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Pedro S. de Achutegui, S.J.

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Bishop Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr.: An Ecumenical Tribute

PEDRO S. DE ACHUTEGUI, S.J.

ON the 21st of September, 1971, Father Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, met with over twenty representatives of Christian Churches in the Philippines at the Cardinal Bea Institute for Ecumenical Studies, located in the Loyola House of Studies on the campus of the Ateneo de Manila University. Among those participating in the simple ecumenical encounter was Bishop Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr., Supreme Bishop of the Philippine Independent Church (PIC), who three weeks later, on October 10, 1971, was to die of a heart attack. Accompanying him was Bishop Macario V. Ga, then Secretary General, who has now been elected Supreme Bishop of the PIC to succeed Bishop de los Reyes. That was the last time that the present writer saw the Supreme Bishop alive. The next time, Bishop de los Reyes was lying in state at the PIC National Cathedral.¹

¹ Isabelo Valentín de los Reyes y Lopez was born in Madrid, Spain, on February 14, 1900, the son of Isabelo de los Reyes y Florentino — who in 1902 was to found the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) — and his Spanish wife Angela Lopez Montero. His mother died in Japan in 1910. Returning to the Philippines, he attended the Colegio-Seminario in Vigan under the Jesuits. There he received his first Communion as a Catholic. His father attended the celebration, a fact worth noticing and recorded in the Diary of the Vigan School, still extant in the Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus.

He is said to have studied at the Ateneo de Manila, although up to the present no record has been found containing his name in any

At the ecumenical encounter with Father Arrupe, Bishop de los Reyes spoke with the present writer of his earnest desire of fostering ecumenical understanding and cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Philippine Independent Church, and reiterated his hope, manifested on previous occasions, that conversations on topics of relevance for the two churches be started as soon as possible. Among the topics, he mentioned as a starting point one he had most at heart: the dialogue on the sacrament of Baptism, with the possibility of coming to an agreement as it had been the case between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines.

Certain steps were being taken in that direction when death struck him. He had previously mentioned that he had an enlarged heart; his ailment could take him any time; in fact, it had prevented him from being present at the ecumenical encounter with Pope Paul VI at the Apostolic Nunciature on November 29, 1970, as he was hospitalized at the time. Death took him too soon to see the conversations started.

of the extant directories and lists of his contemporary students nor in the complete lists of former students which go back up to 1870. This fact is noteworthy, since in many cases the directory records details of students who have attended classes for three or two years, one year and one semester, one year, or even one semester.

Be it as it may, after interrupting his studies and without his father's consent he became a seaman, joined the navy and traveled in Europe. Upon his return he was ordained a priest in the IFI, and some sixteen months later, in 1925, was promoted to the Aglipayan episcopate. He was associated with his father in writing and editing the latter's doctrinal and polemical books of the IFI before the latter's return to the Catholic Church two years before his death (10 October 1938). The son accompanied Bishop Aglipay in his two trips to Europe and America in 1931 and 1934.

After the break with Bishop Santiago Fonacier, he was elected Supreme Bishop of the IFI in September 1946 — succeeding Bishop Bayaca in his temporary incumbency — and was reconsecrated in the Anglican rite on April 7, 1948. He remained Supreme Bishop for 25 years, until his death on October 10, 1971. He was buried at the Maria Clara Church on October 17, 1971, after having lain in state for one full week at the Philippine Independent Church National Cathedral he had built in Taft Avenue, Manila.—

The present article is written with precisely this ecumenical situation in view. It will be, by necessity, limited in scope. It will use, to a large extent, unpublished letters which form part of a rather large correspondence with the present writer. This series of letters, from which selected quotations will be taken, represents an aspect perhaps less known because more personal, which at the same time may shed light not only on the personality of the late Bishop de los Reyes, but also on the ecumenical ideas and spirit with which he was imbued.²

These letters, however, will be complemented with quotations from various articles, sermons, and addresses of the late bishop, taken mainly from *The Christian Register*, the official organ of the PIC. Because of the particular scope of the article it will limit itself almost exclusively to the last decade of his life, and will consider only the ecumenical aspect.

