



## THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES\*

(Continued)

**Pablo Fernandez, OP**

### Chapter Fourteen

#### SECULARIZATION OF THE PARISHES

##### 1. Preface.

In the history of the Church in the Philippines, secularization of the parishes means the transfer to the secular clergy of the ministries founded or administered by the regular clergy. Originally a religious concern, it assumed by the middle of the nineteenth century a political and separatist character which climaxed in the Revolution and the ensuing secularization of almost all the parishes in the Philippines.

It covers two periods: from 1753 to 1849, and from 1849 to 1898.

In general it is good to note that the work of the regular clergy is principally that of the missions; while that of the secular clergy is to a great extent limited to parish work. Theoretically, the religious should be satisfied with founding missions and developing them into established parishes for eventual transfer to the secular clergy. But in the Philippines this had scarcely taken place, due to a series of circumstances, especially the defective formation and the shortage of secular priests, the attachment of the religious in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the parishes they had founded, and the political system of Spain in the Philippines which saw, or believed it saw, during the nineteenth century a dreaded separatist element in the native clergy.

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## 2. Secularization Up To 1700.

In a royal cedula signed 6 December 1583 from Lisbon,<sup>1</sup> Philip II declared that parochial administration pertained in church law to the secular clergy; if the religious priests administered parishes, it was through papal concession dictated by necessity. Therefore, once there was a sufficient number of capable secular priests, these should be preferred to the religious in the provisions of ecclesiastical benefices and missions (*doctrinas*).<sup>2</sup>

## 3. The Royal Cedulas of 1753 and 1757.

By 1753, Ferdinand VI believed that the reasons no longer held for the royal patronage to make use of religious missionaries in the spiritual conquest of the Spanish dominions in the Indies. He thought that in the Indies there was already a number of secular priests competent in learning and in virtue who could take the place of the former in the care of souls. By a royal cedula of 1 February this year, he ordered the viceroys, governors, archbishops and bishops to relieve the religious orders of parochial work, and to assign in their place members of the secular clergy, as the parishes were vacated.

This royal measure, in effect, decreed the universal secularization of the curacies administered by the regular clergy. But, since its implementation entailed serious difficulties, the same monarch decided in another cedula dated 23 February 1757, that the preceding decree be amended in two ways: 1) in no way may a parish be set up as a secular curacy until its effective cession, and not without the approval of the viceroy or governor and the diocesan prelate; 2) the viceroy or governor in accord with the archbishop or bishop, should see to the implementation of the cedula of 1753, such that the religious orders could keep one or two of the richer parishes in each province.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Egaña Antonio, S.J., *La Iglesia en la América Española, Hemisferio Sur*. Edición BAC, Madrid, 1966, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Colín, Francisco, S.J., *Labor Evangélica* (Ed. Pablo Pastells, S.J.). Barcelona, 1900-1902, II, p. 682, ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ayala, Francisco, O.P., *Exposición al Excmo. Sr. Mariano Ricafort*, Manila, 21 de Noviembre de 1825, Ms, APSR, Sección "Patronato y Visita," 1825.



These royal cédulas, however, were not put into effect at the time in the Philippines. Rather, on 24 February 1754, the same king wrote to the religious orders in the islands in the following terms: "It has seemed good to me to express the special pleasure I have at the zeal with which the religious of that province dedicated themselves in a spirit of Christian rivalry to increase and preserve in the Faith the Christian communities in their charge, and to the proper instruction they are receiving, hoping that by your watchful care, you shall continue to advance these same happy developments."<sup>4</sup>

We can say, then, that the monarch's mind with regards to the Philippines was not to secularize the parishes, but to subject the regular clergy to diocesan visitation and the royal patronage. Actually a certain governor had previously tried to put the regulars under royal patronage; but the latter had defended themselves with the royal cédula of 26 September 1687, stating that in the provision of the curacies no innovation should be introduced, and which was confirmed by another cédula in 1710. With these two documents, the religious shielded themselves from the pressure exerted by Governor Pedro Manuel de Arandia on the Augustinian provincial in 1757.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Secularization During the Reigns of Charles III and IV.

