

The Episcopal Consecration of Bishop Jorge Barlin: A New Phase in Philippine Church History

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This essay is about Jorge Barlin, the First Filipino Bishop. My goal in these pages is rather modest: Using the limited available sources, I will present the context of Barlin's elevation to the episcopacy which includes a review of his life and a consideration of the significance of his elevation to the episcopacy to Philippine Church History. The year 2006 was the centenary of his Episcopal Consecration.

I. *Praenotanda* on Some Biographical Notes on Barlin

The following are some biographical sources on Barlin:

1. The review '*El Santísimo Rosario*' in its '*Cronica*' of 1906¹, is one of the earliest documentation that provides us, albeit partially, details on the life and person of Jorge Barlin and his Episcopal Consecration. This particular issue of *El Santísimo Rosario* was published on the same year of his consecration as bishop – 1906. Though it is primarily a documentation of his episcopal consecration, it offers information about his origins and his entry into the seminary:

¹ '*Cronica*', *El Santísimo Rosario*, vol. XXI, 1906, pp. 647-649. Hereinafter cited as '*El Santísimo Rosario*, 1906'.

*"Llamase el nuevo Prelado Filipino Mons. Jorge Barlin, natural de Baao, en Camarines del Sur, donde nació en 1850. Siendo aún muy niño, fue trasladado por su familia á Nueva Caceres, comenzando á estudiar en el Seminario en calidad de externo, hasta que el citado Ilmo. P. Gainza le tomó bajo su amparo formándose el joven al lado del eminente Obispo dominico."*²

Regarding his person, the 'Cronica' describes the new prelate as '*modelo de virtudes, sobre todo de humildad, caridad, y abnegación apostólica.*' It mentions his '*amor a los Españoles y á la Orden de Predicadores.*'³ He is complimented as a model Dominican Tertiary.

On his consecration as Bishop, this same source indicates the place and date of the solemn event.

*"En la iglesia de Sto. Domingo de Manila y ante la veneranda patrona de las Islas, la Virgen de Rosario, tuvo lugar el día 29 de Junio, la Consagración Episcopal del Nuevo Prelado de la Diócesis de Nueva Cáceres para la que hace 43 años se consagraba en el mismo templo el Rmo P. Gainza de perdurable memoria."*⁴

2. An issue of the Revista '*El Santísimo Rosario*' of 1909 provides a documentation of his travel to Rome to make an *ad limina* visit. Such trip became his last as he died in Rome.⁵ This particular issue indicates Barlin's native place – Baao. Here, too,

² *El Santísimo Rosario*, 1906, pp. 648-649.

³ *El Santísimo Rosario*, 1906, p. 648.

⁴ *El Santísimo Rosario*, 1906, p. 647.

⁵ 'Un Prelado Menos', *El Santísimo Rosario*, vol. XXIV, 1909, p. 722. Hereinafter cited as *El Santísimo Rosario*, 1909. "No era anciano aún el ilustre Prelado filipino. Habia nacido en Baao en Abril de 1850. Fue siempre muy español y muy dominico y fue consagrado Obispo de Nueva Caceres en Junio de 1906. Venido á Roma en Mayo de este año 1909, con objeto de hacer la visita ad limina, agravóse en la Ciudad Eterna en sus padecimientos soportados con alma grande hasta que ha fallecido el día 5 de Setiembre, con preciosa muerte, en el Colegio de los PP. Dominicos españoles de la Via Condotti, confortado con todos los Sacramentos y con la especialísima bendición Apostólica que le envió Su Santidad Pio X."

one finds a citation of Barlin as the '*primer Obispo indígena de Filipinas.*'

3. The publication *Los Padres Paules y Las Hijas de Caridad en Filipinas – Breve Reseña Historica, 1862 a 1912 por un Sacerdote de la Congregacion de la Mision*⁶ is an account of the work of Vincentian Fathers and the Daughters of Charity from 1862 to 1912. In this work one finds a section dedicated to Barlin entitled "*Ilmo. Sr. D. Jorge Barlin, Obispo de Nueva Cáceres.*"

Published almost four years after Barlin's death, the aforementioned section provides the first full biography of Jorge Barlin. The account includes his early years in the seminary, his reception of the minor orders and the priesthood, and his pastoral assignments.

Among the praises accorded him in the same biography was that of being the *Vicario Foraneo* of Sorsogon. He was responsible for the peaceful transition of government in Sorsogon during the transfer of rule from the Spaniards to the Americans. It narrates his nomination as Apostolic Administrator and consequently as Bishop of Nueva Caceres. It includes some details of his episcopate and his death in Rome.

This biography became one of the main sources of subsequent biographies of Bishop Jorge Barlin.

4. In 1954, Domingo Abella published his work *Bikol Annals*,⁷ an Episcopology of Nueva Caceres. The section entitled "*First Filipino Bishop, Most Rev. Jorge Barlin Imperial, Secular Bishop of Nueva Caceres (1905-1909)*" provides an expanded biography of Barlin.

This account builds on what has been written in the *Breve Reseña* of the *Padres Paules y Las Hijas de Caridad*. But Abella

⁶ *Los Padres Paules y Las Hijas de Caridad en Filipinas – Breve Reseña Historica de la Labor Realizada en estas islas por la doble Familia de San Vicente de Paul (1862-1912) por un Sacerdote de la Congregacion de la Mision*, Manila, Imprenta de Santos y Bernal, 1912, see pp. 377-381. Hereinafter cited as *Los Padres Paules*.

⁷ Domingo Abella, *Bikol Annals*, Manila, pp. 201-210.

provides some new information: Barlin's involvement in the struggle against the Aglipayan movement. It praises Barlin for having dealt the 'most damaging blow to the new sect from which it never recovered, and this he did at a time when the landslide into the new church was the order of the day.'⁸ The oft-quoted reply of Barlin to the Aglipayan movement: "*Prefiero ser lampazero a ser la cabeza de su jerarquia cismatica*," is found in this account.⁹ This detail on Barlin's involvement on the struggle against the Aglipayans does not appear in the sources previously cited.