The correspondence started in connection with the first volume of the work *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*.³ In acknowledging the copy he had received a few days before from the authors, he wrote:

I did not have time yet to read this historical work which, I imagine, has the merits and shortcomings of fervent Catholic priests. In any event I admire the patience and perspicacy of the authors in dedicating their time and talents to this book on the Religious Revolution in the Philippines. Light comes from discussion. Would that through this kind of historical research our people come to understand better what the Iglesia Filipina Independiente is and will be. And would that the day come when there would be only one flock and one shepherd.⁴

That ecumenical remark at the end of the letter was the occasion of our protracted correspondence and in one way or another became its theme.

As a consequence of the initial reactions to the publication of the first volume of *Religious Revolution* and the correspon-

² Most of the letters were written in Spanish; we offer here their English translation.

³ P. S. de Achútegui & M. A. Bernad, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines. The Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay*. Vol. I, 1860-1940, Manila 1960.

⁴ Letter of August 12, 1960.

dence that was exchanged on this occasion, a friendly meeting was arranged through the good services of Don Emeterio Barcelon, a common friend who offered his residence for the interview. Bishop de los Reyes must have entertained certain doubts about the character of the proposed meeting, and he expressed his misgivings regarding its purpose:

As for our forthcoming encounter, I would like and dare to manifest my stand that in the same way that I will never attempt, even in thought, to make of you an "Aglipayan," I hope that neither will you attempt, with the missionary fervor characteristic of any good Jesuit, to make of me a Catholic, Apostolic, Roman believer. I ambition neither a miter nor to become an acolyte in the Holy, Catholic, Roman Church, to which I am so indebted, although it is not the Church to which I belong, even if I admire and respect her more than what you may imagine.⁵

The proposed meeting took place as planned. Present were Bishops Manuel L. Lagasca, then Secretary General of the PIC, and Francisco J. Pagtakhan, then PIC Diocesan Bishop of Zambales and PIC Secretary for the Propagation of the Faith. Don Emeterio Barcelon was present during the interview which lasted over two hours. The date was significant: it was October 10, anniversary of the death of his father, Don Isabelo, Sr. The date is today doubly significant: October 10 was to be also the date of his own death eleven years later. The meeting was celebrated with the greatest cordiality; various points were brought up in connection with the history of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) and of its contemporary situation. After having made a few comments on our book, the conversation turned to Pope John XXIII whom Bishop de los Reyes highly praised, and then to the theme of Christian unity. Several of the concepts he expressed on this occasion were to be repeated afterwards in several of his letters from which quotations will be made presently.⁶

⁵ Letter of September 19, 1960. In a post-scriptum he added: "I earnestly ask you to please omit the title '*Excelentísimo*' in your letters. I don't deserve it and it does not flatter me. A very simple Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr. is more to my taste, since after all I am a handful of dust."

⁶ Notes of the conversation were taken shortly afterwards and submitted to Mr. Barcelon for his comments in order to assure their accu-

Answering a letter written to thank him for the interview, and after expressing his and his companions' pleasure he said:

Incidentally, in front of the Crucifix at the residence of Don Emeterio, I was about to recite the poetry-prayer of St. Francis Xavier that starts with the strophe: "No me mueve mi Dios para quererte. . . ." After the Lord's Prayer these verses of the saintly Jesuit are my favorite prayer.

Then he went on:

I don't know how to express my thanks for your kindness and I take this opportunity to repeat that my house will be always open to you. I want to assure you that I agree absolutely with you in thinking that to believe in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church and the communion of saints, is incompatible with any sanction given to the divisions in Christianity. Every good Christian must desire and long for the coming of unity of the Body of the Divine Jesus and work for its realization. It is horrible to see the hatred that divides those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For my part I humbly believe that this visible and universal communion of all Christians will become a reality when men will be "perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." But it is our most sacred duty to work in order to accelerate the realization of such a happy longing, modest as our work might be and insignificant its fruit.⁷

Together with his letter of October 21, Bishop de los Reyes had sent a booklet he had just composed attacking the fact stated in Volume I of *Religious Revolution in the Philippines* regarding the return to the Catholic Church of his late father Don Isabelo, two years before Don Isabelo's death. When it was brought to Bishop de los Reyes' attention that the tone of this booklet was quite different from the tone of his personal letters to the author and that certain statements found in the booklet did not tally with the last will of Don Isabelo himself, Bishop de los Reyes answered, acknowledging his own limitations and expressing certain fears:

racy. It is to be noted that a long interview had taken place three years earlier on August 6, 1957, at 1320 V. Concepcion, near the temple of Maria Clara, also in the presence of D. Emeterio Barcelon who had arranged for the meeting. The questions had been carefully prepared and the answers, with his explicit consent were noted down; then they were similarly submitted to Mr. Barcelon for his comments and to secure their accuracy.

