



HIS EMINENCE
ILDEBRANDO CARDINAL ANTONUTTI
Papal Legate

* This is the full text of the Joint Pastoral letter issued by the Philippine Hierarchy following their annual conference in Cebu last year. Attention is called to the forthcoming celebration of the Fourth Centennial of the Christianization of the Philippines.

Grace and peace in our Lord.

As the duly constituted Pastors of the flock of the Lord¹ in this part of Christendom, "the servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God";² We the Bishops of the Philippines, deem it opportune to address to you this Joint Letter on the approaching Fourth Centenary of the evangelization of our country.

All Christians who are aware of the true value of their Christian Faith have to agree that the greatest and most significant event in our history was the evangelization of our people, when we "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God."³ "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gifts."⁴

Before our country was christianized, our forefathers had, no doubt, their natural virtues. But at the same time, they had pagan customs and practices. Their culture was steeped in idolatry and superstition.⁵ It was our conversion to Christianity that ushered us into the family of civilized nations.

It is true that many will deny the unique position of Christianity and will refuse to admit the paramount importance of this gift, the greatest type that we as a people have received from the hands of God the gift of our Christian Faith.

But to those of us who believe in these words of Our Lord: "I am the door. If anyone enter by me he shall be safe, and shall go in and out and shall find pastures. The thief comes only to steal, and slay, and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly."⁶ "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he dies, shall live; and whosoever lives and believes in me, shall never die."⁷ "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me."⁸ "I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in the darkness, but will have the

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light of life."⁹ "Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ."¹⁰ to us, We repeat, who know what these words mean, our Catholic Faith will always be our most precious heritage. We will always glory in our name of Christians, incorporated by baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ. We will always consider the fact that we are the only Christian nation in the Orient as our badge of distinction in the whole Christian world.

For this reason we cannot allow to pass unnoticed the Fourth Centenary of the Christianization of our country. As Catholics the year 1565 is sacred to us for that was the year when the preaching of the Gospel in these islands began in earnest. As Filipinos that year is also of great significance to us because that was the year when the Philippines as a nation came into being. As the Gospel was brought from one island to another, the Philippines as a country, as a nation emerged. Before that, in these islands there were only small kingdoms and tribes, one independent from the other.

The discovery of the islands was made by Hernando de Magallanes in 1521. The first Mass in this country was celebrated in Limasawa, Leyte, on March 31 of that year. The expedition then proceeded to Cebu and there King Humabon, his wife, and 800 of their subjects were baptized.

However, D. Pedro de Valderrama, the priest who landed with the expedition¹¹ died four days after Magallanes;¹² and the rest of the expedition sailed back to Spain. So the first attempt to christianize our people did not have lasting results.

Three other expeditions followed the discovery of our islands, that of Loaiza in 1525, that of Saavedra in 1527, and that of Villalobos, with four Augustinians in 1542. No serious missionary efforts resulted from these expeditions.

But Philip II of Spain had a missionary heart. When advised to "give up such remote and apparently worthless possessions as the Philippines," he replied: "If there were only one person there to keep the name of Jesus alive, I would send missionaries from Spain to spread His Gospel. Looking for mines of precious metals is not the only business of Kings."¹³

So he ordered his Vice-roy of Mexico to organize a new expedition. The leader of the expedition was

¹Acts 20, 28

²1 Cor. 4, 1

³1 Thes 1, 9

⁴11 Cor. 9, 15

⁵For example No. 6 of the Code of Kalantiao said: "He who kills trees known to be the dwelling place of anito shall be put to death by drowning. He who kills sharks and caymans belonging to anitos be put to death by drowning."

⁶John 10, 9-10

⁷John 11, 25-26

⁸John 14, 6

⁹John 8, 12

¹⁰John 17, 3

¹¹Historia General de las Indias Occidentales. HERRERA,

lib. IV, cap. XIV.

¹²Documentos Inéditos. Archivo de Indias. T. III, pp.

291-292

¹³Life of Philip II, WALSH, p. 589.

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Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. The technical head was Fray Andrés de Urdaneta a good cosmographer, in the words of the King himself. Four other Augustinian missionaries came with the expedition. Their purpose was to bring to those islands the Gospel of Christ. They arrived at Cebú on April 27, 1565.

The chronicler of the Augustinian Monastery of Santo Niño de Cebú says that when Legazpi fired the guns of his ships, the Cebuanos fled, leaving their village in flames. Legazpi sent ashore a company of soldiers. While they were putting out the fire, one of the soldiers, Juan de Camas, found in a house an image of the Holy Child, the gift of Hernando de Magallanes to the wife of Rajah Humabón at her baptism.

A chapel was improvised where the image could be venerated, and there Fray Urdaneta celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving for the success of the voyage. Thus was inaugurated the formal evangelization of the Philippines under the patronage of the Holy Name of Jesus, our Santo Niño de Cebú.¹⁴

The Augustinians first preached in Cebú. Then they went to Panay, Masbate, Cebu and Albay. In 1571 Fray Diego de Herrera accompanied Legazpi to Manila.

But after some time, the Augustinians could no longer cope with the ever-increasing demands of their missionary work. So other religious orders from Spain came to help, the Franciscans in 1577, the Jesuits in 1581, the Dominicans in 1587, and the Recollects in 1606.¹⁵ The Capuchins, the Vincentians and the Benedictines followed them much later.