The same author further lauds Barlin for having chosen Santiago Sancho, who later became the first Bicolano Archbishop, as his understudy.

The author has added details from sources written by American authors.¹⁰

5. Jose Arcilla and Pablo Fernandez made a reprint and translation of the "*Relatio Status Dioecesis Novae-Cacerensis ab annis 1895-1908*"¹¹ in the journal *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. 5, November 1970 published by the University of Santo Tomas.

This is a report on the Status of the Diocese of Nueva Caceres from 1895 to 1908 by Bishop Jorge Barlin. A short biography of Barlin precedes the report with the title: "*Brevis Notitia Biographica de. Ven. Rmo. Georgio Barlin, Episcopus Cacerensis*." Some details of this biography, however, are quite different from previous biographies. For example, it states the young Barlin's 'ill health' as reason for Gainza's gesture of taking him under his

⁸ Abella, p. 205.

⁹ Abella, p. 205.

¹⁰ For example: *Philippine Life in Town and Country* by James A. LeRoy (New York, 1907) pp. 160-161; "An Ancient People and Their Problems," by Frank Wilkes Pye, in *Ladies Home Journal* reprinted by the Philippine Press Bureau, Washington D.C., 1919. See Abella, p. 302, footnotes 175-179.

¹¹ Jose Arcilla, S.J. – Pablo Fernandez, O.P., "Relatio Status Dioecesis Novae-Cacerensis ab Annis 1895-1908" in *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. 5, November 1970, Manila, University of Santo Tomas, pp. 373-397. Latin Text and English translation provided.

care. None of the previous biographies, however, mention this. It also relates that Barlin was a young curate of Sorsogon when Gainza died and that it was Leo XIII who named him bishop. These two details are contrary to previous accounts and facts. Barlin was assigned to Sorsogon after the death of Gainza and it was Pius X who named him Bishop.

Nevertheless, this reprint is important for it makes available this primary source. The Report covers a period of thirteen years, from December 20, 1895 to December 30, 1908, giving the reader an idea of the situation of the Diocese during the said period and information on Bishop Barlin's pastoral work.

6. Jesus Esplana's article "A Man Called Barlin" is what may be called a popular biography of Barlin. Popular in the sense that it has seen wider circulation. Originally written for a publication by Baaoeños¹² it has been posted in the internet.

Esplana makes a kind of synthesis of what has been elaborated by the aforementioned accounts by considering Barlin as an 'Alpha Man' – one who has many firsts attached to his name, to wit: *"He was the first clergyman to become civil governor (of Sorsogon) from September 20, 1898, until the coming of the Americans in 1900; the first and only person (up to this time) to have headed and governed a province both politically and ecclesiastically; the first and presumably the only priest to whom the supreme prelacy of the Philippine Independent Church, a.k.a. Aglipayan church, was offered; the first Filipino to have received two distinguished ecclesiastical honors from two Popes. Pope Leo XIII made Barlin a Papal Chamberlain, and his successor, Pope Pius X made him Protonotary Apostolic Ad Instar Participantium; the first and to date, the only priest, whose name is immortalized in Philippine Jurisprudence; the First Filipino Bishop of all times; the first to have been invited to deliver the Invocation of the Inaugural Session of the Philippine Assembly in October 16, 1907."*¹³

¹² Jesús Esplana, *A Man Called Barlin*, (Originally published in *KaIba-Iba* (December, 1995), a publication of Baaoeños, USA). See <http://members.aol.com/bicol/barlin/barlin.html>.

¹³ See <http://members.aol.com/bicol/barlin/barlin.html>.

Indeed, there is no dispute that he was chronologically the first Filipino in all of these but whether he is the only one in some of these would now need re-consideration.

7. Antolin Uy's article, "*The First Filipino Bishops: The Vatican Initiative*" published in *Diwa*¹⁴ supplies additional information on Barlin. The author consulted documents which were found in the *Archivio Storico del Consiglio per gli Affari Pubblici della Chiesa (SCAAEES)*.¹⁵ Uy, who had at his disposal some primary sources, recognized that little is to be found about Barlin in the SCAAEES.¹⁶

This article informs us that the outgoing Bishop of Caceres, Arsenio del Campo, recommended Barlin to be Apostolic Administrator of Nueva Caceres. Although del Campo did not seem to be very impressed by Barlin, nevertheless he found him to be the right man to counter the Aglipayan movement.

Further, the same article reports that the Apostolic Delegate Guidi was knowledgeable of the fact that Barlin defended the rights of the Church during the revolution and against the Aglipayan schism. Guidi included the name of Barlin to be the next Bishop of Nueva Caceres as early as December 1902, together with another Filipino named Pablo Singzon. The article relates that Barlin was ordained Bishop by the Apostolic Delegate Agius with Archbishop Harty and Bishop Rooker assisting.

The article presents two contrary opinions about Barlin. While Arsenio del Campo's opinion of Barlin was that "he has not shown yet the solidity of his religiosity" and to be of "weak character," the Apostolic Delegate Guidi, considers Barlin and Singzon to be 'virtuous, possess more than sufficient learning, they are prudent and at the same time of firm character, and gifted with talent for government.'

This article, supplies new details on Barlin and of the First Filipino Bishops.

¹⁴ Antolin Uy, "The First Filipino Bishops: The Vatican Initiative," *Diwa*, November 1994. Hereinafter cited as Uy, "The First Filipino Bishops."

¹⁵ Cf. UY, "The First Filipino Bishops", p. 89, footnote #2.

¹⁶ Uy, "First Filipino Bishops", p. 81.