⁷ Letter of October 21, 1960.

I am delighted and pleased with your indulgence for my little booklet on the retraction of my late father. . . . Your indulgence means that you are fully aware of my limitations For my part I feel uneasy with the fear that what has happened to me with my monograph may happen to you when you write Volume II of your history. Your masterful technique as befits a good scholar and your documentation are extraordinary; but I am afraid that you might, in your second volume, attribute everything good we have so far achieved to what the English call "mere expediency," and not because we have felt the powerful influence of our conscience and the light of the Catholic faith in which we long to live and to die.⁸

"No break with the Catholic Faith"

The last line quoted, strange as it may sound, or perhaps precisely because it sounds strange, gave Bishop de los Reyes the opportunity to speak about a point he has repeatedly stated: that the IFI did not break with the Catholic Faith.

Although I am not aware of what other Churches may think, I must confess to you that in the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the overwhelming majority of the clergy and faithful have never wanted to separate themselves from the Catholic and apostolic faith; they only intended, as they still do intend, to emancipate themselves from the abuses of the Roman regular clergy in the Philippines. You and the Society of Jesus, as I have repeated more than once, have never been enemies of the aspirations of our people; but how different has been the policy of the other religious orders and corporations in the Philippines. They have systematically fought everything that favored or fostered our liberties and branded as traitors to God and to Spain all those who were asking for reforms and for justice. Had the Iglesia Filipina not existed, I am afraid that we would not have today Filipino bishops and archbishops, still less Filipino cardinals. Finally, many thanks again for your tolerance for my booklet; please rest assured that I only wrote what I thought was the truth.⁹

The idea that the IFI never wanted to depart from the Catholic faith, recurs time and again in Bishop de los Reyes' letters, as well as in his public utterances. Although during the last decade of his life, Bishop de los Reyes still had made on various occasions not a few unfavorable comments on the Ro-

⁸ Letter of November 2, 1960.

⁹ *Ibid.*

man Catholic Church and even against the Pope,¹⁰ he had, however, repeatedly emphasized that the Filipino people did not have any quarrel with the Catholic faith and doctrine as such. It was on this assumption that he justified the Concordat of Full Communion between the PIC and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and he rejected the idea of the PIC having abandoned the Catholic faith. What was needed, according to him, was a "restatement" of the same faith. Thus he said, referring to the PIC's dealings with the Episcopal Church of America:

Our governing bodies were persuaded to adopt a restatement of the fundamentals of our historic Faith and to a rediscovery of the Apostles' Creed. A formal, solemn Declaration of Faith was unanimously adopted, and it brought to our people and clergy a new sense of unity that produced an astonishing revitalization in the whole Church.¹¹

It is this element which Bishop de los Reyes had sought to emphasize not only when he indicated that he admired and respected the Catholic Church,¹² but also when he gave prominence to the Trinitarian aspect of the doctrine of the PIC in connection with ecumenism, a feature which erases his Unitarian statements during the time of Aglipay's life. The idea is repeated in his message at an installation service held at the Episcopalian cathedral of St. Mary and St. John on December 9, 1963:

Today those years (of isolation) have given way to a new era when a National Council of Churches in the Philippines brings us who have been baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit to pray and work together with the moral courage to face the problems of our disunity and face the future with full hearts and dedicated wills.¹³

He had written previously:

¹⁰ Cf., for instance, *The Christian Register*, July 1960, pp. 6, 7; Nov. 1962, p. 6; Sept. 1963, p. 6, etc. These instances refer at times to the Church in general, at times to the particular situation in the Philippines.

