

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

American Beginnings in the Philippines: Theodore Roosevelt and Catholics

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Philippine Studies vol. 6, no. 3 (1958): 348–358

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Book Reviews

AMERICAN BEGINNINGS IN THE PHILIPPINES

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND CATHOLICS, 1882-1919. By Frederick J. Zwierlein. Published by the Rev. Victor T. Suren, Director of the Central Bureau of the Central Verein, St. Louis, Mo. 1956. Pp. xiii, 392.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT was President of the United States from 1901 to 1908. The United States had just acquired the Philippines from Spain. The Philippines was an overwhelmingly Catholic country. Hence President Roosevelt was faced with the problem of what to do about the Catholic Church there. While wrestling with this problem he received much welcome and unwelcome advice from American Catholics both in the United States and the Philippines. An extensive correspondence developed which Father Zwierlein has painstakingly extracted from public and private archives in the two countries. This book, representing several years of research, is the result.

The method of presentation adopted by Father Zwierlein is to let the documents as far as possible speak for themselves. He quotes extensively and judiciously from the letters not only of Roosevelt himself but of Archbishop Harty of Manila, Bishop Hendrick of Cebu, Bishop Rooker of Jaro, and Governors William H. Taft, Luke E. Wright and Francis F. Smith. The excerpts make lively reading, for if Roosevelt was not one to mince words, his correspondents, especially the bishops, gave back as good as they got. But quite apart from its readability, Father Zwierlein's book is a valuable and welcome contribution to the early history of American rule in the Philippines.

One of the knottiest problems with which Roosevelt had to deal—*vexata quaestio*, as a contemporary writer termed it—was what to do about the Spanish friars. Many of the leaders of the Philippine Revolution had, for one reason or another, conceived a bitter antagonism to the friars and were resolved to expel them from the country. Since these leaders were also, for the most part, among the better educated Filipinos, it was to them that the first American administrators turned for help in understanding the country and in persuading the population peaceably to accept American sovereignty. Thus, it was only natural that the views of such men as Taft, the chairman of the second Philippine Commission, should be heavily influenced by the anti-clericals with whom he collaborated so closely.

Taft reported to Roosevelt that it would be most helpful—if indeed it was not absolutely essential—to the re-establishment of peace and order in the Islands that the Spanish friars be asked to leave, or at any rate not be allowed to return to their parishes. It might not be politic to expel them outright, but they might be persuaded to withdraw voluntarily if the government purchased their estates. These “friar lands” could then be partitioned among the tenants who cultivated them, as the Filipino leaders demanded.

Roosevelt apparently accepted Taft’s evaluation of the situation without much scrutiny. Replying to a letter from Bellamy Storer, the American Minister to Spain, he said, “I agree with you that the extensive possessions of the religious orders will have to be, in one shape or another, made usable by the Filipino people themselves and I felt to the last point the need of Americanizing the Filipino priesthood.” He decided that Taft, who was returning to the Philippines as civil governor, should stop at Rome; not, of course, in any diplomatic capacity—there were no diplomatic relations between the United States and the Vatican—but simply “to go straight to the headquarters of the business corporation with which he has got to deal in acquiring that business corporation’s property.” He was to suggest that the sale be negotiated and consummated in Rome itself, in order to override any objections the religious orders in the Philippines might have; and he was to try and persuade the Holy See to look upon the sale of the friar lands as a preliminary condition to the recall of the friars themselves.

The Vatican received Taft with that polished courtesy which is particularly in evidence on those occasions when it must say

"no." The Holy See had no objection to the American government purchasing the friar lands, but for this it must deal directly with the religious orders themselves in the Philippines. Nor must this transaction, if consummated, be considered as committing the Holy See to recalling the Spanish friars from a country where they had labored so well and where they could still be of signal service. Three reasons were given for this, as Taft cabled to Elihu Root, Roosevelt's Secretary of War. First, such a move would be contrary to the positive rights guaranteed to the Catholic Church by the Treaty of Paris; secondly, it would be "explicit confirmation of the accusations brought against the said religious by their enemies, accusations of which the falsity or at least the evident exaggeration cannot be disputed." Finally, "if the American government, respecting as it does individual rights, does not dare to interdict the Philippine soil to the Spanish religious.... how could the Pope do it, the common father of all, the support and born defender of the religious?"