8. Jose Rojas' "*Bonus Miles Christi Bicolanensis, Jorge Alfonso Imperial Barlin*" published in *Hingowa*,¹⁷ is a more recently written and comprehensive biography of Barlin. Rojas incorporates the information given by *El Santisimo Rosario, Los Padres Paules, Abella, Uy, Esplana* and other sources.¹⁸

The sub-titles give an idea of the scope of this biography: "*The Birth of Jorge Barlin and His Childhood, Barlin's Seminary Life and Early Priestly Ministry, Barlin as Apostolic Administrator, the Election of Barlin as Bishop of Nueva Caceres, Barlin and the Aglipayan Schism and Barlin's Death in Rome.*"

Compared to the previous works, this one provides a more complete biography of Barlin as the author used the information given by previous sources and other sources.

9. Jose Quimpo's work, *Buhay ni Mons. Jorge Barlin Imperial, Obispo can Taon 1906 sa Nueva Caceres*,¹⁹ C.S. Published by *Imprenta y Encuadernación Juan de la Cruz* provides some important years of his ecclesiastical assignments. A major part of the work is a description of the liturgy of his consecration and other liturgical celebrations related to his elevation to the episcopacy.²⁰ This is one of the earliest tributes to Barlin.

I have enumerated so far important sources and works on Barlin. In my view, a further research on dailies, newspapers of the early 1900's may still yield further information on Jorge Barlin. From this enumeration of sources and biographies, it

¹⁷ Jose R. Rojas Jr, "Bonus Miles Christi Cacerensis: Jorge Alfonso Imperial Barlin", *Hingowa*, Vol. 3, no. 1, Naga City, Holy Rosary Minor Seminary, October 1999, pp. 91-111.

¹⁸ Among other sources used are: Anonymous, "Msgr. Jorge Barlin Imperial, First Bicolano Bishop," in *Seminarium*, vol. 8, n. 7 (1952); "El P. Barlin," in *La Estrella de Antipolo*, January 31, 1903. J. O'Brien, "Jorge Barlin: First Filipino Bishop"; John Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy and Readings in Philippine Church History*; See Rojas, pp. 91-111.

¹⁹ Jose Quimpo, *Buhay ni Mons. Jorge Barlin Imperial, Obispo can Taon 1906 sa Nueva Caceres*, C.S., Imprenta y Encuadernacion Juan de la Cruz, Naga, C. Sur, 1925, (65 pages).

²⁰ See Quimpo, p. 61.

becomes evident that there was a gradual development of information on Jorge Barlin. There was an expansion from one account to the next. As the sources are limited, each new biography becomes a source for a subsequent attempt to write an enriched biography of Barlin.

II. Jorge Barlin

We now turn to the central concern of these pages, Jorge Barlin and his Episcopal Consecration, a little more than a hundred years ago.

Jorge Barlin is commonly known as the First Filipino Bishop. Abella, however, would emphasize that he is not only the "first Filipino Bishop under the American regime but the *first Filipino bishop of all times*."²¹

The same Abella reports Barlin's refusal to accept the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente's* offer of pontifical regalia; and his victory against Fr. Vicente Ramirez, a Catholic priest turned Aglipayan, with regard the question of ownership of the Roman Catholic Church in Lagonoy, Camarines Sur.

It seems that for many, even for Bicolanos, the only thing that can be said of Barlin is that he was the first Bicolano and Filipino Bishop. But undoubtedly, as shown in these pages, there are more things to be said of him.

Let us consider the following points:

- 1. *Barlin was not only the First Filipino Bishop, but he was the only Filipino Bishop during his time, that is, 1905-1909.***

The periods before and after the 1898 revolution in the Philippines were marked by movements towards Filipinization of the parishes and the clergy. Pope Leo XIII issued the bull *Quae Mari Sinico* which supported the formation of local clergy and entrusted to them major responsibilities. Despite these, there were still efforts to Americanize the Church in the Philippines.

²¹ Abella, p. 202. Emphasis mine.

It will be remembered that from 1595 to 1865, there were only four dioceses in the Philippines. The fifth diocese, Jaro was established in 1865. From 1865 until Barlin's time, there were only five dioceses in the Philippines. When the Americans took over the Philippines, the Spanish bishops left the dioceses.

In 1903 to 1904, there arrived four American Bishops, namely, Frederick Rooker, who became bishop of Jaro; Dennis Dougherty, who became bishop of Nueva Segovia; Jeremias Harty, who became Archbishop of Manila; and Thomas Hendrick, who became the Bishop of Cebu.²² What about Caceres? The last Spanish Bishop, Arsenio Campo, left the Philippines in 1898 due to the tumultuous situation. While officially the diocese was not declared *sede vacante*, however, de facto, the bishop was no longer in the diocese. Arsenio Campo officially resigned on March 30, 1903. The Pope named Jorge Barlin, then parish priest in Sorsogon and Vicario Foraneo, as Apostolic Administrator of Caceres. Since 1903, as Apostolic Administrator, Barlin was acting as Bishop. In 1905, he was nominated Bishop of Nueva Caceres.

Thus, Barlin was not only the first Filipino bishop, but he was the only Filipino bishop during his time. The next Filipino Bishops were chosen only after Barlin. They were Juan Gorordo, Bishop of Cebu (1910) and Pablo Singzon, Bishop of Calbayog (1910). The succeeding years would be a period of significant changes also in the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical territories. The dioceses of Lipa, Calbayog, Tuguegarao, Zamboanga and the prefecture apostolic of Palawan would then be established.

