

Priests and Interior Principles in Filipinos



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We have said that *interior principles* are the objective norms of morality which we have learned from the Church and the school. These consist in the eternal law, the natural law, the decalogue, the Church laws, the governmental laws and other social laws. In short, these *interior principles* are the norms which we are supposed to follow in order to live according to the spirit of Christian faith. This is the law to do good and avoid evil. This is the sixth commandment specially intended to this our age of sexual permissiveness. This is also the Land Reform Laws which we must, with all patience, try to implement, not only because they are provided for by governmental laws but also because they are commanded by encyclicals such as the *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra* and *Populorum Progressio*.

In our previous articles, we have dealt about the Filipino *exterior principles*. We have dealt about *hiya*, *utang-na-loob* and the Filipino materialistic tendency. In treating on them, we have pointed out some ways through which we can make use of them in "interiorizing", as it were, objective Christian values towards a more integrated Filipino Christian personality. We have tried to suggest some methods on how, through them, it can be easier for us to follow the *interior principles*.

In our present article, moreover, we shall attempt to investigate our pre-Spanish concept of God, examine our Spanish past, inquire into our reactive American regime, consider our faith at present, look into the two principal approaches to it and derive some conclusions and observations that can help us suggest some practical means of pastorally "interiorizing" our Christian principles which we can add to what we have already said in our past articles.

OUR PRE-SPANISH CONCEPT OF GOD

Philosophers have theorized that man begot the idea of God out of the feeling of fear. Man, they say, in the beginning, did not know God. But when the heavens flashed, he began to hide himself. When he felt the strength of the storm, he started to look for an alien power to protect himself — and he found God. God compensated for his weakness. Man conceived God as almighty. And in a time when might was right, man became afraid of God as he was afraid of the most powerful man in his tribe. He began to serve Him. He tried to reckon His will and to do His wishes out of fear of punishment.

In the Philippines, during the pre-Spanish times, the natives called this God by the name of *Bathala*. It was believed that when *Bathala* was displeased by a person, He puts difficulties and sorrows in his way. When He is pleased, He facilitates the persons' way. His power over life and death, happiness and sorrow of human beings has made Him a Being to be obeyed and feared.

Thus, we still find some people afraid to hurt priests, not because of ex-communication nor of any legal or canonical consideration, but because they are afraid to displease God represented by the priest. And when one goes against the priests and he meets misfortunes, as for instance, an accident or bankruptcy in his business, people usually think of that misfortune as a punishment from God.

On the other hand, if people are very close to the Church and they get rich or they win in the sweepstakes, they consider this as a reward from God, and they never forget to say that "nagpapasalamat nga kami sa Diyos sa lahat ng mga ipinagkakaloob Niya sa amin". (We really thank God for all that He has been giving us.)

Even natural calamities are interpreted as punishments from God. The Ruby Tower incident, the typhoons which devastated Bicolandia, the flood which paralyzed business in Manila and suburbs and even the cyclone in Pakistan were considered as punishments from God due to the growing crime rate which manifest man's forgetfulness of his duties to the Supreme Being. Some even interpreted these as punishments

for the *bomba* films. For as they say "Gustong-gusto ninyo ng bomba. O, ayan pati mga bahay ninyo pinagbomba." (You like *bomba* films so God caused even your houses to be stripped and be unroofed.) The cyclone in Pakistan was interpreted as a punishment for the complaints and hard headedness of some who would not obey the teachings of the Holy Father on birth control in his encyclical, *Humanae-Vitae*.

In the same way, there is a belief that one should not travel during the hours of mass on Sundays for fear of incurring the anger of God who can cause them accidents along the way.

Thus, we see how fear occupies an important place in the God-man relationships of our ancestors. This has even come down to us as we know from experience.

EXAMINATION OF OUR SPANISH PAST

After having dealt on our pre-Spanish era, we now go into the examination of our Spanish past. Here, we shall treat on the Filipino Spanish Christianization and on Christian indigenization. Indeed, it has often been said that Christianity in our country, during the Spanish times, has been greatly indigenized rather than the people being christianized. In this part of our article, we shall discuss the extent of influence these christianization and indigenization had towards the "interiorization" of Christian principles.