¹¹ TCR, February 1962, p. 5. Sermon delivered at the Cathedral of St. John, on February 11, 1962.

¹² Letter of September 19, 1960.

¹³ TCR, December 1963, p. 5.

I think that the opposition of my countrymen to the Roman Catholic Church, the same as anti-clericalism in Italy, was never directed against the Catholic Faith itself, but against the abuses of some priests blinded by the temporal power they enjoyed in this country.¹⁴

Relations with the Roman Catholic Church

This way of looking at the religious revolution which shook the country at the beginning of the century, and Bishop de los Reyes' insistence that there was no quarrel with Catholic doctrine, was to modify in the last years his attitude to the Roman Catholic Church and help his relationship with it.

Perhaps the beginning of these more friendly relations with the Catholic Church came through his admiration for the person of Pope John XXIII. To an offer made by us to send him a copy of the Pope's latest encyclical he answered:

Let me thank you above all for your generous offer to send me a copy of the Holy Father's encyclical as soon as you can get hold of one. It will be most pleasant to read the complete text of the present Supreme Pontiff who, it seems to me, possesses a mentality of the 21st century and a personality worthy of the favorite uncle of all of us. I don't have the slightest doubt that this wise Pontiff will capture immortality with his ideas and works.¹⁵

Two years later he wrote:

I have very few favorite people among the personages who lead the Christian world, but Cardinal Bea, as well as Pope John, are among my favorites, since I am absolutely convinced that these two saintly men are providential instruments of God to illumine us.¹⁶

And shortly afterwards:

My admiration for the Supreme Pontiff, John XXIII, keeps growing continuously, and I feel the same way for Cardinal Bea . . . May God grant them long years of life for the salvation of souls and the renewal of the Church. Both are sowing the holy seed of concord; God will take care of the harvest.¹⁷

On the occasion of the opening of the Second Council of the Vatican, Bishop de los Reyes sent a circular to the clergy

¹⁴ Letter of October 25, 1962.

¹⁵ Letter of September 3, 1960.

¹⁶ Letter of September 4, 1962.

¹⁷ Letter of October 25, 1962.

and faithful of the PIC, appealing for prayers for the success of the Council. Among other things, he said:

The Second Vatican Council, which begins on October 11th, is of immense importance for us all. I hope that there will be frequent and regular prayers offered in each parish during the time when the council is in session and that we all will remember the Council in our personal prayers that all who bear the Name of Christ, no matter if their surname be Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, shall come to recognize themselves as brothers and children of the same common Master and Saviour.¹⁸

To the letter where this author commented gratefully and favorably on this ecumenical initiative of the *Obispo Maximo* representing as it did a genuine ecumenical spirit, he answered:

Yes, I considered it my duty towards my brethren to insist with them that they pray Almighty God for the success of the Vatican Council. Much, very much, can come out of this historical Council for the concord and mutual understanding of all those who call themselves Christians, even if they have different names.¹⁹

One month later he reiterated the same sentiments:

I continue praying for the total success of the present Vatican Council, of the Supreme Pontiff, and of his representative, venerable Cardinal Bea. May God preserve them for long years.²⁰

He was genuinely interested in the success of the Council, considering it as an event of the greatest ecumenical and spiritual value:

Yes, it is quite possible that the result of the Council may not appear to be spectacular, but undoubtedly its effects will be of incalculable benefit for the souls. Convinced as I am of this truth, I never forget to pray daily for the precious health of the Supreme Pontiff John who is the visible instrument of God in this era. I think we must congratulate each other for the fact that God has made us live in these times when the concord and the desire for reconciliation are imposing themselves, where before rancour and other passions were prevailing. Let us hope that the day will dawn when all who pray the Our Father will do it without any mental reservation and will acknowledge each other as true brothers.²¹

¹⁸ TCR, October 1962, p. 3.

¹⁹ Letter of October 25, 1962.

²⁰ Letter of November 22, 1962.

²¹ Letter of December 10, 1962.

