

STUDIES IN PHILIPPINE CHURCH HISTORY¹

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Philippine history is always an interesting subject; but Philippine Church history, besides being interesting is always fascinatingly challenging and attractively delicate. One has only to review the increasingly growing output of books, articles and reviews touching upon the history of the Church in the country.

The present volume "Studies in Philippine Church History" had taken the challenge and painstakingly unraveled the delicate. The result is a truly informative, excellent historical volume both for merely informative readings and for research in depth.

The best recommendation of this book is the impressionable list of historians writing on their respective field of specialty, boldly touching on the controversial historical questions affecting the life of the various touchy questions about the church in the Philippines. The clarity and frankness demanded by the various questions about the Church in the Philippines can only be explained by the competence of each author.

Paradoxically, this very strength of the book constitutes its one vital weakness. A team-approach to history is very susceptible to many pitfalls: over-lapping or repetition, by-passing of important topics where study and detailed discussions are necessary, etc. The present volume contains overly emphasized points. A typical case is the *anti-friar movement*. While at the same time transcendental subject-matters are completely left out or mentioned only in passing. We do not know whether there is a plan to continue these studies; we certainly look forward however to another volume of Studies in Philippine Church History. One which will contain studies on the teaching activity of the Church, charitable ecclesiastical institutions, Synods and Councils, the spiritual, religious.

¹ Edited by Gerald H. Anderson, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1969. Pp. ixiv, 421. Price: \$14.50-net.

devotional and social life of the people in relation to the life of the Church, pious associations, the Church and the social welfare, positive and lasting contributions to the nation during the Muslim's period of expansion, foreign missions, cultural developments, etc.

It is not possible to comment on each of the points raised and studied in this volume. It is not even necessary. There are, however, two vital topics which deserved to be commented upon in a very special way, namely, *the development of the native clergy and the disentanglement of the Church and State during the early part of the American regime in the Philippines.*

The Native Clergy Question

One of the most challenging studies is that of Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. —“Development of the Native Clergy.” Once again he returns to his favorite topic, the native clergy question.

In page 77, Fr. de la Costa writes: “Three main causes combined to retard the formation of a native clergy in the Philippines. The first was the primitive condition of society, which had first to be raised to that level of cultural maturity required before it could provide suitable aspirants to the Catholic priesthood. . . . The second cause was the framework of the ecclesiastical establishment constructed by the *patronato* in the colony, a framework which provided no suitable room for a native clergy even when the mission was ready for it. . . . And the third was the conciliar and (p.78) synodal legislation of Spanish America, extended without modification to the Philippines, legislation which, while it effectively prevented the ordination of unworthy candidates, did so by excluding even the worthy from the priesthood.”

It is the first of these causes which I should like to supplement here and confirm with additional documentations.

Theoretically, the problem of whether to admit or to refuse admission of orientals to sacred orders and to the religious orders was resolved quite early here in favor of the orientals. This, in essence, is the burden of the answers given by a dominican, Fr. Domingo Gonzalez, and an augustinian, Fr. Alonso Carvajal to a pertinent case-question proposed to them.

The case reads thus:

Pregúntase si, así como son dispensados y admitidos a los órdenes sacros y las sagradas religiones los nuevos cristianos de nación de japones, podrán también ser admitidos los de la nación chinos, mayormente habiendo sido bautizados en su niñez y criados por mano de religiosos en la fe, virtud y buenas costumbres, con la probación de los religiosos, en cuya compañía sean criados y que los tales religiosos tengan larga experiencia de que tienen fortaleza en las cosas de nuestra santa fe, habiéndolo experimentado en muchos ejemplares, y que las cosas de virtud, e specialmente en la castidad, han tenido mucha fortaleza y defendidos con la ayuda del Señor en ocasiones apretadas en que hayan sido convidados, y que junto con esto tengan suficiencia de latinidad, etc.²

The answer of Fr. Domingo González reads:

Por vía de nación ninguno está excluido de los órdenes sacros, ni de las sagradas religiones, si las costumbres son buenas, y así los chinos que tuvieron las cualidades que en este caso se refieren, pueden sin dispensación ser ordenados de órdenes sacros y admitidos a las sagradas religiones. Fecha en este colegio de Santo Tomás de Manila, a 28 de julio de 1643 años. Fr. Domingo González.³

Fr. Alonso Carvajal, OSA, gives an identical answer:

Como tenga las condiciones que las constituciones y estatutos que los religiones disponen, ninguno por ser de esta o aquella nación, esta excluido ser religioso. Este es mi parecer. En este Convento de San Agustín, en veinte y cuatro de agosto de mil y seiscientos cuarenta y tres años. Fr. Alonso de Carvajal.⁴