FILIPINO SPANISH CHRISTIANIZATION

In this section, we shall deal on the methods used by the Spaniards in implanting the Christian faith in our ancestors. We shall divide this section into three, namely, the apostolic method, the goodwill method and the *latigo* (whip) method.

APOSTOLIC METHOD — There are diverse patterns which can be used as models for the Spanish Christianization of the Philippines. There is the then contemporary method used by Portugal, the pattern followed by St. Francis Xavier and the model undertaken for the con-

version of the Moors of Granada. Examination, however, shows that the first missionaries in the Philippines used as a more responsive and adequate method the tactics utilized by the apostles.

There are indeed striking similarities between the task done by the apostles and the missionaries to South America and the Philippines. Just to mention a few parallelisms, we can point out the novelty and magnitude of the undertaking, the mass conversions and the expeditionary nature of the work.

The success of this method in the South American missions really gave an incentive for the Council of the Indies to use "our usual methods" in the Philippines. Besides, most of the missionaries sent here were *flores escogidas en el esplendido campo de los trabajos apostolicos realizados en America*. Thus, the first group of Jesuits were instructed that as soon as they arrive in the Philippines they should apply themselves to the task of "saving their (the Filipinos') souls as far as you can according to our usual methods".

GOODWILL METHOD — To add to the preceding method, the first missionaries used this second method, the goodwill method. They tried to get the confidence of the natives by "becoming all things" to them. The missionaries "visited the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, defended the weak, instructed the ignorant, look for a life partner for those who desired to marry but could not find one, saved the condemned from execution, settled disputes and petty quarrels". In short, the missionaries became "the consoler of the afflicted, the pacifier of families, the promoter of useful ideas and the example of everything good." They became the natives' "father and mother, their lawyer and attorney, their protector and defender, their shield and protection which for their sake receive the blows of any adversity, their physician and healer of corporal wounds and infirmities, as well as of the sins and faults they commit; weak and wretched as they are, to them they turn their labors and persecutions, hunger and needs, and with them they came to rest weeping and wailing just like children to their mother."

Aside from these, the missionaries also assumed the stance of being defenders of justice. The First Synod of Manila (1581-1582) *sternly reminded the colonial authorities of their*

primary duty to dispense justice to the natives. This was regarded as the very least they could do, for "the only justification for our being in this country is that we may administer justice". Injustice is sinful no matter against whom it is committed but it acquired a special heinousness when committed against the natives, "the fruits of whose labor we eat".

The then Bishop Salazar of Manila has passed into history as the real champion of the rights and welfare of the early Filipinos. It was because of his untiring efforts that the Royal Audiencia was established by a royal decree.

LATIGO (WHIP) METHOD — In discussing Filipino Spanish Christianization, moreover, it cannot be bypassed that the Spaniards also did a number of abuses in the name of faith. Thus, historians has always maintained that the Filipinos were converted through the cross and the sword.

Churches, for example, are said to have been built under the threat of the *latigo*. This, however, is explained to have been done with the intention of making the people feel their unity and involvement in the new faith.

Non-reception of sacraments was regarded as suspect.

Preaching lashed fear into the souls of the people with threats of hell though tempered by a promise of heaven.

In general, it is said that towards the last part of Spanish rule, the abuses of Spaniards were so rampant both in civil and ecclesiastical fields that these caused the revolution.

CHRISTIAN INDIGENIZATION

Having made a short exposition of the Spanish effort in christianizing the Philippines, we now proceed into the investigation of the Filipino receptivity to this Spanish apostolate. We shall attempt to look deep into the Filipino soul and see the values which we deem vulnerable enough to be responsive to the call of Spanish Catholicism. We shall talk on our *pakikisama* system, our *pasikatan* system and our authoritarian system.

OUR PAKIKISAMA SYSTEM — Filipinos are natural diplomats. They will never want to hurt the feelings of other people. Pliability is, therefore, one of the greatest traits of the Filipino. In the name of *pakikisama*, or as it has been very well termed "smooth personal relationship", the Filipino has always been accused of conformism or even conservatism — if not praised for sociability or agreeability.

