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**Paul Arvisu Dumol, Trans.**

**The Manila Synod of 1582:**

**The Draft of Its Handbook for Confessors**

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## **The Manila Synod of 1582: The Draft of Its Handbook for Confessors**

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 162 pages.

Paul Arvisu Dumol's publication of his translation of the two drafts of what was purportedly to be a handbook for the use of confessors in late-sixteenth-century Philippines is a remarkable work that will benefit not only historians and theologians but also ultimately and hopefully the public that is interested to gain a deeper understanding of the development of the Filipino people under Spanish rule and care. The two manuscripts, the *Suma de Una Junta* kept in the Dominican archives in Manila and the *Junta y Congregación* found in the Jesuit archives in Rome, both give a summary, varying in length and style, of the 1582 Synod of Manila's *acta* or synodal acts and decrees pertaining to matters of justice and compiled explicitly in accordance with the synod's own purpose for the guidance of confessors in solving moral cases and abuses in the Philippines. It was to guard against the laxity of Spanish officials tasked with the welfare and evangelization of the natives, and against pusillanimity on the part of church people tasked with the care of souls, through the special pedagogical and compelling power of the confessional. The documents of the full proceedings of the synod were burned in the fire that gutted Manila in 1583, and even the drafts here translated are incomplete. The manuscripts represent only the first part of the intended confessors' handbook. Although written differently in terms of style they both reflect the orientation, scope, sequence, and thoroughness of what must have been the synod's actual treatment of the pressing subject on justice and the rights of the natives during the particularly difficult early years of the colonization of the islands when colonial policy from the crown was just emerging by bits and pieces. The subsistence economy of the country then did not make it easy for the colonists who expected to make a fortune and have a good life in the islands.

The diocesan Synod of Manila in 1582 was convened soon after the arrival of Domingo de Salazar, OP, the first bishop of the entire archipelago. The synod was the assembly of the bishop and his advisers, composed of both religious and diocesan clergy, along with competent laymen who were invited as resource persons on the rights and duties of everyone in the colony and the abuses thereof. The synod was clearly the platform for Salazar's

crusading stand for the rights of the *indios* in the vein of his colleagues in spirit Francisco de Vitoria, OP, in Salamanca, Bartolome de las Casas, OP, in the West Indies, and Juan de Zumárraga, OFM, in Mexico. It was from Mexico whence Salazar was plucked by the King of Spain to be the first bishop of the farthest royal colony in Asia.

According to Fr. John Schumacher, SJ, in an article reprinted by Paul Dumol as an introduction to his translation, the lengthier *Junta y Congregación* could have been from the pen of Fr. Alonso Sánchez, SJ, a main figure in the synod who submitted it in his narrative style as a report to the Jesuit superior general in Rome, while the *Suma de Una Junta*, composed more like a list of prescriptions, could have been written by Fr. Cristóbal de Salvatierra, OP, synod secretary and companion of Bishop Salazar. The initial violent reactions from Spanish officials against the synod's strict dispositions could have prevented the completion of the synod's handbook for confessors, overtaken by Salazar's 1591 departure for Spain to plead personally before the king his case for the natives and against Spanish abuses. There he passed away three years later. But even if the intended confessor's handbook was never completed, it certainly kept the discussions alive concerning the moral principles that should accompany the Christianization of the islands, animated debates both in the church hierarchy where opposition to some its stipulations were not lacking and among royal officials and Spanish laity in the Philippines of the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries, who also appealed severally to the king against the "purist" impracticality of the bishop's ideas.