As a matter of fact, around the middle of XVIIth century, there were already chinese mestizos admitted to the sacred order of priesthood, although the great majority did not measure up to the standard. This can be gathered from the following exposition prepared by Fr. Alberto Collares to the Archbishop of Manila:

² Dominican archives (Sto. Domingo Convent, Q.C., P.I.) MSS. Section CHINOS, vol. 1, document 18.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Y es que ha habido y hay mestizos de sangley que se les ha antojado ordenarse de sacerootes a titulo que saben medianamente la lengua china, pero es menester saber que los mestizos tienen la misma sangre chinchea (de Amoy) que sus padres; y, aunque para ordinarios cristianos indios pueden pasar, pero para el sacerdocio son del todo inhabiles, no tanto por falta de entendimiento sino porque quemadmodum patres eorum conversi sunt in arcum pravum.⁵

He then cites the case of a chinese mestizo from Binondo who caused so much scandal due to his excesses in the matter of chastity. Fr. Collares ends his report saying:

... finalmente, si a estos tales se ordenara de sacerdotes, me parece se verificará lo que hizo Julio Cesar, según refiere Cicerón, el cual dio dignidades a algunos que no las merecían, y dice San Jeronimo que non illos decoravit sed dignitatem deturpavit.⁶

The historical conclusion which crystallizes from these documents is that, although *theoretically* there could be no objection to the admission of the natives to sacred orders and to the religious orders, the natives were, in practice, and as a matter of policy refused admission. It was not due to *intellectual incapacity* or insufficiency (7), but due to spiritual immaturity. That during the XVIIth century the European clergy which had the control of religious government of the country, refused to ordain the natives on the belief that the natives were still new in faith, too prone to the temptation of the flesh.

There were two factors which were instrumental in confirming in holding on to this unfortunate policy. The *first* was that even during that time, some creoles were being prepared to the priestly ministry. And quite expectedly, although wrongly, the religious superiors thought that the creoles would provide the compromise solution. It was only too

⁵ *Dominican Archives*, MSS, Section CHINOS, vol. 1, document 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "También tiene otro colegio de San Juan de Letrán... y algunos indios nobles llevan allí a sus hijos para la buena educación, y de estos han llegado a sustentar con lucimiento conclusiones de Teología" (Fr. Polanco, OP. *Memorial to Doña Mariana de Austria*, 1768, *cf.* *Dominican Archives*, MSS, Section PROVINCIA, vol. 2, document 4a, p. 5, year 1668).

late when they realized how unfounded the basis of their assumption was: the number of these creoles ordained to priesthood at the turn of the XVIIth century was not adequate; it was very much equivalent to almost zero. Archbishop Camacho emphatically underlined this fact in his report to the King of Spain, Philip V:

Por este modelo parece que también corren los otros dos colegios de San José, a cargo de jesuitas, y de Santo Tomás a cargo de dominicos, por el poco fruto que visiblemente se consigue de su educación, pues en nueve años que con este he servido en esta Iglesia, solo cuatro sujetos colegiales se han podido sacar para sacerdotes del dicho colegio de Santo Tomás, que los nombro nominalmente para verificación del caso; que son el doctor Luis Campaña, dos hermanos del sobrenombre de Ibarra, y de ellos el uno ya es difunto, y el bachiller Jose de Robles que tambien es difunto. Y del Colegio de San José han salido solos catorce sacerdotes, que todos viven. Y del Colegio de San Juan de Letran solo uno, que es el bachiller Sebastián del Rio.⁸

The second was the only too human fear from the part of the Spanish clergy that the natives, if and when admitted into the priestly ministry, would in due time take away the parishes from them. This is mentioned also by Fr. de la Costa, (p. 93), and attested by two statements drawn from the writings of Archbishop Camacho. In a letter to the King, dated June 14, 1705, he complains:

... y tendrá (la obra del Seminario) sin duda mucha contradicción en los regulares que con dicho Gobernador han profesado siempre estrechísima union por las mutuas convivencias con que se contribuyen para sus intereses y respetos presentes y futuros de que he tocado a V.M. en otros despachos... y que con cautela y doblez trataran de infundir y sugerir informes para derribar la intención pia de V.M., la fundación y conservación de dicho seminario, que con el tiempo ha de ser la piedra silla que echara por tierra toda esta tan elevada y soberbia maquina y estatua de Nabucchodonosor que de si mismo han formado y erigido en estas Islas para (illegible) de todas ellas.⁹

⁸ Letter of archbishop Diego de Avila y Camacho to the King, dated in Manila, on October 11th 1705 (UST Archives, Section LIBROS, vol. 59, fol. 312)

⁹ Letter to the King, 14th of June 1705, MS, UST Archives, vol. 59, Section BECERROS, fols. 294-295.

