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Eucharistic Congresses in the Philippines

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EUCHARISTIC congresses, as the name implies, are gatherings of the clergy and the faithful to glorify Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist. Their purpose is to seek, through the glorification of the Holy Eucharist, the propagation and intensification of Catholic life by means of prayer and the interchange of ideas not only regarding the Eucharist itself, but also regarding the current problems of the Church. In short, the purpose of such congresses is "to restore all things in Christ."

The first eucharistic congress was celebrated at Lille in France from the 28th to the 30th of June 1881. A pious woman, Madame Tamieser, first initiated the work with the collaboration and inspiration of Bishop Gaston de Ségur. That particular event was of merely local scope, but thenceforth year by year eucharistic congresses were held with greater popular support and becoming more and more international in character. The second congress was held at Avignon in 1882, the third at Liège the year after, the fourth at Fribourg in Switzerland in 1885, the fifth in Toulouse in Southern France. Other congresses followed: at Paris, Antwerp, Jerusalem, Reims, Paray le Monial, Brussels, Lourdes, Angers, Namur, Angoulême.

The eucharistic congress held at Rome from the 1st to the 6th of June 1905 was noteworthy not only because the

exercises of the congress were attended in person by the reigning Pontiff, Pius X who has since been canonized, but also because it led to a papal decree of far-reaching importance, the *Tridentina Synodus* of 20 December 1905 in which Pope St. Pius X sanctioned and encouraged the practice of receiving holy communion daily.

The Nineteenth Eucharistic Congress held in London in 1908 was up to that time the most spectacular of the congresses in both an ocular and a historical sense. It was the first to be held in an English-speaking country, in a city believed to be one of the largest if not the largest in the world, and in a country avowedly Protestant and hostile to Catholicism. No papal legate had set foot on English soil for three centuries. The news that the Blessed Sacrament was going to be carried through the streets of London created such a furor that the Prime Minister intervened in person and formally begged the Archbishop of Westminster to desist from such action. How the papal legate arrived in England accompanied by six other Cardinals from six different countries and met by a tremendous concourse of people, how members of the House of Lords led by the Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshall of England, formed themselves into an escort of honor for the papal legate, and how the glittering entourage walked in procession through the streets of London (minus the Blessed Sacrament), the streets lined with cheering multitudes—these and similar events make the London congress of 1908 one of the notable events of English history.

The first World War interrupted the almost yearly series of congresses but in 1922 they were again resumed with a second congress held in Rome. From then on until the second World War brought a second interruption, International Eucharistic Congresses were held every two years. In 1924 it was held at Amsterdam, in 1926 at Chicago, in 1928 at Sydney, in 1932 at Dublin, in 1934 at Buenos Aires, in 1936 at Carthage, and in 1937 in Manila.

One more International Eucharistic Congress was convened before the second World War made further congresses impossible. It took place at Budapest in Hungary in 1938,

a city that now holds world-wide attention. From the Philippine point of view it is noteworthy that one of the speakers at the Budapest conferences was the late Manuel C. Colayco, then editor of *The Philippines Commonwealth*. After the war, an International Eucharistic Congress was held at Barcelona in 1952.

It is against this background of a world-wide movement which has steadily gained momentum that we should look at the congresses held in the Philippines in the past and at the Second National Eucharistic Congress which will be in progress when these pages go to press.

FIRST NATIONAL CONGRESS

The first National Eucharistic Congress of the Philippines was held in Manila from the 11th to the 16th of December 1929. The idea of holding such a congress was broached at a meeting of the Hierarchy in January 1929 by Archbishop Michael J. O'Doherty of Manila. The congress was intended to coincide with the sacerdotal jubilee of Pope Pius XI. On 30 May 1929, the feast of Corpus Christi, the Hierarchy through a joint pastoral letter officially announced that the First National Eucharistic Congress of the Philippines would be held in Manila on 13, 14, and 15 December of that year. Besides this joint pastoral, the bishops issued circular letters to the clergy and faithful of their respective dioceses. In preparation for the national event, local *jornadas eucarísticas* eucharistic tridua or novenas, general communions and solemn processions were held in various parts of the Philippines..