The government's attempt to get rid of the Spanish friars aroused great indignation among American Catholics, and Roosevelt felt obliged to explain that it was in no sense due to antagonism on his part to the Catholic Church or to friars as such. As he wrote to E. A. Philbin, the Catholic district attorney of New York County (16 July 1902), he was merely "endeavoring to meet the wishes of the Catholic population and of the parish priests in the Philippine Islands." He added that "while I believe there has been much exaggeration in the allegations against the friars, I fear there remains a very substantial foundation of truth; and in any event their congregations are so exasperated against them that they will not permit them to return to their parishes... so embittered are the Filipinos against the friars that we thought it best to try whether the Holy See would not take them away if we should pay for their lands."

The question is, what Filipinos? Two American ecclesiastics, Bishop Thomas A. Hendrick of Cebu and Bishop Frederick Z. Rooker of Jaro, were in a much better position to answer this question than Roosevelt was, and their judgment, based on direct and personal experience, was that the President had been grossly misinformed. Bishop Hendrick told Cardinal Satolli that there was indeed "a determined feeling in many parts of the diocese against the Friars," but on the other hand he was in receipt of requests from many vacant parishes for friars. Furthermore, he

had found the Filipino secular priests consistently friendly towards the friars, and had never heard a single disparaging word spoken by them against the friars to the people. Bishop Rooker was more positive. Writing to Roosevelt himself (9 May 1904) he said: "The great mass of the people looked upon the friars simply as priests and respected them as such. They were perfectly willing that they should remain and minister to them spiritually and they made no distinction between them and other priests save in rare cases; and the cases where this distinction was favorable to the friars were as many and more than those in which it was contrariwise."

Roosevelt was big enough to realize his mistake and made no further attempt to make the friars leave. He did not have to do so in any case, for as Bishop Rooker pointed out, "they were voluntarily leaving in droves. Where there were 2600 of them in the Islands before the troubles, there are now (1904) and have been for three years not more than four hundred all told, and nearly all of them are in Manila."

As for the negotiations to purchase the friar lands, they ran into unexpected difficulties, recounted in detail by Richard Campbell, assistant attorney-general of the insular government, in a report to Roosevelt of 30 September 1903. In the first place, a price was being asked for the lands which in the government's opinion was out of all proportion to their marketable value. Secondly, "the difficulties of the situation have been greatly increased by the action of the orders in disposing of their holdings to corporations in which it is believed they hold a majority of the stock, thus practically thwarting all attempts to definitely trace the title of the lands." Campbell adds that "the representatives of the friars deny absolutely that this action was taken with a view to hamper and embarrass the present negotiations . . . They maintain that this disposition of the property was made, prior to American occupation, in 1896-7, and was a precautionary measure in anticipation of the success of the Filipino insurrection." Whether this was true or not Campbell could not say; the fact remained that one of the biggest obstacles to the purchase was the difficulty of determining clear title. In this impasse the government had recourse to the good offices of the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Guidi, who finally succeeded in creating the conditions favorable to agreement with the effective aid, at one delicate juncture, of Bishop Rooker of Jaro.

While the Holy See firmly refused even to consider withdrawing the Spanish friars from the Philippines, it was not averse, as Cardinal Rampolla told Taft, to sending American bishops there if this would promote smoother relations between the government and the Church. Shortly thereafter, in June and August 1903, the consecrations took place in Rome of Bishop Rooker for Jaro, Bishop Dennis J. Dougherty for Nueva Segovia (Vigan), Archbishop Jeremias J. Harty for Manila, and Bishop Hendrick for Cebu.

The immediate result of these appointments was not smoother relations between church and state but definitely stormy ones. The new bishops were thoroughly familiar with American politics and politicians, and did not hesitate to speak out loud and clear whenever the government in their opinion invaded or failed to protect the just rights of the Church. They were particularly outspoken in the matter of church property which they claimed was being unlawfully occupied by Aglipayans and appropriated by town officials.

