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FAITH, FATE AND FORTUNE

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The lowland population of the Philippines which includes the larger language groups in the islands usually finds distinction in belonging to "the only Christian nation in Asia."

Christianity in the Philippines today has moved up into the highland groups and deeper into the interior. Catholic and Protestant missionary effort in this country continues.

The Christianity in the Philippines is largely defined by adherence to the Roman Catholic Church. And some 83 percent of Filipinos profess this faith.

In high schools, Filipino students are constantly reminded that one of the eternal contributions of Spain to Philippine history is the Catholic religion. A perusal of Philippine history does sustain this statement. It

was this religion which the early Spanish-Mexican missionaries nurtured in this archipelago that was to provide a common faith for conglomerations of etho-linguistic groups.

Some Filipino scholars have even asked the question: "What if Spain did not come to the Philippines?"

Of course the answer, at best, would still remain a speculation. The fact is — Spain ruled the Philippines for over 300 years.

Another fact is that the first Filipino converts to Catholicism were those already settled in the coastal areas. Until the close of the nineteenth century, Catholic missionary work in the hinterlands was a painful effort.

In the south, in the area of Mindanao, Palawan and Sulu, where Islam had earlier established strongholds,

Catholicism was to content itself with small outposts. And these had to be backed by force.

Checked in the south, missionary work in the interior of the large islands and the mountainous region of northern Luzon, was till the beginning of the American occupation, stymied by strong indigenous religions.

Since the turn of the century, however, Catholicism has made deeper penetrations inland.

Catholicism today, with roots extending back 300 years, has suffered change in practice and in belief. This was inevitable. For when Spain moved into the Philippines, the islands although politically disunited, more or less, enjoyed a common culture bolstered by a system of ritual and beliefs differing only in the pantheon of gods. Upon this cultural matrix, Spain imposed a new religion. The result today as can be gleaned is a merger or blend of Christian doctrine and rites with pre-conquest beliefs and practices.

The Christianity that has found meaning to the larger mass of Catholics is describ-

ed by scholars as a "rich folk Catholicism."

For the new religion was only accepted along lines where the early Filipino with his own naive metaphysics, could welcome change without profound psychological discomforts. The process was dramatic. Although a Portuguese navigator by the name of Fernao de Magalhaes stumbled upon these islands in 1521, and in the name of Spain saw fit to consider these lands a Spanish discovery, it was not until about the middle of the seventeenth century that the Hispanization process began.

This so-called period of colonization saw an echelon of zealous and sanguine Catholic missionaries from Mexico, the New Spain, move into the Philippines.

The redoubtable religious orders — Franciscans, Dominicans, Recollects and Jesuits — trickling in from their spiritual hearths in the New World, had accepted a new challenge.

Conversion of the inhabitants of these islands to Christianity was, however, only a stepping stone to conquest and exploitation.

But here were a people whose lives were already locked in their own concept of the universe. The task of the early missionaries was to win a people over to the side of a new faith, something which they knew the populace would have to understand and accept as something better.

The initial task of conversion was not as easy as is nicely told in Philippine history books.

The early Spanish missionaries knew that they first faced with a terrific language problem. Next, they also knew that it would demand an understanding of the culture of the people. Only after having learned the language and having lived with the people, could ideas of change be inducted. Hence, it is to the early Spanish priest-historians that Filipino scholars today can be indebted for their narratives of the life-ways of the Filipinos at that time.

If the Philippines today is a highly Christianized country it is because of the fact that the idea of a new religion was finally accepted by the larger groupings of Fili-

pinos. A new set of ideas was pushed across an entirely strange cultural setting. Although we feel that some form of coercion was used, still we believe that religion could only be sold on its own merits.

The early Spanish missionaries already knew the concept of 'motivational research.' We are rather inclined to disbelieve the view that Catholicism was rammed down the Filipino's throat.

We tend to believe that Catholicism was pushed in a slow and painful effort in a kind of 'soft sell' approach. Cultural mechanisms had to be discovered and tapped and this the Spanish missionaries did.

The social structure of the early Filipinos was analyzed. Only, to our thinking, a full understanding of lines of descent, inheritance, residential patterns, authority figures, generational respect, familial roles and kinship terminology could have guided the early missionaries into winning over a largely matriarchy-oriented population to accepting the symbol and

the implications of the Holy Mother.

The kind of Catholicism introduced into the Philippines was not based on the reconquista tradition, which by its nature was a well-defined crusading faith that Spain had mounted a military (and bloody) *jihad* against the "infidels."

The Christianity brought to or imposed upon the Philippines in the seventeenth century was already a humanized affair touched with the ideals of the Renaissance.

Then, the hierarchy of the church and the state was of the view that the "evangelical enterprise should provide their compatriots with no licence to trample over the legitimate rights of the natives." (Andrew Phelan in 'Hispanization of the Philippines.')

It was the great wish of the Spanish king at the outset that the Filipinos be spared the Mexican and Peruvian holocaust. Spanish imperialism was to be gentle and forceful but not bloody.

