

ECUMENISM IN THE SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES

Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J.

A one-sentence decree and two out of 671 numbers of the final document issued by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), form the bulk of the Council's explicit and positive statements in the area of ecumenism. Eleven more numbers in the doctrinal-pastoral part deal with negative aspects of the problem, in particular with Fundamentalism and the Iglesia ni Kristo.¹

More than one bishop, priest, and lay faithful from among the participants themselves expressed their dismay at the fact that the Council has given such a meager and scanty attention to ecumenism, especially if one considers that 17% of the Philippine population, or over ten million Filipinos, are non-Catholic, of whom more than two-thirds are Christian. At first sight this fact appears somehow disturbing — and perhaps it is disturbing!

To get however a clearer picture of the problem, other factors need to be examined, while it would also be useful to try finding out the reasons behind this relative silence. In fact not a few ecumenical elements which deserve careful attention are found in an implicit way in the Conciliar Document. A comparison with previous councils, specifically the First Provincial Council of Manila in 1907 and the First Plenary Council of the Philippines

1. *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* 20 January — 17 February 1991 (Manila: Secretariat, Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992). Numbers in parentheses in the text refer to the marginal numbers of the Conciliar Document. Decrees are referred to by the number of the article. See nos. 216-228 and art. 34.

in 1953, shows that a certain ecumenical shift has taken place along the years, and that even some advance has been made on the road of ecumenism in the Philippines. A further comparison with the Fourth Synod of the Archdiocese of Manila held in 1979 and a reflection on the document of the Latin American bishops gathered in Puebla also in 1979 will serve to round up the picture. A brief statistical profile of the ecumenical situation in the Philippines may help in completing the reflection.

I. EXPLICIT ECUMENICAL ELEMENTS IN THE CONCILIAR DOCUMENT

The explicit *positive* ecumenical elements are found in decree 34 and in numbers 216-217 of the Conciliar Document.

1. The text of the decree reads as follows:

In the area of faith, justice, peace and development, lay faithful, clergy and religious should be made ever more aware of the true value of ecumenism (art. 34).²

One may ask: In what does it precisely consist "to be made ever more aware of the true value of ecumenism"? What does it exactly mean? *How* is this to be translated into practice? What is the value of the decree *as is*? Is this all that the Council had to "legislate" about ecumenism?

It may be of interest to note that although Canon 383 #3 in the footnote speaks of the bishop, stating that "he should also foster ecumenism as it is understood by the Church," in reviewing the decrees the Congregation for Bishops deleted the words "the bishops" which were found in the original text approved by the Council between "religious" and "should be"; and added the word "true" between "aware of" and "value." It is also the Congregation that added at the end of the article the reference to the canons. It is worth noting that the Latin "Episcoporum item est" of Canon 755 #1 has a stronger meaning

2. A footnote to art. 34 refers the reader to Canons 256 #2, 383 #3, and 755 #1.

than the mild translation commonly used: "It is likewise within the competence of bishops . . ." The Latin genitive with "est" indicates not simply competence or power but also *some obligation*.

As can be seen, the decree does not say much about ecumenism, and whatever is proposed is said in a very subdued way.

2. In the Conciliar Document, Ecumenism is the first item listed under "8. Special Concerns," a subsection of Part III, "A Renewed Integral Evangelization." The document acknowledges that "ecumenism has not been one of the top priorities of the Church in the Philippines" and that "neither the clergy nor the lay people have, in general, laid much stress on ecumenical activities" (no. 216), again a very mild formulation if compared with the reality which is marked by almost a total absence of ecumenical activities. The text continues, rather positively:

What Vatican II effected in the Philippines was the lessening of hostilities between Catholics and followers of main line Protestant Churches, the opening towards mutual understanding and tolerance, and the getting together occasionally for common prayer. More frequent are common efforts for development, for the defence of human rights, and for the promotion of justice and peace. But there have not been many significant endeavors to work together towards Christian unity. With gratitude we are glad to note the services rendered to Ecumenism by the Cardinal Bea Institute, the yearly octave of prayer for Christian unity, the cooperative endeavor of Catholics and Protestants in the Philippine Bible Society, and the mutual recognition of baptism between the Catholic Church and some other Christian Churches (no. 216).

The "lessening of hostilities" the Council speaks of is true, at least partly true, since the improvement refers generally to the main line Protestant churches. All in all it represents a welcome change of climate. The Catholic entities entrusted with the promotion of Christian Unity in the country, like the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenical Affairs (ECEA) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and its permanent secretariat, the John XXIII Ecumenical Center (JEC), maintain friendly relations with the National Council of Churches in the

Philippines (NCCP) and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC). At times these relations have been not only friendly but even cordial, depending generally on personal factors. Still some of the most conservative and aggressive member churches of the NCCP not seldom have shown an open antagonism vs. the Catholic Church. Special friendly relations have been entertained with some individual Churches, like the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Philippine Episcopal Church, and in different periods with the Philippine Independent Church — depending again on who the leaders have been.³

Even if not fully subscribing to the doubtful ecumenical aphorism that "doctrine divides, service unites," what the document states on cooperation for development, defence of human rights, and promotion of justice and peace, although not on a big scale, is also substantially true. The same may be said of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (which the document still calls by the old term "octave of prayer"), although again, in general, Protestants are more committed to this Week of Prayer than the immense majority of Catholics, pastors and religious included.

Greater collaboration between Catholics and other Christians, particularly the Philippine Bible Society, has been achieved in the area of translation, distribution, and study of the Bible. The mutual recognition of the validity of Baptism between the Catholic Church in the Philippines and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, solemnly signed on February 6, 1972, and the Catholic Church in the Philippines and the Philippine Episcopal Church on January 20, 1980, are significant ecumenical milestones.

Number 217 of the document elaborates on some of the

3. The Cardinal Bea Institute for Ecumenical Studies (CBI) mentioned in the above-quoted text is the office for ecumenical affairs of the Jesuit Province of the Philippines, as well as the ecumenical section of the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City. The John XXIII Ecumenical Center, permanent secretariat of the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, is also located in the CBI premises. CBI has a specialized ecumenical library with over 5,000 volumes, 94 current periodicals, and the whole series of the Church Unity Periodicals in microfilm with over 60 periodicals — the only one of its kind in Asia. Some of these periodicals go as far back as 1841. CBI publishes *Cardinal Bea Studies*, a series of ecumenical monographs.

activities that might help in fostering the ecumenical spirit and much-needed ecumenical attitudes. The document mentions "high-level dialogues among theologians of the Churches" as "a very important approach to Christian unity" — even if the Vatican Secretariat (now Pontifical Council) for Promoting Christian Unity had already given a mild warning to the effect that the ecumenical dialogue should *not* be limited to theologians and experts. There is also some reason to doubt whether dialogues among theologians constitute such an important aspect of ecumenical relationships in the Philippines, and until what extent these local dialogues effectively advance the cause of ecumenism. Heretofore experience does not seem to warrant an optimistic outlook.

The document rightly emphasizes "spiritual ecumenism" as the best approach in this area.

But the best approach to ecumenism by the Catholic Church is through 'spiritual ecumenism,' i.e., prayer, penance and self-renewal by Catholics with the end in view of drawing nearer to Christ, and, by that very fact, drawing nearer to our separated brethren. Further, Catholics should refrain from using language and doing acts that might unnecessarily alienate our separated brothers and sisters. The annual week of prayer for unity can also be more effectively used to explain the necessity and nature of ecumenism and to urge Catholics to do their share so that all the followers of Christ may indeed, as he prayed, be one (no. 217).

It might not be too easy to explain the adverb "unnecessarily" when referring to the possibility of alienating our separated brothers and sisters.

II. IMPLICIT ECUMENICAL ELEMENTS IN THE CONCILIAR DOCUMENT

The redeeming factor, however, for this apparent ecumenical minimalism of the Council is to be found in the various, and some of them important, elements spread out along the doctrinal-pastoral part of the document. In a similar although more modest way, we find that besides the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, there is an abundance of ecumenical

elements, some of them explicit, others only implicit, in almost all the Vatican II documents.⁴ Several assertions in the PCP II Conciliar Document contain precious theological ideas and insights that are basically ecumenical and, as such, extremely valuable. What is to be regretted is that the Plenary Council did not draw the consequences for ecumenism that would logically follow. The main, if only implicit, ideas may be clustered under six headings: namely, Jesus Christ, Christian, Baptism, the Word of God, Church as Communion, and Concern for Unity.

JESUS CHRIST

1. In the Council the centrality of Christ under the phrase "the focus is Christ" is the real catchword. The centrality of Christ is the first and most important of the four dimensions of the Council — the other three being: the orientation is pastoral, the spirit is evangelization, the context is Filipino. Christ as focus appears in a real sense as the theme of the Council. The Council's logo expresses it unmistakably: "To Unite All Things Under Christ," following Ephesians 1:10.⁵ This characteristic note of the Council was highlighted by Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D., President of the Council, in his homily during the opening ceremonies. It was already operative during the preparatory phase of the Council and it rang and shone all along the Council sessions, giving unity to all the Council deliberations.

2. This is also borne out in Part II of the Conciliar Document, "Envisioning a Church Renewed." In answering the question, "How to live as Christians" in order to achieve a thorough renewal, the document says that "the answer cannot be abstract. For it leads us back to the person of Christ." The Council proposes that living as Christians may be done by contemplating the face and the heart of Christ (no. 36), then developing "the

4. See *Ecumenism and Vatican II, Cardinal Bea Studies III*, P. S. de Achútegui, ed. (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1972).

5. Eph 1:10 can be translated as "to unite all things *in* Christ" or "to unite all things *under* Christ." After consulting several Scripture scholars and comparing various translations both in English and other languages, the Coordinating Office for the preparation of the Council decided to adopt the translation "*under* Christ" for the Council's logo.

Way of Jesus" (nos. 37-61) who was sent by the Father to proclaim the Kingdom of God as a Gift made present in him. But the Kingdom is a task and a promise with the "in-between-time" which is the time of the Church. Christ fulfilled his mission of preference for the poor and obtained liberation from sinfulness for all through the Paschal Mystery as Priest, Prophet, and King. We must answer his call in faith (nos. 74-77). We answer him by becoming the Community of Disciples; we are his disciples, the Church is his Community (nos. 87-101).

At this point one may ask: Is there here anything specifically "Catholic" or is all this simply and essentially Christian, and as such then thoroughly applicable to and valid for *all* Christians? And if valid for *all* Christians, are not then these ideas essentially ecumenical?

3. A further confirmation of Christ as focus is the fact that this community is a community-in-mission which continues the mission of Christ (nos. 102-105). In particular this community will proclaim the doctrine and message of Christ working towards "a renewed integral evangelization" (Part III) which begins by "announcing a message of salvation." As the Council puts it, the first element of this renewed evangelization is "a renewed catechesis" whose essential note is that it should be Christocentric.⁶

Catechesis today must be *Christ-centered*. There is no compromising the centrality and primacy of Christ. Everything — the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the sacraments, word of life, devotions, etc. — must be taught in relation to Christ, and with the purpose of leading the catechized into intimacy with Christ (no. 157).

4. The fourth is a paragraph enshrined in the section on "Renewed Worship" which speaks for itself. While emphasizing the need of Christocentrism in the practices of popular piety, it shows that Catholics hold fast and in unison with other Christians to the truth of Christ being the one mediator between God and humankind — contrary to repeated but unsubstantiated denunciations by certain individuals and groups.

6. See in this issue Joseph L. Roche's article, "Catechesis/Religious Education in the Spirit of PCP II."

We must continue to foster devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. From the beginning of our evangelization as a people, devotion to her has helped spread, foster and protect our faith. But we must make sure that devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints are seen in relationship with, and in subordination to, Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind. In practice the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary seem to preoccupy the attention of many of the faithful more than Christ does. Our pastoral practice must ensure that the Catholic religion does not become saint- or Mary-centered but that it always remains Christ-centered (no. 174).

The elements presented above are enough to conclude that we are much closer to other Christians and more united with them in the love of Christ and the following of his message than what simple people and even sophisticated pastors are inclined to believe at times. We should realize that our common love for Christ makes us closer than we think, that we already are somehow one in Christ, that we are brothers and sisters, that we have in him a most solid basis for our working together for the promotion of Christian unity.

CHRISTIAN

Intimately connected with this fundamental fact of the centrality of Christ is a feature that, whether intended or not, stands out with remarkable force: the great number of times that the word "Christian" is spread out all along the document in contrast with the relatively low number of instances where the term "Catholic" appears. Christian life, Christian mission, Christian love, Christian faith, Christian conscience, Christian culture, Christian community, Christian faithful, to love as Christians, when a Christian loves, equality of Christians, whenever Christians, Filipino Christians, Christian discipleship, Christian dignity, Christian values. . . .⁷

It is not excluded that in the minds of the Council members and of some of those more immediately involved in the

7. It seems that in the document the term "catholic" has been reserved for very specific instances where the "catholic" character was unmistakable, thus confirming the assumption that the term "christian" possesses an all-encompassing character.

composition of the texts to be deliberated upon, the term "Christian" might have been taken as equivalent to "Catholic." This, however, may be a wrong assumption, and certainly runs against the emphasis which John XXIII placed time and again on the word "Christian." Moreover, on some occasions the expression "Catholic Christians" is used, or simply the term "Catholic." Would not that imply that at the back of the minds of the Council members what is Catholic is simply Christian, or vice versa, and therefore they do not care to distinguish between the two terms? Or would it be a subconscious desire of avoiding making too obvious the Catholic character of the Council? Perhaps what has been said in a lapidary way by the great ecumenist Yves Congar and repeated time and again may apply here: "It is more important to be Christian than to be Catholic," or, as it was already said in the fourth century, "My name is Christian, my surname is Catholic."

Whatever the hidden or semi-conscious thoughts of the members of PCP II or redactors of the text of PCP II might have been, there is no doubt that most Christians and most Christian churches or ecclesial communities could subscribe without reservation and sincerely profess more than nine-tenths of what is contained in the Conciliar Document as truly Christian. If the word "Christian" may mean anything, it must mean at least *what is common to all of us* — Christians! The centrality of Christ in our faith and in our lives *makes* all of us Christians. In fact we are Christians by virtue of our common Baptism.

BAPTISM

It has been the merit of the late Cardinal Augustin Bea, the first President of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, to have brought into full light the basic importance and implications of Baptism as ontological basis for ecumenism. As Vatican II stated: "By baptism the faithful are incorporated into Christ and are placed among the People of God and in their own way share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ."⁸

8. *Lumen Gentium* 31. See also LG 7 and 11, and esp. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3 and 22.

Commenting on this text in the section on the laity, the Conciliar Document states that "the lay faithful . . . share with all the baptized an equal Christian dignity" (no. 405), a fact that already has been expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism: "Baptism . . . constitutes the sacramental bond existing among all who through it are reborn." And "the Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian."⁹

If one considers that the immense majority of Christian churches and groups in the Philippines administer valid baptism, we must conclude that Catholics "in many ways are joined" to other Christians in the Philippines. Is this not by itself an ecumenical challenge for all of us? After all, "baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ . . . toward a complete integration into eucharistic communion,"¹⁰ — a true ecumenical challenge.

THE WORD OF GOD

Nor should we overlook another facet clearly proposed by PCP II whereby Catholics come closer to and in a real way united with other Christians. It is brought up in the matter of catechesis and related again to its Christocentrism.

To be Christ-centered, catechesis must be *rooted in the Word*. Nothing and no one speaks better of the Incarnate Word of God than the scriptural Word of God. And when the Bible is read in the Church, it is Christ himself who speaks to us. The Bible must once again become the primary catechetical book. Familiarity with the Bible through prayerful use and study of it should characterize the Catholic faithful, for 'Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ' (no. 159).

This only confirms what Leo XIII had plainly stated one hundred years ago, that all Christians are already united "in the love of Christ and the love of Scriptures."

9. See UR 22 and LG 15, respectively.

10. UR 22.

CHURCH AS COMMUNION

Another element of primary importance is found in the PCP II document as an implicit but solid basis for ecumenism. It is the concept of Church, particularly Church as Communion. This concept is developed at length in Part II in the section "Discipleship in Community — The Church" (nos. 89-97). Anyone familiar with the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, particularly nos. 8 and 15, and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, particularly no. 3, will immediately see the implications for ecumenism of the Church as Communion.

The concept of "Communion" is one of the richest in Vatican II and in post-Vatican II ecclesiology.¹¹ As proposed in the PCP II document one may get the impression that the concept of Communion refers only to the Catholic Church. And yet the reality is immensely deeper, richer, and all-embracing. The doctrine of Communion is substantially accepted and subscribed to without reservations by Orthodox, Anglicans, and the immense majority of the main line Christian churches, — even if there might be some difference of interpretation when it comes to some "loaded" terms. The document, speaking of "unity in diversity" and "equality in dignity" as integrating elements of Communion, constitutes a solid basis for ecumenical reflection and understanding of an already existing reality.

CONCERN FOR UNITY

Another element worthwhile considering in this context is the concern with unity (and existing divisions) which runs through many pages of the Conciliar Document. "To unite all things under Christ" is the cry of the Council's logo. It is accepted that "ours

11. This was particularly manifested during the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops. Cf. "The Final Report," Part II. C. "The Church as Communion," in *The Extraordinary Synod on the Second Vatican Council: Celebration, Verification, Promotion*, P. S. de Achútegú (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1986) 107-12. See also the recent "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 28 May 1992 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17 June 1992, pp. 8-9.

is a pluralistic society" (no. 18), that "we have aimed at uniting all in Christ" (no. 32), that "a Christian cannot be indifferent to . . . injustice and division" (no. 83) — presumably religious division too — and that there should be inter-religious dialogue (nos. 110-115), even if this refers to dialogue with Muslims.

III. THE SITUATION

We have gone over some elements that may be justly considered as implicit premises for a solid inference on ecumenism in the Philippines. Still, we find ourselves with a less than vigorous one-sentence decree that has been preceded by a few relatively mild ecumenical considerations in the body of the document. Given, however, the richness of several "implicit" texts in the document, one wonders what might have prevented the Council members from drawing out the logical consequences, and coming out with a real ecumenical stand and program which could have opened a new era in the Philippines. Why has the Council lost this golden opportunity to give flesh to the spirit of Vatican II, overcome past history, and prepare the Catholic faithful for an ecumenical leap forward into the 21st century? The problem is more complex than it may appear at first sight.

The first reason is precisely the *history of antagonism* between Catholics and other Christian churches and individuals that goes back to the turn of the century. The end of the Spanish domination which was characterized by the union of Church and State, the beginning of the American regime where "separation" became a political dogma, the arrival of a huge contingent of Protestant missionaries who came to "evangelize" the Philippines and carried with them not a few anti-Catholic prejudices and entered into conflict and polemics with Catholics who carried in turn their own anti-Protestant prejudices, the proclamation of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, followed twelve years later by, among others, the emergence of the aggressive *Iglesia ni Kristo*, and the subsequent anti-Catholic attitudes fostered by these factors, maintained and nourished this climate of conflict well unto the inauguration of Vatican II. Thus the ecumenical fresh air that has entered into the Church and blown powerfully, refreshingly, in many places did not reach Philippine shores.

The existing situation was aggravated by the entrance into the arena of numerous *Fundamentalist* groups who initiated an all-out campaign against the Catholic Church in the Philippines, creating a situation of aggressive proselytism through concerted and well-financed attacks, very much similar to the efforts made in Latin America to undermine the credibility and influence of the Catholic Church, particularly in the field of social action (nos. 218-219). The Philippine bishops were understandably alarmed. Thus in January 1989 the CBCP issued a vigorous pastoral statement on Fundamentalism that clearly expressed that alarm.¹²

The uneasiness created by these Fundamentalist attacks and proselytizing activities prevented a good number from among the Council members, including the pastors themselves, from making the proper distinction between the need of fostering genuine ecumenism, which is an integral dimension of the Church life, and the need of protecting the faithful, especially the most simple ones, from attacks on their faith, which entails the rejection of Fundamentalism. The result was to throw out the baby with the bath water. Humbly, however, the Council acknowledges that these groups "succeed because the Church has failed in many ways to satisfy the spiritual hunger of many of the faithful. This we must correct" (no. 223).

IV. THE ECUMENICAL ASPECT OF PCP II IN COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS COUNCILS

FIRST PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF MANILA (1907)¹³

The First Provincial Council of Manila was held within a context where great political, cultural, and religious changes had taken and were still taking place. It is the religious situation that interests us here.¹⁴

12. See "Pastoral Statement on Fundamentalist Groups," *Catholic Guidelines on Fundamentalism* (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1989) 7-12. The Statement was issued on January 27, 1989.

13. See *Acta et Decreta Concilii Provincialis Manilani I*, in *Urbe Manila Celebrati, anno Domini MDCCCXVII* (Romae: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, MDCCCXX) XCII-506.

14. We will not deal here with the 1771 aborted Manila Synod. On this see

The religious revolution launched in 1902 by Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr. that gave birth to the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* and placed Fr. Gregorio Aglipay as *Obispo Maximo* at the helm of the new church had resulted in a real convulsion. Partly to face the new situation created by the change of sovereignty and the withdrawal of hundreds of Spanish friars from the Islands, partly to face the pastoral situation issuing from the arrival of many Protestant missionaries, and partly to deal with the Aglipayan schism, the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop Giovanni Battista Guidi had convoked a Provincial Council for August 7, 1904. Due to the untimely death of Guidi the Council did not take place. His successor, Archbishop Ambrose Agius, issued a summons for a new Council that had to convene, and was convened, on December 8, 1907. While Guidi had shown a certain conciliatory spirit towards the leaders of the schism, Agius did not mince words to describe the new church and its personnel, even if he still offered an opportunity to the schismatics to return to the Church.

Out of the Council's 1,176 decrees, seventeen were directly related to the Philippine Independent Church, while some twenty others bore a close though indirect relation to the schism. The Council was not held precisely to combat Aglipayanism; still the Council Fathers had to deal seriously with it as a major problem.

Aglipayanism was condemned in severe terms by the Council in decrees 70 and 71 — particularly the priests who had joined the schism. The sacraments of Confirmation, Penance, Orders, and Matrimony administered by Aglipayan ministers were declared invalid. Baptism, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, though valid in some cases, were sacrilegious. The severity of the Council was aimed at protecting the Church, preventing any further damage to the faithful, and even at bringing the schismatics back to their senses.

Decree 121 dealt with Protestantism, decree 130 treated the matter of the Bible, reminding the lay faithful that those who

John N. Schumacher, "The Manila Synodal Tradition: A Brief History," *Philippine Studies* 27 (1979), esp. 312-28. On the 1907 Provincial Council, see *ibid.* 328-38.

print the Bible in the vernacular without the bishop's authorization automatically incur the penalty of excommunication. There was prohibition for parents to send their children to non-Catholic schools (decrees 150 ff.). Public debates with non-Catholics were forbidden (decree 161); and forbidden too was the performance of religious acts in common with Protestants (decree 162).¹⁵

On the matter of an eventual repetition of Baptism in case of conversion to the Catholic faith, as well as the attendance as sponsor in a non-Catholic Baptism, decrees 589-591 followed the traditional doctrine.¹⁶

Evaluation. In comparison with the 1907 Provincial Council of Manila, PCP II shows an advance both in content and in tone. This is due partly to a certain, although minimal, change in the climate as it is prevailing today. PCP II does not mention the Philippine Independent Church/Aglipayan. It does not speak of excommunication. It does not condemn Protestant Churches nor their activities. It encourages the reading and study of the Bible in the vernacular.

FIRST PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES (1953)

From the 7th to the 25th of January 1953, the First Plenary Council of the Philippines was held in the old walled city of Manila under the presidency of the Papal Legate, Norman T. Cardinal Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney.¹⁷

Six decrees had explicit reference to Aglipayanism which continued being called "Aglipayana secta".¹⁸ These decrees deal

15. *Acta et Decreta*, chap. VII, nos. 183-203, deals with Freemasonry, which the Council calls "Masonica secta", urging compliance with all prescriptions of the Holy See in this matter, a position similar to the one taken in the final reviewed text of the PCP II Decree 35.

16. Even today the general doctrine in this matter remains practically the same, although the "Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters," Part I, no. 57, is more lenient.

17. *Acta et Decreta Primi Concilii Plenarii Insularum Philippinarum* (Manilae: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Sancti Thomae, 1956) XLVI-321 + (15).

18. *Ibid.* The decrees that refer to the sacraments in relation to the Aglipayan ministers are: 297, 330, 340, 393, 422, 458. Decrees 330 and 422 speak of the "Aglipayan pseudo-bishops"; decree 340 mentions "schismatic or Aglipayan pseudo-priests"; decree 393 speaks about "Aglipayan ministers"; and decree 458 of "schismatic pseudo-bishops or Aglipayan ministers."

with the validity and administration of the sacraments: *Baptism* is declared invalid if administered in accordance with the ritual contained in Aglipayan books, which is Unitarian. *Confirmation* is also declared invalid, reiterating the warning given by the 1907 Manila Council. The *Eucharist* celebrated by Aglipayan priests who lack valid ordination is invalid, and if offered by ex-Roman Catholic priests may be valid, but not if they follow the Aglipayan ritual which omits the essential form of consecration. *Penance* is also invalidly administered because of the lack of valid ordination in most of the ministers and the lack of jurisdiction in all former Catholic priests turned Aglipayan, except in danger of death. Reiterating the declaration made by the 1907 Council, *Orders conferred by Aglipayan bishops are invalid and sacrilegious. Marriage of Catholics celebrated before Aglipayan or other non-Catholic ministers are also invalid.*

In speaking of the Philippine Independent Church, the First Plenary Council used, although not always, a slightly milder terminology than the 1907 Manila Council, but still maintained strict prohibition of common religious activities with Protestants and the attendance of Catholic students in Protestant schools, and occasionally used strong terms in speaking of "heretics."¹⁹

Strangely enough, generally it dealt with the non-Christian Chinese in a much milder tone than when it spoke of other non-Catholic Christians, and exhorted faculty and students in Catholic schools not to give any scandal to non-Catholic students (decree 696).

Evaluation. The First Plenary Council does not appear to have viewed Aglipayanism with such worrisome alarm as the Manila Council had. The reason might well be that the influence of the Philippine Independent Church was visibly dwindling in the 1950s, torn by internal strife and breaking into factions. The First Plenary Council seemed more concerned than the Council of Manila was with the growing influence of Protestantism even in public life, the increase in the number of Protestant churches and their constituencies principally because of the schools ran by them. But in general, the advance made by the First Plenary

19. *Ibid.* Decree 626 uses the expression "haereticorum vesania" (madness of the heretics) which results in a "great and pestiferous evil."

Council over that of the 1907 Manila Provincial Council was minimal. The passing of almost five decades had not altered substantially the ecumenical climate.

FOURTH SYNOD OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MANILA (1979)²⁰

It can be safely said that, as far as ecumenism is concerned, the Fourth Synod of the Archdiocese of Manila towers loftily over the 1907 Manila Provincial Council and the 1953 First Plenary Council of the Philippines. The explanation is simple: the Second Vatican Council mediates in between with its truly ecumenical spirit and particularly the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, it issued.

Out of eleven documents, the Fourth Manila Synod dedicated one full document to "Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs." Out of 162 pages of the eleven documents, 20 pages (12%) are reserved for ecumenism; out of the 154 statutes enacted by the Synod, 20 statutes (13%) were decrees on ecumenical and inter-religious affairs.²¹ The situationer together with the doctrinal-pastoral orientation cover twelve pages. The approach is positive, pastoral, and authentically irenic, while honestly acknowledging the real difficulties surrounding the promotion and practice of ecumenism both from inside and outside the Church.

The synodal document presents systematically the doctrinal orientation, offers clear principles, in particular on the sacraments, and proposes concrete directives and guidelines on cooperation for social action, education for ecumenism, and ecumenical structures. The corresponding statutes on worship and prayer, sacraments and funerals, Holy Scripture and social action, men of other faiths, and the Archdiocesan Ecumenical and Inter-faith Board established by the Synod reveal a very solid

20. *Acts and Statutes. The Fourth Synod. Archdiocese of Manila* (Manila: Chancery Office, 1979) vi-237.

21. *Ibid.* Statutes 122 and 123, under Title IV deal specifically with "Men of Other Faiths." The situationer has also a special section under no. 5 on "Non-Christian Religions." Cf. also *ibid.* 131-32. Two other statutes deal specifically with ecumenism: Statute 32, which emphasizes the importance of ecumenism in the formation of seminarians; and Statute 139 under "Title VI. Ecumenical Collaboration" in the document on Community Affairs and Social Justice.

and comprehensive document.

Evaluation. It is unfortunate, but it is a fact, that in the matter of ecumenism, PCP II pales in comparison with the treatment of the same matter in the Fourth Synod of Manila held twelve years earlier. The ecumenical approach of the Fourth Manila Synod was hailed as "rain that falls in May." It represented an advance on the road of ecumenism. Thus it strikes one as a surprise that having at hand such a model for study of and reflection on ecumenism, PCP II came up with a rather emaciated produce.

What was the reason? Was it due to the situation of alarm brought about by the assaults of Fundamentalists? Was it due to the deeply felt awareness of, and intense concentration on, the social condition of injustice and poverty prevailing in the country which forcefully imposed themselves during the Council beclouding other horizons? Was it a confusion of the roles of ecumenism and apologetics? Other hypotheses are not excluded. The sad fact, however, is that PCP II lagged far behind the 1979 Manila Synod and thereby lost the opportunity of charting the course of ecumenism from the part of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. There remains no doubt that the Fourth Synod of the Archdiocese of Manila dealt with the problem of ecumenism in a much more positive and thorough way than the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines.

PUEBLA²²

Although not a Council and therefore without its legislative trimmings, the Puebla Assembly of the Latin-American Bishops bears more than one similarity with PCP II if only by the fact that the pastoral situation in Latin America, in particular regarding ecumenism, has many points of resemblance with the Philippine situation. Both have a great majority of Catholics, both have been the object of concerted efforts of Protestant groups at proselytizing, in both areas political intervention has used non-Catholic groups to undermine Catholic ascendancy, and as of late

22. *Puebla. Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops. Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America. Conclusions* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979) x-220. Numbers in parentheses in this section refer to the marginal numbers of the Puebla document.

Fundamentalist attacks have concentrated their efforts, personnel, and resources against the Catholic Church as "enemy number one." The extremely aggressive proselytism of Fundamentalist groups is recognized (nos. 342, 419). While trying to stop this Fundamentalist religious avalanche, the Latin American bishops did not hesitate to openly urge "the practice of ecumenism," clarifying at the same time that it finds expression in dialogue and joint efforts at human promotion as "part of the move toward the unity we long for" (no. 108).

Puebla bases this practice on the principle of communion and participation (nos. 211-215, 378) and speaks of communion "between various ecclesial families" (no. 667). It recognizes the importance of Baptism as the sacramental bond already uniting all Christians (nos. 252, 295, 476, 852). It sees the danger of the sects (nos. 219, 342, 469), being deeply worried by the effects of their proselytism (no. 628). Puebla insists forcefully on the importance of Scripture and the obligation of using it as a main source in catechesis (no. 1001), exhorting to step up ecumenical dialogue (no. 1096), acknowledging that although Latin America had been evangelized in the Catholic faith, "for various reasons a growing religious and ideological pluralism is appreciated today" (no. 1099). But "we cannot preach a divided Christ" (no. 1114). In step with Vatican II, Puebla exhorts pastors and lay faithful "to recognize the signs of the times and to participate skillfully in the work of ecumenism" (no. 1115).

Evaluation. Puebla was confronted twelve years ago with the same ecumenical problematic PCP II encountered in 1991. Puebla's reaction and attitude were not dissimilar to the PCP II reaction. But Puebla appears to have a wider vision of ecumenism, is positive and more open, and the ecumenical concern pervades many of the recommendations and pastoral suggestions all along the document. In this sense Puebla is more ecumenical than PCP II.

A COMPARATIVE SUMMARY

Summarizing the reflective comparison on ecumenism as found in PCP II and the above-mentioned assemblies, we may arrive at these conclusions:

a. PCP II does not show the preoccupation with Aglipayanism that was prominent in the 1907 Manila Provincial Council and the First Plenary Council in 1953.

b. Neither does it give the Protestants, especially the main line Protestant and other non-Catholic religious activities, the legal or "canonical" prominence that appears in the previous Councils, particularly in the First Plenary Council. In this sense PCP II manifests an attitudinal advance — after all, the ecumenical spirit of Vatican II and its Decree on Ecumenism had to produce some effect.

c. PCP II ranks very much below and far off from the openness, freshness, and thorough doctrinal and pastoral treatment of ecumenism of the Fourth Synod of Manila in 1979.

d. While it is not very dissimilar in its stand from the Puebla Assembly, still PCP II is slightly below it.

e. Also, in its more situational and negative aspects, PCP II has a stinging denunciation of both Fundamentalism and the *Iglesia ni Kristo* (nos. 218-221) — which have dislodged the Philippine Independent Church and the Protestants in general from the center stage they occupied in 1907 and 1953.

The reasons are obvious: The *Iglesia ni Kristo*,²³ established in 1914 by Felix Manalo, did not seem to represent a serious threat at the time the First Plenary Council convened in 1953. Seven years later in fact, the 1960 Census gave the INK only 1% of the population with 270,104 members, while 1,414,431 Aglipayans represented 5.2% of the population. However, the 1970 Census showed that the INK membership had increased considerably, counting 475,407 members or 1.6% of the population. Extrapolated figures gave the INK 752,000 members in 1980. Due to this remarkable increase, the Fourth Synod of Manila took serious note of this fact in the situationer of the document on "Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs."

The last Census of the Philippines, taken in May 1990, just a few months before the Council, registered a remarkable growth of the INK — 1,388,730 or 2.29% of the population. Considering

23. Fernando G. Elesterio wrote a monograph entitled *The Iglesia ni Kristo: Its Christology and Ecclesiology*, *Cardinal Bea Studies V* (3d printing; Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1988) viii-218.

that the INK "is similar in nature to these fundamentalist and evangelical groups except perhaps that it has been more virulent in its attacks, and has become a very important political force in the country" (no. 220), the Council felt the need of dealing specifically with it. Ecumenical dialogue has become extremely difficult with the INK and other Fundamentalists (no. 221). The Council recognizes that "faced with these realities, there is need of widespread catechesis and apologetics" (no. 222). At the same time the Council accepts the challenges raised by the presence of Fundamentalist groups. These challenges the Council enumerates following the CBCP pastoral statement on Fundamentalism issued in January 1989 (nos. 224-228). ^

V. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

To complete the picture, a statistical overview of religious groups may prove useful as a point of reference. It may help in assessing the degree of concern manifested by PCP II in relation to the non-Catholic population of the Philippines which would constitute the natural area of its immediate ecumenical interest.

The figures below are taken from the 1990 Census of the Philippines, as initially tabulated by the National Statistics Office (NSO). The official figures have not yet been released; they are being finalized. But as stated by one of the top officials of NSO, even if there might be some discrepancies between the figures kindly furnished this writer and the official final tabulation, the discrepancies will be minimal as far as absolute numbers are concerned, and practically none in the percentages. The data were given by provinces; the total sums and the percentages are by the author.²⁴

24. It is appalling to see the nonchalance with which some columnists, and even editorials of respectable newspapers, speak of millions when referring to the membership of some religious groups, without bothering to take the simple step of approaching the National Statistics Office (NSO) for reliable information, and thus avoid statistical blunders. In his article "Iglesia Vote Makes a Difference and Everybody Is Counted" (*Manila Bulletin*, 26 March 1992, p. 7), Bernabe C. Paguio uses the phrase "four or five million voters" (emphasis supplied) when referring to the Iglesia ni Kristo, a figure that would presuppose a good ten million

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Total Population	60,195,098	
Catholics	49,972,467	83.01%
Non-Catholics	10,222,631	16.99%
Of the non-Catholic population:		
Islam	2,723,698	4.52%
Christians:		
Aglipayan	1,571,206	2.61%
Iglesia ni Kristo	1,388,730	2.29%
Protestants (incl. Fundam./BA)	3,560,303	5.91%
(Fundamentalist + Born-Again)	1,120,544	1.86%
Others (incl. Buddhist, non-believers)	978,694	1.63%

Among the Protestants, the main groups are the following:

UCCP (United Church of Christ in the Phils.)	1,380,730	2.29%
Baptists (all groups)	408,445	0.68%
Seventh-Day Adventists	374,603	0.62%
Methodists (all groups)	187,432	0.30%
Philippine Episcopal Church (PEC)	101,164	0.17%
Lutherans	22,221	0.03%
Other Protestants	405,343	0.67%
Other Evangelical Churches	129,725	0.21%

The combined figures of members belonging to the main Protestant groups specifically mentioned above and to the other member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (which include the Aglipayan Trinitarian section, the Philippines Independent Church), add up to a total of about

million members. And yet, from the combined figures furnished by the NSO, the actual number of INK members — not voters — amounts to 1,380,730. Again in the same newspaper, but this time the editorial itself entitled "The Philippine Independent Church on Its 90th Foundation Anniversary" (*ibid.*, 2 August 1992, p. 6), speaks of the "four million members of the PIC." The actual number as per the figures supplied by the NSO is 1,571,206 comprising all "Aglipayan" followers. The term "Aglipayan" used by the Census includes not only the juridically official PIC, but the members of at least 14 other groups that also claim to be "Aglipayan."

4,000,000 Christians or 6.7% of the population. The Catholic Church in the Philippines could enter into fruitful ecumenical dialogue with them. The John XXIII Ecumenical Center is in fact in contact and dialogue with several of these churches.

The above figures speak for themselves. For itself also speaks the staggering figure of about 1,325 different churches, sects, or religious groups. Not all of them are registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. A great number of these groups are small, fundamentalist, militant.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the above considerations and figures. Firstly, it would have been useful for the PCP II members to have in mind the proper distinction between "ecumenical" and "non-ecumenical" groups. It would have helped them to have an open, more positive outlook in the matter of ecumenism and encourage more vigorously dialogue and cooperation with the main line churches, most of them members of the NCCP. Quite a number of the Council members were not acquainted enough with the existing ecumenical situation, nor familiar enough with ecumenical principles.

Secondly, considering however the two positive paragraphs dedicated to ecumenism in the doctrinal-pastoral part of the final document (nos. 216-217), together with decree 34, and delving on the "implicit" but rich ecumenical ideas found along the Conciliar Document, there is no reason to be remiss in the practice and promotion of ecumenism in the Philippines. If the Council did not draw the complete consequences of its own implicit premises, the Council presupposed that the People of God (laity and clergy) are intelligent enough to draw their own conclusions, and fired with love ardent enough to keep pressing for the eventual union of all Christians and harmony and cooperation with other religious groups.