in 1954-1956 I found that the archives of the Embassy had been transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Madrid.

³ The Spanish crown's intervention in the ecclesiastical affairs of the colonies was based on concessions granted by the Holy See constituting the Spanish sovereigns royal patrons of the Church in the Indies. One of the privileges of this *patronato real* was that which empowered the king to nominate or present to the pope candidates for episcopal office in the Spanish Indies.

Council sponsored one or more candidates, sometimes, not always, selecting them from a list submitted by the previous incumbent. After thorough discussion an official list was recommended by the Council to the King.

2. ROYAL SELECTION. The King either chose one of the names on the list or, setting the list aside, nominated one of his own choice. The royal action was known at the time as the *election*, and the recipient of the honor was from that moment called the "bishop-elect."⁴

The royal choice having been made known to the Council, this body had the ministerial duty of notifying the appointee of the honor conferred upon him and requesting that he signify whether he accepted it or not. A reply could be returned in behalf of those who happened to be overseas at the time of their election either by their religious superiors, if they were religious, or their accredited agents (*apoderados*). In case the ecclesiastic chosen rejected the honor, the procedure described above was repeated. Otherwise the Council went on to the next step.

3. PRESENTATION. An official communication was coursed to the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See directing him to *present* the name of the royal "bishop-elect" to the pope and request his *fiat* or confirmation of the appointment. At the same time, royal decrees were dispatched to the appointee and to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the colony in which the vacant diocese was situated. These decrees instructed the royal appointee to take possession of his see at once ("while waiting for your bulls"), and ordered the colonial authorities concerned to allow him to do this. According to the accepted custom of the time, the royal election entitled the appointee

⁴ The term *bishop-elect*, in its strict signification, and as used to-day throughout the Catholic world, refers to a prelate who has been promoted to the episcopate by consistorial action but has not yet been canonically installed or consecrated. This is obviously quite different from an ecclesiastic who has simply been "elected" for presentation to the Holy See by a king with patronal rights. I use "bishop-elect" (in quotation marks) in the latter sense; without quotation marks in the former.

to assume the outward state of a bishop even before he was proclaimed as such at the Vatican. It needs to be stressed that the official steps taken up to this point were civil, not ecclesiastical in character.

4. CANONICAL APPOINTMENT. The Spanish ambassador, in making the presentation of the royal nominee, transmitted to the Vatican officials all the pertinent documents collected during the previous steps of the process. The Consistorial Congregation, having taken cognizance of the royal message, now conducts an inquiry into the life and qualifications of the candidate, and submits its findings to a secret consistory of cardinals. A favorable action by this body, confirmed by the pope and made public, constituted what is often termed *preconization*.⁵ The necessary papal bulls of appointment were forthwith dispatched to the new prelate.

5. INSTALLATION. Upon receipt of the papal bulls of appointment the new bishop is installed or enthroned in his see. The rites of episcopal consecration, by which the sacrament of orders is conferred, do not, as such, pertain to the conferral of jurisdiction. However, these orders are necessary to hold episcopal office; hence their conferring must usually follow soon after the installation. On the other hand, they may not be conferred before the arrival of the papal bulls of appointment.

Because of this several years might pass before a royal appointee in some remote colony could be consecrated. In some instances the papal bulls never arrived. In the meantime, however, the "bishop-elect" actually administered his diocese, exercising all acts of jurisdiction which did not require episcopal consecration.

SOURCES OF CONFUSION

Chroniclers and historians have divergent opinions as to the precise step in the procedure just described which entitled

⁵ Fathers Ritzler and Sefrin, of whom I speak further down, called my attention to the fact that strictly speaking the term "preconization" bears no canonical meaning. According to canonical usage a consistory *promotes* an ecclesiastic to the episcopate or *provides* him with a bishopric. Hence the canonically correct term for the creation of a new prelate is not preconization but promotion or provision or canonical appointment. From this stage on the process is substantially that in force today.

a nominee to inclusion in a catalogue of the hierarchy. While some authors would include "bishops-elect" from the time of their election by the king, others prefer to exclude them and record only those who had been canonically appointed. Because some "bishops-elect" were, for one reason or another, never canonically appointed, a disparity is created in the published lists as to the *number* of occupants of a given see.

Of the first group of authors, some would date the beginning of episcopal tenure from the royal election; others from the presentation to the Holy See; others from the prelate's assumption of office. There thus results a conflict of *dates*. On the other hand, of the authors of the second group, some consider the acquisition of episcopal rank to begin from the moment of canonical provision, others from the moment of consecration, thus creating more confusion of dates.

