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A Banahaw Guru, by Marasigan

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casional passages of ideological prose – especially when he is protesting that “The U.S. interests, IMF-WB loans, military bases, and TNCs protected by the puppet government continue to dominate us” (p. 53). And it could be argued (as I would argue) that such a view is simplistic and, at best, half-true. But such passages are surprisingly rare. Gaspar’s overriding concern is with the living out of the *Gospel* message of good news and liberation for the poor. He quotes liberally from, and reflects movingly upon, the scriptures, the statements of Popes and Councils, and such diverse figures as Pablo Neruda, Teilhard de Chardin and the Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel. His fellow prisoners were blessed in at least one sense: They were exposed to a liberal Christian “education” such as few of us are privileged to experience!

Section 6 (“Liturgical Feasts and Celebrations”) and 7 (“Various Reflections and Challenges”) provide especially rich material for meditation on the meaning of Jesus Christ for our place and day. They also point up a problem with a book like this: how does one unify a collection of letters and occasional topics? How provide a focus to prevent centrifugal forces from tearing the book apart? While there are parts of this one which drag and seem repetitive, on the whole Sisters Graham and Noonan have succeeded admirably in their task of unification. I suspect, though, that it is really Karl Gaspar who solved the problem. Despite the extraordinary range of his interests and concerns and contacts, he is a man with an integrated vision of life. One passage captures it beautifully: “A church that refuses to be incarnated in the lives of the poor and powerless has no right to claim to be witnessing to the gospel. A church that celebrates the people’s struggle to be fully human by being in the center of this historical, creative process is truly Christ’s legacy for his followers through the ages” (p. 101). Anyone who resonates to that vision of the meaning of the Church will find Karl Gaspar’s *How Long?* a deeply moving and an enriching experience.

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A BANAHAW GURU, SYMBOLIC DEEDS OF AGAPITO ILLUSTRISIMO. By Vicente Marasigan, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985. 190 pages.

A Banahaw Guru is a book about religiosity relating the author’s attempt to live and come to grips with the religious experience and world of thought of the members of the Tatlong Persona Solo Dios sect near Dolores Quezon, on Mt. Banahaw, in the Philippines. The purposes of this endeavour are to explore the gap between two cultures, namely, between the more Western-

ized and the less Westernized Filipino cultures, and to rediscover the positive elements in popular piety in order to learn to purify the participant observer's and/or the community's religiosity of its negative elements.

The author is a Jesuit theologian and philosopher and sees himself as a rational, scientific man. As such he is a representative of the "more Westernized Filipino culture." In order to achieve understanding he follows the recommendations of Lonergan's *Method in Theology* that recognizes the operations of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. The first three of these operations directly lead to interpretations of "Banahaw religiosity" that are based on the experience of coworshipping and living in a face-to-face situation with the members of the sect and on a document, "Mga Dakilang Kasaysayan ng Amang Ilustrisimo" (MDKAI), that relates the "symbolic deeds of Agapito Ilustrisimo," the founder of the sect and the title's Banahaw Guru.

The author seeks an "immersion experience," which inevitably leads to "intellectual conversion" or good old-fashioned empathy (Einfühlung"). In this sense the report is avowedly doubly subjective: it relates the immersion experience of the author and his "intellectual conversion" resulting from an intensely personal confrontation with a seemingly mystical world of piety. Whereas the author is keenly aware of the limitations of this approach — "objectivity and my subjective states of consciousness seem incompatible" — the report offers just this: a subjective interpretation of subjective experiences and reading. He allows, however, for better interpretations and sees his work as a mere beginning of the endeavour of understanding Filipino peasant religiosity.

This modesty leaves us with a report that is difficult to criticize. Whereas the method is subjective and "theological," the book has three commendable points. The first is that it takes the "other Filipinos" seriously while becoming aware of the limitations of one's own world view. The second is a highly preliminary description of a type of religiosity and its concomitant world view. The third is the publication, in the original Tagalog and in English translation, of a document about the biography and peregrinations of the founder of the sect as compiled by its members. It may be of interest to elaborate these points.

Fr. Marasigan's approach clearly recognizes the existence of two cultures in the Philippines that he acknowledges as the more and the less Westernized. I think that the contrast is more vehement. There are the members of an alienated, foreign-oriented, miseducated urban mestizo culture that is seriously in doubt about its roots, and the members of a more firmly rooted culture who are often referred to as "the common tao." The former are presumably special. For a long time the special people have been so busily depending on whatever came from across the ocean that they simply neglected the place where they were standing since their dependency is being questioned, their native soil and origins are gradually growing in interest. Very

slowly the culture of lowland Christian Filipinos is beginning to be explored for its own sake and as a potential source of roots and identification.