The elevation of Barlin was certainly a boost to the Filipino clergy, who had been regarded as inferior and unworthy of any high office. The last Spanish Bishops were of the idea that indigenous priests were only good to be *coadjutores*. They could not be named bishops. The last Spanish Archbishop of Manila declared that Filipino priests are "totally incapable (*omnino impotens*) of

²² See Atolin Uy, "The Making of the First Four American Bishops in the Philippines," *Diwa*, Vol. XVIII, no. 2, November 1993, pp. 73-85. Hereinafter cited as "The Making of the First Four American Bishops." See also Lucio Gutiérrez, *Historia de la Iglesia en Filipinas (1565-1900)*, Madrid, Editorial MAPFRE, 1992, p. 298.

carrying out the sacred ministry.”²³ The Bishop of Nueva Segovia Hevio Campomanes even said: “They are not for the priesthood much less for the episcopate.”²⁴

Moreover, the first Apostolic Delegate, Placide Chapelle, who was known to be sympathetic with the friars proposed the replacement of the last remaining Spanish Bishops. His proposal was two Americans and three Spanish friars.²⁵

Barlin, therefore, was chosen at a time when there were still doubts regarding the suitability of Filipinos for high offices like the episcopacy. That there was a Filipino among the bishops in the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century was a sign of development.

2. The period of Barlin saw the beginning of the ‘entry of Rome’ into the affairs of the Philippines.

For more than three hundred years, since the arrival of the Spaniards, the system of the *Patronato Real* was operative in the Philippines. Under this system, the Spanish Crown pulled the strings not only in the political arena but in the ecclesiastical sphere as well. The nuncio in Madrid, and the Council of the Indies where important posts that regulated the relationship of the church in the Philippines with Rome. Because of this, it can be said that Rome did not have a direct hand on the affairs of the Church in the Philippines. The nomination of Bishops was a privilege enjoyed by the Crown of Spain. The Council of the Indies nominated to the King candidates for episcopacy from among whom the King chooses one to be recommended to Rome for canonical appointment.

Barlin was a witness to the end of the *Patronato Real* and the entry of Rome. “The arrival of the Americans in the Philippines, and the subsequent defeat of the Spanish forces by Commodore George Dewey on May 1, 1898 marked for the Philippines the

²³ Uy, “The First Filipino Bishops,” p. 75.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Uy, “The Making of the First Four American Bishops,” pp. 73-85.

fall of one colonial power and the onset of a new colonial era. Further these events heralded for the Catholic Church in the Philippines the providential entrance of the Holy See into the ecclesiastical affairs of the country.”²⁶

It was no longer the Council of the Indies which recommended candidates for bishops of the dioceses in the Philippines, but the Apostolic Delegate. By assigning an Apostolic Delegate,²⁷ Rome had a direct say in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Pacific Archipelago. The first Apostolic Delegate was Placide Chapelle.

His successor, the Apostolic Delegate Giovanni Battista Guidi (1902-1904), began to speak favorably of the native clergy and actually insisted that it was high time that a Filipino cleric be ordained Bishop. He implored the Holy Father through the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Rampolla, “*to name Filipino priests as bishops*” mentioning in particular the parish priest Jorge Barlin as the most suitable candidate for Nueva Caceres.²⁸

Thus, for more than 25 years Barlin served as priest under the system of the *Patronato Real*. By the time he discharged his duties as Apostolic Administrator and as Bishop, a new system was inaugurated.

3. *Barlin’s importance should not be reduced to simply being chronologically first. His being chronologically the first Filipino Bishop was not simply an accident but was due to his capability.*

It may seem that the nomination of Barlin as First Filipino Bishop was accidental. However, the sources cited above prove that it was not mere luck that catapulted Barlin to a high ecclesiastical office. His stature as a person and his capability warranted for him the office of the bishop. A review of his life will prove this point.

²⁶ Anne Kwantes (ed), *Chapters in Philippine Church History*, Manila, OMF Literature Inc., 2001, p. 160.

²⁷ See Antolin Uy, “The First Three Apostolic Delegates to the Philippines and the Entry of Rome,” in Kwantes, p. 160 and ff.

²⁸ Uy, “The First Filipino Bishops,” p. 78.

Jorge Barlin was born on April 23, 1850 to Mateo Alfonso and D. Francisca Imperial²⁹ in Baao, Ambos Camarines. At an early age, his talent was recognized, by Bishop Gainza (1862-1879). From the early days of his seminary formation Barlin already distinguished himself. A contemporary of Barlin wrote in the *Reseña de los Padres Paules*:

*"En dicho Seminario, cursó con notable aprovechamiento toda la carrera eclesiástica, distinguiéndose, más aún que por sus talentos, por la madurez de juicio que demostró desde su juventud, lo cual no pudo menos de llamar la atención del Illmo. Sr. Gainza, quien le escogió, siendo todavía teólogo, por su familiar."*³⁰

The same Gainza entrusted to him positions of no small responsibility. Barlin was ordained on September 19, 1874. He was named *Capellan de Solio* and *Mayordomo* of the Cathedral.³¹

Below is a chronology of other significant events in Barlin's life.

1879 – After the death of Gainza, he was assigned to 'Sirona' as '*cura misionero*'.³²

²⁹ Abella reproduces the information in the baptismal certificate as he found it. The baptismal register of Baao is no longer extant as the book was destroyed by fire on the early morning of September 6, 1971. (Source Parish Records of Baao). *JORGE ALFONSO – In the place of Baao, province of Camarines Sur, on the 24th day of the month of April, year of 1850, with my license, the Presbyter D. Pedro de Guzmán, my coadjutor, solemnly baptized a male child who was born on the 23rd day of the same month, and to whom he gave the name Jorge Alfonso, the legitimate son of Mateo Alfonso and D. Francisca Imperial, incumbent Cabeza de Barangay, grandson by paternal line of Vivencio Ignacio and Da. Antonia Maria Saco, natives of this said town, and by the maternal line, of Benito Imperial and Bernardina de Jesús, natives of the mentioned town; his godfather was D. José Marcos, married and resident of the said town who was advised of the spiritual relationship and duties. In testimony thereof, I, the Parish Priest, sign on the said day, month and year. Sgd. Francisco Cabrera. Folio 135 of the Book of Baptisms No. 5 of the Parish of Baao. See Abella, p. 302, footnote no. 173.*

³⁰ *Los Padres Paules*, p. 377.

³¹ *Los Padres Paules*, p. 377.