The schismatic church founded by Gregorio Aglipay won a considerable following among both priests and people in the dioceses of Cebu and Jaro. When the bishops tried to recover the churches and parish houses occupied by the priests who had joined the schism, the latter refused to give them up. They often had the backing of municipal officials who had also turned Aglipayan. In parishes which had been left vacant by the withdrawal of the Spanish friars, municipal officials simply appropriated church plazas and cemeteries as government property, or installed an Aglipayan priest in the town church.

Bishops Hendrick and Rooker contended that this was in clear violation of the Treaty of Paris, whereby the United States government guaranteed peaceable possession of its property to the Catholic Church; hence, they said, it was the duty of the insular government to evict forthwith the unlawful occupants of church property in their dioceses. The position taken by the Philippine Commission was to make a distinction between what the government could do by executive action and what it had to refer to the courts for settlement. As Commissioner Smith explained to Roosevelt (24 October 1903), "where possession was secured by threats, menace, violence or by breach of the peace, the Executive has interfered to restore the *status quo*, but where the care-taker or clergyman became a schismatic, it is plain that there was no room

for executive interference, and such cases had to be remanded to the court where the status of the recalcitrant care-taker or clergyman and his right to possession could be judicially determined." This was the policy which Governor Taft instructed provincial governors to follow in a directive issued the previous January.

Bishop Rooker vigorously protested this ruling in a letter to Roosevelt dated 9 May 1904. His objections, as summarized by Father Zwierlein, were, (1) that since there were in his diocese alone 150 separate parcels of property in dispute, it would take an enormously long time to reclaim them in courts which were swamped with enormous dockets; (2) that since the diocese had been deprived of its revenues precisely by these confiscations, he did not have the money to pay the cost of litigation; and (3) that the judges in some of the provinces were sympathizers of the Aglipayan movement and hence "no confidence could be placed in them." It was not as plain to him, as it seemed to be to Commissioner Smith, that "there was no room for executive interference." In many cases the property had been taken away from the Church by municipal officials, who belonged to the executive branch of government; surely the executive had both the power and the duty to rectify what had been wrongly done by its subordinates.

Bishop Hendrick, for his part, emphasized the fact that in Northern Mindanao, then part of the diocese of Cebu, parish churches and property attached to them were being withheld from the Catholic Church not by simple occupation but by intimidation and threats of violence on the part of Aglipayan or anti-clerical officials. The governor of the province of Misamis, for instance, was a bitter enemy of the Church, and he had cowed the people of the town of Misamis to such an extent that only a few families dared to profess themselves openly as Catholic. One of them was the family of the editor of this review, and it was at the house of Don Anselmo Bernad that Bishop Hendrick stopped while making a visitation of his diocese.

Both bishops were very much cast down by the government's attitude. On 21 December 1904 Bishop Rooker wrote a gloomy letter to his colleague in Cebu: "The government is doing nothing and I don't see how we are ever going to get back what is already gone. It would take a century and cost a mint of money. I can't afford the law expenses... God only knows what is to become of it all. With so few priests as I have, I can't see any

light ahead and, I am truly very much discouraged.... There is absolutely no money coming into this diocese except the interest on the small fund my predecessor left and the parishes ...are continually asking for aid from me. In the whole diocese there are not a dozen parishes which are self-supporting... It all looks mighty dark, and the U.S. government is to blame for the situation for it crippled the diocese horribly to have municipalities take so much property and the Aglipayans so much more, practically with the consent of the Gov't."

They were discouraged but they did not give up. They scraped the money together somehow and they fought the cases in the courts, until in 1907 they had the satisfaction of seeing the Philippine Supreme Court render full justice to the Catholic Church claims.

