

## Book Reviews and Notices

121 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES. By **Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J.** Quezon City: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1991. Pp. 70.

When Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1959, he was asked whether this was to be a new Council or the continuation of the suspended and never completed Vatican I of almost 100 years before. He stated emphatically that this was a new Council — hence the name Vatican II — because he wished it to be different from all previous ecumenical councils. They had been doctrinal or “dogmatic,” convoked to clarify disputed points of doctrine. This council was to be “pastoral,” not primarily concerned with defining doctrines but with entering into a pastoral dialogue with the contemporary world. It was in this spirit that the council was concluded under John’s great successor, Paul VI. And the pastoral spirit of Vatican II has been one of the hallmarks of the twenty-five years since the end of that Council.

As Fr. Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J., makes clear in the book under review, the same spirit pervaded the recently concluded Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II). And he is uniquely well-positioned to make this judgment. As he says in his preface, referring to himself in the third person: “He had been involved in the preparation of the Council from its inception in November 1987 as Assistant National Coordinator for three full years, and throughout the Council itself (January-February, 1991) as Assistant Secretary General.” He has also been one of the most sought-after speakers on the Council in the months since its completion. The present book, catechetical in form, places in print the questions most frequently asked, and the answers he has given. The book is not an official document, as the author makes clear. When he wrote, and at the time this review is being written, the single document issued by PCP II is being reviewed in the Vatican — the

technical term is "recognitio", as he points out in #5 — and will only be officially promulgated when that process is completed. Thus the book serves at present to fill a void in our knowledge of what the PCP II was "all about." It provides priests and theology teachers and involved laity (cf. p. 6) with a handy compendium of the major themes, and the important emphases, of the Council — and thus enables them to start the process of diffusion and implementation which is essential to the ultimate success of PCP II.

If I am not mistaken, however, the *121 Questions* will still be of value even after we have the final decrees on hand. Father de Achútegui has provided us with a masterful summary of the vision of this Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (the first having been in 1953), clearly underlining and outlining the major themes and concerns of the Philippine Church at this moment in her history. In this brief review we can only indicate the main points touched, in the hope that those for whom it is written will "take and read," and thus will be better equipped to serve as agents of deepening and change for the faithful of our country.

The book is divided into seven parts, of which the first three (questions 1-23) provide background information on councils in general, this particular national council, and the decision of the delegates, after much discussion, to issue but a single conciliar document. The doctrinal heart of this document is discussed in parts IV and V. Part IV (questions 24-38) is entitled "Envisioning a Church Renewed" — and presents the ideal of Church (somewhat like *Lumen Gentium* in Vatican II, although on a much more modest scale) which provides the paradigm within which the delegates viewed all the particular concerns of the Philippine Church today. Two images stand out: a "Community of Disciples" and, flowing from this initial experience of Jesus' personal call to discipleship, a "Community-in-Mission." The latter might be seen as the central operative metaphor, since the stress of the Council is, as Part V is entitled, "A Renewed, Integral Evangelization" (questions 39-81, the longest section of the book). This call to be evangelizers and evangelized involves proclaiming a "message of salvation" — the traditional areas of catechesis and worship, — but also, very much in the spirit of Vatican II and of Pope John Paul II, a "message of liberation," grounded in the current realization (inherited from the great prophets of Israel) that justice is a constitutive element in authentic faith.

Would that there were space to cite the impressive list of concerns which PCP II addressed, from inculturated liturgy to ideology, and from the status of women and cultural minorities to fundamentalism and the *Iglesia ni Kristo*. Similarly, Part VI (questions 82-119) provides a brief

but comprehensive survey of the roles of the various members of the Church — lay, religious, and ordained ministers — and of various organizations, traditional as well as new, in the work of renewing the Church. Suffice it to say that the operative word throughout the document is "renewal." The conciliar delegates are well-aware that we live in a nominally Catholic and Christian country, and that there is indeed much that is good and solid in the faith of our people. What is really needed, they and Fr. de Achútegui insist, is a renewal — a deepening and a broadening — of this very real heritage of faith. And they call all of us to commit ourselves to this "work of God" in our day.

Part VII, the final section of the book (questions 120-121) and of the document, summarizes the resolutions of PCP II under the rubric "Agenda for Renewal." This would be the most interesting part for journalists. But to my mind the resolutions adopted simply place in clear and concise form the consequences of the vision enunciated in parts IV to VI. This latter is the heart of the matter. As a personal observation, I never thought I could enjoy returning to the catechism format of my childhood, with its implications of cut-and-dried, to-be-memorized answers to every conceivable question on God and the faith. That Father de Achútegui has made that return enjoyable, and far from painful or boring, is a clear indication, I think, of the success of his *121 Questions and Answers* in articulating the vision of PCP II.

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THE DREAM OF THE EARTH. By Thomas **Berry**. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. Pp. xv + 247.

"Mt. Pinatubo is angry at the mining industry." So an old Aeta sighs sorrowfully. The plaint is an intuitive insight based on the imagery of many tribal peoples, whether Aeta or Mayan or Incan, among ancient world religions, whether Buddhist or Confucian or Hindu. Whence comes this imagery? Why do people personify the planet earth as being pleased or displeased with human beings, as doing favors or disfavor to them?

Whatever the Origin of such universal imagery, its importance is making a strong come-back in recent writings on ecology. For example, in 1988, just three years before Pinatubo erupted, Thomas Berry, in the