

An appraisal of our nation's
spiritual destiny

A FOREIGN MISSION FOR THE PHILIPPINES

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To some readers the title of this article may prove confusing, for the Philippines has always been considered a mission field. And rightly so, for countless thousands who never heard the name of Christ still dwell in these isles. This holds true for the Moros who live along the southwestern coast of Mindanao and the Sulu Islands, as well as for the pagans in the hinterlands of Luzon, Mindanao, Mindoro, and Palawan.

The problem of sending missionaries to these non-Christians is made more acute by the demand for apostles among the Christians themselves. There are simply not enough priests. Indeed a large proportion of the priests are foreign missionaries who are actively engaged in educational and parish work. Only a handful of these missionaries are working exclusively among the heathens. Hence, the term "mission" has a double meaning for the Philippines — the Non-Christian mission and the mission to the Christian people. Both missions are in grave need of workers.

"With all these pressing demands, why should the Philippines

turn her eyes elsewhere?" one may well ask. To answer this quite legitimate inquiry, several considerations must be weighed:—

HISTORICALLY — the Philippines once had a foreign mission. True, she had been the object and the crowning glory of Spain's spiritual conquest in the Orient. But not long thereafter, she began to share Spain's glorious efforts in pushing forward the rim of Christendom in Asia; in fact she more than did her share in shattering the outer bourne of the Mohammedan crescent.

Mustered into the missionary squadrons of Europe and Mexico, her sons helped to establish spiritual beachheads on the mainland of Asia and the Pacific Islands. For in her heyday, the Philippines was the springboard of Christianity in the Far East. China, Japan, Indochina, and the Marianas felt the missionary zeal which radiated from this Christian lighthouse off the coast of Asia.

GEOGRAPHICALLY—the Philippines lies at the very heart of the lands washed by the western waters of the Pacific and the Chi-

na Sea. She is the very center of the bowl formed by the southeastern periphery of Asia and the great chain of West Pacific Islands. When her greatest hero, Rizal, proclaimed the Philippines to be the "Perla del mar del Oriente", he had in mind this natural geographic centrality rather than the luxurious abundance of natural beauty which God lavished upon her.

POLITICALLY—World War II decidedly placed the Philippines on the map. Until then, the Philippines was to the rest of the world, an abode of "leisure-loving South Sea Islanders". And in America the seeming champions of her fight for political freedom were in reality lobbyists for their own native sugar and margarine interest! But the heroic struggle of Filipinos side by side with Americans on Bataan and Corregidor, focussed the attention of the world on the Filipinos' fight for freedom.

It was only fitting then, that she who sacrificed the flower of her youth for freedom's cause, should enjoy that freedom as her own. Her Declaration of Independence in 1946 has become a loadstone attracting the eyes of other oriental nations, still under the domination of the Occident. India, Burma, Indonesia, Indochina, Malaya—all look to the Philippines as a cynosure. She

has managed well her first faltering steps, as Democracy's first-born in the Far East, and despite appalling difficulties, is pressing bravely forward.

SPIRITUALLY—Filipino Catholicism has not the glorious history of the Church in Japan which in so short a time bloomed with martyrs, then underwent a winter of existence comparable only to the days of the Catacombs. But the Philippines has kept the Faith for the last four centuries and more in spite of heavy odds from within and from without. To this day she remains the only Christian nation in the Orient. For she too lives in the framework of that civilization which ever turns Romeward. May we not then hope that the political prestige of the new Republic may lend to Filipino Catholicism a new dignity and interest in the eyes of her Oriental Neighbors?

HER OBLIGATION — Charity demands that as the recipient of the great gift of Faith, she should share it with the less fortunate of her Oriental brethren. To them she must serve as the beacon of Gospel Truth to light the darkness of paganism around her. Are not the words of Christ to Peter applicable to her? "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith shall fail not: and thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren." She must not hide her

lamp in a bushel, for her hour has come to swing into action in the foreign field. She must take her share of the work of the Church in these perilous times, and her sons should look beyond the confines of her boundaries and hasten to assist the Church legions now battling against tremendous odds among her Asiatic brethren.

One of the glories of the Church in America lies in this, that while she could make good use in her own home missions of all missionaries she has sent abroad,

still her generosity prompted her to be mindful of the less fortunate people of other lands. For this magnanimity God has blessed her immensely. And the Philipines will be the recipient of similar blessings from the hands of God, if she too heeds the call. And to those spiritual isolationists who tenaciously cling to the old adage that charity begins at home, we can reply in the words of Boston's Mission-minded Archbishop, "If we are generous to the missions, God will be generous to us at home".

TAMING OF THE SHREW?

The bishop came each year for Confirmation and in his preliminary quiz always asked the same questions of the children. The shrewd nun had noticed this and coached her charges accordingly. The first boy would be asked, "Who made you?" The second boy would be asked "Who were our first parents?"

This year the bishop came late and the first boy had to leave the room. Hence when the bishop arrived the second boy was first.

"Who made you?" the Bishop asked of this lad.

"Adam and Eve," stoutly affirmed the boy.

"No, no," said the Bishop. "Think hard! Who made you?"

"Adam and Eve," reiterated the youngster with conviction.

"Come, come," said the Bishop smiling. "You know better than that. Didn't God make you?"

"No, Your Excellency," responded the boy. "The little boy whom God made left the room."