There is a slight correction which I should like to make in page 86 of the book under review. Fr. de la Costa, talking about a concrete attempt to construct a seminary for the natives writes: "The College of San Clemente was duly torn down and the construction of a completely new seminary was begun on another site, a seminary which would be of the right size, for eight and only eight seminarians, and which would bear when finished the more appropriate name of San Felipe. Was it ever finished? Apparently not, for a royal letter of 1720 inquires of the governor whether it would not be a good idea if the site and foundations of the proposed seminary were to be used instead for the "creation of a building for the Royal Exchequer, the Royal Treasury, and an armory with lodgings for the infantry." Thus the seminary for native priests did not advance beyond the paper stage until 1772, when Archbishop Sancho de Santa Justa y Rufina transformed the University of San Ignacio, after the expulsion of the Jesuits, into the diocesan seminary of San Carlos."

However, by going over vol. XXVIII of Blair and Robertson collection, we come across the narrations of Fr. Juan Francisco de San Antonio, Fr. Juan Delgado and Mr. Le Gentil, who writing at different times and years of the XVIIIth century, clearly testify that the seminary of San Felipe went on, but in a different building, although, due to lack of funds and of competent personnel it had to exist in a very precarious and difficult situation.

The seminary of San Felipe functioned, it must be admitted, more like a *convictorio* similar to that of Letran College during those days, rather than a seminary in the proper and technical sense of the word. But the important fact is that it continued to function for fifty long years.¹⁰

Nationalism, Dissent, and Disentanglement

Three studies stand out among the various articles on the preparation, development and consequences of the Philippine Revolution. The most controversial among which deserving special attention is that of

¹⁰ Cfr. Emma Helen Blair James Alexander, and Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, XXVIII, pp. 117-22, 190-98.

Mr. Peter G. Gowing's "The Disentanglement of Church and State early in the American Regime in the Philippines," pp. 203-12.

By and large, it is a very informative study, containing adequate data, most especially about the sale of the friars' haciendas. It is a bold study of a subject which is both interesting and controversial. It requires a great deal of courage to write on this matter; a greater tact in the evaluation of its history. It is for these reasons that Mr. Gowing's article should be judged as a real positive contribution to our Philippine Church history.

Unfortunately however, I feel constrained to express my disagreement to the main thesis of Mr. Gowing and his evaluation of facts pertaining to the Philippine Revolution.

The thesis of Mr. Gowing seems to lead fatally to this affirmation: the friars were *the* cause of that social upheaval. It is sad to say, and definitely surprising to find a serious historian of the Philippines still advocating this unfair theory. It is not my intention to deny that the friars were *one* of the causes of the Philippine Revolution. But there is a world of difference between being *the* cause and that of being *one* of the causes. Any failure to see this distinction can spell disaster in the process of drawing conclusions.

To begin with, the friars were certainly *one* of the causes of the Philippine Revolution, but only in an *indirect* way. And this for a number of reasons. The enemies of Spain saw in the friars the strongest single factor of Spanish continuous hold over the people, and they zeroed on the friars to insure the downfall of the Spanish government. The scandalous examples of some friars were also indirectly responsible for the social upsurge. The vast and extensive possessions of the friars invited at first envy from many quarters and then, hatred from others. One can also mention the system of too close a connection between the Church and the State, giving ground thereby to impute the faults of one to the other.

The Propaganda Movement is a very complicated historical event. When narrowed down to the anti-friar movement, we may describe it as a barrage of truths, half-truths and lies hurled against the Religious Orders in order to undermine and weaken their power and influence, and eventually to cause the downfall of the Spanish dominion.

In order to come out with a fairly just study on the Propaganda Movement of this country, the historian must bear in mind four essential principles. First, *avoid generalizations*. The faults of some should not be made to appear as the faults of everyone in that social group. That some friars behaved in an unworthy manner should not be denied; and I do not deny it here. But we should not thereby say that because some did not live up to the sanctity of their calling, we should point an accusing finger to *all the friars*. This would certainly be unacceptable and unfair.

Second, avoid concentrating on the dark and negative sides of their actuations. There are good things — many excellent contributions in every field of human endeavor — which the friars had given to this nation. Justice and charity oblige us not to forget this.

