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Distribution of Priests

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nad wrote a study of three short stories that had received prizes from the *Philippines Free Press*. One of those stories featured precisely this erotic interpretation of devotion to the Mother of God, that we find in Mr. Demetillo's criticism. Is it a coincidence that these two indications should come to our attention so closely together, or are they signs that this rationalization of devotion to the Mother of God is being more widely disseminated than we would have suspected?

The second question that arises is about Mr. Demetillo's concept of Christianity, for we presume he considers himself a Christian. Mr. Demetillo seems to see little to choose between the tenets of Christianity and the myths of paganism. But if that is an accurate interpretation of his position, he is very remote from Christianity.

Does Mr. Demetillo perhaps represent the logical term of a Mary-less Christianity? Have we here another manifestation of the oft-attested truth that where Mary is abandoned, Christ soon is too? Cardinal Newman, who knew both Protestantism and Catholicity so well, wrote in his *Difficulties of Anglicans*:

If we look through Europe we shall find, on the whole, that just those nations and countries have lost their faith in the divinity of Christ who have given up devotion to His Mother, and that those, on the other hand who had been foremost in her honor, have retained their orthodoxy.

L.A.C.

Distribution of Priests

RECENT WRITING ON MISSION WORK has carried several suggestions that something should be done to distribute the clergy of the world with reference to the Catholic populations. An article in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, "L'appel de l'Amerique latine" by J. Luzzi, S.J. touches this question with reference especially to the deplorable situation in Latin America.

Father Luzzi begins his study by quoting a very significant statement made by the Sacred Congregation of the Consistory in the

name of the Holy Father, and circulated to the Bishops of Italy. The statement was as follows:

The movement which has been started to prepare seminarians for future work in other dioceses of Italy and abroad, especially with the purpose of helping emigrants, deserves every support. But it is not enough. Every Ordinary should take cognizance of this problem and put at the disposition of the Holy See as many well-prepared zealous priests as are not absolutely necessary for his diocese. This is a sacrifice which this Sacred Congregation demands in the name of the Holy Father, Pastor of the whole church, who, though he is consoled by the great spiritual vigor of some dioceses, nevertheless is grieved to see how many others languish through lack of ministers of the gospel.

The desires of the Holy Father have not been without good results, and some dioceses have responded generously to the call. But the need is still acute. And not only in Latin America.

According to the figures presented by Father Luzzi, which he in turn compiled from the *Annuario Pontificio* of 1952, the total number of Catholics in Latin America is 148,000,000. These are served by 29,000 priests, or an average of one priest for every 5104 Catholics. In the rest of the world there are 252,000,000 Catholics served by 331,000 priests, or an average of one priest for every 761 Catholics. To put the comparison another way, Latin America has about 1/3 of the Catholics and 1/11 of the priests. The rest of the world has 2/3 of the Catholics and 10/11 of the priests.

The average figure of 1 priest for 5104 Catholics does not represent the much more deplorable situation of some of the individual states of Latin America. Guatemala heads the list as the most woefully in want (probably in the whole world) with one priest for 25,475 Catholics. Of the 22 countries listed in the Latin American analysis, 15 are worse than the average: Venezuela, 5491; Bolivia, 5468; Panama, 5578; Brazil, 6185; Paraguay, 6653; Puerto Rico, 7098; Cuba, 7602; Nicaragua, 7733; Haiti, 9064; Salvador, 10,348; Honduras 11,540; Dominican Republic, 12,491; and Guatemala with the final low of one priest for 25,475. The best countries in Latin America are still far from presenting reasons of exultation. Uruguay at the head of the list has one priest for 2065 Catholics, and Chile, the next, has one priest for 2912.