The opening ceremonies of the congress took place on 11 December 1929 at the Manila cathedral, at which the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, the Most Reverend Guglielmo Piani, welcomed the crowds that had come from various parts of the Philippines. This was followed by a Women's Day, a Students' Day, a Children's Day and a Men's Day. The ceremonies were held in the cathedral but a field Mass for the students was celebrated at the Luneta by Bishop Constancio Jurgens of Tuguegarao. At the Mass on Men's Day (15 December) civil authorities and members of various religious-civic organizations

(like the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of the Holy Cross, the Knights of Christ the King, the *Hijos del Pueblo*, the Catholic Truth Society, etc.) received holy communion.

The congress closed with a solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament. The procession started at the Malate Church ended at the Luneta. An estimated 100,000 took part in the procession. That was of course a large crowd in those days when no one yet dreamed of the mammoth crowds that would march in procession and line the streets of Manila in 1937 and 1954.

At the concluding ceremonies at the Luneta, Bishop Sofronio Hachang of Calbayog preached the sermon, which was followed by an allocution from the Archbishop of Manila and a concluding discourse from the Apostolic Delegate. At the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament the Filipino people was consecrated to Christ the King and a profession of faith (the Apostle's Creed) was sung. The religious ceremonies were followed by a fireworks display at the Luneta.

Beginning 16 December, the day after the official closing of the Congress, several events took place which the Program calls *actos extraoficiales*. Among these were the convention of the Catholic Women's League, a Catholic Students' Conference, and the blessing of the cornerstone of *La Ignaciana*, the Jesuit House of Retreats for clergy and laymen on Herran Street at Santa Ana.

THE INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

Of far greater importance and requiring far greater preparation was the XXXIII International Eucharistic Congress held in Manila from the 3rd to the 7th of February 1937. Preparations for this great event began as early as the first months of 1935. On 11 February 1935 the Hierarchy through a joint pastoral letter launched the program of "spiritual preparation." Local eucharistic congresses were held in every parish, followed by larger congresses in every diocese. In the pages of the *Boletín eclesiástico*, in its *sección informativa—noticias de Filipinas*, are recorded some of the great spiritual harvests of holy communions, conversions to the Faith, marriages validated and fruitful missions in connection with these congresses.

Nor was material preparation neglected. A member of the Permanent Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses, Father Joseph Boubée S.J., came to the Philippines to act as adviser to the various committees set up to handle the material and social aspects of the international gathering. Some of the work of these committees has been recorded in the issues of *The Philippines Commonwealth* during the two-year period 1935-1937.

The arrival of the papal *legatus a latere* on 1 February 1937 was a great civic and religious event, heightened by the fact that it was a personal "homecoming" for the legate himself. His Eminence Denis Cardinal Dougherty, who had been a bishop in the Philippines before his election to the archbishopric of Philadelphia. The legate was met at the quay by a large multitude and was welcomed officially by the Mayor of Manila who gave him the symbolic key to the city. At the civic reception in the Rizal Memorial Stadium the Vice President of the Philippine Commonwealth, Sergio Osmeña, later President of the Republic, read an address of welcome. The legate resided, during his official stay, at Malacañang Palace as the guest of the President of the Commonwealth, Manuel L. Quezon despite the fact that President Quezon was absent from the country. The First Lady, the late Doña Aurora Aragón de Quezon, gave a social reception at Malacañang in honor of the legate.

One of the side-events in connection with the congress was the Pontifical Mission to the shrine of Our Lady at Antipolo, led by the papal legate. The main events of the congress were held at the Luneta where an elaborate altar was constructed with pews radiating from it in a semi-circle. In addition to the general assemblies held at the Luneta, there were sectional meetings conducted in various languages and dialects and held in various parts of the city. Noted visitors from abroad took part in these conferences, among them the well-known author, the Rev. C. C. Martindale S.J.

