

**THE FILIPINO CLERGY  
DURING  
THE SPANISH REGIME**

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PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE SPANISH COLONIZATION WHICH INFLUENCED THE SLOW FORMATION OF A FILIPINO CLERGY

**I. — THE SPANISH ROYAL PATRONAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

- a) Was it a real *cause*, or simply an *eventual occasion*, of the slow formation of a Filipino clergy?

The first accusation raised against the *Patronato Regio* to blame it for the slow formation of a native clergy is that *with it* the missions lost their *supernational* character, and consequently became unable to achieve fully the "planting of the Church" on the solid ground of a native clergy.

It is true that *under the Patronato system*, or better *during the epoch of the Patronato* the missions lost, *to a certain extent*, their *supernational* character; but it was *not because of the Patronato*, *with the Patronato* or *by the Patronato*. The simple proof is that even *without the Patronato* the so-called "*loss of supernational character*" of the missions would have taken place — *to a certain extent* — in any colonial mission land, due to the *evangelization undertaken through colonization* as it was the common case in the age of geographical discoveries. Not the *Patronato* but the very fact of *evangelization undertaken*, as it

seemed obvious and normal in those times, by *missionaries belonging to the colonial power* of the mission land was the real cause of a *certain nationalistic color* which tinged, in some way, the missions of the colonial period.

Our readers may notice that we underline and repeat the restrictive clause "in some way," "to a certain extent"; it is because we cannot assert sweepingly that in this period the missions lost their *supernational* character, and the missionaries in the colonies became *European agents, political instruments at the service of their own colonial regimes, foreign propagandists of the foreign interests of their own nations* in preference or even at the expense of the social and cultural patrimony as well as the political and national rights of the colonies. All such accusations might have been true with respect to some *particular cases* or *individual missionaries*; but in no way are such accusations justified when directed against the missionaries of any country *as a whole*. Catholic missionaries in general, abandoned their fatherland not moved by political motives but enkindled by apostolic zeal; looking for the salvation of souls and not for furthering their own national interests. Certainly, they did not and ought not have to lose or renounce the virtue of patriotism in order to become missionaries of Christ, Who was the first to give us the best example of true love for our own fatherland; but this love for one's own land has to be absolutely disregarded and put aside in the fulfillment of the evangelical mission, in such a way as to become, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, "everything by turns to everybody, to bring everybody salvation" (I Cor. 9, 1922). And this is what at times, some individual missionaries, human as they were, lost sight of to some extent; and still more, some colonial regimes under whose auspices the missionaries worked, tried to pay no heed to, in certain selfish policies imposed occasionally upon these missionaries. In this sense we can admit that during this age of *evangelization undertaken through colonization* the missions lost to a certain extent, in some way, their *supernational* character. The missionary activity of certain nations was then exercised, not exclusively indeed, but in special way, in their *colonies* or *protectorates*. France in Indochina, French Africa or Madagascar; Belgium in its Belgian Congo; Holland in Indonesia; and before them, Portugal and Spain in their overseas colonies (cf.

Angel Santos Hernandez, *Misionologia* . . . , op. cit., p. 513). It was then the normal and common practice that the missionaries of each nation should go to work in their respective colonies. It is not strange—although certainly to be regretted—that in such condition a certain “missionary nationalism” (“*pestis teterrima*” “most awesome pestilence” (as Pope Benedict XV styled it) might occasionally have crept into the very ranks of the missionaries, and still more in the political schemes of the governments under which they pursued their apostolic labor.

However, it is not entirely true, at least for the Spanish colonies, that the missions lost their *supernational* character, in all respects. The best proof is that we can notice in them a wonderful spirit of missionary adaptation: the missionaries, at least in the Philippines where the Spanish immigration was quite small, learned the native dialects and wrote the first grammars and vocabularies of the indigenous languages; preserved and fostered, improving or christianizing them when necessary, the customs, music, dances, arts and folklore of the natives; and although a notable degree of “europeanization” or “hispanization” was introduced by force of the colonial system it was not rigidly imposed by violent means, but through patient education so that it was gradually assimilated and integrated with the native culture itself in a precious blend of the “occidental” with the “oriental” which became in the course of time our own specific, truly original and national Filipino civilization, of which we may be rightly proud today.