Usually, the Filipino cannot say an absolute *yes* or an absolute *no*. If he wants to disagree, he uses such expression as *pangit naman 'ata?* (It seems not to look nice, does it?) or *siguro* (perhaps or possibly). Sometimes, he even agrees completely with the speaker even if deep inside him, he disagrees. At other times, he just says *ewan* or that he does not know the answer to the question of the speaker even if he knows.

Indeed, in spite of incongruities of opinions with other people, the Filipino can still manage to please and force a smile. This is specially true if the person to whom he talks is a benefactor. Out of *utang-na-loob*, the Filipino will never "insult" him by disagreeing with him.

As a natural consequence of this, the Filipinos could not contradict the teachings of the Spaniards because of the services these have given them in almost every field of endeavor.

OUR PASIKATAN SYSTEM — Filipinos are *pasikat* (boastful). They love to show others their superiority. Often, we find them presenting some extraordinary things which they have just acquired (*nagpaparangalan*). As a natural consequence of this trait, Filipinos are observed to be great lovers of pageantry. This is said to have been inherited by us from the Chinese who have this motto: sageliness inside and kingliness outside. It is no wonder then that our ancestors were captivated by the beautiful solemnity of Christian ceremonies.

Aware of this Filipino characteristic, the Council of the Indies commanded that the first missionaries in their preaching must "wear at least surplice and stole with the cross in the hand" for the purpose of eliciting the admiration and attention of the natives.

And it is precisely this trait which commands the Filipino to stand in awe at the picturesque and the spectacular, since these are expressions of his inner desires, that caused Rajah Tupas and his Cebuano subjects to dispel their hostility and suspicion of the foreigners. Because of this, the daily mass was done with the utmost pomp possible. Musical instruments and congregational singing were even utilized precisely to attract the natives.

OUR AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM — This is what is termed in modern Philippine scene as *tuta-ism*. This originated from the Chinese filial piety which we inherited. Obedience to parents was regarded as a rule of ethics and honor even in pre-Spanish times. This, moreover, acquired a wider extension during the Spanish regime when our central government was established extending the obedience, formerly due only to parents and elders, to civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Thus, our authoritarian social system originated.

The aristocratic and superior stance taken by the Spaniards was equated by the Filipinos to authority. Whatever proposal, therefore, which came from them was regarded as commands which must be obeyed with resignation. Even the status quo must not be criticized because this will imply "lack of omniscience" in the part of the superiors and hence an insult to them.

It is said that one of the means how the old still hold the young's loyalty is the narration of stories about the mysterious *tianak*, *aswang* and other such evil spirits in a way that the elders appear to have known the mystery, unknown to the young, behind these beings. This, it is also said, epitomizes the manner how authority works in the Philippines. The young just believe the stories of the old including religious narratives. And when they narrate these stories, they just cite the authority of their grandfather or grandmother reflecting the relation of the people to the Church where the people just know what the Church is for, but often, they do not know what *they* are for because they have really never had an actual personal experience with the Church and her teachings.

INVESTIGATION OF THE REACTIVE AMERICAN REGIME

The American regime is a great blow to Philippine Catholicism. This began a more pragmatic outlook in life, which hampered Filipino religiosity to a great degree.

The separation of Church and state principle lessened the authority and prestige of religion. The abolition of religion classes in public schools plus the withdrawal of government subsidies slowed down ecclesiastical efforts to develop well integrated Filipino Christians with a more balanced outlook on things. Masonic and protestant influences, capitalizing on the anti-clericalism which was then prevalent, spread unhindered.

A great number of parishes then under the ministrations of foreigners were forcefully vacated leaving the faithful without any spiritual leadership thus alienating them from the Church indifferentism and immorality.

Liberal minded publications, manuals, magazines and newspapers usually anti-religion came out of the press leading to indifferentism and immorality.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESENT

We shall devote this part of our article in more thoroughly discussing the principal effects of the American regime which we are now experiencing. We shall subdivide it into three general topics, namely, utilization, secularization and democratization.

UTILIZATION — We speak here of relevance. It is a sad fact that today when we talk to farmers about their problems, they give us a response of amazement. It really seems that the present generation has forgotten the times when priests act as leaders in the community. The functions once upon a time usually performed by the Church — the assistance to the poor and the destitute, care of the sick, the fight for social justice — are now left into oblivion. It really seems that the period of rest induced by the American regime have been too long.