In 1964, after his trip abroad, Bishop de los Reyes wrote his impressions in connection with his visit to Cardinal Augustin Bea, then President of the Vatican Secretarian for Promoting Christian Unity, which had been arranged by the Philippine Ambassador to the Vatican, Mr. Benigno Toda, Sr. Bishop de los Reyes also indicated some of the topics that had been the subject of their conversation. His meeting with the Cardinal was the object of commentaries in subsequent letters. Among them, and in answer to an interchange of ideas on things of interest to both the PIC and the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop de los Reyes wrote:

We should let the Holy Spirit, whose action we know so little, continue operating in our hearts. I am happy to know that you think that "doctrinally we are much closer than we were during the first 45 year of the IFI." I totally agree with this idea and I would like to call your attention to the radical change of climate in the religious world. Yes, the IFI has changed very much its attitude in very many things and these changes have been, in my opinion, inspired by the Holy Spirit and will undoubtedly bring us gradually closer to that Christian unity which should be the goal of any true disciple of the Redeemer.²²

The cover of the PIC bulletin, *The Christian Register*, for June 1967 featured the picture of Cardinal Bea with this personal dedication: "To my dear friend in Jesus Christ, Don Isabelo de los Reyes Jr., + Aug. Card. Bea." And almost every time this writer met with the bishop, the name of Cardinal Bea came up as one of the most natural topics during the conversation.

Probably the most favorable statements of Bishop de los Reyes in this respect may be found in a radio speech broadcast in January 1968 in connection with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. A few pertinent passages may show better than any paraphrasing his esteem for the work of the Second Council of the Vatican, and for the important role and position of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ecumenical movement:

The World Council of Churches and Vatican Council II have already done much to stimulate the determination of all Christians to work

²² Letter of May 15, 1964.

²³ Letter of June 3, 1964.

for unity.... Thanks to Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, much has been done within the past decade to stimulate a desire for common action and unity among the different branches of the Christian Church, for both of mankind's supreme needs are "Renewal and Reunion" Let us realize that the Roman Catholic Church is ready to meet halfway other branches of God's Church while, non-Roman Christians already are aware that there can be no fulfillment of the divine purpose in any scheme of reunion which does not ultimately include the great Latin Church with which the historic past of the Philippines has been so closely associated and to which Filipinos are still bound by so many ties of common faith and tradition. The Philippine Independent Church and the Evangelical Churches in the Philippines realize they cannot produce Christian Unity in our Republic and that it is indispensable on the part of the dominant Catholic Church to remove difficulties toward restoring Christian Unity among our people.²⁴

A concrete example of the increased harmony between him and the Catholic Church was the visit he paid to the University of Santo Tomas on Dec. 20, 1967. Considering the fact that Bishop de los Reyes was himself the editor of *The Christian Registrar* at that time, both the editorial and the description of the event acquire a particular significance, since it can be assumed that they were either written or at least approved by him. On this occasion, according to the editorial, the Obispo Maximo

... declared himself in favor of Christian Unity through a college of indigenous, national, Catholic and Apostolic Churches with the Pope in Rome as its Presiding Bishop. A College of Churches without uniformity, but fully united; each Church free to adopt its own reformed liturgy in the language of its people, free to choose its episcopate; Churches that hold the Sacraments necessary for salvation and have a profound concern for Holy Scriptures. These, all united under the Pope in Rome as the legitimate successor to St. Peter, with the supreme power to rule, govern, teach and guide the college of National Catholic and Apostolic Churches, and sharing with all its Bishops the teaching and guidance of God's Church.²⁵

²⁴ *TCR*, February 1968, pp. 5, 14.

²⁵ *TCR*, January 1968, p. 3. Not all the statements of this paragraph of the editorial are equally clear but it is obvious that his view of the relationship between the PIC and the Roman Catholic Church had gone a long way from what it had been in the past and which had been often described by him in rather dark colors.

Bishop de los Reyes was personally interested in the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines in the fall of 1970 and participated in various meetings of the Interfaith Committee, always manifesting a spirit of Christian interest and desire for collaboration. He spoke about the "pastoral care of the Holy Father for Christian unity throughout the world," and was particularly interested in the ecumenical encounter that was to be celebrated in the Apostolic Nunciature on Nov. 29, 1970. Unfortunately, his heart condition prevented him from being present at the encounter: he was sick in the hospital with an enlarged heart. His successor, Bishop Macario V. Ga, then Secretary General, represented him and led the other members of the PIC delegation. They presented the Holy Father with a copy of the *Filipino Missal*.