The synod first of all clarified that, regarding the rights of Spanish officials, they had no claims other than what the king of Spain had granted them, and the king could only grant what the pope had given him and which the pope himself had received from Christ: to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Under this divine command, the king

could send preachers to all the lands that were being discovered and for their protection . . . send as coadjutors of the Gospel men of arms who were necessary to assure preaching, to receive, protect and govern converts, and to do in their lands whatever was necessary in temporal government for this spiritual purpose of unforced conversion and preservation in the faith received. But . . . it does not follow that they can, as they have done, completely take control of and seize other peoples' kingdoms . . . (11)

And with forthright honesty the synod pinpointed the cause and root of so much disorder, abuses, and evils in the islands: the impunity with which different persons committed crimes against the natives because the responsible officials did nothing about it. Without hesitation the introduction to the handbook makes the graphic generalization that

all Spaniards, no matter their social class or age, take themselves to be the lords of the Indians and their possessions, and at the very least each can . . . force them to serve him to do what he wishes, punish them as he wishes, abuse them and seize what he wishes, as very ordinarily happens, without fear of being punished for it. . . . (17)

The handbook cites instances of violation of the rights of the natives that the church could not tolerate and which had to be opposed vehemently and corrected through the sacrament of penance: the thievery, the ill-treatment by word or beating, giving bad food and forcing excessive work load on the natives taken as rowing crews in expeditions, taking bribes to exempt individuals from work or to assign them to less work, collecting tributes in excess of what the valuation had fixed, or using excessive rigor in enforcing collection, and others (21–22). For all damages thus incurred, the Spanish officials and soldiers involved must in conscience pay and make restitution in full.

Even the wives of captains and soldiers had to be properly scrutinized during confession: “she sins most gravely who, mala fide and knowing that the wealth of her husband comes from conquest or is ill-gotten, spends and consumes it in banquets, galas, and gambling and other superfluous vanities, which she should make restitution for” (22–23). As to the children of conquistadors, “if the son knows for certain that his father possessed through ill means what he left him, . . . he should restore everything he inherited, if everything was acquired in that manner or everything is needed for the restitution” (25). For merchants who bought goods from conquistadors, “if the merchant knows that what the conquistador has is ill-gotten and consists of goods seized in the conquest, in no way can he buy from him because he buys from a thief and buys what he knows to be stolen, especially if the owners or heirs are known” (27).

Such rigorous moral uprightness and remarkable pastoral realism (confessors declaring restitutions to be made must not be too trusting that the

penitents would really go in search of the victims to make restitution, and so before giving absolution they should first ensure that the necessary steps had been undertaken) typify the 1582 Synod of Manila's earnestness in teaching and upholding the Catholic way of life early on in the Christianization of the Philippines. This is at the very least a corrective to the blanket assumption often made and seldom challenged that, in the partnership of the cross and sword in the Spanish colonial era, the Catholic Church was in connivance with the state in abusing and despoiling the natives.

With evident circumspection and meticulousness natural to an assiduous and responsible translator, Paul Dumol has studied the two drafts and partly two of the four copies of the *Suma de Una Junta* available, comparing them and underlining similarities and differences, uncovering puzzling and nonsensical verbiage due to glosses and marginalia made part of the texts in the course of time, arbitrary remarks and insertions, and outright slips and misinterpretations by copyists. He has with *Akribie* tracked down and bared what may be termed the "original" texts of the two documents, with emendations and interpolations. But one wishes that Dumol had included the original Spanish transcriptions of the two drafts. His opening protestation, that he would have been rewarded already if out of indignation at his translation some others attempt a better translation, could have been more realistic if interested readers had access to the original Spanish texts they could refer to. A feel of the original texts can be a big help, as when one peruses the photocopy of the *Suma de Una Junta* in *Philippiniana Sacra* (1969:431–537). Also, along this line of connecting materially with historical documents so important to us, a semi-iconographic approach with both the translations and the original "dis-assembled and re-assembled" Spanish texts can help very effectively: differentiating from the supposed original body the translator's annotations of insertions, later glosses, and other editorial interpolations by visually employing other fonts, types, and so on.

Paul Dumol is to be thanked for his labor of love, so valuable and needed. We can expect more in the years ahead from this man, who got his doctorate in Medieval Studies from the University of Toronto and is now with the Department of History of the University of Asia and the Pacific.

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