In another and possibly more important area of conflict the bishops did not come out so well. This was the public-school question. They did not object to state schools as such. What they objected to was that according to their best information, state schools were being used by Protestants to proselytize Catholic school children. Roosevelt agreed with this view when the matter was called to his attention. He wrote to Taft that "the teachers must not only be careful to abstain from taking sides for or against Catholicism or any other creed, but they must be careful to abstain from action which gives the impression that they are thus taking sides. I think it most unfortunate that any clergyman should be appointed a teacher. How many such are there in the Islands? Can you not take steps that hereafter no such are appointed? If so, please take them." By "clergyman" Roosevelt meant, of course, Protestant minister. Bishop Rooker claimed that in spite of this directive clergymen, or at any rate ex-clergymen who "carry with them still something of their proselytizing zeal," continued to be appointed to influential positions in the public school system. It seemed reasonable to expect that in a Catholic country the superintendents of schools should by preference be Catholics; yet such was not the case. "Of the thirty-five or thirty-six division superintendents," Bishop Rooker wrote to Roosevelt in 1904, "only one is a Catholic, and a number of them are ex-clergymen.... The same must be said of a number of American teachers who are likewise ex-missionaries. Of the native teachers, I fear a large proportion of them are appointed by local political influence, and the result is that very many of them are professed haters of

the Catholic Church and use their influence ... to the damage of the faith of the children. In a recent trip through the province of Occidental Negros ... complaints were made to me in nearly every town that the native teachers were exercising a perverting influence religiously"

The hostility to Catholicism of the Filipino teachers referred to was doubtless due to the anti-clericalism generated by the recent Revolution and might in time have passed away. But a more permanent anti-Catholic bias was given to the Philippine public-school system when the insular government decided to send future teachers to the United States for study. The group sent in 1903 was put under the charge of a Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland, who placed all of them in Protestant schools. Father Wynne, editor of the *Jesuit Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, took the trouble to write to all the principal Catholic educational institutions in the United States, asking them if they had been approached regarding the Filipino students. Ten replied that they had simply been asked for their catalogues or information about their terms. Three, Georgetown University, St. Mary's Institute (Dayton), and Mt. Angel Seminary (Oregon), upon being contacted further, had offered free tuition. However, the students were sent to none of these. They were sent instead to Oberlin College (Ohio), Dixon College (Illinois), Milliken school (Decatur, Ill.), and the University of Penn (Knoxville, Tenn.), all of them, according to Father Wynne, definitely Protestant schools. The Episcopalian St. Andrew's Brotherhood was entrusted with the task of selecting lodgings for them. Those assigned to the State Normal School at Westchester, Pa., were scolded for not attending Protestant chapel exercises and ordered to do so. In nearly all the other institutions inducements were offered to the Filipino students to do the same. Mrs. Sutherland, who was apparently put in charge of the girl students, took them to a Methodist church in St. Louis.

Previous to this, Bishop Montgomery of San Francisco had written to Bishop Hendrick warning him of the danger to which the Catholic faith of Filipino *pensionados* in California was being exposed. There were about a hundred of them, all in non-Catholic schools. Several had been sent to study in a Protestant college and were lodged with Protestant families. Only in one case did a non-Catholic superintendent of a public school which five or six Filipinos were attending introduce them to the parish priest

in order that they might receive religious instruction and fulfil their Catholic obligations.

The upshot was that Archbishop Harty lodged a strong protest with the President; and Roosevelt, writing to Governor Taft on 1 July 1905, asked him to talk the matter over with Sutherland, adding that "Sutherland might as well be transferred to something else." Roosevelt seems to have made this suggestion purely as a matter of expediency, not from any real sympathy with the Catholic view, for his next remark was merely that "Harty has been a good fellow and a good friend of ours."

Such being the climate of opinion in official circles, it is no wonder that no real change was made in the public-school policy. Even Francis F. Smith, a Catholic, when he had charge of the Bureau of Education, was either unable or unwilling to do anything about making the public schools less corrosive to the Catholic faith of Filipino children. Bishop Hendrick took him to task for this in no uncertain terms when Smith was Governor (1 January 1907): "What I object to is the palpable discrimination in your former department against Catholic teachers. As has often been said, only one superintendent out of thirty-five or more is a Catholic, and less than five percent. [in the entire department] are Catholic. The facts are in themselves an answer to all claims of fair play... Since I came here, four Catholic teachers, all men and all competent, have left the service because they said they were constantly under disfavor because they were Catholics. How far you may be responsible for this discrimination I do not know, but I believe you may be acquitted of being partisan to Catholics."