Again, as a distinguished historian has pointed out, "the king not infrequently chose an ecclesiastic as bishop-elect and sent him as governor of the diocese *en vacante* until the bulls arrived. Sometimes the bulls never arrived, or the bishop-elect died or was transferred before they appeared."⁶ Historians vary in their treatment of cases of this nature.

Another source of confusion must be noted here. There were cases when an ecclesiastic residing in Spain was elected by the king for an overseas bishopric, was presented to the

⁶ C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1947), p. 181. Attention has been called to the same element of confusion by the present official historian of the archdiocese of Mexico, Mgr. Jesús García Gutiérrez, in his work *Regio patronato indiano* (Mexico, 1941), p. 87: "It sometimes happened that those who thus governed bishoprics . . . either died or were transferred by the king to other bishoprics before they received their bulls. Some never received their bulls at all, as for instance the Most Rev. Bergosa y Jordán, who, after governing the archdiocese of Mexico for three years, was sent back to his own bishopric of Oaxaca. Similarly, the Most Rev. Abad y Queipo was never more than bishop-elect of Valladolid. All these cause a thousand doubts and conflicts even today. If we consult the catalogues of bishops of any given diocese, we shall see that not two of them are in agreement, because some of them include as true bishops those who had merely been *elected* [by the king] while others exclude them . . ."

Holy See and was canonically approved (some even received episcopal consecration), but *resigned* shortly thereafter without having left Spain and seen his diocese. Canonically the episcopate had been truly and validly conferred on him and the diocese given to his charge. But the chroniclers of the remote colony where the see was located, even those who lived contemporaneously with the event, had no inkling whatever of what was going on in the mother country. Thus the chronicles of that particular see would record a *sede vacante* for that period, omitting all mention of a full-fledged bishop preceding that of the next actual occupant of the see.⁷ Because the prelates in these cases never reached their bishoprics, no record of their existence may be found today in the diocesan archives. Hence their omission from the episcopal lists is likely to be perpetuated, unless the error is corrected by a thorough examination of the pertinent records in Spanish and Roman archives.

As if this were not enough, we have confusion worse confounded by the inclusion in episcopal lists of "bishops" *invented* outright. I refer to those gratuitously given the miter by some old chronicler on the basis of insufficient evidence or sheer conjecture. The mere antiquity of the chronicle would then be taken as sufficient guarantee of its reliability, subsequent writers would repeat the error, and by frequent repetition give it the semblance of truth.⁸ Even modern

⁷ A case in point that of Bishop-elect Andrés Echeandía who was promoted in consistory for the see of (Nueva) Cáceres in 1775. See my *Bicol Annals*, I (Manila, 1954), 127-131.

⁸ This is illustrated in the case of San Pedro Bautista, a Franciscan missionary in the Philippines in the latter part of the sixteenth century, who was martyred in Japan. On the basis of the repeated statements of chroniclers to the effect that the saint had been *elected* by the king to be bishop of (Nueva) Cáceres before his martyrdom, some historians today would include him in the episcopal list of the said see. The fact of the matter is that he was never *elected* by the king, much less canonically *appointed* by the Holy See; see my monograph, "San Pedro Bautista—Obispo de Nueva Cáceres?" published in the Franciscan journal *Archivo ibero-americano* (Madrid, July-September 1956), pp. 355-375. Another case of the same nature is that of Manuel de Hendaya, included by Mexican historians in their published catalogues of archbishops of Mexico. This inclusion has no basis in fact; see my essay, "Manuel José de Hendaya y Aro—fué electo arzo-

historians, otherwise well informed, have not succeeded in avoiding this pitfall.⁹

Faced with this chaos (the term is not too strong to apply to the situation), I decided to seek the advice of the authorities in charge of the Vatican Archives. It was thus that I made the acquaintance of two unassuming German Franciscans who are universally recognized as the authorities on all questions bearing on episcopal succession: Fathers Remigius Ritzler and Firminus Sefrin. They were engaged at the time—and they still are—in continuing the monumental series, *Hierarchia catholica*, begun by their confreres Conradus Eubel, Gulielmus van Gulik and Patritius Gauchat. It may be noted in passing that *Hierarchia catholica* is generally recognized as *the* reference work on the hierarchy anywhere in the Catholic world covering the period from 1198 to 1730.¹⁰

According to Fathers Ritzler and Sefrin it is consistorial promotion (canonical appointment) that entitles an ecclesiastic to a place among the hierarchy of the Church. All the steps previous to this, even if taken by kings or governments endowed with the privilege of the *patronato*, may be disregarded in the preparation of an episcopal list, since, as pointed out above, such steps have no ecclesiastical character. The actual taking possession of a see, and even the rite of episcopal consecration, are likewise of no significance in this particular inquiry. If I understand Fathers Ritzler and Sefrin correctly, a prelate is to be considered the bishop of a particular see from the moment of his consistorial promotion, even if he should die or resign the see the moment afterwards without having received consecration or without having taken possession of his office.

bispo de México?" in the journal *Memorias de la Academia mexicana de la historia*, n. 4 (Mexico City, October-December 1956), 345-362, and in *Revista de Indias*, n. 68 (Madrid, April-June 1957), 223-239.