When the present writer went to his office on April 2, 1971 to present to him the medallion of the Pope's visit which Bishop de los Reyes had not been able to receive because of his illness, together with a Rosary from the Apostolic Nuncio, his reaction was expressed both in the desire of having a picture taken "of this happy occasion" and in the comment that appeared in *The Christian Register* of which he was still the editor. He received the gifts

. . . as mementoes of the increasingly harmonious relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Philippine Independent Churches [sic] The Supreme Bishop was profoundly touched by the Pope's and the Papal Nuncio's unprecedented thoughtfulness and accepted both gifts in the spirit of real Ecumenism and Christian reconciliation.²⁸

Further examples of this new relation were, among others, his acceptance of the invitation sent him to participate in ecumenical gatherings at the John XXIII Ecumenical Center and the Cardinal Bea Institute for Ecumenical Studies. Besides his presence at the necrological service for the late Cardinal Bea, he came gladly to meet the Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Fr. Pedro Arrupe. After Fr. Arrupe had finished a short presentation of his ecumenical ideas, he entertained questions from the participants. On this occasion, Bishop de los Reyes volunteered some thoughts, and extolled

²⁸ *TCR*, April 1971, p. 7.

with gratitude the magnificent social action of the Jesuit Fathers in our country. They are at the vanguard of fighting for the rights of the common people...that is Christianity in action.

Ecumenical spirit and ecumenical ideas

In the citation for the awarding of the Doctorate of Divinity, *honoris causa*, by the Central Philippine University to Bishop de los Reyes (May 20, 1965), the opening lines point to the leadership he had exercised in the second generation of the PIC. This leadership is described further on as having guided his Church

through an outward reaching for Christian fellowship and witness.... With his world-view Bishop de los Reyes has led his Church into membership in the World Council of Churches and the East Asian Christian Conference.²⁷

The highest honor that the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury can confer on the head of any Church outside of the Anglican Communion and which, since the year of its institution, 1939, until 1969, had been conferred only on 16 individuals (Cardinal Bea being one of the recipients), was conferred on Bishop de los Reyes on December 28, 1969. On that day, Bishop Benito C. Cabanban of the Philippine Episcopal Church, on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury, conferred on Bishop de los Reyes Jr., the Lambeth Cross which had been instituted by Archbishop Lang for exceptional services to the cause of Christian unity, especially in the strengthening of relations between particular Churches and the Anglican Communion.²⁸

On repeated occasions, Bishop de los Reyes had showed his joy at the sight of the change in the world's ecumenical climate. He expressed himself thus:

We live in times which would simply be incredible a few decades ago. I pray that the meeting between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Holy Father (which I think is the work of the Holy Spirit) result in the mutual acknowledgement that all of us are brothers and sinners who need both the divine grace and much humility. I never cease praying

²⁷ TCR, July 1965, pp. 7, 8.

²⁸ Cf. TCR, January 1970, pp. 10 ff.

that a new longing for reconciliation and a more noble concept of the Church of God may come out from this encounter. I must confess to you that I pray frequently that among the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, as well as among my faithful, the number increase of those who practice charity towards those who do not totally share in the religious convictions of our neighbor. I believe that the world would be a paradise should the good samaritans be in the majority.²⁹

I have just read in the American press that during his visit to the Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury handed over to His Holiness, the Supreme Pontiff, a copy of the program of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth and that His Holiness in turn gave to the Anglican Archbishop a silver medallion. These details were not published in the Philippine press, but they indicate an inspiring feeling of conciliation among the heads of Churches. May the Holy Spirit never abandon us to the growing threat of communism, which is the religion of matter, the most dangerous religion in the history of humanity.³⁰

The same idea appears often in his letters. Here is another instance:

I am fully convinced that the longing for unity and reconciliation which like a strong wind has mysteriously vivified and circulated through all the Christian Churches, is the work of God, whose will always prevails.³¹

How he understood his own personal mission, if the word may be allowed, appears in various of his letters. One example may suffice:

I have just read a phrase of an ancient anonymous writer which has impressed me very much: "As the soul is in the body, so are the Christians in the world." Although wearing a different uniform, I am, like you, trying to help men to satisfy the most imperative needs of their souls, preaching faith in Jesus and in His divine teachings. Will it be possible that we meet each other after this short life? "Your will be done on earth as in heaven."³²

A point which would take more than a short article is to know exactly what his concept of ecumenism was; to which another previous question would serve as pre-requisite, namely,

²⁹ Letter of November 17, 1960.

