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Viewing cable 05VATICAN561, EAST TIMOR: JESUIT VIEWS CHURCH, BISHOPS

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000561

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VATICAN 00000561 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Fleur Cowan, Political Officer, POL, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) This is the second of two cables on the East Timorese Catholic church viewed from Rome six months after the May anti-government protests led by Bishops Basilio Nascimento and Alberto Ricardo da Silva. Ref (D) presented the perspective of the Holy See's Country director for East Timor. In contrast, another Vatican-based source, East Timorese Jesuit Father Joao Piedade (protect), continued the criticism of Bishops Nascimento and da Silva he last raised with us in Ref (A). He feels that the bishops are overly combative in relations with the Fretilin government, and consequently neglect their roles as pastors. Piedade was glad to hear that Archbishop Don, nuncio to East Timor, will leave Jakarta, as he was appointed to the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship December 12. End Summary.

¶2. (C) East Timorese Jesuit (Society of Jesus) Father Joao Piedade, a professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University graduate school, told us recently his fellow East Timorese Jesuits were quietly opposed to the April and May protests incited by Bishops Nascimento and Ricardo. Piedade maintains close touch with East Timor, and spent much of last summer at the Society of Jesus residence in Taibesi. There are approximately 20 Jesuits in East Timor, divided between the headquarters at Taibesi, and a small presence in Relaco and Suai.

Bishop Basilio Nascimento of Baucau

¶3. (C) Piedade argued that Bishop Basilio Nascimento of Baucau

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and Bishop of Dili Alberto Ricardo da Silva have no strategic vision and no leadership skills. Piedade felt that Bishop Nascimento is intelligent, yet opportunistic. "When the Indonesians were gaining the advantage, Nascimento supported them," Piedade explained, "but when the tide turned, he went with it -- he follows the power." According to Piedade, Nascimento "knows how to back the winning side, and how to get things done." He pointed to the large new church in Baucau as an example. However, Piedade noted that, "as a result of these machinations no one has confidence in Nascimento's positions."

Bishop Ricardo da Silva of Dili

¶4. (C) Piedade stated that he had known Bishop Ricardo da Silva for some years, and felt that da Silva was generally quite reserved, "a quiet man, who is silent even when in opposition." He felt that da Silva was intelligent, but "easily influenced by the others." One individual known to exercise influence on da Silva is Father Filomeno Jacob, Ref (A) who had been working for Bishop da Silva. According to Piedade, Father Jacob was recently called back to Rome to consult with the Jesuit Superior General, apparently because of this influence. "He was told it was time to leave da Silva," Piedade said, explaining that the Jesuits felt Jacob was getting too involved in diocesan politics. Da Silva also appears to be distancing himself from his predecessor, Nobel laureate Archbishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo. Belo celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination as a bishop last July, and had planned to return to his native East Timor. According to Piedade, he was discouraged from coming back by Ricardo and Nascimento. Piedade claimed that the two bishops "didn't want him back to steal the limelight."

Consolidating control despite internal dissent

¶5. (C) According to Piedade, Bishop da Silva "retaliated against critics" of the bishops' support for the May demonstrations, reassigning two priests who spoke out publicly against the protests. Piedade said that one priest was sent from the parish of Montalero back to Australia where he had served previously. Another priest who had been critical was sent from Dili to a parish in rural Becora.

¶6. (C) Piedade said that during his summer visit to East Timor he came away with the impression that "if you opposed the demonstrations you are against the Church." The bishops were creating an atmosphere in which there was "no freedom of thought or ideas, and no one was allowed to contradict them." According to Piedade, "it wasn't like this with [Archbishop]

VATICAN 00000561 002.2 OF 002

Belo. Even the priests that wanted to stay with Indonesia were never retaliated against." Piedade feels that the bishops are in competition with the state. "The Church is not an opposition party- but it takes positions just to be in opposition to the Fretilin government." He noted however that the government was not blameless. "Prime Minister Alkatieri has been handing out jobs to the incompetent," Piedade said, thus giving the bishops easy targets for their attacks.

Politics Distracting from the Pastoral?

¶7. (C) Piedade feels the bishops are overly involved in politics, and neglect their pastoral leadership. He also thinks they are over-reaching. He pointed out that despite their ambitions for a university, in the Dili seminary there are "no professors, no library, and no books." Another Jesuit contact, Fr. Joseph Doan, East Asia director for the Society of Jesus, also criticized the plans for a Catholic university, suggesting that it would be more practical to increase teacher training, and create more high schools or middle schools, especially in the more remote mountain areas.

Nuncio Returns to Rome

Â¶8. (C) December 12 Pope Benedict appointed the nuncio to Indonesia and East Timor, Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don as deputy at the Holy See's Congregation for Divine Worship. Don had been nuncio for less than two years, and was criticized for what was seen as an inflammatory role during the May protests Ref (A). At the time the Holy See reaffirmed its support for Don, but both Vatican MFA and other Vatican-based contacts said recently that Don was not a "natural diplomat." Piedade was also glad to hear of Don's return to Rome. "He was not a mediator. He's out of touch," he said. With this change, and the possibility of the creation of the new diocese of Same, Piedade thought that it was possible one might see a changed dynamic in the East Timorese Church in the coming year.

Comment

Â¶9. (C) Piedade's criticism of the East Timorese bishops is nothing new, as he blasted them in conversations with us at the time of the spring demonstrations. However, that the intensity of his feelings has not waned over the intervening months is notable. And although Piedade has little or no influence over official Vatican policy on East Timor, he wields some influence within the Jesuit Curia on the issue. His views also provide insight into critical elements within the East Timorese Church.
End Comment.
ROONEY