After all, the larger objectives of the Spanish adventure into this part of the world were: (1) to push Por-

tugal out of the spice trade, (2) establish a base for further missionary work in China and Japan, and (3) to Christianize the archipelago.

The actual Hispanization process began in 1565 when Legaspi's Mexico-based expedition finally made a foothold on the islands.

Church and state in the Spanish view being one, the concept of conversion was to be directed toward getting the inhabitants 'under the bell.'

For the Spanish missionaries discovered that while some population clustered in small villages, there were others in the outlying areas. Conversion could be a very difficult thing. To get the population concentrated in accessible points was both a religious and political job. To accomplish this, the Mexican-Spanish missionaries not only borrowed from their experiences in Mexico and Peru but also had to introduce some innovations.

The big towns of the Philippines today have their hearts in the plaza dominated by the church on one side and the town hall on the other. But before making

new changes on the landscape, it was necessary to convince the Filipino that the new religion was much better. Since the old religions still thrived, it was again deemed necessary that all symbols of native belief be destroyed.

Wooden idols and so-called sacred groves were declared idolatrous and destroyed. Almost anything that seemed to bear an indigenous thought was consigned to the flames. The early Filipinos watched these desecrations of the religion of their ancestors with, we believe, no small amount of protest.

But in the cultural setting then obtaining, it was the powerful god that must rule. And the power of the Christian God was made eloquent in the booming of the Castilian cannon, the gleaming armour and weaponry of its new Far Eastern conquistadores. The Christian God was championed against all and any gods.

The Spanish soldiery that backed up the conversion movement was, to our thinking, the one big factor that finally broke through native

resistance, both in mind and in spirit.

This was on the military plane. But the early Spanish missionaries, really accomplished much on the psychological plane. Soldiery was only brought in when the convincing had met a hostile resistance.

Working their way into the very mind of the people, the Spanish missionaries used some gimmicks, knowledge of persuasion and 'miracles.' Every town almost in the Philippines has some kind of 'miracle' connected with the person of the patron saint.

But it was in the fiesta, an annual festivity in a town or barrio, celebrated in honor of a patron saint, that the new religion finally came to terms with the values of an old culture.

Phelan in his book summarizes the Hispanization of the Philippines thus:

"From the viewpoint of the Church, the Catholicism of the Filipinos left much to be desired. The quality of indoctrination was not always adequate, nor did converts always participate fully in the sacramental life of the

Church. Outward religious formalism, rather than sound doctrinal knowledge, the triple dangers of idolatry, superstition and magic, added to the infrequency in the administration of the sacraments, were all defects which could have been partially remedied by a well-trained Filipino clergy."

Catholicism in the Philippines today, to its larger adherents, seems to be defined by a compromise arrived at centuries back between the new and the old religions.

The early Filipinos accepted many features of the new religion, but they also retained certain features of their own. Hence, the view that Christianity in the Philippines today, to a large extent, is a kind of 'folk Catholicism.'

It's a new and foreign religion accepted and adapted by a people whose basic outlook toward life had already been sunk in their ancient subconscious.

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The Catholic Filipino worships God, believes in the

Bible, goes to church on Sundays — but he also conceives of the Lord as a "giver of gifts," performs certain rituals and reads omens in so many things.

The sweepstake is an almost weekly affair in the Philippines. To win a major prize and a big purse, the typical Filipino today would invoke not only his Christian God but also a belief-idea that could guarantee a high probability score "to make it."

The ritual demanded to accomplish this end, again, is worked through the rituals of the Catholic religion, but ever strengthened by other formulas based on numerology, astrology and superstition.

But over the years, all these acts of propitiation and an intelligent reasoning on Faith have been so blended that form and substance in spiritual affairs have achieved a certain consistency. And the average Filipino does not feel ill at ease in moving through this channel of behavior and action.

But he has begun to feel ill at ease because the religion he has finally imposed

upon himself suffers from inner inconsistencies.

These inconsistencies form, as a Filipino historian has pointed out, one stumbling block to the Philippines moving forward.

For the Filipino believes in technical progress. He can appreciate this. But he is not quite so willing to alter a

tradition fortified by his present system of worship and ritual.

It is again a strange thing but the Catholic Church in the Philippines can see this 'change' clearly and, against an almost fixed matrix of tradition, Filipinos are moving forward. — *The Asia Magazine*.

ECONOMIC CZARINA?

The way things are going now, says Ernesto del Rosario of the *Manila Chronicle*, Senator Maria-Kalaw Katigbak may soon be the 'economic czarina of the Republic.' Dr. Jose Katigbak, notes del Rosario, is already head of the ACCFA. Senator Katigbak's son in law Armand Fabella is Program Implementation Agency director and her nephew Sixto Roxas is chairman of the National Economic Council and the Rice and Corn Agency.

"Some people say [Senator Katigbak] is also related to Executive Secretary Rufino Hechanova [Senator Katigbak], the first crowned beauty queen of the country, was Visayan like Fenny." Some set-up, indeed!