³⁰ Letter of January 28, 1961.

³¹ Letter of August 20, 1962.

³² Letter of September 4, 1962.

what was his concept of the Church?³³ This second question, however, would lead us too much afar. For the purpose of this article, it will be enough to present a few quotations where Bishop de los Reyes' idea of ecumenism may appear sufficiently clear.

He deplored, in the context of the birth of the IFI, the fact that the early American missionaries had misinterpreted the Aglipayan movement, and

concentrated themselves in planting little colonies of their particular denominations and discouraged, if not actively opposed, all movements for religious or political self-determination.³⁴

Two years later he said:

We are confronted with a scandalous crop of multi-religious denominations which have appeared among our population with contradictory claims and motivations.³⁵

His idea of ecumenism was, on the other hand, rather a broad one. Speaking of the national Cathedral to be built—one of his dreams and one of his achievements—he wrote:

We should build to the glory of the Lord, for Christ's peace, and the universal brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.³⁶

He spoke of

... faithful steps towards bringing closer together the broken fragments of the Christian Church in these parts of the world.³⁷

He hailed the Concordat with the Philippine Episcopal Church, hoping that one of its results would be that the PIC will go

... straightforward towards a wider, all-embracing Concordat that shall make of all Christians our true brothers and sisters, united not only

³³ He speaks of the "different fragments of the universal Church." *TCR*, November 1962, p. 4. In convoking a special session of the Council of Bishops he announced that the following item was to be considered: "The position or degradation of one bishop who has been conducting a systematic and malicious campaign against the Holy Church which is the mystical Body of Christ." *TCR*, July 1965, p. 15.

³⁴ *TCR*, July 1960, p. 7.

³⁵ *TCR*, February 1962, p. 9.

³⁶ *TCR*, October 1966, p. 9.

³⁷ *TCR*, November 1961, p. 3.

for a fight against common evils, but also to work for positive ends.... Let us pray and work that such ecumenical movement shall grow everywhere and bring all of God's children unto a solidarity similar to the one that makes of Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God of all creatures in heaven and earth.³⁸

It is a fact that during his long tenure of office as Obispo Maximo—25 years—Bishop de los Reyes instilled a great deal of the ecumenical spirit into the PIC and brought his Church into the ecumenical world. The membership of the PIC in the World Council of Churches (1958), the Concordat of Full Communion with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America (1961), and then with the other member Churches of the Anglican Communion as well as the Old Catholics, the entrance of the PIC into the East Asian Christian Conference (1963), its membership in the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (1963) of which he became the first Chairman, his ecumenical contacts in the international sphere—Patriarch Athenagoras and Cardinal Bea were two of the figures he visited with special affection—and his desire for a better relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines will stand as witnesses to his ecumenical interests.

His last letter to the present writer was in answer to an invitation to participate in the ecumenical encounter with the Superior General of the Society of Jesus mentioned at the beginning of this article. In that letter, he wrote:

Of course I hasten to accept with humble and grateful thanks the privilege to meet such an international leader of Christianity during these revolutionary times, and feel absolutely confident the meeting will prove of extreme profit for my people and me. So rest assured that, if still alive, I will appear to attend the informal meeting on September 21st.³⁹

Bishop de los Reyes on that occasion was gracious and warm. He was confident of a closer cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church. Things were supposed to begin moving soon. But on October 10 he died. We feel confident that his successor, Bishop Macario V. Ga, has also inherited, with the office of Supreme Bishop, the ecumenical legacy Bishop de los Reyes had left to the PIC.

³⁸ *TCR*, February, 1962, pp. 7 and 10.

³⁹ Letter of September 7, 1971.