We now awake in a situation when the mere mention of a traditional doctrine is going-establishment. This is a lamentable fact which is still worsened by the consciousness that the people who reject these doctrines have not really had a chance to have a complete knowledge and understanding of them. Indeed, what is worst is that the Church now awakes when the present generation can no longer understand her tongue and the contemporary language can hardly be used by her in transmitting her good news. Spanish terms, for example, can hardly be understood nowadays. Even some Tagalog words used in the Church can no longer be deciphered by an average listener. Evolution of languages is indeed so fast that the Church must take extra care in always keeping herself abreast so that she may at least be understood.

The involvement of the Church in temporal affairs of nationalistic significance has also long been overdue. It is a historical fact that nationalistic tendencies have given rise to different Filipion sects. The Church of Aglipay is one of these, the *Watawat ng Lahi*, the *Lapiang Malaya*. This need was even recognized by the Dominican friars, though it did not maintain its right path, when they organized the *Guardia de Honor of Pangasinan*. The Church must learn how to utilize this nationalistic tendency of the Filipino in order to be relevant.

The Church certainly cannot just content herself today with having a reputation of being a mere museum exhibit. It is a good sign that the new generation of clergy is now heading towards the same relevant Church which we had in the past. These membership of the clergy should never, however, always brush aside the guidance of the old.

SECULARIZATION — We refer this term to the current technological age brought about by scientific advances. We now live in a time when the cross no longer serve as a protection, like an *anting-anting* (talisman), against sickness, thunder and lightning.

Ours is a time of two conflicting generations, namely, the old and the young. The old generation is the victim of the American imperialism which denied religious instruction to them. These well intentioned people, however, in spite of their

ignorance, still cling to the faith of their fathers — a faith which principally consists in processions, in chanting the Passion during the Holy Week, in approaching the altar through their knees and in rubbing their handkerchiefs on the images of the saints. This is the faith which seems to have been left vacuum by years — a faith which repulses the youth of our time.

The young generation of our age looks for meaning in this faith. We, therefore, think it time to exert our greatest possible effort in the education of our people. This, indeed, is a good chance for us to implant in them a more solid faith — a faith which can make a new generation of Christians in our country in whom Christian principles will really work and be obeyed.

DEMOCRATIZATION — The Church has obviously had an authoritarian tradition. This, however, is largely due to the low educational attainments of the laity in the past. Today, there is a growing *intelligentia* within the folds of the Church. The middle class and upper classes now want to be heard in ecclesiastical circles.

The disrepute incurred by the clergy during the Spanish times when there was a mass ordination of *sacristan priests* still have a sort of hangover in the minds of our faithful. The fact that majority of our priests come from the poorer level of society is another factor pointed out as spurring on the decreasing respect had by the people to the priest. These plus the increasingly high standard of education of the laity corresponding to the lowering of the standard of seminary education, specially in suburban seminaries, lead to the more strengthened conviction of the non-clerical members of the Church to have a voice in her decisions. Even the present atmosphere of change either unknown or disregarded by some conservative segments of the Church specially in the provinces promote this growing tendency.

It is obvious, however, that democracy in the Church is unfeasible. But the need for an active laity *properly guided* can be a tremendous help to our apostolate. The Cursillo Movement is today a potent factor in the establishment of an active, organized laity.

TENDENCIES TOWARDS REFORM

Faced with the above problems which naturally calls for some changes or modifications in the conservative outlook and approach of the hierarchical Church towards a more "interiorized" Christian principles in her faithful, a researcher in this field will find two prominent and seemingly opposing tendencies towards reform, namely, the tendency towards personalization and the tendency towards socialization.

PERSONALIZATION — This tendency is certainly of the older generation. We find this in Quiapo, in Baclaran and in St. Jude's Church. Personal novenas, private rosaries, retreats, solitude fall under this heading. Usually, this type is only for those who have more or less been trained under this aspect of worship. Children of religious family traditions follow these devotions.

We cannot, however, condemn these practices because, properly motivated, they are in themselves good if not exercised to the extreme as for example, to the extent of fanaticism. As a matter of fact, everyone needs this in order to see his existence in perspective. Besides, in our country, where there is no rivalry between sects — except in few cases where in a parish there is really a tight rivalry between Catholics and Aglipayans — we need these exercises in order to confirm our faith so as not to endanger its life to utter lukewarmness.