The work realized by Spanish missionaries in the evangelization of the Philippines was truly marvelous. Indeed, it is enough to note that almost the entire country was reached by the missionaries and the great majority of our people was converted to the Christian Faith in less than fifty years, an achievement which has no parallel in the history of missions.

Divine Providence has truly chosen our country to be the "lighthouse of Catholicism" in the Orient, as John XXIII said.¹⁶ We can apply to our people those words of the Lord to the Israelites: "I will set my Dwelling among you, and will not disdain you. Ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people."¹⁷

Since we "have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints with all who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place — their Lord as well as ours"¹⁸, since by the grace of God we are what we are, God's grace in us must not be fruitless,¹⁹ we must "not receive the grace of God in vain."²⁰

In His infinite mercy, God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have our redemption, the remission of our sins."²¹ In gratitude, it is our duty to "remain firmly founded in the faith and steadfast,"²² it is our duty to render "thanks to the Father, who has made us worthy to share the lot of the saints in light."²³ "For the hope of the im-



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grate melts like a icintry frost and runs off like useless water."²⁴

It is for this reason that We said that We can not allow to pass unnoticed the Fourth Centenary of the conversion of our country to the Christian Faith. We have to celebrate the year 1965 with special acts of thanksgiving. And the best way of showing our gratitude to God is to live our Faith in accordance with what we say in our national hymn to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus:

*La Fc de Filipinas es como el sol ardiente;
Como la roca, firme; inmensa como el mar.*

In order to make our celebration of this Centenary as worthy as the occasion demands, We have decided to hold the following activities:

1. We will send a petition to the Holy Father that he may deign to:

- declare the year 1965 a Jubilee Year for the Philippines; thus, it will be a year of thanksgiving, of pardons and of grace;
 - confer the title of Minor Basilica on the Santo Niño shrine in Cebú City;
 - grant the privilege of Canonical Coronation of the image of Santo Niño de Cebú, this image that was so closely connected with the first missionary endeavors of the Augustinians in these islands.
2. We unanimously approved the idea of our

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¹⁴The History of the Augustinian Monastery of Santo Niño de Cebú, 6 & ss.

¹⁵Historia de las Islas Filipinas, Concepción. 248-257; Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas, Medina 101.

¹⁶Address to Pres. Macapagal, July 1962.

¹⁷Lev. 26, 11-12

¹⁸I Cor. 1, 2

¹⁹I Cor. 15, 10

²⁰I Cor. 6, 1

²¹Col. 1, 13-14

²²Col. 1, 23

²³Col. 1, 12

²⁴Wis., 16, 29

late Apostolic Nuncio, the Most Reverend Salvatore Sino, to hold in Cebu City, the cradle of Christianity in the Philippines, the Third National Eucharistic Congress from April 28 to May 2, 1965.

We cannot think of a more fitting centennial celebration than an Eucharistic Congress in which the whole Philippines will kneel before our Eucharistic Lord in humble adoration and in thanksgiving for the gift of Himself as our Bread of life: "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."²⁵ In preparation for the National Eucharistic Congress we have approved the celebration of Eucharistic Congresses in our parishes and dioceses. In that way a national consciousness of the importance of the centenary will be awakened.

3. We will bless the cornerstone of a seminary for the Philippine Foreign Mission Society, a missionary congregation which We have agreed to establish. This missionary society will be a living monument of our gratitude to God for the conversion of our country to Christianity. Pope Pius XI, the Pope of the Missions, in his letter to the Bishops of the Philippines, said that our country is destined "to become a center from which the light of truth will radiate, and to be, as it were, an advance guard of Catholicism in the Far East."²⁶ Pope Pius XII also said that our country has "a missionary vocation" in this part of Asia.²⁷ The time has come for us to fulfill our missionary vocation as the only Christian nation in Southeast Asia. We owe our Faith to the missionary spirit of Spain. In order to pay that debt, we have to undertake the task of evangelizing our non-Christian neighbors. This is an apostolic responsibility that we cannot elude. Hence, the plan to establish a Foreign Mission Society under the auspices of the Philippine Hierarchy.

The theme of our centennial celebration will be: **THE PHILIPPINES FOR CHRIST.** Among the peoples of the Far East we have been privileged to be "the first-fruits unto salvation, through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."²⁸ Christ has chosen us to be His people, a part of "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people," so that we "may proclaim the perfections of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light."²⁹ In order to "proclaim the perfections of Christ," we will make a public avowal of our faith in Him, we will declare ourselves for Christ: **THE PHILIPPINES FOR CHRIST.**

To all of you, Our beloved flock, We heartily impart our Pastoral Blessing. May the Patroness of the Philippines, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception continue to help us preserve the priceless heritage of our Faith and make it bear abundant fruits for all of us and for the countries surrounding us.

Given in Manila, on the 2nd day of February, 1964, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.

FOR THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF THE PHILIPPINES:

(Sgd.) JULIO R. ROSALES, D.D.
President, CWO Administrative Council
Archbishop of Cebu

THE SANTO NIÑO OF CEBU

by Rosa C. P. Tenazas

²⁵John 6, 51-52

²⁶Apostolic Letter, Jan. 18, 1930.

²⁷Address to the Philippine Ambassador, 1951.

²⁸1 Thes. 2, 13

²⁹1 Pet. 2, 13