There was a Women's Day, a Children's Day, a Men's Day (with a midnight Mass at the Luneta attended by thousands). An estimated 600,000 people marched in the Eucharis-

tic Procession along Dewey Boulevard to the Luneta on the closing night of the congress. The papal legate officiated at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and then the sea of faces, with candles lit, listened with rapt attention as the shaking voice of the aging Pontiff, Pope Pius XI, came over the microphone by direct radio contact with the Vatican.

The Manila congress drew visitors from many countries in considerable numbers and especially from the countries of the Far East. The number of missionary bishops and priests present at the event gave a missionary character to the Manila congress, a fact also emphasized by the Mission exhibit that was held during the congress.

THE MARIAN CONGRESS

Although eucharistic congresses are our subject, we must not omit mention of the Marian Congress of 1954.

On 8 September 1953 His Holiness Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical letter *Fulgens corona* decreeing the year 1954 as a "Marian Year" to be celebrated throughout the world in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. On 9 April 1954 the Philippine Hierarchy issued a joint pastoral letter on the national celebration of the Marian Year. This joint pastoral had been preceded by individual circular letters issued by various archbishops and bishops to their respective dioceses.

During the entire year 1954 Marian Congresses were held in parishes and dioceses throughout the country. The enthusiasm and the large concourse of people that attended these congresses is unbelievable. Masses, communions, conferences, processions, rallies, pilgrimages to famous shrines were among the features of these congresses.

This year also marked the rapid propagation, especially in the Visayas, of the association called *Barangay sa Virgen*.

Worthy of mention was the novel project of "mass marriages" held in Cebú City in connection with the Archdiocesan Marian Congress of Cebú. A thousand couples were gathered

with their sponsors at the grounds of the Abellana High School and these thousand marriages were validated at the same time. About half a million people attended the congress in Cebú, held from the 23rd to the 27th of November 1954. The enthusiastic celebration of the Marian Congress in Cebú may be taken as typical of other diocesan and archdiocesan congresses, as may be read in the *sección informativa* of the *Boletín eclesiástico*.

The National Marian Congress was held in Manila from the 1st to the 5th of December 1954 with His Eminence, Fernando Cardinal Quiroga y Palacios, Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, as the papal legate. The rosary was recited during the five days of the congress for 120 consecutive hours throughout the entire Philippines but particularly in Manila. As usual there was a Women's Day, a Youth's Day, a Day for First Communicants, and the midnight Mass for the men at the Luneta at which over 600,000 men were present, many of them receiving holy communion.

On the last day of the Congress the papal legate celebrated a pontifical Mass at the Luneta at which he also preached. The solemn Marian Procession was held in the afternoon. It was a mammoth procession. One writer said that it was impossible to count the sea of people who joined the procession. To enhance the national character of the event, thirty-three of the more famous images of Our Lady venerated in various parts of the Philippines were brought to Manila by land, sea or air and were carried in procession. At the Luneta, a message from the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, was conveyed over the radio. This was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. And as a final act of tribute to the Mother of God, the President of the Philippines, Ramón Magsaysay, led the mammoth throng at the Luneta in an "Act of Consecration of the Philippines to the Immaculate Mother."

Immediately afterwards, the members of the Hierarchy and the clergy departed for their various dioceses and parishes throughout the Philippines in order to be at their respective stations for the solemn closing of the Marian Year on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1954.

SECOND NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

This month we are celebrating the Second National Eucharistic Congress of the Philippines. It will begin on 28 November and end on 2 December. This will naturally not be as well attended as the International Eucharistic Congress of 1937 and it may be an anticlimax after the mammoth Marian Congress of 1954. Nevertheless it is an event of national importance.