Another proof that our missions did not lose totally, as writers seem to imply, their “supernational” character is the very clash which often took place between the missionaries and the civil authorities, in many cases because the former tried to defend the rights of the natives against the abuses of the foreign colonizers, in other cases because the missionaries refused to submit to unfair encroachments or interferences of the State against their rights as religious ministers of the Gospel and of the Catholic or Universal Church, as evangelical laborers sent by the Pope (although through the king, under the Royal Patronage) and recognizing always the Roman Pontiff, and not the Spanish king, as their Supreme Head and Pastor.

A further proof still is that, notwithstanding the general law of the Spanish colonies forbidding the admission of *foreigners* into the new lands under the Spanish regime, the law was most of the time very mildly interpreted and applied to *foreign missionaries*, and thus we can see from the 16th to the 19th centuries (that is, all the time of the Spanish colonization) a good number of foreign missionaries (quite a minority indeed as compared with the Spanish missionaries) working in Spanish American colonies and in the Philippines (cf. Lazaro de Aspuz, O.F.M. Cap., *La aportación extranjera a las Misiones españolas del Patronato regio*, Madrid, 1946 passim). It is worth noticing that such discriminating law against *foreigners* was then an accepted and common practice under all colonial regimes, at times with greater rigor in Portuguese, Dutch and English colonies than in the Spanish ones (Ibid., op. cit., p. 38). Catholic missions where foreign missionaries labored side by side (although in reduced numbers) with colonial and native priests, as it happened in Spanish-American colonies and in the Philippines, cannot be said to have lost entirely their *supernational* character.

Finally, it may well be remarked here that the aspersion cast upon the missionaries of the colonial times as if they acted in general as european agents and foreign propagandists of the interests of their own colonial regimes, has been more bitter in reference to the French missionaries than in regards to the Spanish ones. (cf. Angel Santos Hernandez, op. cit., p. 511.) And with respect to these last, the accusation may assume more resemblance of a truth if we consider the colonies where immigration became considerably great, as in America, than where the immigration from the mother country was too small to influence much in their favor the missionary policies of the Church, as it was the case in the Philippines.

However it may be, the accusation that *with the Patronato* the missions lost their *supernational* character is *not exact*, as we have already declared from the start. Whatever loss of *supernational* character there may have been in the missions of the colonial period should be traced back to the system of "*evangelization through or together with colonization*" as its *real cause*, and not to the *Patronato* or extraordinary privileges granted by the Roman Pontiff to the kings in charge of main-

taining that system, in recognition of the immense benefits derived for the propagation of the faith from that system, otherwise liable to bring along eventually some evil effects through abuses, defects or misunderstanding of the all but too human persons involved in it. Certain loss of the *supernational* character of Catholic missions seems to be inherent as an effect of undertaking the work of "*evangelization through or together with the task of colonization*," since the colonization is carried out by *one particular nation*, and thus the evangelization is also practically undertaken by *that particular nation*. The Patronato then comes only to give a formal recognition of that position of affairs, grants it officially a permanent status, elevating it to a privileged situation in acknowledgment of its beneficial fruits for the Church.

Even if that state of affairs (sc. "*evangelization through or together with colonization*") would have not been privileged by the rights of the *Patronato*, the alleged loss of *supernational* character of the missions could have taken place just as well wherever the mission personnel would belong almost exclusively to one particular nation and would work more or less directly under the auspices of that nation. Such was the case of the missions in French colonies, for instance, which were not under any Royal Patronage, and whose missionaries, as we have said above, have been most bitterly accused of "missionary nationalism."

What in all justice can be admitted at most is that the *Patronato* not only did sanction but also confirm and *officially* recognize and establish an already existing system, ("*evangelization through colonization*") which although *essentially good and beneficial* in itself could *incidentally cause some detriment* to the missionary enterprise by giving it a certain *nationalistic taint* quite contrary to the *supernational* character of all Catholic missions. Only in this way, may the *Patronato* be said to have *possibly and indirectly* caused detrimental repercussions in achieving the ultimate goal of the missions, the formation as soon as possible of a native clergy.