The secularization of the parishes did not effectively take place until Archbishop Basilio Sancho arrived in Manila. As we have already seen the Dominicans submitted to diocesan visitation in August 1767. A little later, 13 April 1768, Governor José Raon, in accord with the royal audiencia and the archbishop, presented to the Dominican provincial a decree bearing the date of 13 March that year, which ordered among other things that the provincial should present three religious for each mission (*doctrina*), so that the Ordinary could confer canonical investiture, according to the laws of royal patronage; otherwise, they should leave their ministries.

This time the provincial did not easily bend before the will of the governor and the archbishop. And so, on 16 April, the governor sent

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Tamayo, O.P., *Sobre una reseña histórica de Filipinas*, Manila, Imprenta de Santo Tomás, 1906, pp. 25-29.



an order to the archbishop to appoint secular priests to the parishes of Binondo and the Parian. For his part, the archbishop not only lent himself to second the will of Raon, but even encouraged him to order the secularization of the Dominican ministries in Bataan. And in effect, a priest moved in shortly to administer the Binondo parish, and in June secular priests assumed charge of the Parian and six Dominican ministries in Bataan.

At the expulsion of the Society of Jesus, many of their parishes also passed to the hands of the secular clergy, both those in the suburbs of Manila and those in Cavite and Negros provinces.

Anda succeeded Raon. With his characteristic energy the former threw himself to the task of compelling the Augustinians to accept royal patronage. Because they had opposed the non-transferability of the parishes and had refused to submit the terna, Anda forcefully deprived them of seventeen curacies in Pampanga which he immediately assigned to the secular clergy. It must be noted, however, that some Augustinians retained for themselves and for their Order their respective parishes, in time and on their own initiative submitting to the royal patronage and canonical visitation.

The Augustinians felt offended and complained to the king, who ordered Anda through the royal cedula of 9 November 1774 to restore what belonged to them; at the same time, however, the king approved the secularization of the curacies and ministries, with the condition that in each province one or two of the richer missions of their choosing might be left to the religious. While this was happening to the Augustinians, the Dominicans had already submitted to the royal patronage on 6 June 1771, in order to avoid worse evils.

Incidents in Pampanga and other less wholesale experiences made Anda realize that rapid and total secularization of the missions would entail many evils in the islands, both spiritual and temporal. On 3 January 1776, he sent a memorial against secularization to Charles III. This resulted in the royal cedula of 11 December 1776 addressed to the Dominican provincial, which ordered that things returned to the *status quo ante*; in other words, the secularized ministries were to return

to the religious, on condition that the latter accept royal patronage and submit to diocesan visitation.<sup>6</sup>

This was followed by the Royal cedula of 17 September 1788, which was occasioned by the following incident. The year before, the parish of guingut had been left vacant by the death of the Augustinian missionary in charge, Fr. Bernardo Notario. The acting governor, Pedro Sarrio, assigned it to an Augustinian, Fr. Manuel Rivera, on 5 December. To justify his action, Sarrio memorialized the king briefly but substantially on the situation of the secular clergy in the Philippines, at the same time expressing opposition to the policy of secularization.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the question of secularization was raised anew, when the vice-patron and the archbishop entrusted the newly-founded parish of Santa Rosa to the Dominicans, and the parishes of Imus and Las Piñas to the Recollects. The secular clergy protested against the usurpation of ministries they claimed for themselves. Making common cause with the latter, the cabildo elevated a petition to the king, and a cedula bearing the date of 31 March 1803 was issued, immediately transferring the three parishes to the secular clergy. But the vice-regal patron did not heed the mandate, and the curacies remained under the administration of the religious.<sup>8</sup>

##### 5. A Decree of the Cortes Favoring Secularization in 1812.

In 1812, Bishop Arispe of Guayana petitioned the Cortes in Cadiz to secularize the parishes in his diocese. The representatives for America prevailed upon the Cortes to pass the decree of 13 September, extending the Arispe resolution to all of the Americas and the Philippines. When the decree reached the islands, the superior government quickly noted that its implementation was inadvisable due to the dearth and the inadequate preparation of the secular clergy here. To this end,

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. *Cedulario de ultramar*, Ms. AUST, Sección de "Libros," Tomo 117, folios 742v-745.

