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The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania 1825 to 1850

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Tao?; Kabanata II – Etika: Ano ang Kabutihan?; Kabanata III – Teodiseya: Ano ang Diyos?), this book touches on practically all the relevant philosophical questions pertaining to man, morality and religion.

In its attempt to be comprehensive, the book has to sacrifice a lot of depth. Except for some exceptional parts like the treatment on wealth (Maha-laga Ba ang Kayamanan?), most topics are oversimplified. Sartre's Existentialism with its notion of freedom is presented as very similar to Thomism and Aristotle – to the neglect of Existentialism's emphasis on feeling. Marx is reduced to several paragraphs, centered on the problem of which is more important, environment or man's freedom? (Phenomenologists will certainly react to this false dichotomy!)

With some additions on Chinese ethics in Chapter II and the problem of evil in Chapter III, this book would make a good textbook for a course on a general introduction to Philosophy in Pilipino.

And this is the outstanding merit of the book: it is written in Pilipino. Though some terms need to be revised (e.g. "indefinable" on page 43 cannot be translated as *walang kahulugan* which means "meaningless," *katalagahan* on page 98 would mean "reality" rather than "determinism"), the book as a whole proves that Pilipino can be used as a medium of instruction in philosophy and for philosophizing. Dr. Emerita S. Quito has already proven this in her two other works: *Ang Pilosopiya sa Diwang Pilipino* (United Publishing Co., Inc., 1972) and *Kasaysayan ng Pilosopiya* (Zone Printing Co., Inc., 1974).

Practically half of the book contains short, translated excerpts of the major works of the philosophers mentioned in the three chapters, (Quito's included). Again, this proves that Pilipino is not short of philosophical terminology, not to mention the universality ('Catholicity' in the author's term) of philosophy.

But is that all there is to writing philosophy in Pilipino? What is there in philosophy that writing or teaching it in Pilipino makes a lot of difference?

Manuel B. Dy, Jr.

THE FOUNDING OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN OCEANIA
1825 TO 1850. By Ralph M. Wiltgen. Canberra: Australia National University Press, 1979. xxiii + 610 pages.

When the subject is Oceania, the talk is not about the admittedly vast expanse of sea between California and the Philippine or Indonesian Archipelago, but of how far apart from each other are the small islands of this region: the Hawaiian Islands, Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, Easter Island, Marquesas

Islands, and the Tuamotu Archipelago. In 1978, it had an estimated population of 23,000, of which only 6,000 were Roman Catholics. It has today 66 ecclesiastical sees or jurisdictions. How the Roman Catholic Church was planted in these islands is the subject of Wiltgen's long book.

It has been said that had Magellan steered along the lower latitudes, he would not have hit the future Philippine Archipelago, and history would have followed a different course. As it is, while the Marianas and Guam had already been evangelized by the Spanish missionaries since 1668, the southern Pacific Islands were discovered only a century later and Roman Catholicism was brought there only in the second quarter of the last century.

Towards the end of 1824, Jean-Baptiste Rives, a French cabin-boy who had won the confidence of the royal family in Honolulu, presented to the French government a plan for a commercial and religious enterprise to the Pacific Islands. To recruit priests, he contacted the Superior of the Paris Foreign Mission Seminary. The latter had no priests to send, but he promised to interest the proper authorities in Rome.

At about the same time, Father Marie-Joseph-Pierre Coudrin, founder of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, also known as the Picpus Fathers, because their main house in Paris was at Rue de Picpus, was in Rome seeking approval of his Rule. Taking advantage of the situation, the papal secretary of state who was also the pro prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Nations (formerly the S. Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), offered the new mission of Hawaii to Father Coudrin. It was thus, that through the initiative of an adventurous Catholic, the first Catholic mission in the Hawaiian Islands was established in 1825.

Three years later, Peter Dillon, an Irish Catholic, returned to Europe after discovering the wreckage of the fleet of the famous Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de la Pérouse, who had disappeared while on a scientific expedition around the world. Challenged by some native South Pacific islanders to send them "some members of your religion to teach us what is right" (p. 23), Dillon approached the rector of the Irish Seminary in Paris. The latter introduced him to Gabriel-Henri-Jerome de Solages, a priest who had always wanted to work in the South Sea Islands, just named Prefect Apostolic of Bourbon (now Réunion) Island east of Madagascar. "Our ideas were identical," wrote the Prefect Apostolic, "both for the plan to be followed as well as for the places where the missions were to be established" (p. 25).