³² The Canonical Books spell the name 'Siroma'. (Cf. Book of Deaths)

1883 – He served as Parish Priest of Libog (now Santo Domingo).

1887 – At 37 years old, he was named *Vicario Foraneo* and Parish Priest of Sorsogon.

Abella remarked that ‘his appointment as Vicar Forane was an unprecedented one. He was a young upstart, but it was a jump over much older priests in point of age and in seniority of service.’³³ He worked in Sorsogon for sixteen years with distinction. The *Reseña de Los Padres Paules y Hijos de Caridad* notes:

*“Siendo el ídolo de sus feligreses y un vivo ejemplar á todo el clero por sus virtudes sacerdotales y por su nombre sin tacha, virtudes que todos unánimemente reconocían en el P. Barlin. Amante, como pocos, del esplendor del culto y de la disciplina del clero, fue siempre modelo en este punto, no sólo en lo que á su persona y parroquia atañía sino que también procuraba, según sus posibilidades, fueran lo mismo los párrocos que con él tenían alguna relación, por razón de su cargo de Vicario.”*³⁴

1898 – His exemplary life and his consummate prudence were recognized by the civil authorities.³⁵ On September 20, Señor Villamil entrusted to Padre Barlin the governance of Sorsogon. Thus he became political and ecclesiastical leader. He was responsible for the peaceful transition of government in Sorsogon (1887-1903).

1902 – On October 17, at a convention in Manila attended by dissidents of the Filipino clergy and lay sympathizers, the birth of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* was proclaimed. Barlin was then offered the pontifical regalia of the said group, but he refused.

³³ Translated by Abella from *Los Padres Paules*, p. 387. “Esto sucedía el año 1887, cuando sólo contaba 37 años de edad el P. Barlin, como familiarmente se le llamaba. Las esperanzas en él cifradas por su Prelados fueron correspondidas por el P. Barlin con un celo y prudencia á toda prueba.” See Abella, p. 203.

³⁴ *Los Padres Paules*, p. 378.

³⁵ *Los Padres Paules*, p. 378.

- 1903 – Mons. Ambrose Guidi, Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, nominated Barlin to the government of the Diocese of Nueva Caceres, naming him Apostolic Administrator of Nueva Caceres, a little after the Augustinian Bishop Arsenio Campo left for Spain.
- 1904 – The Court of First Instance decided in favor of Barlin against Fr. Vicente Ramirez, a Catholic Priest who joined the Aglipayan ranks, regarding the ownership of the church in Lagonoy. The decision was sustained by the Supreme Court in November of 1906.³⁶

It was also during this time that he was named by Pius X 'Protonotary Apostolic *ad instar participantium*', a dignity higher than a Domestic Prelate.³⁷

- 1905 – Mons. Ambrose Agius, Apostolic Delegate of His Holiness, proposed Barlin to Pius X to become Bishop of Nueva Caceres.
- 1905 – December 14, he was proclaimed bishop-elect of Nueva Caceres.
- 1906 – June 29, he received Episcopal consecration in Santo Domingo Church, Manila, from Apostolic Delegate Ambrose Agius. Archbishop Harty and Bishop Rooker were present.

4. Barlin proved his worth as Bishop

Barlin was not only a suitable candidate for the episcopacy, but he proved himself worthy of such an office of serious responsibility.

His report to the Vatican, described the extent of the diocese of Nueva Caceres at the time of his incumbency.

³⁶ See full text of the decision on Barlin vs. Ramirez in the internet "abogadomo.com". See also *Supreme Court Decisions of 1906* (No. 2832, November 24, 1906), Barlin vs. Ramirez et al, in *Philippine Reports*, Vol. 7, p. 11-65, as cited by Rojas.

³⁷ *Los Padres Paules*, p. 378-379.

‘[Nueva Caceres] comprises a third of the island of Luzon, besides the islands of Burias, Masbate, Ticao, Rapu-Rapu, Batan, San Miguel, Catanduanes, Alabat, and many other smaller islets. The diocese is bounded in the north by the archdiocese of Manila, in the south by the dioceses of Cebu and Jaro, and in the east and the west by the sea.’³⁸ “It has only one city, Nueva Caceres, with four civil provinces and two sub-provinces in which there are 123 municipalities or pueblos. These include, besides the principal township which is the municipality, four, five, eight, or more rural villages called *visitas*, which fall under the municipal jurisdiction.” There are 122 parochial churches including the Cathedral which is at the same time a parish church; five public chapels are in the charge of respective chaplains. Of these, one hundred parochial churches and two chapels are of solid construction. But some of them are in a lamentable condition now.’³⁹

He faithfully discharged his duties observing the rule of the residence. In the same report, he cited only one instance of being away from the diocese.

‘Since I have undertaken the government of this diocese, I have tried to fulfill as best as I could the rule of the residence. With proper permission of the Apostolic Delegate, I left the diocese for a short time in the month of October 1907. At the urgent invitation of the Fathers of the Order of Preachers, I went to Manila for the canonical coronation of the miraculous and holy image of the Blessed Virgin of the Most Holy Rosary by the Apostolic Delegate representing the Supreme Pontiff, our beloved Father Pope Pius X.’

1907 – October, the Legislative Assembly was inaugurated for the first time and Bishop Barlin made the official invocation. This impressed many. One observer remarked:

³⁸ See “Relatio”, Chapter 1, number 2, in *Philippiniana Sacra*, p. 275.

³⁹ Chapter 1, number 7 of the “Notitiae”. See *Philippiniana Sacra*, pp. 277-278.