The second accusation in this regard against the *Patronato* is that with it the formation of a local clergy was seriously hindered by the "European" organization given to the Church in those far missions, so widely different in most of their conditions from the centuries-old christianities of Europe.

Certainly, we agree and believe that the alleged fact was a serious mistake and became a serious handicap for the quick formation of a native clergy. But it was due to the unpreparedness of the missionaries of that epoch to face and meet a situation absolutely new for them; the Church had not yet developed by that time her doctrine and methods of missionary adaptation to the degree they are understood today.

However, we simply cannot see how the *Patronato* can be blamed for this fact; there seems to be no relation at all between the one and the other. Or shall we say that it was because the *Patronato* was granted to "European" Catholic nations? But, to what other nations could the missionary effort be entrusted then? Or should we say that it might not have been granted to any particular nation, that it might have never existed, reserving all the missions to the exclusive charge of the Holy See alone? But, the Holy See was in Europe, the Church of those days knew only of an "European" organization, and the missionaries which the Holy See would have sent could not be other than Europeans, and would have just the same established in those far mission an "European" organization, as the missionaries under the *Patronato* did. The defect, then cannot be attributed to the *Patronato*; it was a mistake and a consequence of the times, rather than of the men.

The third accusation is that under the *Patronato*, never was it thought of the need of forming an indigenous clergy or establishing an indigenous Church. When an indigenous clergy was mentioned or referred to, it was always with the aim of giving an *auxiliary* clergy, *subservient* to the European pastors, and *nothing more*.

This accusation, so often repeated, based though it may be on certain misleading facts, is certainly untrue, and cannot withstand the evidence on the contrary afforded by a close and critical examination of historical documents. In Chapter I, art. 2, and Chapter II, art. 2 of this study we have presented good enough evidence that from the beginning of the Philippine evangelization the missionaries and civil authorities under the *Patronato* thought of and actually worked for

the formation of a native, nay, and indigenous clergy. We may just recall here that the first Spanish Bishop of the Philippines, the Dominican Domingo de Salazar, as early as in 1581 decided to established a Seminary "secundum sancti decretum Concilii (Tridentini)" to form *as soon as possible* a worthy INDIGENOUS FILIPINO clergy to whom should belong by right and in virtue of his apostolic authority the ecclesiastical benefices of the Church in the Philippines: "donec in posterum, visa et cognita *per nos* et successores nostros christianitate et capacitate INDORUM, eis dicta beneficia conferri possint; tunc enim iisdem INDIS NATURALIBUS . . . *conferenda esse et conferre volumus et apostolica auctoritate decernimus*"; and that these were no empty words or mere wistful dreams, we may be sure at the sight of the actual efforts and deeds achieved by the zealous Bishop, generously seconded and encouraged by the first Spanish missionaries, ecclesiastical and civil authorities of the Islands during the 16th century (as we have already seen in the above Chapters) and in the following centuries to the end of the Spanish regime, as we shall see in the course of this study.

With regards to Spanish America, it may be enough to recall here the two early (most probably, too premature) foundation of the Seminary College of Sancta Cruz in Santiago Tlatelolco, Mexico in 1536 through the efforts of the Viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza, Archbishop Fray Juan de Zumarraga, O.F.M., and other Franciscan Spanish missionaries, with the approval of the king of Spain, following the still earlier suggestion made in 1525 by the Spanish Contador (Treasurer) Rodrigo de Albornoz (cf. Carlo Santi, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-126), for the formation of an AMERICAN-INDIGENOUS clergy. It is beyond the scope of our study to investigate here the vicissitudes in the American colonies under the *Patronato*. But it may be opportune to remark that in the II Council of Lima, Perú, where, as the famous missionologist and missionary himself, Jose de Acosta, S.J., puts it, "PRUDENTER est a maioribus constitutum ut *nemo ex Indorum genere, sacerdotio aut gradu aliquo ecclesiastico donetur*" (cf. ACOSTA, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute*, lib. VI, cap. XIX, p. 565) in 1567, the very same words used later by our first Bishop Salazar indicating not