Third, in drawing our conclusions from historical facts, we should situate ourselves in the context of the time within which our personages were moving, the type and import of the then prevailing mentality. Thus unjust imputations and deductions would be avoided.

Finally, the historian must read the writings of both sides. Any historical investigation is only as good as its sources, and only as objective as its authors. To deliberately concentrate on one side, and to select only those documents which confirm that side would be an unpardonable breach of the sacred duty of a historian: that of veracity. That would make the author and the study disgustingly impartial. The written documents are the clear and unrefutable witnesses of thoughts and consequently dependable guides to the meaning of their actuations.

It is along this line that I invite Mr. Gowing's attention to a confidential letter written by Fr. Evaristo Arias. The letter is dated 1897, and was directed to a friend. Writing in a *no-holds-barred* style (*duela a quien duela*), he tells his friend about the causes of the Revolution. He says:

En los transcendentales sucesos que lamentamos, todos tenemos culpa, todos en le pusisteis vuestras manos¹¹

But who were the first ones to have a hand in this matter? The Masonry — both Spanish and Filipinos through the Katipunan. Mason-

¹¹ *Archivo de Santo Tomas, folletos, vol. 95, fol. 8 v.*

ry is the only single efficacious cause of the Movement; all the other causes played a very subsidiary role.

No la ha promovido ni sido autor de ella ningún español, para satisfacción nuestra; es obra exclusiva de los masones y libre pensadores filipinos, estando ajena a su preparacion y desarrollo la gran masa de país, pues, incluso los indios tagalos que a ella se han adherido y que ahora luchan como fieras, no tienen culpa en su preparación, y no han hecho sino seguir las ordenes de sus jefes, los venerables de las logias y de los Katipunans¹².

Telesforo Canseco an eyewitness of the Cavite uprising confirms this very same conclusion:

Ya he dicho que en la insurrección fue trabajada en las logias masonicas, segun confesión de los mismos cabecillas. Estas logias estaban permitidas por el gobernador Don Fernando de Parga, siendo el mismo el venerable de la logia de Cavite... Tambien debian estar protegidos por el gobernador general Blanco, puesto que públicamente decian los insurrectos que dicho señor era también hermano mason.¹³

In this connection we must also mention the fact that a segment of the native clergy participated in the movement. The eyewitness tells us:

Todos los clérigos de la provincia han trabajado, quien más quien menos, por la insurrección, si bien es verdad que algunos lo hicieron llevados del miedo que tenían a los jefes insurrectos... Lo dicho no se entiende más que del clero indígena de esta provincia. Ya sabe V.R. que en las demas provincias tagales, en donde esta la insurreccion, ha habido clérigos que se han portado como verdaderos españoles, y han trabajado cuanto han podido contra la insurrección.¹⁴

During one of the meetings of all the Philippine bishops in 1900, presided over by the Apostolic Delegate, Mons. Chapelle, we find Mons. Nozaleda speaking in the same vein as Canseco:

The clergy helped with all the means at their disposal the society "Katipunan", which is masonic. I know for a fact that there were

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ CANSECO, TELESFORO. *Historia de la insurrección filipina en Cavite*, 1896. MS in the Dominican Archives, Section HISTORIA CIVIL DE FILIPINAS, vol. 7, p. 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

clergy members of this wicked society, and others who supported its goals. The periodical pamphlet "Filipino Libre" was patronized by clerics from the very beginning up to this time. The so-called pamphlet "Democracia" and other similarly ferocious periodicals enjoyed the protection of the clergy. Finally, it was the clergy who founded and still support the openly masonic periodical called "La Patria".¹⁵

There is no presumption here to pass any judgment on the moral nature of this clerical participation in the Movement. My contention here is simply to point out that we can find no ground to put the whole blame on the friars *alone*.

Inaccuracies and Generalizations

Mr. Gowing tells us in his article, p. 204 of the book: "For many Filipinos the Spanish friars had become the symbols of tyranny and oppression." This would be a valid statement of an objective fact, had he said instead of *many*, "for some Filipinos," as we shall show later.