⁹ See Mgr. Jesús García Gutiérrez's rejoinder to my above-mentioned essay: "El Ilmo. Sr. Dr. D. Manuel José de Hendaya y Aro . . . nunca fué arzobispo de México," in *Memorias de la Academia mexicana de la historia* (January-March, 1958), pp. 5-7.

¹⁰ Eubel began publication of the series in 1898. The last volume to appear is the fifth, by Ritzler and Sefrin (1952).

If, then, we are to follow this criterion, the episcopal succession of any diocese cannot be constructed without reference to the consistorial records of the Vatican. This is all the more necessary in the case of old bishoprics whose early episcopal lists were prepared before the Vatican Archives were opened to researchers.¹¹ The early chroniclers are certainly not to blame for their mistakes; but it is difficult to excuse those who, writing in more recent times, with the primary sources available to them, continue to resort to secondary materials and, worse still, insist on adhering to them in spite of the most unexceptionable evidence to the contrary.

I am presenting herewith the episcopal succession of the see of Manila. After the name of each prelate I give only one date: that of his consistorial promotion to the see. Only in cases when a prelate was transferred from or to another see do I record other dates, namely, those of the consistorial acts by which these transfers were effected. At the end of the list I give the sources on which it is based. Although I have collected, also from primary sources, other dates and data, such as those of birth, death, royal election, presentation, resignation, etc. of prelates, I do not give them here because they are not considered pertinent to the purposes of an episcopal chronology. Authors of larger and more detailed works may take cognizance of them.

I should call attention to another characteristic of the consistorial records. In naming a new prelate, they invariably mention his immediate predecessor, thus leaving no room for mistakes of omission or commission. Thus I submit that in the list which I am going to present, constructed as it is on the basis of these records, the chronological succession of prelates is accurate.

THE SEE OF MANILA

The see of Manila was erected as a suffragan of the archdiocese of Mexico, under the advocacy of the Immaculate Con-

¹¹ In 1881 Leo XIII opened the Vatican Archives to the scholars of the world. Except for materials less than one hundred years old, researchers may examine and obtain copies of any document in the Archives.

ception, by the bull *Fulti praesidio* of Gregory XIII, dated 6 February 1579. On 14 August 1595, Clement VIII raised it to the rank of an archbishopric with the suffragan sees of Nueva Segovia, Cáceres, and Santísimo Nombre de Jesús (Cebu).

Of the four Philippine sees founded in the sixteenth century, Manila has the least confused episcopal series. While historians and chroniclers disagree with each other in not a few respects, particularly with regard to dates, they are almost unanimous on the order of succession of prelates. However, comparison with the Vatican records shows that most of the existing lists must be corrected in one important respect.

I refer to Bishop Ignacio de Salamanca of Cebu (1792-1802), whose name appears in many a "List of Archbishops of Manila"¹² between that of Juan de Orbigo and Juan de Zuláibar. Here we have a concrete example of what I pointed out earlier, namely, that not all those "elected" by the king were confirmed by the Vatican, or even presented for confirmation. For while it is true that Salamanca was issued all the documents concerning the royal election of his person to succeed Orbigo,¹³ he died as Bishop of Cebu and was never promoted in consistory as Archbishop of Manila. The Vatican record (*Acta Cameralia*, original ms., vol. 50, fol. 26) is clear and definite: Juan de Zuláibar was promoted to the episcopate on 26 March 1804 to succeed Juan de Orbigo as Arch-

¹² For instance, that of Buzeta and Bravo, *Diccionario II* (Madrid, 1851), 279; that of P. B. Gams, *Series episcoporum ecclesiae catholicae* (Ratisbon, 1873), p. 113; that of Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland, 1903-1909), 51, 314.