only a thought but a decided plan to form an INDIGENOUS CLERGY, are found: "donec in posterum visa et cognita per Nos et successores nostros christianitate Indorum . . . visum fuerit, INDIS etiam NATURALIBUS dicta beneficia esse providenda" (cf. Santi, op. cit., p. 149). From which provision added to the law forbidding provisionally or or for the time being the ordination for indigenous candidates to the priesthood, we may well conclude that this as well as other similar discriminating laws precluding the admission of the indigenous race to the Holy Orders ought to be understood as referring to indigenous candidates" . . . illegitimis, vel ad alios minus meritis, aut incapacibus" as the illustrious canonist JUAN DE SOLORZAON (cf. *De Indiarum Iure*, Lugduni 1672, t. II, lib. III, cap. XX, p. 683) declares, and by no means out of any racial discrimination (Sancti, op. cit., pp. 148-149).

And let us notice, on the passing, that from the words "ecclesiastical benefices" used by Bishop Salazar and by the II Council of Lima in the documents cited above, it is clearly seen that the aim of the Church authorities under the Patronato both in the Philippines as in America was certainly *not* to form an indigenous clergy to be given as an *auxiliary* to the European clergy. In Canon Law a curate or a coadjutor is not considered to possess an "ecclesiastical benefice" (cf. can. 142). Hence, the same texts cited above come to prove that it is a gratuitous and erroneous supposition the claim that when an indigenous clergy was mentioned under the Patronato it was *always* with the aim of giving an *auxiliary, subservient* clergy to assist the European pastors, and *nothing more*. This might have been true in some particular cases, under certain peculiar circumstances; but certainly *not always*. Under the Portuguese *Padroado*, in 1585 it seems that in India "the idea of developing the native clergy and training them in such a way that they would be able gradually to replace the European clergy even in offices of greater responsibility did not occur to them (to the Portuguese missionaries of India)" remarks Carlos Merces de Melo (in his work *The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy in India, 16th-19th century*, Lisboa, 1955, p. 141); and he adds instantly: "No wonder, it was much too early then (in 1585), to think of that!" after more than three quarters of a century of evangelization in India. In the Philippines, however, we had the good fortune of



falling under the Spanish *Patronato*, and within the first quarter of the first century of evangelization, in 1581, our first Spanish Bishop, Domingo de Salazar, following the ideals pursued by the Spanish Fathers of the II Council of Lima in America, in his letters for the execution of the Bull of erection of the Manila Diocese, was already planning and dreaming on the granting of ecclesiastical benefices in a near future to the INDIGENOUS, full-blooded Filipino clergy. And from the words he used it seems that he intended to confer upon this indigenous clergy the ecclesiastical benefices in preference to any other foreign clergy; so that, if there were still foreign priests to work in the Philippines, they were to form an *auxiliary, subservient* clergy to the *indigenous priests!* Exactly the opposite of what is commonly admitted by the accusation we are refuting!

One thing is to say that for a longer time than what was convenient, or to a greater extent than what might have been opportune, the Filipino clergy remained in a subordinate position, as assistant of the Spanish clergy, due to various factors and peculiar circumstances of the times (and not on account of race discrimination); and another quite different thing is to affirm that the policy of the State and the aim of the Church authorities under the *Patronato* was to keep that *status quo of a subservient* indigenous clergy to assist the European clergy as mere curates. The first fact, we do admit; the second claim seems to us untenable in view of the evidence we have found and we shall see later in the course of this study. Who does not know in the Church history of Spanish America and the Philippines under the *Patronato* about the ever periodically recurring efforts made by the Church and State authorities to *secularize the parishes*, which, for all practical purposes and in the Philippines especially where this came to be known as "*Filipinization of parishes*," meant a removal of the Spanish religious pastors to put in their place the secular *native* priests as rectors of the parochial churches? If such efforts failed, and the proposed aim did not crystallize, at least they served to prove how gratuitous is the affirmation that under the Spanish *Patronato* never was it thought of forming a native clergy, and much less to establish an autonomous indigenous Church, with its own clergy (and not a foreign one) to rule it and assume full responsibility of the pastoral ministry.