

DOCUMENTATION

JOINT PASTORAL LETTER OF THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF THE PHILIPPINES ON THE VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER

On November 27 the Philippines will have the great joy and honor of welcoming the Vicar of Christ. Up till this time most Filipinos have had to be content to manifest their "love and loyalty to the common father" at a distance or in those prelates who represent him. But now we are to see him in person.

He is coming to attend the Meeting of the Asian Bishops, but his visit will at the same time be the fulfillment of a wish expressed by him, when in 1965 he sent Cardinal Antoniutti to the Fourth Centenary Celebration. "How it would please us on this occasion to visit your beautiful country, . . . to give by our presence a new testimony of the affection which the Vicar of Christ professes for this great people." This ardent desire will not have cooled in the five years that have intervened, during which the Church in the Philippines has had more than one opportunity to demonstrate its loyalty to him in his time of trial.

When Some 400 years ago in the Providence of God the Filipino people began to embrace the Catholic faith, they entered upon a long history of close unity with the Roman Pontiffs, which even certain critical religious events did not interrupt. When in 1953 the Philippine Hierarchy gathered for the First Plenary Council of Manila, they greeted Pope Pius XII in words that may be taken as a summary of this long history: "emphatically attesting their own and the Filipino people's most earnest filial homage and unceasing devotion and fidelity to the Chair of Peter."

The Popes on their part have on many occasions shown their solicitude and love for the Filipino people. When events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought entire nations for the first time within the

salutary influence of the Church's teaching, our nation too was an object of that general concern which the Roman Pontiffs manifested for the new peoples. Always the Popes were anxious that these nations should be treated with every consideration, wishing, as Clement VII said in 1605, "to water the tender plants of this new growth, the faithful of those lands, with the gentle dew of kindness."

When the islands came under American rule, Leo XIII wrote his Apostolic Constitution, *Quae Mari Sinico*, Sept. 17, 1902. He recalled the long relations of the Popes with this nation. From the very moment of Spain's occupation, he said, "It became the chief and most earnest endeavor of the Roman Pontiffs . . . to convert the inhabitants of these islands to the faith . . . The people were advanced in human culture through the discipline of letters and art . . . (and) Catholic interests progressed in the Philippines under the patronage of the Roman Pontiffs."

In recent years the Supreme Pontiffs have continued the concern of their predecessors. Pius XII "followed with keen interest and fatherly participation the experiences of this country," "separated from Rome by vast stretches of ocean, nevertheless bound to the See of Peter by close bonds of reverence and charity." When he spoke of the Philippines his eyes glowed with love.

John XXIII in turn told of "the affection which his fatherly heart felt for this great nation," and of the warm ties that held the Philippines to the Holy See. Recalling the deep solicitude of Pius XI, John insisted that he too felt "the same burning love."

Our present Holy Father therefore, our guest of November, has a long precedent for his interest in the Filipino nation, "that great people" as he called them, "so full of promise."

It is appropriate to pause here and to ask who it is that we are receiving and what is his true position in the Church. Holy Scripture tells us that "our Lord after praying to the Father, called to Himself those whom He desired, and appointed twelve . . . and these He formed into a college of stable group."

Then, "to establish His Holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, He entrusted to this College of twelve, the task of

teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Among their number he selected Peter" and "placed him over them that the group might be one and undivided, instituting in Peter a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity and faith and communion."

"After Peter's confession of faith, Christ determined that on him he would build His Church. To Peter too He promised the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and after his profession of love, entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith and shepherded into perfect unity. Christ Jesus was Himself forever to remain the chief cornerstone and shepherd of our souls, but He willed that the apostles and their successors — the bishops with Peter's successors as their head — should preach the Gospel faithfully, administer the sacraments, and rule the Church in love."

"In this Church of Christ, the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, enjoys supreme, full, immediate and universal authority over the care of souls by divine institution. Therefore as Pastor of all the faithful, he is sent to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual Churches."

The Holy Father is therefore supreme teacher of the faithful. "He enjoys infallibility as head of the college of bishops in virtue of his office, when, as supreme shepherd and teacher of the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals..." "But even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*, religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff; that is, it must be shown in such a way that the supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will."