Preparations for the great event have been going on since the first months of this year. The circular letters issued by the Most Reverend Archbishops and Bishops to their respective jurisdictions may be found in the pages of the *Boletín eclesiástico*. There is a theme running through these circulars: the intensification of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is appropriate as this year marks the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the feast of the Sacred Heart. This greater devotion to the Sacred Heart is being promoted by *jornadas eucarísticas*, the establishment of centers of the "Apostleship of Prayer," the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in individual homes, the establishment of centers of the *Adoración Nocturna*, the reception of holy communion, First Friday devotions, Holy Hours, the Forty Hours' Devotion, etc. This year the feast of Christ the King was celebrated throughout the archipelago with greater splendor and solemnity.

The Holy Father is sending to the Philippines as his legate to the congress an old friend of the Filipinos and a frequent visitor to the Philippines, His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York. Cardinal Spellman is also Military Vicar of all the armed forces of the United States and as such he has made it a point to spend his Christmases with American troops abroad, particularly those on the battlefields. His trips on such occasions to Korea and other places have also brought him to the Philippines as a guest of President Magsaysay or the late President Quirino. But these visits to our shores have hitherto been of an informal, personal nature. Cardinal Spellman's arrival on 26 November as papal legate will be a different matter and will entitle him to the full honors due to that exalted position. Religious, civic and social

receptions have been scheduled, and there will be a testimonial banquet in his honor at the Manila Hotel on 1 December.

As usual the main functions of the congress will be held at the Luneta. The opening ceremonies will be held on the afternoon of Wednesday, 28 November. The Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, the Most Reverend Egidio Vagnozzi, will preach and Archbishop Rufino J. Santos of Manila will officiate at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Thursday, 29 November will be Women's Day. Pontifical Mass will be celebrated by Archbishop José Ma. Cuenco of Jaro, and Coadjutor Archbishop Juan C. Sison of Nueva Segovia will preach. At the Mass Filipino families will be consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the First Lady, Mrs. Luz Magsaysay, leading the Act of Consecration.

The night of Thursday, 29 November will be Men's Night. A Holy Hour will begin at ten o'clock with Bishop Lino Gonzaga of Palo preaching the sermon. As at the men's night of the Marian Congress, Father Pedro Verceles S.J. will direct the Holy Hour. Father Verceles is secretary general of the congress. At the conclusion of the Holy Hour, shortly before midnight, there will be a Pontifical Mass celebrated by the present writer. He shall be assisted at the altar by the seminarians from our own archdiocesan seminary of Cebú, the Seminario de San Carlos. The Mass will be sung also by the choir of our archdiocesan seminary of Cebu. We might add that at least eighty of our seminarians are coming from Cebú to Manila to attend the congress.

The ceremonies for Friday, 30 November will long remain in the memories of men. At 6:30 in the morning there will be a mass ordination at which three archbishops and eight bishops will officiate at a mass ordination at which about seventy *ordinandi* from eleven jurisdictions will be raised to the priesthood. The ordaining prelates will be: the Archbishop of Manila, the Archbishop of Cebú, the Coadjutor Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, Bishop Madriaga of Lingayen-Dagupan, Bishop Obviar of Lucena, Bishop Olalia of Lipa, Bishop Gonzaga of Palo, Bishop Frondosa of Capiz, Bishop Van den Ouwelant of Surigao,

Bishop Cronin of Ozamiz, and Bishop Surban of Dumaguete. Father Leo Vandromme C.I.C.M. of the archdiocesan seminary of Manila will act as Master of Ceremonies. The ceremonies will be explained to the people by Father Antonio Piñon O.P. The choir of the Central Seminary of Santo Tomas will sing.

The children's Mass on Saturday, 1 December will be said by Archbishop Pedro Santos of Naga. A sermon in Tagalog will be preached by Auxiliary Bishop Reyes of Manila. In the evening of that same day, the papal legate will celebrate a military field Mass, to be followed by Benediction at which Bishop Olalia of Lipa will officiate.

