

# philippine studies

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

---

## **Soldiers Impersonating a Priest**

Miguel A. Bernad

*Philippine Studies* vol. 5, no. 1 (1957): 92–94

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

concessioners to attend a conference convoked by the secretary of agriculture and natural resources to discuss the problem of the forests. The secretary convoked that conference on the eve of the opening of congress. It was to have been attended by officials of the bureau of forestry and of the department of agriculture, by forestry experts, by logging concessioners, by public works experts and by the legislators concerned: namely, the senate and house committees on agriculture and forestry. It is said that few of the concessioners and none of the legislators bothered to attend the conference.

The problem is serious. It grows more serious with time. It requires positive, constructive statemanship to grapple with it. We commend it to our national leaders and to our legislators. Our forests are part of the national heritage: it would be criminal to dissipate this heritage.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

### *Soldiers Impersonating a Priest*

IN a celebrated murder case which continues to occupy the headlines in the papers, the agents of the law in a very laudable effort to get to the bottom of the case have been reported to have used means which can only be termed shocking.

The facts as reported in the press are as follows: a certain driver called Purisimo Cielo, having given conflicting testimony regarding his part in the murder of a matron, is said while under constabulary custody to have expressed a desire to go to confession to a priest. Whereupon a soldier donned a cassock and posed as a priest to whom then Cielo is said to have "confessed" the details of the crime, the "confession" meanwhile being recorded on tape. The details of the confession were then divulged, as was also the tape recording of the "confession."

The chief of the constabulary, General Cabal, later denied the story. He said that there had been a confession and that the confession was tape-recorded but that it had not been obtained in the manner described. Officials at Camp Crame however were subsequently reported to have admitted that a soldier did put on the cassock of a priest and in that guise pretended to give a "blessing" to the accused but that it had "nothing to do" with the confession that Cielo had made.

Efforts on the part of this Quarterly to obtain the real facts of the case have failed. The secretary of defense was "not available" nor was anyone else in his office. Our telephoned inquiries to Malacañan were passed from one office to another and in one office was given treatment less than courteous. General Cabal himself was not available; however, a secretary in his office informed us of what we already knew—the General had denied that there was any truth to the story.

We are not then in a position to talk about what actually happened. We do however wish to talk about the case as an academic question and, as it were, hypothetically. *If* an officer of the law should impersonate a priest and thereby obtain a confession of guilt or details of a crime, the person thus impersonating a priest is using means which cannot possibly be justified by any motives no matter how laudable or by any results no matter how salutary. The end does not justify the means.

To impersonate a priest and to deceive another into going to confession to the supposed priest is both a sacrilege and an infringement of a constitutional right. A sacrilege because the sacrament of penance (which involves confession to a priest) is a sacred thing and its travesty is sacrilegious. A violation of a constitutional right because under the law no one is obliged to incriminate himself. Officers of the law are required upon arresting a person to inform him that anything he says may be used against him. A Catholic going to confession to a priest makes his confession confident in the thought that whatever he reveals to the priest will be kept inviolable. Priests have been known to have suffered torment and even death rather than reveal the secret entrusted to them in the confessional. For officers of the law therefore to impersonate a priest and thus deceive a person into confiding to them secrets that he would not want revealed is to betray that person's confidence in a most offensive manner. In effect it makes that person incriminate himself.

The unfortunate man who had confessed to the murder and whose tongue had been cut out is now dead. He committed suicide. The guard in whose custody he was at the time is now up for court martial. A court martial in such a case is proper. But if the alleged impersonation of a priest had actually taken place, then there are others besides the guard who must be arraigned; and they will also have to answer before a court higher than any court martial.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

## VIEWPOINT ON THE PHILIPPINES

One must believe that much of the public confusion as to the facts regarding the Filipinos and their country has been due to the failure, on the part both of writers and readers, either to take, or if taken to preserve, a definite point of view toward the subject. If we leave the history of the Filipinos unheeded,—and that is what a great many critics and commentators seem to have assumed they could safely do—we are plainly going to get a very different report on them from the man who approaches the question with a perfect faith in the regenerative power of universal suffrage and in the innate capacity of all peoples for self-government on the national scale, than we shall get from the man who thinks all Malays are alike incapable of progress beyond the tribal stage.

James A. Le Roy *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York 1906) pp. 2-3.