

Priests and Some Socio-Political Values of Filipinos



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With the growing tendency towards the adoption of religion to local customs and traditions, the need for the right understanding of a nation's set of values can never be over emphasized specially for preachers and confessors. It is, therefore, along this line that this article was written.

At the outset, let it be noted that the values we treat in this article are not necessarily absent among the greatest values kept by the peoples of other nations. As a matter of fact, most of the values we treat in this paper can also be found among Italians, Spaniards, Americans, Chinese, Japanese and so on. It just happened that, to a certain degree, they became more pronounced in Filipinos.

And we can say that among Filipinos it is very hard to contend that one value is of equal intensity in one region as in all the rest. The best thing, therefore, to do is to limit our study in only one region which can more or less typify the whole nation.

I selected the Tagalog region for two reasons: first — because this is the region about which I am acquainted, and second — because it is here where, in its different sectors, I find the smallest degree of variations of values.

In our treatment of these values, we shall try to trace their beginnings from the barangay times, follow their evolution during the Spanish regime and present their usages at present.

We treat here of the Spanish regime because the Spaniards, staying in our lands for three centuries, were really able to influence our culture to a great noticeable degree. We shall no longer treat of the American period because this in itself can be a subject of another study.

Starting from the time of our earliest settlers, it is important to recall that, unlike in America, our settlers came, not in groups of boats, but in isolated individual boats. And we know that these settlers lived in the country separately.

Concentrating our study in one of these isolated typical boat of settlers, we shall notice that the lives of these settlers can be well divided for the sake of investigation into two parts: religious and socio-political.

The religious part concerns itself with the study of the religion of the Filipinos beginning from the *babaylans*, the *anitos*, the *aswang*, the *nuno sa punso*, the *tianak* etc. . . Fr. Bulatao, SJ and Fr. Gorospe, SJ seem to have already clarified this topic for us in their articles on Split-level Christianity and Christian Renewal of Filipino Values. This article, therefore, concentrates only on the socio-political values of Filipinos.

Now, conscience has been traditionally defined as the "judgement or dictate of the practical intellect deciding from *general principles* the goodness or evil of some action which is to be done here and now or has been done in the past". In this article, we shall try to examine these *general principles* according to which an average Filipino decides the goodness or evil of an action.

We shall consider two kinds of these general principles, namely, the *interior principles* and the *exterior principles*.

The *interior principles* are the objective norms of morality as learned from the Church and the school. These consist in the eternal law, the natural law, the decalogue, the Church laws and the government or other social laws. This is the law to do good and avoid evil. This is the sixth commandment specially intended to this our age of sexual permissiveness in which, working under the conviction that truth is with us, we must always do what is right. This also is the Land Reform Law which we must, with all patience, try to implement.

The *exterior principles* are of two kinds, namely, the *utang-na-loob* (reciprocity) and the *hiya* (shame). The *utang-na-loob* (*initial-positive-norm*) is a *concupiscible* motion towards good. And the *hiya* (*final-negative-norm*) is an *irascible* motion away from evil. It should be noted that both of these *exterior principles* are of cultural nature, working,

not only within the individual, as in the *interior principles*, but also with persons outside the individual as their objects arising from the innate value of family loyalty within the Filipino.

Bypassing the *interior principles* for another study, we shall, in this article, limit ourselves in the consideration of the *exterior principles*.

For the sake of clarification, we shall try to get specific and typical Filipino values to examine. We shall divide these values into two, namely, values within the family life and values outside the family life.

Regarding the values within the family life, we shall talk about the family structure, justice standard, barangay expansion and polygamy. And as regards the values outside the family life, we shall deal about the *pakikisama* system, Filipino hospitality and Filipino sense of aristocracy.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Speaking about the Filipino family structure, we can say that in the beginning, there was no one ruler among the settlers. No one is given the right to severely impose laws. The elders served only as arbiters of disputes. The *datu* was only a sort of a paternalistic head. There was great freedom enjoyed by the members of each barangay.