‘The Bicol, who for decades have pointed with pride to their high percentage of literacy... are a deep thinking serious minded people; they have their Jorge Barlin, the first Filipino Bishop under the American regime. It was Father Barlin who made the invocation at the opening of the first Philippine Assembly in 1907 – a little incident in world history the full significance of which one hardly grasps. In a setting of Oriental fanaticism, where life is held at naught, where man has no right that he may not lose overnight, where his liberty, his home, his family are his only so long as they are not wanted by another more powerful than he, there has come into existence an island people with Christian ideals, in whose land our own America had laid the foundation of democracy. Here, in 1907, the Bicol Bishop, Father Jorge Barlin, gave the opening invocation at the first Oriental Assembly of the people, by the people and for the people.’⁴⁰

1907 – December, Barlin participated in the Provincial Council of Manila. “His experience and practical knowledge which he had of church affairs in the Islands were a valuable help in the solution of not a few questions raised in the respectable assembly.”⁴¹ It would be good to note that at this time, the other Bishops were only a few years old in the Philippines.

1909 – As his health deteriorated, he was prescribed a break out of the country. He took advantage of this opportunity to make an *Ad Limina Visit* to the Pope. On the month of May, he left for the Eternal City of Rome. There he fell seriously ill.⁴²

1909 – September 4, Barlin died and was buried as a Dominican Tertiary by the Cemetery of *Agro Verano*.⁴³

⁴⁰ Frank Wilkes as cited by Abella, p. 207.

⁴¹ Abella’s Translation of *Los Padres Paules*, p. 380.

⁴² *Los Padres Paules*, p. 380.

⁴³ *El Santísimo Rosario, 1909*, p. 722.

5. *Barlin's loyalty to the See of Peter was a significant factor to his nomination to the episcopacy and consequently to the future of the Catholic Church in the Philippines*

The period after the French Revolution was characterized by movements for independence and nationalism. There was the rise of nation-states and even nationalist churches.

In the 1900's, the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* was a movement in the Philippines towards a nationalist schismatic church. The movement saw in Barlin a potential leader. He was invited to become the Bishop of Sorsogon. But Barlin remained faithful to the Catholic Church. His reply to the invitation was described as the sharpest: He wrote Sr. Don Simeon Mandon, the secretary general of the movement⁴⁴:

'My dear Sir: I have received your letter and the bulletin *Fraternidad* of the new Philippine church, separated from the Catholic Apostolic and Roman. Since I do not belong to your church, I am sending back your documents, for how can a non-member be a leader of the same? I am a member of the one true Church, that of Rome whose only head is the Roman Pontiff, successor of the Prince of the Apostles, to whom I owe obedience like any one else who values being a Catholic. For forty mortal years I have studied the constitution and laws of my Church and I know by the grace of God that she is the true Church outside of which no salvation is possible. As a member of this unique Church I despise with all my heart the honor bestowed on my by your schismatic congregation... The congregation then, of which you are the secretary-general, may revoke my appointment and give it to another of your communion, for possible there will not be lacking a madman (*loco de atar*) who would readily accept it. I take this opportunity to assure you that I am your most humble servant, begging the Supreme Being to illumine you so that all of you may see the preci-

⁴⁴ See Pedro de Achutegui, SJ et Miguel Bernad, SJ, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines: Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay 1860-1890*, Manila, Ateneo de Manila, p. 187.

pice to the brink of which you are hastening with gigantic strides.'

Jorge Barlin
Ex Obispillo⁴⁵

It was the same Barlin who gave the most damaging blow to the new sect from which it never recovered. In Ilocos Norte only three priests had remained faithful to Rome; all the Filipino priests in the Panay Island,⁴⁶ sixty in number, had defected to the schismatic church with the support of their congregations. Because the defectees had moved into the ranks of Aglipayanism without vacating their churches, a question arose for the American authorities to order. To whom did those churches belong?⁴⁷

When one of the priests in Nueva Caceres, Fr. Vicente Ramirez, refused to vacate the church in Lagonoy, Barlin fought the case in court and won. The victory of Barlin over the Aglipayan movement was an important victory for the Catholic Church in the Philippines. In the words of a historian, had it not happened, there would have been a big probability that majority of the Filipinos had become Aglipayans.

The Apostolic Delegate, Guidi, believed that Barlin, by defending the rights of the Church during the time of the revolution, was not a sympathizer of the renegade cause. Besides Guidi saw Barlin as a staunch supporter of the Church against the Aglipayan schism. Together with Pablo Singzon, who was also being eyed for the Diocese of Cebu, Guidi described Barlin and his fellow candidate as:

'under every regard, most worthy and most fit for the episcopate. They are virtuous, they possess more than sufficient learning, they are prudent and at the same time firm of character (*Fermi di carattere*) and gifted with talent for government. Both have moreover the practice and experience in managing church affairs. The parish priest Barlin

⁴⁵ Achutegui et Bernad, p. 187.

⁴⁶ For documents of the so-called 'Jaro Schism', see Achutegui et Bernad, vol. IV, pp. 232-255.

⁴⁷ Abella, p. 205.

was for many years close to and then secretary of the famous Dominican Bishop Gainza of Nueva Caceres.⁴⁸

In the face of the threat of protestantism and schism, Barlin remained loyal to the Holy See. While Bishop Arsenio del Campo was wary about the solidity of his religiosity, the Apostolic Delegate saw Barlin differently. Barlin's competence and fidelity to the Catholic Church made him fit for the responsibility of the task of a bishop.

Barlin was bishop during a transition period – from Spanish to American rule. Transitions are not always easy. Yet Barlin proved that Filipinos are capable of discharging serious and important task as that of a bishop. After him, history would see two more Filipinos elevated to the episcopacy: Juan Gorordo who became the First Filipino Bishop of Cebu in 1910 and Pablo Singzon, the First Filipino Bishop of Calbayog also in 1910.⁴⁹

III. *Post Scriptum*

Some post scripts may be added to what had been said above.