That was probably the nub of the difficulty: the anxiety of those who framed public-school policy that the system should be completely non-partisan. The public school must be a neutral school; but in their efforts to make it completely so, they merely succeeded in making it neutral *against* the religion of the vast majority of the public.

The fact that the correspondence of the American bishops in the Philippines with President Roosevelt consisted chiefly of complaints about the way he was governing the country may give the impression that they were animated by a perverse desire to be contrary. Actually, this was not the case. They co-operated whole-heartedly with the government in projects that were clearly for the common good. Bishop Hendrick contributed

materially to the putting down of the fanatical *pulahan* revolt on the island of Samar. The provincial fiscal, Norberto Romuáldez, told the bishop that the *pulahan* leaders were stirring up the people by telling them that the United States intended to deprive them of their religion. Bishop Hendrick immediately took the field with several of his priests in order to give the lie to this accusation. He later sent his brother the substance of the sermon which they preached in every parish they visited. It is as clear and simple a statement as one can find anywhere of the American ideal of church-state relations:

"The government of the United States is not the enemy of the Catholic Church. The separation of the State from the Church does not mean that the State is against the Church. It means that the Church is independent from the State, and the State is independent from the Church, but does not mean any hostilities whatever to each other... The American people, either as a nation or as individuals, are not the enemy of the Catholic Church; in fact, our Archbishop and Bishops are Americans. The religion that the *pulahans* claim to follow is not a true religion at all. It is simply a shameful and misfortunate [sic] fanaticism and is against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church does not teach the killing of the people, the burning of towns and barrios, the revenge against the enemies, the robbery and other crimes like those sometimes committed by those who claim to be religious men in the mountains... For the good of their own souls, for the good of their own people and country, for the good name of their race, those *pulahans* must stop from their wrong doings."

Earlier in his political career, while still Governor of New York, Roosevelt had expressed himself as "very strongly of the opinion that the uplifting of the people in these tropic islands must come chiefly through making them better Catholics and better citizens." The first American bishops of the Philippines had no other aim in view; and if they fought their own government on occasion, it was because they believed that the government was, directly or indirectly, making the Filipinos worse Catholics, and by that very token, worse citizens.

There is much else in Father Zwierlein's book that will be of interest to the student of Philippine affairs. Certain defects of presentation may be noted. It might have been better if, instead of following a strictly chronological arrangement, the

material had been organized under certain general headings. In this way the development of major policies, both political and ecclesiastical, would have been easier to follow. Father Zwierlein sometimes neglects to date important letters or extracts from letters not published elsewhere; this reduces their usefulness to the scholar considerably. Quite frequently quotations are opened but not closed, so that it is impossible to determine where a direct quotation ends and the author's summary or comment begins. But these blemishes detract but little from the signal service Father Zwierlein has rendered by blazing so fine a trail through a relatively underdeveloped area of our national history.

H. DE LA COSTA

INDEX TO THE OFFICIAL GAZETTE

1956 OFFICIAL GAZETTE DESK BOOK. By Federico B. Moreno. Index Publishing House. Quezon City. 1957. Pp. ix, 385. ₱10.

THE *Official Gazette* is an important publication, being the official journal of the Republic of the Philippines. In its pages, issued fortnightly, are published the acts and decrees of every branch of government—executive, legislative, judicial, and the laws of the land are promulgated upon publication therein. Thus, the *Gazette* is an indispensable source book for the judge, the lawyer, the civil servant and the research scholar.

Unfortunately, it is an unwieldy thing to use. It is voluminous and it is not indexed. This is a grave inconvenience for anyone who seeks quick and accurate access to the material buried in hundreds of printed pages. This need has been met for the 1956 volume by Professor Moreno, librarian of the school of law of the Ateneo de Manila.

His *Desk Book* is more than an index. It is really a collection of tables and indices, giving complete coverage to all the material in the 1956 *Gazette* and including a 63-page "citor," indexing all the citations made in the *Gazette* and listing them according to source: the Constitution, the Codes, court decisions, treatises, periodicals foreign and local.