The Bishops too have been appointed by the Holy Spirit as successors of the Apostles and pastors of souls. Together with the supreme pontiff and under his authority they are to continue throughout the ages the work of Christ the eternal Pastor." "But the Pope's power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful remains whole and intact, in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church. And he is always free to exercise this power."

"The order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of the apostles, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head, they exercise only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff, for our Lord placed Simon alone as the rock and the bearer of the keys of the Church and made him shepherd of the whole flock."

This description of the office of our Holy Father, as given in the Second Vatican Council, will enable us in some measure to appreciate the great honor that is ours in his visit and will quicken us to respond to the desires he entertains in our regard. It is obvious that the popes look with equal love upon all the nations of the world and that the Philippines can assert no special claim in this regard. Nevertheless the Sovereign Pontiffs have expressed a special interest in the Philippines because of the special role assigned this nation by the Providence of God, a role that is being highlighted by the convening of the Asian Bishops Meeting in Manila. Pius XII said: "A glance at the map of Southeast Asia and Oceania reveals strikingly the vital point on the earth's globe in which Providence has placed this people, the field of life and action which it has assigned them in the community of nations."

This too is the mind of our present pontiff: "One wonders about the intention of Divine Providence regarding your singular position. Surely it is to radiate the faith to the surrounding lands." "As a great Catholic nation you are truly a city set upon a mountain . . . The geographical position and historical destiny of your country in the Extreme Orient, the splendor of the religious life of your homes, . . . are calls . . . to give your sincere Catholic profession a wider missionary expression." The Pope in coming to the Asian Bishops Meeting in Manila is at once coming to all the nations present at it and is re-emphasizing this central vocation of the Philippines.

The Bishops who meet in this conference come together with pastoral problems that are peculiar to their countries and yet shared by their neighbors. They come together with the Sovereign Pontiff in collegiality to find with one another and with him solutions to their problems, to study what is the role of the Churches in this part of the world and of each of them in the universal Church. The Holy Father will be able to help

them and he in turn will be helped by this first-hand knowledge of the problems in the Far East.

At the same time his mere presence here will be a reminder of what Vatican II again and again said of the Pope. He is the sign of unity. His presence in the Conference will be a sign of unity among the bishops present as well as a sign of their unity with the Holy Father and through him with the bishops of the whole world, and what is more important the unity of all in Christ.

It is obvious that the faithful of the Philippines must respond to the Holy Father's visit in a spiritual manner. It is the Vicar of Christ who is visiting us, the successor of Peter, the shepherd of the flock of Christ, the head of Christ's Church, the chief of the episcopal college, the Rock, the holder of the keys. The Pope's visit will be a reminder of the great grace Catholics have in the Papacy. In a world and at a time full of doubt and rebellion, it is a source of great spiritual satisfaction to know that there is one authority to whom we can turn with security and follow with peace of soul.

The visit will also be an occasion to question our own Catholic life. Especially it will be an hour of self-examination on our concern for our less privileged brothers. Paul is the Pope of *Populorum Progressio*, who wrote: "There is the scandal of glaring inequalities not merely in the enjoyment of possessions but even more in the exercise of power. While a small restricted group enjoys a refined civilization in certain regions, the remainder of the population, poor and scattered, is 'deprived of nearly all possibility of personal initiative and responsibility, and often times even its living and working conditions are unworthy of the human person.' He is the Pope who appealed to the faithful "to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures in which they live."

The visit of the Pope will remind us of our vocation in a new world. He himself is an example of readiness to admit new ideas and programs with prudent retention of what is of value in the legacy of the past. Those Catholics among us who are such in name only, or who find passive satisfaction in inherited forms, "jealous guardians of a pious Christ-

ian memory or tradition," should experience an awakening from the Holy Father's visit, whose very journey itself, so arduous, so new in papal practice, is an example of concrete adjustment to a new world and an exhortation to adaptability, a reminder that many Catholics may have long journeys to make before they meet the world of today and the Catholic demands of our times.

The visit of our Holy Father will have been fruitful and successful if it gives encouragement to the spirit and momentum of this renewal, to the unmistakable work being done by Holy Spirit in making Christians conscious of their responsibility and encouraging them to serve Christ and the Church in all circumstances.

For the Catholic Hierarchy of
the Philippines:

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