In the same page, he continues: "During the fighting the majority were able to escape to Manila, but better than 300 of their less fortunate brothers were taken prisoners, and some fifty of them were killed." This is not entirely accurate. The fact was that only a handful were able to escape to Manila from Visayas and from the neighboring Tagalog provinces. Most probably around 400 became prisoners, of which 115 were dominicans, some Jesuits and Benedictines from Mindanao. The others escaped to Hong Kong from Dagupan, Iloilo and

¹⁵ "Clerici foverunt mediis omnibus societatem "Katipunan," quae massonica est. Certo scio non deesse clericos qui membra sunt illius improbae societatis, et alios illius proposita secundare. Immundum folium periodicum "Filipino Libre" ab ortu ad finem usque a clericis fuit sustentatum. Illorum vixit protectione aliud ejusdem furfuris folium "Democratia" nuncupatum. Et clerici denique sunt qui fundaverunt et sustinent periodicum aperte masonicum "La Patria" nominatum." *Acta Collationum Quas Episcopi Philippinarum habuerunt in civitate de Manila, preside Rdmo. D. Delegato P.L. Chapelle, sessione quinta, numeris tertio et quarto (Documentum reservatum in archivis Ordinis Praedicatorum in civitate Quezon.)*

Cebu, while the rest, like the religious of Panay were hardly molested. After the period of captivity and before the exodus for Spain, Manila had almost 500 friars.

"At Imus, Cavite, for example," again Mr. Gowing in the same page, "thirteen were savagely put to death, one by being burned alive, another by being hacked to pieces and still another by being roasted on a bamboo pole." There are some inaccuracies in this statement. There were nine, not thirteen, namely: *Fr. Learte*, parish priest of Imus, *Fr. Herrero*, administrator of the Imus Hacienda, brothers *Angos*, *Zueco*, *Caballero*, *Goñi* and *Lopez*, *Herrero's* assistants, brothers *Garbayo* and *Umbon* of Salitran, who were then staying in Imus. Some were killed near the boundary line between Imus and Bacoor while on their way to Manila, others in barrio Sainpaloc near Silang. Only one died in the hacienda, brother *Caballero*. They were shot or boloed to death, but no record of anyone "being burned alive" and much less of "being roasted on a bamboo pole."¹⁶

The death list of friars gathered from different sources reads as follows: 28 Recollects, 13 Augustinians, 1 Dominican, and no Franciscan.

All these inaccurate data given to us by Mr. Gowing were meant support his conclusion as stated in p. 205: "In general however, the devoutly religious Filipino people were antifriar without being anti-Church or anti-Catholics, though many of the ilustrados (native intelligentsia) advocated separation of church and state."

This statement seems not according to objective fact. Contemporary documents contradict this, while upholding one consistent fact: the Filipino people, by and large, were not anti-friar. We have the testimony of the *Actas de Junta*:

A most consoling fact, which greatly honors the Catholic Filipino people took place during the captivity of the Religious. Many of them, being in poor health, could not in any way bear the torments and privations of their imprisonment, if it were not for persons of both

¹⁶ RUIZ, Licio, *Sinopsis historica de la Provincia de San Nicolas de Tolentino*, vol. II, Manila, 1925, pp. 346 ff.

sexes, but mainly women, who not frightened by any dangers, succoured them with a generous hand.¹⁷

In page 211, Mr. Gowing asserts: "The people do not want the friars back, and peace and order were threatened by the mere suggestion of their return."

Let us see why "peace and order were threatened:"

Pedro de Tavera, is responsible for all abuses committed against the friars in the provinces, for hardly was it known that the Archbishop of Manila or the bishop of any diocese sent friars to a parish, Pedro de Tavera gave orders that trouble should be excited among the people, with the object in mind of attributing these hostile manifestations to the presence of the friars.¹⁸

An identical method was applied in the case of the Dominicans during their return to Tuguegarao in order to open new schools there. The Federal Party, very much opposed to the friars, greeted them with a considerably well organized opposition and even went to the extent of forcing the people to follow suit.¹⁹

It is truly unfortunate that an otherwise excellent study like that of Mr. Gowing could be spoiled by this marked anti-friar attitude. His was, I would want to believe, a sincere and considerable effort to make a substantial contribution towards the ever growing interest in the history of the Church in the Philippines. In this I share with my whole heart his purpose, and for this I took pain to offer my comments and observations.

¹⁷ "Factum magnopere consolatorium, quod valde honorat populum catholicum philippinum, locum habuit durante captivitate religiosorum. Multi ex iis valetudine infirmi ferre nullo modo potuissent termenta atque privationes prisionis, defuissent personae utriusque sexus, praecipue vero mulieres, quae, nullis territae periculis, illis larga succurrerunt manu." *Acta de Jura*, sessione quinta, numero secundo.

¹⁸ *The Attitude of Gov. Taft and his fellow Commissioners to the Catholic Religion*, MS in the Dominican Archives Section PROVINCIA, vol. 8, document 5, p. 2, 1900.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.