Statistics and averages are of course never a complete picture, and in this case they conceal the blackness of the real situation. The priests of Latin America are not only few in number but they have to serve vast territories, reached by the most primitive means of communication, and populated by Catholics thinly spread over the whole wide area. Father Luzzi gives the examples of two dioceses of Argentine: Santiago del Estero, where 57 priests serve 665,000 Catholics in a territory almost as big as Mindanao and all the Visayas together, and Viedma where 97 priests serve a territory more than twice the size of the whole Philippines. If we take as a desirable figure the generally accepted one of one priest for every 1000 inhabitants, we understand how far Latin America is from possessing an adequate clergy. It is no wonder that the faith is languishing.

Father Luzzi, writing in a Belgian magazine, naturally turns to the Belgian Church for his comparisons. This amazing country possesses one priest for every 517 Catholics, and this in a highly developed country with excellent transportation, and of such small expanse that each priest is responsible only for 2 square kilometers, or in farmer's language 200 hectares! And some of the dioceses of Belgium are considerably better than the average. Namur, for example, has one priest for every 295 Catholics, and Malines 1 priest for every 100 hectares of territory. I have called Belgium amazing because in spite of the very large number of priests in Belgium itself, this tiny nation does just as well for the missions. One diocese in Belgium has 6,000 workers in the foreign missions, which is the highest rate in the world.

If we consider the Philippines in the light of these two sets of figures, we are in a position to understand the deplorable state of our nation. There are 2,492 priests in the Philippines. The Catholic population of the Philippines is computed to be 15,810,024, which gives an average of one priest for 6,340 Catholics. This means that the average of the Philippines is considerably worse than the average of Latin America. And as would be expected in dealing with averages, some places are much worse. Palo and Calbayog for example have an average of only one priest for more than 12,000 Catholics.

Comparative Figures on Ratio of Priests to Catholics

		Catholics
Namur, Belgium		295
Belgium	One	517
United States		620
World outside Latin America	Priest	761
Latin America		5,104
Philippines	to	6,340
Palo		12,000
Guatemala		25,475

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen editorializing in *World Mission* laments the relatively poor showing of the United States in sending missionaries to mission fields. The United States has one priest for every 620 Catholics, but though very generous with money, the Catholic Church there has provided only 4,375 missionaries abroad. And it is in view of this that Msgr. Sheen raises the question, which the Holy Father raised with reference to the Church in Italy. Bishop Sheen suggests that religious orders, congregations and dioceses set up some system of personnel taxation for man power. He writes:

No religious community or diocese will ever admit it has enough members. When vital needs are supplied, new needs are created on the periphery with the result that each one asks: "What are these among so many?" But if one looks to the *whole Church* and to the world, there are many communities or dioceses who could impose upon themselves 10 per cent or 15 per cent of their personnel for the foreign missions. These are days of sacrifice and repentance, and under the shadow of the Cross we see that there can be a luxury of man-power and woman-power as well as a luxury of things. If it suddenly became clear that by sending 10 per cent of the personnel out through the country collecting, our societies or dioceses could pick up \$5,000,000 in a year, the "sacrifice" would gladly be made. But then what of souls in Asia, Africa?

And we can add, what of souls in the Philippines? The Philippines stands in the forefront of those countries that need help from without. Left to ourselves there is no saying how long it will take to reach the ideal spread of 1 priest to 1,000, or even the starvation spread of 1 priest to 2,000. There is no saying, because the situation is getting worse instead of better. This scarcity is not a fertile soil for vocations, and so the worse we are, the worse we have a tendency

to get. We need stimulation *ab extrinseco* in order to achieve a rate of growth, which will justify us in hoping for an ultimate remedy. At the present time we are losing ground, for though the absolute number of priests is increasing, the population is also increasing still more rapidly, and therefore the *per capita* spread is worse each year.

The missionary burden has up to the present fallen generally on certain orders or congregations, which consider the preaching of the gospel in foreign lands their proper objective. It seems they can do no more. The Holy Father's appeal and Bishop Sheen's suggestion would widen enormously the sources from which personnel could be derived, and might work a revolution in the missionary situation.

L.A.C.