With the coming of the Spaniards, a more rigid restructuring of the family within the barangay came about. One is born with his role already fixed. He is to be the nephew of a certain man, the grandson of an old man, the younger brother of another man and so on. Thus, our authoritarian family structure arose which later had its repercussions in the school. Aside from these, a man is born already the older brother of his younger brothers and sisters. He is supposed to be uncle to his nephews and nieces. And to them, he has obligations and duties to fulfill. His independence, therefore, was lessened.

Up to the present, we still have this custom. These strong family ties have assured social security to the members of the family or clan. As a matter of fact, our economy is much ruled by this system. A president of an industrial company

will always give the highest job in his company to his brothers or relatives. Even in the field of politics, we have this.

The evil, however, comes when the relatives are not capable of running the posts reserved for them or when there are more qualified applicants for the office. Objective qualifications, therefore, do not serve much as criteria. Relations have a stronger role. Thus, mismanagement often occurs which is harmful to our economy or to our government as a whole.

JUSTICE STANDARD

On justice standard, it should be remembered that during the barangay era, once a crime is committed within the barangay, the crime is gravely punished. But if the crime is committed by one within the barangay against a member of another barangay, both barangays are involved—one defending the lawbreaker even if he is wrong, and the other avenging their brother. Thus, an individual feud becomes a barangay feud.

Spanish Catholicism was not able to do anything against this. As a matter of fact, with its emphasis on family solidarity, it still became stronger.

Today, we still have this. A chief of police, for example, can arrest any criminal in town. But if the criminal happens to be his son, it is another story. He will not arrest him. Instead, even if he knows that his son is the culprit, he will still defend him.

BARANGAY EXPANSION

About the barangay expansion, it should be noted that during those times, a member of one barangay could intermarry with a member of another barangay. This is done through a certain rite, as for example, by blood compact. This practice strengthened the social security of the family. For, as we still see today, the Filipino family is bilateral. Children have family ties both with the father's and the mother's kin. And both sides recognize these children as members of their family.

During the Spanish regime, the same practice continued with a certain addition, that is, the *compadre* both in baptism

and in the wedding. The *compadre* is taken in as a member of the family and of the clan. And the *compadre* is supposed to behave like one. This is specially true with regard his godchild whom his Catholic faith entrusts to him.

Thus, with this expansion, a greater security of the child is attained. And to insure greater security, a man of wealth or power is usually selected to be one's *compadre*. It is along this line that it is said that in Mexico, as in the Philippines, the greatest obsession of every Mexican is not to be a president but to be a *compadre* of the president.

Today, the same practice is done, if you are a *compadre* of a president of a company, or of the president of the land, or of a congressman, or of a governor, or of a mayor — you are *malakas* (strong). You can ask him to give his godchild any job available in his company or in the government. And this is done even if the godchild is not the best qualified.

POLYGAMY

An important corollary to the Filipino family expansion is the polygamous life of the pre-Spanish Filipino. Contrary to common belief, the Filipino is said to have been polygamous. This is affirmed by most modern archeologists. And the present practices of the Isnegs, of the Apayaos and of the many tribes of Mindanao and Sulu prove this.

During the Spanish times, the Spaniards tried to teach us the Catholic doctrine of monogamy. But the same problem occurred — the Filipino was not properly instructed. So, the Filipino polygamous life in the past still remained.

The present-day *querida* system is explained as an outlet of the past Filipino polygamous life which had been implanted and unconsciously transferred to him.

PAKIKISAMA SYSTEM

With the numerical expansion of the barangay members, people were forced to tolerate the faults of others even to the point of injustice being done to them because they think this is required by the exigencies of community life. This system is also an outcome of the tight family ties where each one must be patient with another.