<sup>7</sup> *Importantísima cuestión que puede afectar gravemente a la existencia de las Islas Filipinas*, Madrid, 1863, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Fonseca, Joaquín, O.P., *Historia de los PP. Dominicos en las islas Filipinas, y en sus misiones de Japon, China, Tung-king y Formosa*, Madrid, 1871-1872, Tomo V, pp. 310-313.



it sent to the archbishop, Juan Antonio Zulaybar, O.P., his arguments for delaying the promulgation of the decree, to which this prelate agreed, convinced of the same reasons. Besides, he penalized some clerics who, knowing that the decree had arrived in Manila, had presented themselves at the palace to petition its implementation.

Thus things stood until 1820, when king Ferdinand VII, in acknowledging the Constitution, had to sanction the decree of secularization, as he had been bound to it by the liberal ministers. This disposition reached the Philippines in the time of Governor Mariano F. Folgueras, who consulted the archbishop before publishing it. Because there were not enough secular priests to take the place of the religious, the latter requested him not to pass it. Nonetheless, although the archbishop was convinced it was impossible to effect total secularization at one step, he believed it was possible to do so by degrees. And so, when the Malate parish was left vacant by the death in 1822 of its Augustinian administrator, it was given to a secular priest, following the competitive synodal examination.<sup>9</sup>

#### 6. The Royal Cedula of 1826.

The government of Spain had wanted for many years to secularize the parishes because of the high cost of sending religious missionaries to America and the Philippines. But, from the time of the independence of the American colonies which had been fomented by the secular clergy, Spain changed her policy completely, in order to prevent the same disaster in the Antilles and in the Philippines. This was the basic reason for the royal order of 8 June 1826, aimed to nip in the bud all projects of secularization in the Philippines during the nineteenth century.

In this decree, after a brief resume of the history of secularization since the reign of Ferdinand VI, Ferdinand VII ordered "that both the calced Augustinians and the religious of the other orders be restored to administer their curacies in those same islands, in the manner and condition they had enjoyed and was decreed for them by the royal cedula

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<sup>9</sup> Arbea, Carlos, *Exposición a su Majestad sobre el clero regular*, Ms APSR, Sección "HOR", 1823.

of 11 December 1776, notwithstanding the doubts presented in later cédulas regarding the meaning of their provisions, and *neither by the vice-regal patron, nor by the diocesan ordinaries, may any curacy be secularized without express orders from my royal person*, protesting, as I now protest, that none of those determinations prejudice the interests or the honor of the secular clergy, on the supposition that they are not deprived of any of their rights."<sup>10</sup> Since the time of this royal decree it was the sorry lot of the secular clergy to watch how, one by one, the parishes which had been won for them in the time of Archbishop Basilio Sancho, passed to the regular clergy, whenever they were vacated by death or the removal of the secular parish priest.

This royal order was not completely implemented until 1870, the year the secular parish priest of San Simon died and his parish was turned over to the regular clergy. But, by that time, the Filipino secular clergy had already received harder and more painful blows, as we shall see right away.

### 7. The Secular Clergy Loses Some Parishes in Cavite.

Seeking some ministries near Manila where their Provincial Definitors could exercise the 'care of souls, the Procurator in Madrid of the Recollect Province of San Nicolás in the Philippines, petitioned his majesty for the grant of some curacies in Cavite province. Because they owned some estates in that province since earlier years, Governor Claveria supported the Recollects' request, although he indicated to the Madrid government that it would be better to divide the parishes of Cavite among the secular clergy who had held some of them since before, the Recollects who owned Imus, and the Dominicans who owned two prosperous estates there.

His majesty acceded to the request of the Recollect procurator, just as Governor Claveria had recommended it, through the royal cédula of 9 March 1849. This measure necessarily affected the rights of the secular clergy to certain parishes which, either founded by them or by the Jesuits, they had for many years now been administering.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Cedulario de ultramar, loc. cit., fol. 873.*

<sup>11</sup> Pons y Torres, Salvador, *En defensa del Clero Filipino*, Manila, 1900,