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Philippine Christianity: The Protestant View: “Vier Hunderte Christentum Auf Den Philippinen”

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Book Reviews

PHILIPPINE CHRISTIANITY: THE PROTESTANT VIEW

"VIER HUNDERTE CHRISTENTUM AUF DEN PHILIPPINEN".

By Gerald H. Anderson and Peter G. Gowing. In *Evangelische Missions-Zeitschrift*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May 1964).

"Vier Hunderte Christentum auf den Philippinen" is the title of the first of three articles in *Evangelische Missions-Zeitschrift* (Vol. 21, No. 2, May 1964), devoted to the fourth centenary of Christianity in the Philippines. Originally written in English by Gerald H. Anderson, the dean of the Theology Department and professor of Church History and Ecumenism at the Union Theological Seminary, Manila and Peter G. Gowing, associate professor of Church History and Systematic Theology at Silliman University, Negros Oriental, the article contains a general coverage of Christianity and its growth in the Philippines in the past four hundred years. The 'Iglesia ni Kristo' is not included in this survey.

The article treats Roman Catholicism from a unique point of view, namely, from the point of view of the major problems it has met in the evangelization of the Philippines. Adaptation of ritual and teachings to the local non-Christian culture results into Folk-Catholicism, the perennial problem of personnel shortage, church and state conflicts, the religious secular clergy controversy, the supremacy of monastic orders and political involvement in the Philippine revolution. A careful reader senses an acute sensitivity of the part of the authors as they chart their course on such controversy-laden material. Perhaps this is the reason why such issues are treated from the natural point of view of problems.

Aglipayanism is traced from its break with Roman Catholicism, through its brief and shaky, strife-torn existence as the Independent Philippine Church to its recent merger with the American Episcopal Church.

The history of the Protestant Evangelical movement forms the last part of the article and it is handled with sober, mature frankness. The movement is traced as it rides the significant crises of its young history. It triumphs over the initial and at times open hostility on the part of a pre-ecumenical and predominantly Catholic population. It is harassed by the problem of disunity and isolation even among the diverse Protestant missionary groups. The article is very realistic in its appraisal of the status of the Evangelical Churches in the Philippines. There are signal successes in some isolated areas, what they term 'witness and service' in some strata of society, in the journalistic world and in the field of medical care. The Bible has been translated into 34 of the 89 Philippine languages and dialects. Together with all this, there is also an acute awareness of areas where progress should have been made and where no progress is felt. Membership has increased but not significantly in the context of the total increase in population. There is the staggering problem of 'alienation'. Though most of the personnel and Bishops are Filipinos, still the Philippine Evangelical Churches are referred to in Asia as "American". There has been no progress in acculturation. Though there are many basic and strong communal or community oriented themes in Philippine values, still Filipino Protestant communities do not seem to respond to basic social and community directed themes of the Protestant evangelical spirit. At the same time it is also this strong community feeling, this strong reliance on authority which generates massive reluctance to anything like a reconsideration of the 'status quo', this split between the younger and older factions among pastors, which labels any attempt at mature constructive self-criticism as "un-Filipino".

Many Filipino Catholics will take issues with this article on certain points. Many will find the presentation of the so-called Folk-Catholicism an oversimplification of the problem. To treat of Roman Catholicism in the Philippines from the vantage point of problems which it has met in the course of its history will appear too narrow. There are also large areas in Philippine life and culture where Christianity did have profound impact, in art, architecture, in social thinking. One need but recall the statement on religious freedom formulated by Diego Silang to the commander of the British forces occupying Manila to get an appreciation of how extensively and how deeply Christianity has realised this process of enculturation in Filipino life. But these remarks do not in any way tarnish the excellent merits this article contains. Among them is the strong and all pervading spirit of understanding that examines Christianity and the history it has created in its 400 year presence in the Philippines, its life and its people.