1. *Barlin and Bishop Francisco Gainza*

In almost all the biographies written about Barlin, the Bishop Francisco Gainza is prominently mentioned. The *Cronica of 1906 of El Santisimo Rosario* relates: 'Fué discípulo predilecto del P. Gainza que le educó de joven á su lado y á quien el hoy sucesor en la Diócesis profesó siempre profundo amor y respeto.'⁵⁰

The Apostolic Delegate Guidi, in one of his letters, associated Barlin with Gainza: "The parish priest Barlin was for many years close to and then secretary to the famous Dominican Bishop Gainza of Nueva Caceres."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Guidi to Gasparri, Secretary SCAAEESS, 26 April 1903, SCAAEESS, Sp., a. 1903 Psoz. 998, Fasc. 396, p. 41 as cited by Uy, "The First Filipino Bishops," p. 82.

⁴⁹ See Uy, "The First Filipino Bishops," pp. 83-89, for further reading about these two bishops.

⁵⁰ *El Santisimo Rosario*, 1909, p. 647.

⁵¹ Guidi to Rampolla, 31 December 1902, Manila, no. 10, #75917, SCAAEESS, Sp. A. 1902-1903, Posiz. 986, Fasc. 385, p. 35 cited by Uy, "First Filipino Bishops," p. 82.

Barlin, on the other hand, spoke highly of Gainza. In his *Relatio*, which covers the year 1895 to 1908, Barlin mentioned his predecessor a number of times:

In number 10: Number of Hospitals, Colleges and Confraternities, etc. 'There is one hospital for the lepers founded by my predecessor, the *Most Rev. Fray Gainza, O.P.*'

Paragraph 5: 'There are two colleges for the education of girls. One is in this city, the other is in the town of Tayabas, which is within the diocese but quite far from the Episcopal See. The first is under the charge of the Daughters of Charity, with 36 boarding pupils and 80 day scholars. This college, as mentioned in the preceding report, was founded by the *Most Reverend Bishop Fray Francisco Gainza, O.P.*, my esteemed predecessor, partly from pious trust funds, partly from the contributions of some parishes, and partly from voluntary offerings of the faithful. He ceded the school to the Daughters of Charity, with a total renunciation of his rights, that is, as long as they willed to keep it; but the day they leave the diocese, the College reverts to the administration of the succeeding bishops. He also wanted to give it its name and, and the school is called the Diocesan College for Girls of Santa Isabel of Nueva Caceres. This is clear from the codicil of the Last will of the venerable founder, an authentic copy of which is kept in the special Episcopal archive. A second small college in the charge of the Sisters of Saint Paul is of recent foundation. With my approval and support was founded by the common consensus of a lay association called the *Centro Catolico de Tayabas*.

The Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary had been established in many parishes throughout the Diocese by my predecessors; where it did not exist, I myself established it.'

In number 2, on Diocesan Visitation: 'I have gone around the whole diocese once, except two small parishes which I could not reach because of the turbulence of the sea. I began the visitation while still in Apostolic administration, before I had been announced, although unworthy, as the bishop of Nueva Caceres. And although I had waned to perform this duty every time the affairs of the diocese allowed me, I have never been able to do so until this year. But those places that cannot be frequently visited because

of the terrain and the dangers and extreme difficulties from the sea have already been often visited by my predecessors, as already mentioned, especially by the *Most Rev. Fray Gainza*.'

Caput Tertium: In Number 9: 'I am also continuing a necessary and very useful project long ago started by my venerable predecessor, the *Most Reverend Fray Gainza, O.P.*, namely the opening of a canal that the overflow of the rains may not enter the sanctuary, where the miraculous image of the Blessed Mary of Peña de Francia, the principal patroness of the city of Nueva Caceres, is venerated.'

Caput Septimum: In Number 2: 'The seminary has a clearly defined set of regulations in fore since the day that my venerable predecessor, the *Most Reverend Fray Gainza, O.P.*, inaugurated the Seminary materially and formally.'

2. Barlin and Our Lady of Peñafrancia

Barlin was a devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He reported continuing the Gainza's project on the canal near the Shrine of Peña de Francia. Yet, he did something more which is being done up until the present day.

Bishop Manuel Grijalvo, O.S.A., initiated the current practice of holding the yearly novenary to the Lady of Peña de Francia at the cathedral instead of at the chapel near the river. He decreed likewise that the said novenary be held from Saturday to Thursday and the rest at the shrine. Bishop Gainza, in 1864, amended this decree extending the novenary at the cathedral to Saturday.⁵² Bishop Barlin obtained permission from the Vatican to transfer the annual festivities of Our Lady of Peña de Francia from the month of July to September.⁵³

The founding of the *Asociacion de Ntra. Sra. De Peña Francia*, now known as *Our Lady of Peñafrancia Association* (OLPA), is attributed to Barlin. Fr Jose Quimpo says in his work: "Ualat sa Palasio maimbod na Pastor na señor obispo niatong magna bicol

⁵² See Abella, p. 163.

⁵³ Abella, p. 210.

iyong nang pag mucna caning Asociacion na Peña de Francia nagsunod na taon.”⁵⁴

This Association has played an important role in the propagation of the devotion, and in numerous different activities related to the Lady of Peñafrancia. In fact, it was the ‘*cuerpo directivo de Caballeros y Damas*’ for the coronation of the Lady in 1924.⁵⁵ The association, now a hundred years old, continues to play significant role in the propagation of the devotion to Our Lady of Peñafrancia.

3. Barlin and the Santiago Sancho, the First Bikolano Archbishop

Among other things that merited praise for Barlin was his choice of Santiago Sancho. One historian narrates:

‘Even when he [Barlin] was yet apostolic administrator, he had picked among his youthful seminarians a humble barefooted lad from San Vicente, a fishing barrio in Libmanan and had taken him as he himself had been picked and tutored by Gainza. The bishop saw his own understudy become a priest in 1903 but did not live to see him become a Doctor of Canon Law in 1912, a bishop in 1917, and the first Bikolano archbishop in 1951. This lad was Santiago C. Sancho.’⁵⁶

Sancho was with Barlin when he died in Rome in 1909.