The climax of the congress will be Sunday, 2 December. In the morning pontifical Mass will be celebrated by the papal legate, His Eminence Cardinal Spellman, at which he himself will preach the homily. At the offertory of the Mass, the Filipino people will be solemnly consecrated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Act of Consecration will be read by the President of the Philippines, Ramón Magsaysay.

At noon on that day (as on the previous days of the congress) the bells in all the churches will ring. And at four in the afternoon the solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament will be held, and it is hoped that the attendance will compare favorably with the great Eucharistic procession of 1937 and the Marian procession of 1954.

At the closing ceremonies at the Luneta, a message from the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, will be broadcast. The papal legate will officiate at Benediction, assisted by the seminarians from San José Seminary. The singing will be furnished by the combined choirs of the seminaries in the Manila area under the direction of Father Gregorio Garcia O.P.

On the following day, 3 December and the feast of St. Francis Xavier, the Cardinal legate will officiate at the laying of the cornerstone of the proposed National Basilica of the Sacred Heart.

Besides these main functions of the congress, there will be others of a more social nature. Choral concerts are now being given by the Glee Clubs of the various colleges of Manila. A

pageant depicting the history of the devotion to the Sacred Heart is being presented. The pageant is written and directed by Father James B. Reuter S.J. of the Ateneo de Manila, with the cast drawn from the various Catholic colleges of Manila. At the solemn religious reception for the Cardinal legate, the *Ecce sacerdos magnus* will be sung by a thousand voices, the combined Glee Clubs of the Catholic colleges. The score arranged for seven voices was composed for the occasion by Father John Van de Steen C.I.C.M., director of sacred music of the archdiocesan seminary of Manila.

To raise funds for the expenses of the congress a number of benefit performances are being held. This includes the premier performance of a new and well-publicized film, and a series of basketball games in which the leading teams of the collegiate and university athletic leagues of Manila will battle for the trophies donated by the papal legate, the Archbishop of Manila and the Archbishop of Cebú.

Among the *actos extraoficiales* in connection with the visit to the Philippines of the papal legate will be the blessing of the new chapel of the high school compound of the Ateneo de Manila at Loyola Heights by Cardinal Spellman.

As in previous congresses, the government of the Philippines is taking cognizance of the great civic importance of the national gathering. The Bureau of Posts is issuing a commemorative stamp which is singularly appropriate. The stamp, it is reported, will feature the little wooden statue of the Sacred Heart which Rizal carved with a penknife when he was a student at the Ateneo, and which he had with him in his last hours at Fort Santiago before his execution at the Luneta on 30 December 1896, just sixty years ago.

And thus, Deo volente, another great manifestation of faith will go down in history as one of the notable events in our country. Congresses such as these are inspiring events. They are not only spectacular manifestations of the deep faith of our people, but they are occasions of renewed dedication to the

cause which should be dear to every Christian: the restoration of all things in Christ.¹

¹ Regarding eucharistic congresses in general, sufficiently detailed accounts may be found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* 5:593 ff. and in Espasa (*Enciclopedia universal ilustrada*) 22:1271 ff. A more recent account may be found in *Mundo hispanico* Nos. 50-51 (mayo-junio 1952) pp. 19 ss. Regarding the congresses held in the Philippines, information may be had from the souvenir programs published on each occasion, from the prewar *Philippines Commonweal* and the postwar *Sentinel* and from the *Boletín eclesiástico*. The following articles in the *Boletín* are especially pertinent: "Pastoral conjunta" Vol. XIII (abril 1935) 220 ss.; "XXXIII International Eucharistic Congress" Vol. XV (feb. 1937) 118 ss.; "Carta enciclica" Vol. XXVII (dic. 1953) 752-759; "Pastoral colectiva" Vol. XXVIII (junio 1954) 366-373; "El II Congreso Mariano Nacional" Vol. XXIX (enero 1955) 61 ss.