Now the plot thickens. De Solages needed priests and material resources. Because of the distance from Europe, Dillon suggested using the annual government boat in order to send supplies to Reunion. Since the boat returned empty, it could stop and unload both cargo and personnel at the various South Pacific Islands which had not yet been evangelized. The idea seemed good and, soon, efforts were made to extend the jurisdiction of de Solages to include all the islands below the equator, from Easter Island to New Zealand

inclusive. In other words, he was going to be the sole ecclesiastical superior of more than one-fourth of the southern hemisphere, or more than 65 million square kilometers! Nor was this all. With the resignation of the Prefect Apostolic of Madagascar, de Solages was also given charge of an island more than 200 times larger than Reunion.

Where was he going to recruit his priests? He approached Coudrin who, after an initial pause, declined on the ground that it were better the Picpus Fathers have no other superior than their own Superior General. On the other hand, since Eastern Oceania was relatively close to the Hawaiian Islands, Coudrin began to think it might not be a bad thing if some of those islands fell within the jurisdiction of Hawaii. This meant slicing off territory over which de Solages wanted to exercise jurisdiction.

Both men appealed to Rome. But de Solages, moving faster, was named Prefect Apostolic *also* of the South Sea Islands on 10 January 1830, the day before Coudrin wrote his official request.

One of the good points of the book is Wiltgen's detailed analysis of the decision-making process in the papal curia. While the original idea of founding missions in the Pacific came from lay men, it was the papal decision, based on the advise of the Evangelization Congregation, that gave it reality. But, as the author clearly shows, this had its drawbacks. Decisions made in Rome, far from the missions, and by men often unaware of local conditions, were not always the best. More than once, decisions were made depending on who "got the ear" of the pope. To call this intrigue is not quite correct; rather, it is the story of people with the best of intentions, but whose plans worked at cross-purposes with one another. Experience, unforeseen difficulties, and the clash of personalities, even human ambition – unconsciously clothed as zeal for souls – led to frequent modifications of original plans.

The book covers only a period of twenty-five years: from 1825, when the first Prefecture was created, to 1850, when there were already one archdiocese, eight dioceses, and eight vicariates apostolic in Oceania. During these years, more than one missionary died; but there had also been "remarkable growth indeed and much good had been done" (p. 548).

Wiltgen's familiarity with the original sources is patent in every page, but it also explains the weakness of his book. Based on the official documents and correspondence of the people involved, *The Founding of the Church in Oceania* is a study of the institutional church rather than of the conversion and christianization of the Pacific islanders whose acceptance or refusal of Roman Catholicism is, after all, the key to the growth of the Church in Oceania. One also wishes there were some discussion of the mission methods employed, or a description of the native cultures in the islands. In today's efforts to express the Christian message in the local culture and language, it is therefore surprising that Wiltgen devotes only a few paragraphs late in the book to describe some native social usages (p. 364f).

One familiar with the history of the missions in the Philippines will notice certain parallelisms and differences in the way the two areas developed. In the Philippines, it was through the Spanish *patronato real* that the missionaries solved many of their material difficulties, e.g. travel and support, protection from unconverted and hostile natives; whereas, in Oceania, appeal was made to the French government which had no similar mechanism but was nevertheless willing to do what lay in its power. Significantly, as in the Philippines, the missionaries in Oceania were wary of unlimited contact between their new converts and the whites who were a scandal rather than a help to their apostolate. And interestingly, just as the Jesuits in the last century had to prove to the Tirurays in Mindanao that they were staying permanently before they won the latter's trust, so also the possibility that the Passionists would leave their western Australian missions was frowned upon lest the natives "lose all confidence in the missionaries, persuaded that others would forsake them in like manner" (p. 376).

Wiltgen goes out of his way to explain certain facts that might not normally be understood by the reader, but in doing so, he unnecessarily clutters up his style which does not make for easy reading. For example, he adds in a parenthetical afterthought, that a letter from Lyons to Rome took two weeks, or C.M. means Congregation of the Mission, whose other names are Lazarists or Vincentians (pp. 145, 169).

A few factual errors regarding the Philippines could have been avoided had the author or his editors taken time to verify them. The famous Manila galleon plying the Manila-Acapulco-Manila route did *not* make "numerous" stops enroute, but only at Guam (p. 176). There were several Parians in Manila and elsewhere in the Philippines, but the lot on which the first Dominican convent was built in 1587 adjacent to the *second* Parian was not outside the walls of Manila, either before or after the walls were constructed (p. 178). The province of Batangas is in southern Luzon, but Bataan is immediately north of the city of Manila. And Bocavi is now spelled *Bocawe* (p. 280).

Despite the above errors, which are minor, *The Foundation of the Church in Oceania* is a good book. One hopes that Wiltgen will soon produce a companion volume that discusses the process itself of the conversion of the islanders and their special way of expressing their faith.

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