

A REPORT ON THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES AND PRIESTLY FORMATION

Last March 25, 1969 the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education called a meeting of delegates of Episcopal Conferences to discuss a program on Priestly Formation. The Conference of Bishops of the Philippines sent the Most Rev. Teotimo C. Pacis, C.M., Bishop of Palo as its delegate.

Bishop Pacis sent the following report which might be of interest to the Bishops and Clergy of the Philippines:

At the call and under the auspices of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, delegates representing 28 Episcopal Conferences met in Rome on March 25-28 to go over, examine and discuss a SCHEMA on priestly formation.

All the delegates, except two, were Bishops and Archbishops in their capacity as chairman or as members of the Episcopal Commission on Seminaries in their respective countries.

Also present at the meeting were:

- a) five staff-members of the Secretariate of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education;
- b) three observers representing the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches for Religious and Secular Institutes, and for the Evangelization of the People of God;
- c) and four others in the category of the theologians and experts, brought in by some Bishops.

The moving spirit was His Eminence Gabriel Maria Cardinal Garrone.

The delegates were divided into four working groups:

- I. French — France, Canada, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain.
- II. English — United States, Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

- III. Spanish 1 — Central America: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo.
- IV. Spanish 2 — South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The Philippines remained unclassified. She was like a star apart. It was not possible to form an Asian group, for I was the only delegate from Asia. All the other Asian Episcopal Conferences were not directly involved in the Schema that was to be discussed.

The first day (March 25) there was only one group for all Spanish-speaking delegates, including the one from Spain. I joined this group. I felt united with them by bonds of history and cultural heritage. My Spanish was inferior to theirs, but we did understand one another. I did understand their problems and anxieties as regards priestly vocation and priestly formation.

The Spanish speaking-was found to be too big to work. So, on the second day (March 26), at the suggestion of Cardinal Garrone, the Bishops of Central America formed one group and those of South America another. With this last group I sat down for exchange of views. The delegate from Spain was shifted to Group I, so he could share views and experiences with countries in the context of Europe.

On the third day (March 27), I joined the English-speaking delegates. I thought it would be helpful to get their views, since our educational system and the mentality of the present generation of Filipinos are deeply influenced by Anglo-American culture.

Each group worked separately morning and afternoon to end in a plenary session every evening from six to seven thirty, presided over by Cardinal Garrone.

The whole three-day meeting was brought to a close at the fourth day at 12:30, Friday, March 28.

When at the opening session comments on the Schema were asked from each delegate, I felt quite at a loss, for while others submitted written comments prepared by their respective Episcopal Commissions, I had none

but the "Norms" as approved by the Hierarchy on July 12, 1968 and the "Resolutions" by the CEAP Department of Seminaries, as approved during the Bishops' annual meeting last January in Baguio City. Both documents, to the credit of our Seminary experts, are in substantial agreement with the *Ratio* as per Schema.

The discussions and exchange of views were held in an atmosphere of complete freedom. There was awareness of the seriousness and supreme importance of the task at hand. Dialogue was at its best. The Sacred Congregation was open and responsive to the criticisms, observations and proposals for changes in the structure of some sections and in the phrasing of some articles.

As a whole the SCHEMA, covering all the aspects of priestly formation (doctrinal, disciplinary, spiritual and pastoral) is, to my mind, a magnificent document, notwithstanding the unfavorable criticism of some delegates. Structured along lines traced out by Vatican II, especially by OPTATAM TOTIUS, it moves forward by taking in new ideas, new means and ways to standardize, revitalize and update priestly training in keeping with the demands of today's world. It provides general norms according to which the Episcopal Conferences can work out and frame their own *Ratio*. Many other points are left to further development by each Episcopal Conference in accordance with local conditions. Hence, unity is preserved in a gamut of regional or national variations. A sense of urgency was felt. Urgency to have a *Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, as envisioned by OPTATAM TOTIUS and as postulated by the Synod of Bishops in October of 1967. Urgency in the face of the crisis of vocations in some countries, specially in Europe and in America. Urgency too, in the face of wanton experimentations and innovations that have confused the minds of many as regards priestly training in today's world. This same urgency was reflected in the address that PAUL VI delivered to us in a special audience on Thursday noon, March 27. It is not within the scope of this report to come down to details contained in the Schema and discussed at the meeting. It would seem premature to bring them out since the *RATIO*, as reviewed and dissected by the delegates, will undergo a revision. Many proposals were presented and approved by consensus for possible incorporation into the final draft.

With the help of Fr. Jesus Cavanna, C.M., I submitted some five proposals in behalf of the Philippine Episcopal Conference; proposals which I was sure our Bishops would gladly endorse in toto.

Copies of the revised draft of the *Ratio* will be forwarded to the Episcopal Conferences concerned not later than May 20 . . . for further study and comment. The Episcopal Conferences are given seven weeks to review the draft and are expected to submit their observations and recommendations to the Sacred Congregation before the deadline: July 10.

The Sacred Congregation will then rewrite or redraft the *Ratio* for the last time, taking into account the responses from the Episcopal Conferences. When the ratio comes out in its final form, it can be said to be the seasoned fruit of a sincere, open and long dialogue between Rome and the Episcopal Conferences. And the Philippines has had her part in that dialogue.

The concluding act will be the submission of the Ratio to the Commission of Cardinals for their approval when they meet in Rome before the Synod of Bishops open on October 10.

Then, it will be promulgated by Paul VI.

And a new era shall dawn upon the Seminarians and the formation of priests in this post-conciliar world.