The Spaniards, teaching justice, did nothing to change the situation. The *pakikisama* system was favorable to them because they were the government officials, the hacenderos and the keepers of servants. They needed this system in the construction of roads, municipal buildings and churches. So, they just let it go.

If the evil effects of this system, however, has ever come into the front, it is today. Because this is precisely one of the most serious reasons why Land Reform in the Philippines cannot succeed. So, the unjust tenant-landlord relationship is perpetuated. The tenant cannot just destroy his *pakikisama* with the landlord, who has become an extension of his family, even if he knows that the landlord gives him less than what he deserves.

FILIPINO HOSPITALITY AND HIS SENSE OF ARISTOCRACY

Due to the innate group consciousness of the Filipino who, in the beginning, belonged to only one barangay where everybody was a relative, and due to the fact that each one has done something for another either in the form of *pakikisama* or *bayanihan* — the Filipino developed his hospitality.

Thus, we see until now that if someone from the province comes to Manila, he has to stay with his relatives here. Otherwise, he will meet social disapproval. This is precisely what our ancestors had. And this hospitality of a relative towards another relative was extended to everyone since they were all relatives in the barangay. One should not be ashamed to be treated as a member of the family of another eating whatever the family eats.

With the Spaniards, the same hospitality was retained. But more, it was extended to the other members of the barangay due to the centralization program of the Spaniards and due also to the Catholic doctrine that all men are brothers. Thus, hospitality was made universal embracing all the barangays.

And that was not all. From the Spaniards, we also received our sense of aristocracy which plays an essential part in our hospitality. In the beginning, we only had the pater-

nalistic *datus*. Now, we had the Spaniards and the Spanish officers — the aristocrats.

This rise of the aristocracy led to the corruption of our hospitality. Through this hospitality, the Filipino now wanted to show that he is of the higher class — of the aristocracy. Thus we have the following customs:

The fiestas are the best examples on how people show others that we have something to offer. We serve everybody. And what is lamentable is that usually, and this is specially true with the lower bracket of our society, people go all the way consuming all the coins in their pockets without thinking of the future just to make a show off once a year or just to let people know that they are a little more *class* than they think.

This is also manifested by the financial system of the Church (*arancel*). First class, second class and third class services according to how much one is willing to pay. And, of course, Filipinos will always like to be different from others. Weddings and baptisms, therefore, must, as much as possible, be always first class to show that they are of the aristocracy even if they just have to borrow money.

Filipinos patronize anything foreign because they associate everything foreign (Spanish or American) with the aristocracy. They want imported foreign goods (*stateside*). They use foreign names (Winston, Henry etc.). They talk in English or Spanish because it is *class*. Filipinos would not want to be subject to a fellow Filipino. They would rather have a foreign boss.

Filipinos have the tendency to put up with the Joneses. If a neighbor remodels their house, the Filipino would also want to remodel his house. If another buys a television, he would also want to buy one.

We also have the so-called *Filipino time*, that is, the habit of arriving later than the appointed time. (This, however, is a misnomer since not only Filipinos have this habit. Italians and Spaniards are said to be worse. But, anyway, we have it.) And a Filipino is typified by Doña Victorina in one of Rizal's novels who came to the theater late because she wanted to make a *dramatic entrance* to be noticed and be different from others because that is the way the aristocrats of the time did it.

We, Filipinos, also have the tendency to admit a fault when no one offers criticism. But we feel slighted when others point out that fault. The tendency to admit a fault is regarded as noble and, therefore, *class*. But no one should blame or point a fault to his superiors — to the aristocrats. This is considered as an insult.

In spite, however, of the striving of the Filipino towards aristocracy, the *indio* complex which had been implanted in him by the Spaniards also occurs. For example, if a visitor is admitted into a house, the tendency of the Filipino is to excuse the humbleness or the poverty of the house. Another example would be the tendency of the Filipino to minimize praise offered him.

