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Progress in Vietnam

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Notes and Comment

Progress in Vietnam

IMMEDIATELY after the conclusion of the National Eucharistic Congress last December a group of Filipino bishops, priests and laymen left for the Republic of Vietnam. It was my privilege to be at the head of that group and I believe that I am speaking for my group when I say that we were considerably impressed by what we saw in our sister republic.

Our visit was in a manner of speaking a return courtesy call. A group of Vietnamese bishops, priests and laymen had journeyed all the way to the Philippines to attend our 2nd National Eucharistic Congress. Their presence was greatly appreciated by all Filipinos but in particular by those of us who were responsible for the conduct of the Congress. We were only too glad therefore to accept the very kind invitation from His Excellency the President of the Republic of Vietnam to go and pay a visit to his country.

The arrangements for the trip were made by the Minister of the Vietnamese legation in Manila to whom on behalf of my group I wish to express sincere gratitude for all the courtesy extended us.

Vietnam is a tourist's delight. I will however omit mention of all the things that delighted us as tourists and I will confine my remarks to a few points that we found significant.

The first thing that impressed us was the great work that the government is doing to resettle the hundreds of thousands of refugees that have crossed the border from the Communist-held north. For any government this kind of project cannot be free

from almost insurmountable difficulties. The Vietnamese government is solving the many problems involved in this work in what seems to be a very efficient manner. The government has made it possible for the refugees to live again a normal life. This certainly must be considered a factual refutation of the claim sometimes made by the Communists that they are the only ones who know how to work for the social and economic welfare of the people. Sceptics should go to Vietnam to see what the democratic way of life can do for the welfare of the people.

A second impression of our group was the strong religious faith of the people. Everywhere we went we saw evidence of this. The Vietnamese are a profoundly religious people.

Of course as Catholic bishops the thing that impressed us most was the splendid work of the hierarchy and clergy of the Vietnamese Catholics. The Catholics form only about 10% of the total population but they are a very strong and progressive group and many of the country's leaders, including the President himself, are Catholic. Considerable numbers of the refugees from the north are interested in becoming Catholics. The number of the clergy is definitely too small to cope with the numbers of prospective converts. Catholic life among the Vietnamese is lived according to high standards and it can be set up as a model for other Catholic communities in our part of the world. We actually felt a certain awe not unmixed with envy for our brother Catholics in Vietnam when we learned that they have over a thousand martyrs who have died for the Catholic faith during the various persecutions under non-Christian rulers. Some of these native Vietnamese martyrs have been raised to the altars as *beati*.

We are not political experts but we were impressed by the sincerity and honesty with which the government officials are trying to serve their people. The President of Vietnam is a dedicated man and with him at the helm there is no doubt the Republic of Vietnam will attain a state of stable security and prosperity. The Constitution of Vietnam is very impressive as an expression of democratic principles. That little Republic deserves the admiration and also the prayers of all of those who wish her well, particularly those of us who are her neighbors in the Orient.

JULIO R. ROSALES D.D. *Archbishop of Cebu*