

A Superstructure For A National Missionary Movement

Sometime during the fourth centennial celebration of the Christianization of the Philippines, the Philippine Hierarchy assembled in a body resolved: "We, therefore, proclaim officially our intention to undertake a national effort to orient our people to the Missions. To achieve this and to express in the concrete our gratitude to God for this gift of our Faith, we will organize the Mission Society of the Philippines". Hence, the MISSION SOCIETY OF THE PHILIPPINES (MSP) was founded with this purpose: "The propagation of the faith among the non-Christians and the preaching of the Gospel to the de-Christianized masses in those regions where the Holy See will call it to work".

Responsibility

Even without that statement of the Hierarchy, this Christian country, besides its debt of gratitude, has obligations as members of "the pilgrim Church which by her very nature is missionary, since it is from the mission of the Son and mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father".¹ Hence, the responsibility for the existence and support of a missionary movement in the Philippines does not rest upon the Hierarchy alone, but on the totality of the Philippine Church: "this duty, to be fulfilled by the order of bishops, under the successor of Peter and with the prayers and help of the whole Church is one and the same

¹ Lumen Gentium, 48.

everywhere and in every condition even though it may be carried out differently according to circumstances".² But why has this truth and reality awakened only a token response from our bishops and faithful?

Response

One would like to think that the MSP was established dramatically with all its historic trimmings as part of God's beautiful Providence. It should serve to measure our mission sense and our Christian responsibility as a nation, as represented by the Hierarchy. But when one looks back after all these years, one fears that the founders intended to put up a monolith; because there seems to be neither missionary sense nor responsibility to speak of so proudly, if one takes note of their individual and total contribution towards its support and promotion after its foundation five years ago. Perhaps, they can't be blamed for thinking like St. Paul: "we have planted; God gives the growth". But I pray that something be done to forestall its falls and to help it grow without expecting miracles.

A Suggestion

The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church speaks of a council or a Central Mission Board under the office of the Propagation of the Faith which may consist of the body of bishops and the superiors and/or representatives of all existing local missionary communities. Perhaps, within the framework of their real zeal and charity, a superstructure of a mission society could be built up involving not only a limited group, but opening opportunity to all to participate harmoniously in a missionary movement to Christianize defined areas in Asia. "This will take charge of searching out ways and means for bringing about and directing fraternal cooperation as well as harmonious living with missionary undertakings of other Christian communities that as far as possible the scandal of division may be removed . . . It should promote missionary vocation and missionary spirituality, zeal and prayer for the missions by making use of scientific means suited to the con-

² De Activitate Missionali Ecclesiae, ch. I, par. 6

ditions of modern times, always taking into consideration present-day research in matters of theology, of methodology, and missionary pastoral procedure . . . It should have available a permanent group of expert consultants, of proven knowledge and experience, whose duty it will be among other things, to gather pertinent information about local conditions in various regions, and about the thinking of various groups of men, as well as about the means of evangelization to be used . . . They will then propose scientifically based conclusions for mission work and cooperation".³ If these were entrusted to eight young idealistic, but inexperienced priests and some seven girls, still groping for their identity, currently filling up the structures of the MSP, could such a gigantic task be undertaken? Whereas, if all missionary communities and bishops really pool their zeal and ingenuity together, if they actually put their resources, manpower and facilities together, instead of each one doing his own thing; then, perhaps, the difficulties would not be so formidable. It is comforting to note that, intimating such an idea of cooperation, some missionary groups, realizing identical experiences as foreign mission societies of their countries, sympathized with the MSP, like the Maryknoll Fathers represented by Fr. John Walsh, M.M., who is helping with his expertise in financial drives, and the P.M.E. Fathers, who are taking in the MSP theologians to their regional seminary.

So, unity is necessary. Yes, there will be problems to establish unity in such diversities; but if they are motivated by real Christian zeal for souls and true charity, then nothing is impossible. In our times, when Catholics bend over backwards to harmonize relations with their separated brethren in the name of Ecumenism, it would be a sad irony to admit that we can't find ways and means to present a united front within our ranks to confront the common problems of evangelization on this side of Asia.

Quo Vadis MSP?

The Mission Society of the Philippines is on the right direction; but it is 300 years late when compared to the missionary movement of

³ *Idem*, ch. V, par. 29

other countries who have been sending out their indigenous missionaries while barely in their first centennial of Christianity.

The MSP is a historic monument of our Christianity which should not only be preserved, but could be used as a dynamic center of any framework of mutual missionary cooperation which Vatican II has envisioned. It has its plans and visions which only need the total unselfishness of more dedicated men and women to bring to reality and fruition.

S C H E M A

Congregation of the Propagation of Faith

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missionary societies

Bishops of the
Philippines

Superiors-women
missionary societies

Secretariat

Committees

Seminary-
training centers

logistics
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