In these practices, we notice that the *interior principles* are not followed. Loyalty to the family or to the family extension which takes the form of polygamy or of the desire to be a member of the aristocracy win over objective justice and truth. Politicians, industrialists and defenders of justice give way to it.

Monogamy which both the Church and the school offer as the best thing to do gives way to virtual polygamy which is the *querida* system. And this can be explained by the fact that the pre-Spanish Filipinos took pride in having several wives because by so doing, he can have more children and thus contribute more warriors to his clan. We see, therefore, that polygamy during those times was motivated by loyalty to the tribe or the family. And this is unconsciously transferred to us through the *querida* system.

Moreover, this sense of family loyalty is best shown by the effort of the Filipino to uplift his social status through hospitality and his sense of aristocracy even if he cannot afford them.

On the other hand, due also to the inner family loyalty of the Filipino, he obeys the *external principles*. And this is because of the *utang-na-loob* (reciprocity) — the *initial-positive-norm*, and the *hiya* (shame) — the *final-negative-norm*.

Utang-na-loob: *initial* — because the good things done by the family or by the extended family now asks for reciprocation by guarding (as in the case of the judge or of the chief

of police), by strengthening (e.g. through the *querida* system) and by uplifting the family social status; and *positive* — because the reciprocation is now required, that is, the expression of gratitude should now be put into a concrete action. *negative* — because this *hiya* is to be evaded.

Hiya: final — because if reciprocation is not given, one is branded as an *ingrato*, which is supposed to result in *hiya*; and

We conclude, therefore, that it is the family loyalty in the Filipino which takes the forms of the *utang-na-loob* norm and the *hiya* norm that leads him to follow the *exterior principles* and not the *interior principles* developing in him a split-level personality which plays a great role in the formation of his conscience.

We should not, however, be mistaken in thinking that all the Filipino values which we mentioned above are bad. Family loyalty, which as we have said, is the main root of all these, is in itself good. Generally, it brings security to the members of the family. Through it, one can easily be convinced that a more efficient preparatory training of employees, relatives or not, leads towards a more stable business enterprise for the family or for the nation as a whole. Suggestions on how to prevent youngsters from ruining the family's name can be very well accepted. The close relations of the members of a community can help the government help the people in helping themselves towards better social and economic conditions. This Filipino love for his family can be the best means to help people eliminate their polygamous tendencies. The *pakikisama* system can take the form of the *bayanihan* system. Even the *barkada*, although usually taken in its pejorative sense, can be a very good way of developing good social traits among the young and the old as well. The same is true with regard the Filipino hospitality. And our sense of aristocracy can help us realize our ideals with more determination.

ROLE OF PRIESTS

Priests can do a lot in encouraging the good and in discouraging the bad in the *exterior principles* which people usually follow. Sermons can be very effective means to persuade parents to educate their children, to convince them that it is nobler to rely on oneself than to rely on a *compadre*. The priest as a teacher in his Catholic school can exert much in-

fluence in the good moral upbringing of children, implanting in them a real deep conviction that the *interior principles* should be obeyed, awakenning in them a growing awareness that if they share in the disrepute incurred by their immediate family, they also share in the disrepute incurred by the universal human family from poverty and oppression. One cannot remain insensible to the sufferings of others. The true Christian brotherly love must be practiced.

Campaigns against immodest places, films, books and magazines can be organized. And this, under the Christian conviction that monogamy best serves the interest of the family. Catholic family planning centers can even be established. The *pakikisama* system can be best utilized in Credit Unions and Cooperatives. For it must always be remembered that if an individual has a debt of gratitude to his family, he also has the same to society as a whole.

Confessors and spiritual directors can best emphasize the virtue of humility without, however, impairing idealism and ambition.

Much work, indeed, is still left to our contemporary preachers and confessors to discover the good which can arise from the *exterior principles which we*, Filipinos, have already acquired and to lead their flock into a permanent obedience to *interior principles*.

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