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Philippine Plenary Council

Review Author: Miguel A. Bernad

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Book Reviews

PHILIPPINE PLENARY COUNCIL

ACTA ET DECRETA PRIMI CONCILII PLENARII INSULARUM PHILIPPINARUM MANILAE A DIE VII AD DIEM XXV MENSIS IANUARIII ANNO DOMINI MDCCCCLIII CELEBRATI. Manilae. Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Sancti Thomae. 1956. Pp. xlvii, 321, cum indice 15 pp.

In general there are four types of councils or synods in the Catholic Church. There is first of all the diocesan synod which is a formal assembly of the bishop and his priests to legislate for the diocese. There is secondly the provincial synod which is a formal gathering of the hierarchy of an ecclesiastical province: in other words, of a metropolitan archbishop and his suffragan bishops. There is thirdly a plenary council which is the formal assembly of the entire hierarchy of a country in which there are several ecclesiastical provinces. There is finally the ecumenical council which is the formal assembly of the entire hierarchy of the Catholic Church throughout the world.

The first provincial synod held in the Philippines was that of Manila in 1907. At that time the entire Philippines comprised only one ecclesiastical province with the metropolitan see in Manila. For several decades the rules and regulations laid down by that council continued to direct the conduct of the Church in the Philippines.

In recent years however a new formal gathering of the Philippine hierarchy was made necessary by the changing times and the growth of the Church in this country. This growth of the Church (steady in the past fifty years but spectacular in the past decade) may be illustrated by a few facts. In 1900 there was only

one archbishopric in the country; today there are six (Manila, Cebu, Cagayan, Vigan, Naga, Jaro). In the early decades of this century there were only seven dioceses; today there are twenty-one dioceses and some ten other autonomous jurisdictions (called vicariates or prelatures or prefectures). The island of Mindanao alone may be taken as the most spectacular example of this growth. From one bishop in 1930 (Zamboanga) there are now one archbishop and five bishops in Mindanao and one prefect apostolic in Jolo.

Hence the timeliness of the first plenary council of the Philippines held in Manila in January 1953. The council was presided over by a papal legate *a latere*, His Eminence Norman Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney, Australia. Present at the council were the apostolic nuncio, five archbishops (the see of Manila being then vacant), twenty bishops, three prelates nullius, one prefect apostolic, twenty superiors of religious orders and congregations, and some eighty-seven priests who served in various capacities (as consultants, procurators, notaries, secretaries, etc.). The assemblies were held in that venerable edifice which has withstood time, fire, earthquakes, floods, typhoons and the bombs and shells of a full-scale war, the Church of San Agustin.

The acts and decrees of the council are now published for the first time in the volume under review. We might translate its title as: *The Acts and Decrees of the First Plenary Council of the Philippine Islands Held in Manila from the 7th to the 25th Day of the month of January in the Year of the Lord 1953*. The volume contains 46 pages of introductory matter, 280 pages of text, 39 pages of appendices and a 15-page index.

The introductory matter includes: a) the letter of His Holiness Pope Pius XII (Rome, 8 December 1952) appointing Cardinal Gilroy his legate to the council; b) the decree of the papal legate (Sydney, 13 December 1952) convoking the council; c) various decrees and messages during the council itself and the roll call of participants; d) the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council (Rome, 25 February 1956) approving the acts of the council; and e) the decree of the apostolic nuncio (Manila, 15 August 1956) promulgating the decrees. The decrees began to take effect on 15 February 1957, six months from the date of promulgation.

The decrees themselves are 751 in number divided into ten groups called "titles" as follows: I. Preliminary decrees and general norms; II. On clerics in general; III. On clerics in particular;

IV. On religious men and women and those living under vows; V. On the laity; VI. On the sacraments and sacramentals; VII. On sacred times and places; VIII. On divine worship; IX. On the teaching function of the Church; X. On the administration of ecclesiastical property.

There are five appendices of which Appendix III contains the formula of consecration by which the Philippines has been consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived immaculate. This is in conformity with decree 562 of the council which renews the declaration of the first provincial council of Manila that "the principal and universal patroness" of the Philippines is Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception. The formula of consecration is given in Spanish, English and Tagalog, and according to decree 563.1 of the council it is to be renewed each year on 8 December in all the cathedrals and parish churches of the country.

Appendix IV contains the text of some of the speeches delivered at the more solemn assemblies of the council. These include the opening address by the senior metropolitan, Archbishop Julio Rosales of Cebu, and the response of the cardinal legate. The addresses are in English except that by Bishop Rufino Santos (now Archbishop of Manila) who spoke in Tagalog and Bishop Alfredo Obviar of Lucena who spoke in Spanish.

Appendix V contains the Conciliar Letter addressed by the hierarchy to the Catholic people of the Philippines on 25 January 1953, the last day of the council.

The remaining two appendices (I and II) contain various formulae for chancery and parochial use (the incardination and excardination of clerics and the prenuptial questionnaire).

This is not the place to evaluate the decrees of the council themselves and we are not the proper person to do it. But we should perhaps say a word about how the decrees came to be. The 751 decrees now published in this volume are the culmination of a long process of drafting, rewording and debate. Long before the council opened in January 1953 the work of drafting and redrafting had already been done. Credit is generally given (though there is no mention of it in this volume) to the two "promoters" of the council: Bishop Luis del Rosario S.J. of Zamboanga and Bishop Cesar Ma. Guerrero of San Fernando. In recognition for their

work these two bishops have been raised by Pope Pius XII to the added dignity of honorary assistants to the papal throne.

These two prelates were aided in their work by a board of consultors composed of five theologians and five canonists. The theologians included one secular priest (Mons. Artemio Casas), one Dominican (Father Juan Ortega O.P.), one member of the Society of the Divine Word (Father Ambrosio Manaligod S.V.D.) and two Jesuits (Father Juan Ledesma S.J. and Father Emilio Azarraga S.J.). The canonists included one secular priest (Mons. Narciso Gatpayad), one Dominican (Father Juan Ylla O.P.), one Vicentian (Father Fermin del Campo C.M.), one "Belgian Father" (Father George Vromant C.I.C.M.) and one Jesuit (Father José Ma. Siguión S.J.).

Father Horacio de la Costa, associate editor of PHILIPPINE STUDIES who is now abroad collecting data for his forthcoming history of the Philippines, was one of the four secretaries of the council. Bishop Rufino Santos, then administrator of Manila and Lipa, was secretary general of the council.

The *Acta et decreta* of the first plenary council of the Philippines has had a somewhat unusual printing history before its definitive publication in December 1956. The draft of the decrees was printed and circulated among the Fathers and consultors in 1952 before the council opened. It contained 184 pages and was entitled *Schema decretorum Primi Concilii Plenarii Insularum Philippinarum*. There were only 698 decrees in this draft edition.

After the council ended, according to canonical procedure, the decrees as finally passed were sent to Rome for approval. This approval came three years later *nonnullis illatis emendationibus* (with some corrections made). After the decrees were promulgated by the nuncio a definitive edition was prepared, printed, bound and was already in circulation when a misprint was discovered. The word *concilium* was printed *consilium*. The misprint was not very important but it was very prominent as it occurred on the shelf-back title itself and in certain other places. Accordingly the copies were withdrawn from circulation, the mistake was corrected and the definitive edition finally distributed at the end of 1956. And this is the book that will henceforth guide the Church in the Philippines during the coming years—perhaps during the coming decades.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD