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The Manila Cathedral, 1571-1958

A Symposium

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I

THE FIRST TWO CATHEDRALS

ON 7 December 1958, eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the Philippines, the "Distinguished and Ever Loyal City of Manila" witnessed the consecration of its new metropolitan cathedral. This new church is the sixth cathedral of the city. It has therefore, in the patient building and the violent destruction of its five predecessors, a history that must generate much interest in the telling.

To begin with: there is much conflicting data especially in recent articles published by the popular press surrounding the beginnings of the cathedral. A newspaper of wide circulation credited the Augustinian Fray Andrés de Urdaneta with the building of Manila's first church. In another section of the very same issue of that newspaper, another reporter gave the honor to a secular priest, Juan de Vivero. On the other hand, a history professor speaks of four Augustinians as the builders of the same church.

Fray Urdaneta could not have built that church excepting by divine intervention of a very special sort. For the good father never set foot in Manila. He had accompanied the Ade-

adelantado Miguel López de Legazpi from Mexico to Cebu and had returned to America long before Legazpi himself saw the Mohammedan settlements on the Pasig. Furthermore, Urdaneta had died in 1568; Legazpi did not proclaim Manila a city and did not order its first church built until three years later—in 1571, a date doubly historic because it marks not only the end of Mohammedan control in Manila but also the end of Mohammedan control in the Mediterranean. The battle of Bankusay in which Legazpi triumphed over Soliman, and the battle of Lepanto in which Don John of Austria crushed Ottoman naval supremacy forever, were fought only four months apart: Bankusay on June 3rd, and Lepanto on October 7th. If therefore Manila's first church was first ordered built in 1571 and if, furthermore, Fr. Urdaneta died in 1568, he could not have been its builder.

This leaves us with Father Juan de Vivero and the four Augustinians. Father de Vivero had joined the Legazpi expedition while the *adelantado* was yet in Cebu, and it is entirely possible that he came with Legazpi to Manila. As a matter of fact, the records show that Fr. Juan de Vivero was later named treasurer of the diocese of Manila. On the other hand, we also know that there were Augustinians in the company of Legazpi (Fathers Martín de Rada, Diego de Herrera, Pedro Gamboa and Andrés Aguirre). If clerics undertook the building of Manila's first church, we would then have to credit either Father Juan de Vivero or the Augustinians, though not Father Urdaneta himself, with its construction.

We speak of the building as a church and not yet as a cathedral because it did not in fact become a cathedral until ten years later—in 1581 when Manila's first bishop, Fray Domingo de Salazar, O.P., arrived in Manila to take possession of his diocese. Three years before this time, in 1578, Pope Gregory XIII had issued a bull creating the diocese of the Philippines, a see suffragan to Mexico. It was only upon his arrival in Manila that Bishop Salazar chose the church as the seat of his diocese.

The physical aspect of this cathedral was nowhere as magnificent as that of the one we have at present. The historian Wenceslao E. Retana speaks of it as *modestísimo* inasmuch as it was made of wood and of nipa palm fronds. We have moreover the description given by the bishop himself in a memorial letter

to King Philip II of Spain. His cathedral, he complained, was entirely lacking in ornamentation, and had neither chalices, nor statuary, nor bells, nor any of the other paraphernalia necessary for the services a cathedral was ordinarily expected to extend to the flock.

The bishop was most solicitous concerning the building of a cathedral which would do justice to the glory of God, but the first few years of his administration were marred with repeated unpleasant differences between himself and Don Gonzalo Ronquillo, governor of the Philippines up to 1583, and Don Diego Ronquillo who took over from that date. These differences centered about certain policies towards the natives and the Chinese who inhabited settlements circling the city. Bishop Salazar therefore divided his attention between their defense and the building of a suitable cathedral.

The nipa cathedral had a short history, for it was soon consumed by the flames of the Great Fire of Manila, the date of which seems incorrectly reported in many of the brochures distributed at the various presentations during the pre-inaugural ceremonies for the present cathedral. In many of these brochures or programs, the date of the Great Fire is listed as 1582. It would seem however that what is usually referred to as the Great Fire of Manila did not occur till 1583. This fire had been the result of an accident that occurred during funeral services for the same Don Gonzalo Ronquillo whom we have mentioned earlier. The story is carried in the notes of the historian Retana appended to Dr. Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*. Retana speaks of how the fire had its beginnings in the church of the monastery of St. Augustine, at noon, when a candle or lamp fell on the catafalque and immediately set the sanctuary of the church on fire. The fire quickly spread to other buildings and in a few hours the flames had embraced the entire city, for the city at that time was chiefly made of wood and other easily combustible materials. Since the first Governor Ronquillo died in 1583, and since an accident during funeral services for him had started a conflagration that eventually consumed the whole city, that which we call the Great Fire could not have taken place in 1582, the year before his death. We have further evidence from a letter addressed to Philip II describing this fire. Father Colin records the bishop's complaint that his new library and his new residence were eaten by the flames.

We do not, of course, exclude the possibility that another fire could have taken place the year before, but if the cathedral perished in the same fire that gutted all of Manila, then the date must have been 1583.

In 1591, after ten years of dedicated work in his diocese, Bishop Salazar left for Spain. He had already initiated the construction of the first cathedral building of stone masonry. We are not sure to whom credit should go for the actual supervision of the work on the construction of this new cathedral, although a number of commentators have pointed to Father Antonio Sedeño, S.J. who in 1581 had arrived in Manila with the bishop, and who was a great and good friend of the Dominican prelate. While Bishop Salazar was in Spain, King Philip II requested the Holy See to elevate the diocese of the Philippines to an archbishopric. The Holy See raised Manila to an archbishopric, independent from Mexico and with three newly created suffragan dioceses—namely Nueva Segovia, Nueva Cáceres and Cebu—but in its own time, in 1595. Meanwhile, Bishop Salazar had died in Spain on December 4th of the year before.

In recent years, the *Catholic Directory of the Philippines* has been dating the history of the Manila archdiocese from 1585. On the other hand, Father Francisco Colín S.J., in his *Labor evangélica*, reports that the bull elevating the see of Manila to this new distinction was issued by Pope Clement VIII. But Clement VIII did not become Pope till 1592. If Manila first became an archdiocese in 1585, then the bull would have been issued either by Pope Gregory XIII who died that year, or by Pope Sixtus V who ascended to the throne of Peter in that same year. In any case, Fray Ignacio de Santibáñez, O.F.M., is ordinarily listed as the first archbishop of Manila. This would not be possible were we to accept 1585 as the true date, for Bishop Salazar would then still have been alive and in Manila.

The construction of the first stone cathedral began almost immediately after the nipa cathedral was burned, but its completion took something like eleven years. There were all sorts of difficulties and there is in fact evidence in the notes of Fr. Pablo Pastells S.J. to Fr. Colín's *Labor evangélica* that in 1591, Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas—then governor of the Philippines—wrote a letter to the King of Spain complaining that although the king had indeed authorized the sum of 12,000 ducats for the rebuilding of the cathedral, not all the funds had up to that time been made available.

Dr. Morga, in his *Sucesos*, gives a concise description of this stone cathedral. Dr. Morga says:

On the public square stands the principal church made of stone masonry, with its major chapel and the choir with high and low seats, enclosed with grillwork, adorned with an organ, lecterns and all necessary appurtenances, and with sacristy, chambers and offices.

Beyond this, we have from the sources still available no more complete description of the first cathedral of stone, the second of Manila. This cathedral was not to see much of the 17th century. Fr. Colín says that the year 1600 said goodbye with a formidable earthquake on its last day, at the dramatic stroke of midnight. In this earthquake, Manila's first stone cathedral—its second—was completely destroyed.

About this event, one notes an interesting discrepancy in the sources. For to supplement this account by Fr. Colín, Fr. Pastells would have the student refer to Chapter 52 of Fr. Pedro Chirino's *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* where the Jesuit chronicler has a description supposedly of this same earthquake. On checking with Fr. Chirino's *Relación*, however, the student discovers that Fr. Chirino was speaking of a completely different earthquake, for he puts the date of his earthquake in the middle of June 1599. It seems from this that we can assume that at least two different earthquakes collaborated in the destruction of Manila's cathedral, especailly since Colín himself mentions that there had been, previous to the 1600 earthquake, several temblors of varying intensities. This is probably one reason why present day commentators and reporters speak of the first stone cathedral as suffering from damage in the earthquake of 1599, and collapsing completely in the major shock that came at midnight, December 31st, 1600.

Still another source, Fr. Joaquin Fonseca, O.P., says that the cathedral was ruined partially in the earthquake of 1600, but the archiepiscopal annals tell a different story:

....in one moment the greater part of the houses fell into ruins; and of the churches, the Cathedral and that of the Society of Jesus, were totally destroyed.

Thus it is that at a time when Elizabeth I was still queen of England, when Philip III was King of Spain, when Boris

Godunov was monarch of Russia, and barely two years after Henry of Navarre had issued the Edict of Nantes, Manila had already lost two cathedrals.

ANTONIO G. MANUUD

II

THE CATHEDRAL OF THREE NAVES AND SEVEN CHAPELS

In the year of Our Lord 1614, on the 6th of December, Manila witnessed the consecration of its second stone cathedral, the Cathedral of Three Naves and Seven Chapels, which, certain documents assure us, was of sumptuous construction. The various annals accessible to our time fail to mention, however, the particular style of architecture, neither do they describe with precision the interior and exterior details of the structure.

This cathedral was the special concern of the third archbishop of Manila, Fray Miguel Benavídez, who in 1603, upon his installation, initiated the project but died long before it was completed. It was Benavídez who conceived of a cathedral of three naves and seven chapels, a splendid piece of architecture, far better and (perhaps he had hoped) far more durable than the provisional church he described in his letter to King Philip III. "The great church of this city," he wrote, "is without ornaments and greatly needs to be repaired lest it fall to the ground. I beseech Your Majesty to have it remedied."

After Benavídez's death in 1605 the construction was suspended. Five years later, Archbishop Diego Vásquez de Mercado assumed the administration of the archdiocese of Manila, and noting the inadequacy of the provisional church and the progress that had previously been achieved in the construction of the stone cathedral, ordered the resumption of the work.

The cathedral had ten altars. The codex of Rev. Don Francisco Moreno especially cites the Licenciado Don Francisco Gómez de Arellano, fourth dean of the metropolitan cathedral chapter, who, with personal funds, alms from the faithful and a generous grant from the King of Spain, "made possible" the construction of the cathedral. He was royally interred in the

main chapel and his tomb was adorned with bronze borders and an inscription. The codex further mentions:

Captain Juan Sarmiento, native of the city, illustrious heir of the famous Captain Pedro Sarmiento, one of the first captains to participate in the conquest and development of the islands, together with his wife Doña Isabel de Paredes donated one of the chapels with an annual Mass endowment of two hundred pesos.

Captain Antonio de Espinosa and his wife María de Aciaza, residents of the city, donated another chapel dedicated to San Bartolomé with a chaplaincy of one hundred eighty pesos a year.

The chapel of the Blessed Sacrament was donated by Captain Alfonso Tarancon from the estate of the pious and devout Father Miguel Simón, a secular priest revered by his contemporaries. This was granted a chaplaincy of two hundred and ten pesos a year for the pastor of the Spaniards of the cathedral and an additional one hundred and forty pesos for the sanctuary lamp.

Archbishop Diego Vázquez de Mercado constructed, to the left of the main altar at the rear, a chapel where he was to be interred. Over his sepulchre was placed a stone slab one yard in height and two and a half yards in width, with his portrait carved in wood over it. He also provided a chaplaincy of one thousand pesos a year to be served by the cathedral chapter.

The sixth chapel was donated by the accountant Alfonso de Espinosa with a chaplaincy of five hundred pesos served by the cathedral chapter.

The seventh chapel was that of the Licentiate Don Rodrigo de la Barrera, with a chaplaincy of five hundred pesos annually.

Thus was commemorated the generosity of these eminent personages. The gracious endowments, the pledges and legacies, however, did not last long. In 1621, only seven years after the grand inauguration of the cathedral, Archbishop Miguel García Serrano wrote the King:

The poverty of the Cathedral is so great that it has had no revenue with which to provide not only a reredos, or the necessary ornaments as regards the colors of the season but also a veil to cover the altar during Lent. On Palm Sunday, the two prebendaries who accompanied me as assistants when I performed the pontifical office on that day, wore copes of different color from what they should have worn, as we did not have the right ones in church.

One year later, Archbishop Serrano wrote:

Hitherto (the cathedral) has had but one priest, and inasmuch as I found the curacy vacant, and thought it advisable for the better administration of the parishioners, I discussed with the governor the matter of having two. He agreed to it and consequently a proclamation was published and the appointments given by competition to two virtuous and learned clerics who today serve in the said curacy. In that parochial church are directed in confession 2,400 Spaniards, both men and women among whom are found a few mestizos. 1,000 are male inhabitants and transients; 816 regular soldiers and 584 women. In the above number, neither the religious priests nor children are included.

In 1632, the ecclesiastical *cabildo* wrote Philip IV in the plaintive tone somewhat reminiscent of Benavídez:

This church is also in need of ornaments and of a sacristy.... with the sum of three or four thousand pesos, the sacristy that was commenced more than ten years ago could be finished. It has been impossible to finish it because we had not the means to do so.

The evening of St. Andrew's Day in 1645 seemed no different, from other evenings. "At eight o'clock, they had just finished ringing the '*animas*' in the cathedral, the parish churches and the convents; the sky was clear, the moon bright and the air calm and still," wrote Father Joseph Fayol of the Order of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives, He continued:

Suddenly a frightful crash was heard and the earth began to quake so violently that it seemed as if it would become a sepulchre for all the inhabitants. As a result, during the space of four Credos, the time during which the first shock lasted, the earthquake passing from north to south and then from east to west with a rapid movement, in that brief time flung to the ground the most beautiful and magnificent buildings in the city. The stone walls were shaken and bent like sheets of paper or parchment fluttered by the wind. The towers swayed and bent like trees; and the largest broke like the masts of ships in the midst of a fierce hurricane. Nothing was heard but the crash of buildings mingled with the clamor of voices entreating heaven for mercy, the cries of the terrified animals adding to the horror. In the streets could only be seen the heaps of stone from ruined houses which hindered the flight of those who in frightened haste were leaving their homes. The cathedral was totally destroyed, towers, roofs, chapels and even the foundations were overthrown.

The archives of the cathedral which had been kept in the hall of the chapter were buried in the rubble. Thus passed the glory of the Cathedral of Three Naves and Seven Chapels.

ENRIQUE D. PEREZ

III

ARCHBISHOP POBLETE'S CATHEDRAL

After the earthquake of 1645, Manila had to wait for seventeen years for another cathedral to be raised on the same spot. This cathedral stood for 200 years.

The see of Manila was vacant for eight years after the earthquake of 1645. It was not until 1653 that Archbishop Miguel de Poblete arrived to fill the vacant post. The very day after he formally assumed office, he inspected the ruins of his church. He was dismayed by what he saw. In the middle of the square where the cathedral once stood was a makeshift hut. In this hut, in the absence of a cathedral, the divine services were celebrated.

Archbishop Poblete acted swiftly. He ordered the makeshift structure torn down. In the meantime, arrangements had been made for the use of another church as his pro-cathedral. This was the church of La Misericordia which had been completely rebuilt by this time.

Then Archbishop Poblete proceeded to the heroic undertaking of rebuilding his church. He sent an appeal to the King, asking for a portion of the taxes collected in the islands. He went from house to house and walked along the streets begging for alms for his cathedral. He admitted this to be his greatest mortification, but the whole city, seeing its archbishop begging, was deeply moved.

Archbishop Poblete proved to be a most effective beggar. Years later, when the construction costs of the cathedral were compiled, it was found that Archbishop Poblete's begging accounted for the substantial amount of ₱40,455.50—at a time when the Philippine peso was far more stable than it is today. This amount represented nearly two-thirds of the total cost of the reconstruction of the cathedral. In less than a year the

archbishop had collected enough money to begin the construction. On 20 April 1654, Governor Pedro de Mendiola himself carried the first stone to the old cathedral site for the archbishop to bless.

Nine years elapsed before the main work on the cathedral was completed. In 1662, preparations were made for the festivities of the inauguration. The celebration that was planned, however, did not take place on the appointed day. There is almost a parallel between the events that engrossed our own attention a little earlier this year (as the present cathedral was nearing completion) and those that took place in 1662. A few months ago a fierce battle was raging in the Formosa Straits. There was some anxiety here over the possibility that the Chinese communists would take Matsu and Quemoy, overrun Formosa, and from that island threaten the Philippines. We can be thankful that the danger seems to have been dissipated for the moment, and that we can still mark the inauguration of our cathedral with a fitting celebration. Three centuries ago, in 1662, the people of Manila were also looking anxiously towards Formosa where a fierce battle had just been fought. A Chinese pirate named Coxinga had just driven the Dutch off Formosa. Early that year he sent a message to Manila demanding tribute from the Spanish authorities. Coxinga's demands were rejected, and there was imminent danger that the conqueror of Formosa would attack the Philippines.

Today there is much talk about deporting "undesirable aliens," especially the so-called "overstaying Chinese." In 1662, a similar but more serious problem arose in Manila. As a result of the threats of Coxinga, Governor Manrique de Lara prepared to expel all Chinese residents. Fearing for their safety, the Chinese residents in Manila rose in arms. They burned Sta. Cruz district, killed Spaniards and Filipinos and pillaged homes. An army of 4,000 *Kapangpangans* under Francisco Laksamana, a descendant of Lakandula, marched against the Chinese rebels and crushed them in battle.

In view of this emergency, all the plans for the celebration of the blessing of the Manila cathedral had to be abandoned. Only simple ceremonies attended the consecration on 7 June 1662 of the third permanent cathedral of Manila. At the time of its consecration, the cathedral was not complete in every

detail. The church still lacked many finishing touches which could not be made immediately because the stipends due the archbishop from an encomienda granted by King Philip IV failed to come.

Archbishop Poblete died on 8 December 1667, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the church he had built so laboriously. On his death he left the task of continuing the work on the Manila cathedral to his nephew, Jose Millan de Poblete, who later became bishop of Nueva Segovia.

The cathedral was finally completed in all its parts on 30 August 1671. The total cost of the reconstruction was ₱63,118.70. It was a happy day for Manila when its cathedral stood perfectly rehabilitated. Coxinga was dead and the city was safe again. Elaborate celebrations started on 31 August 1671 and lasted eight days. The faithful of Manila gathered in the new cathedral to attend the rites and listen to the sermons preached by the most learned members of the secular and regular clergy. In the evening of the last day, there was a lavish theatrical presentation.

Archbishop Poblete's cathedral stood for 200 years. It saw the British lay siege on Manila and capture the city in 1762. During the British occupation which lasted two years, Archbishop Rojo turned over to the British all the silver and jewels of the cathedral (valued at ₱31,309.00) to make up the million pesos demanded under threat of death. In 1852 the cathedral was heavily damaged by a strong earthquake and expensive repairs were necessary.

On 3 June 1863, less than three months after some extensive repairs were completed, a stronger and more terrible earthquake rocked the city and the whole structure of the third permanent cathedral of Manila crumbled into a heap of stones.

GENARO V. ONG

IV

THE FOURTH CATHEDRAL: 1872-1945

When in 1872 the construction of a new Manila cathedral began, the site on which the new stones were being laid was

already a few feet higher than the surrounding terrain. The ruins of three previous cathedrals, and of the first wooden church of Manila, had accumulated on its few hundred square meters of area.

History had literally been buried on that site. In times of great calamity—fire, earthquake, war—dust and broken stone had many times been conjoined with numerous ancient ecclesiastical archives to raise, inch by inch, that bit of ground which fronted Moraga's public square, before which had always stood the "major church" of the Distinguished and Ever Loyal City of Manila.

It was exalted ground therefore—land raised by dirt and by history—on which a great structure began to rise on the fourth of October 1872. Manila had no cathedral for nine years and her devout townsmen were eager to have their church. Now those marvellous energies that men are somehow always able to muster when moved by lofty purpose were marshalled once again. And a new church arose. Thus, the fourth Manila cathedral was built, following a floor plan believed to have been similar to that of its predecessor. The new church was blessed on 8 December 1879.

Churches have a way of telling the story of their cities. The history of the Manila cathedral before 1872 had been much the history of the City of Manila — a story of glory and reverses, great fortune and great calamity, of war, pestilence and earthquake, and sometimes even magnificent enterprise and magnificent achievement, but through it all, the quieter story of a strange doggedness, an undying courage, of truest nobility and loyalty as indeed befitted her proud title—*Insigne y Siempre Leal*.

The first church of Manila had been built the year that the city itself was founded, by the *Adelantado* Miguel López de Legazpi. It was a frail structure of bamboo and nipa but so was the settlement along the Pasig which the Spanish conquistadores had captured from Ladya Soliman. The succeeding cathedrals told much the same story—of Manila and its people, of their exploits, their wars, their victories, their defeats, their epidemics, their earthquakes. But they had more than told a story. They had shared it. They had been, each of them, the city's constant handmaiden.

Now then what lay in store for the fourth cathedral of 1872? The new church was destined to last only sixty-six years. Its bell tower was not even to survive a year for in July 1880 another earthquake shook the city and the tower collapsed. But the rest of the cathedral remained intact through almost seven decades and was a close witness to what may be described as one of the most fateful periods in the whole of Philippine history.

The year in which work on the fourth cathedral was begun—1872—was the year of the Cavite revolt, which started off the series of historical events that culminated in the Philippine Revolution of 1896 and ushered in the modern period of our history. This cathedral saw our people now enslaved, now for an instant free, and then again not wholly free but still aspiring and fighting to be free. This was the cathedral known to Fathers Burgos, Zamora, and Gómez, known to José Rizal, to the Revolution, to the first Republic, the American Occupation, to Manuel L. Quezon and the Commonwealth, to World War II and Fort Santiago, the cathedral that saw the eve of final Philippine Independence.

Early in its life it was a hospital, for men seeking relief from the wounds of war. Shortly before its death, it was a bomb shelter, for men, women and children escaping the cruelties of war.

But God who works strangely had decreed that misfortune should outweigh good fortune in those sixty-six years. When war broke out in 1941 and the Philippines was overrun by a new enemy, the country was desolate; and the cathedral, while it still comforted the Catholic population of Manila, somehow itself came to seem disconsolate too, and empty. For on the other side of the old public square, in the fort named after a saint, Filipinos—Manileños—were being tortured and killed because they would be free, as the Church had taught them to be.

Finally, when early in 1945 the brave, "the Distinguished ever Loyal City of Manila" once again strode to battle, the fourth cathedral fell. But yet true to her proud lineage, when she fell, the city, her mistress, had fallen too.

ANGELITA MARTINEZ