¹³ While historians are unanimous in saying that Salamanca never actually assumed the office of archbishop of Manila, since he died "before having received the dispatches of his new dignity" (Blair and Robertson), they nevertheless include him in their episcopal catalogues. Moreover, Blair and Robertson assert that Salamanca was "presented as archbishop of Manila," which is not correct if we are to give the term "presented" its proper meaning when used in connection with the exercise of the *patronato*. Salamanca was *elected*, but never *presented*, as the documents of the Spanish embassy to the Holy See disclose. It was Zuláibar who was presented to succeed Orbigo.

bishop of Manila. This correction having been made, the chronological list of prelates for the see of Manila is as follows:

Prelate	Date of Consistorial Promotion
1. DOMINGO DE SALAZAR, Dominican, first bishop	6 February 1579
2. IGNACIO DE SANTIBAÑEZ, Franciscan, first archbishop	30 August 1595
3. MIGUEL DE BENAVIDES, Dominican ¹⁴	7 October 1602
4. DIEGO VAZQUEZ DE MERCADO, of the secular clergy ¹⁵	28 May 1608
5. MIGUEL GARCIA SERRANO, Augustinian ¹⁶	12 February 1618
6. HERNANDO GUERRERO, Augustinian ¹⁷	9 January 1634
7. FERNANDO MONTERO DE ESPINOSA, of the secular clergy ¹⁸	5 February 1646
8. MIGUEL DE POBLETE, of the secular clergy	21 January 1649
9. JUAN LOPEZ, Dominican ¹⁹	14 November 1672
10. FELIPE PARDO, Dominican	8 January 1680
11. DIEGO CAMACHO Y AVILA, of the secular clergy ²⁰	28 November 1695
12. FRANCISCO DE LA CUESTA, Hieronymite ²¹	28 April 1704
13. CARLOS BERMUDEZ DE CASTRO, of the secular clergy	20 November 1720
14. JUAN ANGEL RODRIGUEZ, Trinitarian	18 December 1731

¹⁴ Promoted to the see of Nueva Segovia in 1595, and transferred thence to Manila.

¹⁵ Bishop of Yucatan, Mexico, since 1603.

¹⁶ Transferred to Manila from Nueva Segovia, of which he was created bishop in 1616.

¹⁷ Transferred to Manila from Nueva Segovia, of which he was created bishop in 1627.

¹⁸ Promoted to the see of Nueva Segovia in 1640.

¹⁹ Promoted to the see of Cebu in 1663.

²⁰ Transferred to the see of Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1704.

²¹ Transferred to the see of Michoacán, Mexico, in 1723.

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| 15. PEDRO DE LA SANTISIMA TRINIDAD,
MARTINEZ DE ARIZALA, Franciscan | 3 February 1744 |
| 16. MANUEL ANTONIO ROJO DEL RIO Y
VIEYRA, of the secular clergy | 19 December 1757 |
| 17. BASILIO SANCHO DE SANTA JUSTA Y
RUFINA, Piarist ²² | 14 April 1766 |
| 18. JUAN ANTONIO DE ORBIGO, Francis-
can ²³ | 15 September 1788 |
| 19. JUAN DE ZULAIBAR, Dominican | 26 March 1804 |
| 20. HILARION DIEZ, Augustinian | 2 July 1826 |
| 21. JOSE SEGUI, Augustinian ²⁴ | 5 July 1830 |
| 22. JOSE ARANGUREN, Recollect | 19 January 1846 |
| 23. GREGORIO MELITON MARTINEZ Y
SANTA CRUZ, of the secular clergy | 23 December 1861 |
| 24. PEDRO PAYO, Dominican | 28 January 1876 |
| 25. BERNARDINO NOZALED A Y DE VILLA,
Dominican | 24 May 1889 |
| 26. JEREMIAH J. HARTY, of the secular
clergy ²⁵ | 9 November 1903 |
| 27. MICHAEL J. O'DOHERTY, of the se-
cular clergy ²⁶ | 10 August 1916 |
| 28. GABRIEL M. REYES, of the secular
clergy ²⁷ | 25 August 1949 |
| 29. RUFINO J. SANTOS, of the secular
clergy ²⁸ | 10 February 1953 |

²² Transferred to the see of Granada, Spain, in 1787.

²³ Formerly bishop of (Nueva) Cáceres, to which he was promoted in 1778.

²⁴ Created titular bishop of Hierocaesarea, *in partibus infidelium*, auxiliary bishop of Manila, in 1829.

²⁵ Transferred to the see of Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A., in 1916.

²⁶ Formerly bishop of Zamboanga, to which he was promoted in 1911.

²⁷ Bishop of Cebu in 1932; archbishop of Cebu in 1934. Transferred to Manila on the date indicated as titular bishop of Phullita, with right of succession to the archbishopric.

²⁸ Formerly titular bishop of Barca.

It may be of interest to note that with the exception of Archbishops Poblete, Bermúdez de Castro and Rojo, who were Mexican *criollos*, that is, full-blooded Spaniards born in Mexico, all the occupants of the see of Manila during the Spanish regime were *peninsulares*, that is, full-blooded Spaniards born in Spain. In future articles in this review I hope to present the episcopal lists of the other three Philippine dioceses founded in the sixteenth century.

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