4. Barlin’s Death and his Remains

El Santisimo Rosario, 1909 recorded Barlin’s last moments and death in Rome. He died at the College of the Dominicans in Via Condotti. He received the sacraments and a special apostolic blessing from Pius X.

⁵⁴ See Quimpo, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Quimpo, p. 55; See footnote #1: “*Asociacion can Ntra. Sra. De Peña Francia 1907 na iyo an Cuerpo Directivo de Caballeros y Damas (na nag pa corona can 1924).*”

⁵⁶ Abella, p. 208

His body, vested with pontifical vestments, was laid in the church. A funeral mass was celebrated by the Very Rev. Fr. Jerome Coderch, Consultor of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments and Socius of the Master General of the Order of Preachers, and with the Master General himself, Fr. Jacinto Ma. Cormier pronouncing the final responsory.⁵⁷ Cardinals, bishops, generals of religious orders, secular priests and devotees of the roman nobility were reported to have attended the funeral. The body was carried through an elegant carriage to the cemetery Campo-Verano, and was buried in the chapel that in the said cemetery the Dominican Fathers have.⁵⁸

There have been attempts to bring his remains to the Philippines but they all failed.⁵⁹ The most recent one was in 1990, exactly 81 years after his death in Rome. A team composed of Dr. Luciano Santiago, a scholar of the Toyota Foundation and Fr. Mario Gaite, a priest from Baao, Rev. Delfin Felipe of Pontificio Collegio Filippino and Mr. Benedict Ballesteros of Sorsogon, searched for the tomb of Bishop Barlin at the Campo Verano Cemetery. But since his bones were deposited on a common grave of the Order, it was difficult to locate his remains.

The team obtained a certificate of burial, Register 1909, number 8852, which indicates that Barlin was buried on September 7, 1909 at the Campo-Verano Cemetery. The search came to this conclusion: "While his death and burial records are well-preserved, his tombstone is now missing."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See *El Santísimo Rosario, 1909* and footnote number 7 of this essay.

⁵⁸ *El Santísimo Rosario, 1909*, p. 722. "El cadaver del virtuoso Obispo dominico, colocado en elegante carroza de primera clase, fué conducido al cementerio de Campo Verano, y alli sepultado en la capilla que en dicho cementerio poseen los RR. PP. Dominicos."

⁵⁹ Abella, p. 208.

⁶⁰ See Press Release, "Tomb of the First Filipino Bishop found in Rome," December 5, 1990. Copy available at the Archdiocesan Archives of Caceres. See also the Scheda di seppellimento, Reistro del 1909, Num. 8852.

5. *Barlin's Memorabilia*

In the face of the difficulty of obtaining his remains, we are not entirely lacking of artifacts that would remind us of this important person in the history of the Philippine and local Church.

In the *Museo del Seminario Conciliar de Nueva Caceres* located within the confines of the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary, one finds memorabilia of the late bishop: a souvenir coin of his episcopal consecration, two books of Barlin: '*De Jure Ecclesiastico*' and '*Luz y Fe*', a card bearing Barlin's name, the baptismal font of Baao where he was baptized, and his episcopal chair.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

As we look back some hundred years ago particularly on the Episcopal Consecration of the First Filipino and Bicolano Bishop, Jorge Barlin (1906), let us keep his memory alive. He is a signpost of utmost importance to the story of the Filipino Clergy and the Church in the Philippines.

Remembering Jorge Barlin is a summons to fidelity and an invitation to give the best for the service of God and his people.

I close this review by reiterating a praise from a contemporary of Barlin:

'We shall not stop to talk of his virtues. Simply we shall say that in him shone a faithful loyalty to the authorities of the Church and the teachings and dispositions emanating from Rome. He distinguished himself with zeal and prudence and abnegation of his conduct in the apostolic offices as missionary, as parish priest, vicar, and bishop as proven by his whole life. His munificence was that of an austere religious, for although he has a rich parish, like Sorsogon, and for such a long time, he hardly carried any cash with him when he left; so much so that he has not the necessary

⁶¹ See Ecclesiastical Museum of the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary, Naga City. A street in Naga is named after him. A monument in Baao, Camarines Sur, is dedicated to him. At the Holy Rosary Major Seminary one finds the Jorge Barlin Library. A marker was recently inaugurated in Baao, Camarines Sur, birthplace of Barlin.

wherewithal for the expenses concomitant with his Episcopal promotion. It was necessary for his clergy to come to his aid. On the other hand, he was prodigal with the indigent.⁶²

Barlin was chosen at a time when there were doubts as to the capability and suitability of Filipinos for higher ecclesiastical offices. Thanks to Jorge Barlin, we are able to say with confidence that the Filipino is capable of fulfilling such serious responsibility with distinction. Barlin, deserving of the honor and the title of being the First Filipino Bishop, showed what the Filipino can achieve.

The consecration of Jorge Barlin as the First Filipino Bishop signaled a new dawn in the history of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. He heralded the era of Filipino bishops. □

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⁶² Abella's translation of *Los Padre Paules Paules*, p. 381. "No nos detendremos en hablar de sus virtudes. Sencillamente diremos que resplandeció en él una inquebrantable adhesión a las autoridades de la Iglesia y á las enseñanzas y disposiciones de Roma. Distinguióse por su celo, prudencia y abnegación en el desempeño de las funciones sacerdotales y ministerios apostólicos de misionero, párroco, vicario y obispo, como lo prueba toda su vida. Su desprendimiento fue el de un austero religioso, pues con poseer tan pingüe parroquia, como la de Sorsogón, y por tanto tiempo, apenas llevó consigo cantidad alguna considerable al dejarla; tanto es así, que no tuvo para costear los gastos necesarios que lleva consigo la promoción episcopal; fue necesario que le ayudará su clero. En cambio era pródigo para con los pobres. Dios en su misericordia habrá premiado y con creces cuanto este fiel siervo hizo por El en la tierra." See Abella, pp. 207-208.

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