A shared sense of religiosity may very well be a crucial element that ties the two Filipino cultures together while being a key in the search for roots. Fr. Marasigan approaches this subject from a stark contrast, yet his respectful and loving description is commendable and his personal attraction to the undiluted and spontaneous religiosity of the Mt. Banahaw people sounds like a homecoming from the artfulness of Loyola Heights.

If we take a look at the substantive description of Banahaw religiosity, I do not hesitate to call it highly preliminary. Of course, a beginning has to be made somewhere and that is the merit of this enterprise, but the immersion experience leads to the confusion of empathy and observation, and therefore fails to produce a tangible description. Consequently the reader remains in the dark about the origin of the sect's members, their number, spread and organization, economic basis and means. They are poor squatter farmers leading an ascetic, contemplative life in which religious ritual and closeness to nature occupy central positions and they are inspired by "The Voice," whispering spirits and dreams, but we fail to get much information about their cosmology and world view, about their conceptions about the relationship of man with God and supernature, about eschatology, about man as such. The reader cannot even decide whether the Banahaw religiosity described is of an individual-centered mystical type or rather a formally organized, ritualistic communal variety. Whereas the description tends toward the latter type, this may merely be the view of the author as a representative of "official," formally organized religion.

The interpretation of the MDKAI document is not very convincing as long as it is not more closely connected with the cosmology and world view of the people who produced the document. As it stands it smells too much of the theological arm-chair and elegant overinterpretations in the direction of modern Catholic thinking ("human dignity"; "spiritual warfare"; etc.). On the other hand, to have made available and translated an original document that will contribute to the construction of the points of view "from below" is very meritorious indeed.

The study of Filipino mentality, such as revealed in the expressions of lowland Christian culture, is still in its infancy and precious little is known about the possibly greatest of unifying institutions, namely, Filipino religion and the spirit that pervades it. Quiapo processions, *penitencias*, a sense of sin, faith healing and sense of trust, Rizalista cults, *anting-anting*, *adoraciones*, magical practices, fiestas, pilgrimages and other devotions, or even formally organized religion, have hardly been studied. It even seems that these very basic expressions of Filipino mentality are denied their existence by the secularized social scientists of UP and the Ateneo. Consequently it is still

possible to publish entire books about Filipino psychology and world view without any reference to religious expression. In that sense Fr. Marasigan's book should be greeted as a highly welcome contribution to the still fledgeling study of Filipino religion and its mentality.

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CUENTOS. By Lina Espina-Moore. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985. 134 pages.

Cuentos by Lina Espina-Moore, fiction writer and journalist, is a collection of a dozen stories which transcend the boundaries of setting, i.e., the author's native Cebu and the Central Cordilleras, her home for seventeen years.

A sentence from "Night Out With Id" illustrates the author's favorite theme: "There is a twilight—a time when it is neither light nor dark, as there are also twilight women—wives functioning as such; women who are free but not that free; women deeply in love, loved in return but [who] can make no claim on the lover" (p. 99). In short, Moore writes of women entrapped in an illusory world with only an impenetrable void for company.

In "Holiday From Fear" for instance, Mariana's loneliness and fear of being alone are detected by Anna, from whose consciousness the story unfolds. For Mary (her self-appointed name) and her string of affairs, "there must have been a deep longing to be admired and just, perhaps, wanting the sweet choice to reject or accept admiration" (p. 17). This longing is her respite from the ultimate fear of isolation. But her holiday, like all holidays, ends. She dies alone, adorned with artificial flowers.

Cora, a "crisp" young widow in "The Ugly Man" is an "uncomplicated graphic artist" enjoying herself in her "happy, perfect world," only to discover life and herself in the ugly and the complicated as personified by Alex, "the ugly man."

In "Sam-it and The Loom," Sam-it, the Igorot housemaid, witnesses the disintegration of the devout Mrs. Allen upon the sudden death of her husband. Ironically, it is the pagan Sam-it who understands and has time for her mistress, not the so-called religious women from the Church. The discovery of Mrs. Allen's grotesque "bundles" (dead animals with their life histories) prompts them to ask, "Now, what right have we to be making new Christians when we have no patience, no heart, no time for our own?" (p. 33).

"The Silent Hills" develops Elisa's war trauma, her struggle between "common sense and Christian charity." Her painful experience with the Japanese in the war planted the seed of hatred in Elisa. Dr. Sato, a Japanese woman anthropologist "reads" Elisa's "surface accommodations," "for it is a woman