The growing popularity of drugs, "eastern" mysticism and yogas also show how this personalization is important in this age of the absence of self-reflection.

SOCIALIZATION — This is the tendency which has transformed our otherwise silent congregation into an unruly swinging group of faithful. It should, however, be noted in this regard that the Filipino has for long practiced a sort of socio-religious practices of his own. We have mentioned this before but it is good for us to be reminded of it in relation to our present topic. In the barrios specially, some occasional religious practices are centered on the family for whom the priest comes to say mass. Baptisms, weddings, funerals, Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, All Saints' Day are occa-

sions for family gathering. There is, therefore, a certain degree of socialization in the Filipino religious practices. But they are just as wide as the family in extent.

The Filipino aloofness from the non-members of the family, therefore, plus the so-called ruling class ideology of the Church which makes the suffering patiently bear his lot because in the other life there is a reward awaiting him are mentioned as our present real problems which ask for solutions.

These however, can be easily remedied. The present threat of communism can be used to unify the faithful against a common enemy and thus transcend the family line. The tendency of young priests to universalize Church teachings, as for example, by applying Church doctrines to both the rich and the poor, is a healthy sign.

Processions can also help a lot in ushering in unity in our parishes. There seems, as a matter of fact, a subconscious reflection of this in our youth today — their love of demonstrations.

OBSERVATIONS

We must have noticed that during the pre-Spanish regime, there was a great tendency to obey divine norms only because of fear. This was even heightened during the Spanish regime by the moral and physical threats given by Spaniards for non-conformity to their laws. Obedience out of fear as we all know, tends to be only surface-deep. It cannot last. Love, which is the true Christian motivation must, therefore, be emphasized.

During the Spanish regime, we must have also observed that the values we discussed together with the methods of Christianization used by the Spaniards seem to have only brought about an external faith among the converts leading to a permanent formation of *exterior principles* among Filipinos.

Our *pakikisama* system, our *pasikatan* system and our authoritarian system also actually influenced those mass conversions which presupposes baptisms without the necessary preparations.

In this regard, we believe that the education of our people can remedy this problem. There should be a Catholic school in every parish. The tendency of the laity to participate in Church affairs is a good sign. This means that they can already reason out and not merely say *yes* out of *pakikisama* or respect of authority or because of admiration brought about by Church pageantry which is now little by little being minimized. More solid Christian *interior principles*, therefore, are slowly gaining ground within the Filipino soul. But religious education is still a must.

Meanwhile to remedy the bad effects of the American regime, we suggest that priests frequent the barrios so that our people there may have a more suitable expression of their religious needs. Seminaries should train seminarians on how to live in these rural areas. Temporary assignments bring a very bad effect to the ministry because lack of dedication is observed since one never knows when he will be transferred. This state only makes the priest dream for a better parish instead of transforming his present parish into the parish he dreams of. Permanent parishes are, therefore, suggested. Through these means, the alienation of our people from the Church will be at least lessened. Besides, it is still true that the presence of a priest and his example of total dedication to the teachings of Christ seen by the faithful can give them an assurance that our Christian principles are still relevant and thus more worth practicing than the pragmatic principles preached by the Americans.

About the present, we can say that our faithful are now faced by an apparent dilemma. Old beliefs, habits and devotions "are now discredited and made to seem foolish." On the other hand, the newer forms are "too sophisticated and too daring." These, in short, are the two tendencies which we have discussed, namely, personalization and socialization. We have pointed out that these two do not necessarily contradict each other. In their applications, prudence and vigilance must be the rule. For example, personalization which is equivalent to superstition must never be permitted. On the other hand, socialization which will hamper the ministry of the priest as when he attacks corrupt politicians with many relatives and followers in his parish from the pulpit must also be avoided.

To conclude, we can say that if we can only educate our people more, if we can only work for them with a little more dedication, if we can only implant in them the true Christian principle of charity, then there is a great hope that we shall succeed in injecting Christian motives in their daily lives. For, indeed, a nation with *amok* and *juramentados* cannot forever remain superficial in her beliefs.

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