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# The *Santo* and the Rural Aristocracy

Victor S. Venida



One of the more spectacular events in rural Philippines is the annual procession during Holy Week. Several images—or *santos*—representing the stages in the Passion of Jesus Christ and the biblical characters associated with this event are processed in gilded, flower-bedecked and brilliantly lit floats called *andas* or *carrozas*. The *santos* themselves are often dazzling creations in wood and ivory with cloaks often trimmed in gold and precious gems.

Guidebooks often classify this procession as part of festivals. But little systematic study has been done on it. This note is an attempt to explore issues related to this religious ritual. The theological-didactic element shall be discussed but only peripherally. The main focus is on the social class structure and economic base of this structure that underlies the celebration of Holy Week in rural Philippines. This class structure and economic base have strong medieval features.

The first section describes the Holy Week procession. The following section then discusses the material base of the owners of the *santo*. The next section shall then present a sketch of the class structure of medieval England and Italian city-states based largely on Bagchi (1982), Girouard (1978) and Webb (1993). The focus is the aristocracy, specifically the titled nobility of England in relation to the monarch, and the notables of Italian city-states in relation to the patron saints. The underlying class structure of rural Philippines is then analyzed with reference to medieval England and Italy. The main argument is that the *santo* represents the monarchic principle with their owners being the aristocrats of rural Philippines.

## The Holy Week Celebration in the Philippines

The Holy Week cults of the Philippines represent a medieval legacy of Western Europe. On the surface this manifests the so-called “folk Catholicism” of the Filipinos at its most ornate. On another

level, the images and trappings of the images remind one of the dynamism of native folk art and craft at its most extravagant. But seen from the perspective of medieval tradition and feudal economic structure, the cult may not be folk Catholicism after all, but Filipino medievalism at its most definitive stage.

The Holy Week processions themselves have a strong didactic element. The images of the santos represent events and personalities in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as set in the Gospel and by Catholic tradition. The number of floats varies but the most common ones can be cited here.

On Holy Wednesday, the traditional images are those representing the *pasos* or stages of Christ's Passion: the *Oracion en el huerto*, the Agony in the Garden; the *Señor de columna*, or the Scourging at the Pillar; the *Señor dela paciencia*, or the Crowning of Thorns; the *Señor Nazareno*, or the Carrying of the Cross; and the *Santo Cristo*, or the Crucified Christ. These are accompanied by the male saints, St. Peter—the apostle who most dramatically denied Jesus Christ—with his signature keys to the Kingdom and the rooster; and St. John the Evangelist—the only apostle to be present with Christ at His crucifixion—with his writing quill. Also in attendance are the four women: Maria Cleofe or Jacobe, Maria Salome, Maria Magdalena, and Maria Veronica.

Magdalena is mentioned in all the Gospels except Luke as being at Golgotha. Salome is mentioned explicitly in Mark 15:40. Cleofe or Jacobe seems to be confused with Mary the wife of Cleofas in John 19:26 and the mother of James (Jacob in Hebrew) mentioned in Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40. These three comprise the *Tres Marias* and carry signature appointments to the burial of Christ: Cleofe or Jacobe carries the broom to sweep the sepulcher, Salome the incense and Magdalena the perfume for anointing the remains. Veronica is part of an ancient tradition as being among the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27–31) and of having wiped the face of Jesus Christ; she holds the traditional cloth on which was imprinted that bloodied face of Christ. At the end of this procession is the sublime image of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Virgin Mary with the sword piercing her heart in fulfillment of the prophecy at the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:35). Prominent among those who march behind the *Dolorosa* are the penitents, called either *pasos*, or in Camarines Norte, *sayos*: men and women robed in black with black veils covering their faces and carrying instruments of the Passion—the nails, a wooden cross, crown of thorns, and a bottle of vinegar with bile, among others.

Good Friday commemorates the Death of Jesus Christ. In place of—or in Central and Southern Luzon, in addition to—the pasos, or the stages of the Passion, the image of the dead Christ, the *Santo Entierro*, is processed, accompanied by all the other male and female saints mentioned above, but this time, all draped in black. In some Bicol towns, the procession is lead by the harrowing image of *La muerte*, or Death, signifying that on this day, like any human being, Christ suffered the ignominy of dying, the curse of Adam. In addition to the pasos or the sayos, among the marchers are the black-robed *apostoles* who attend to the image of the *Santo Entierro* (and who, incidentally, had their feet washed at Holy Thursday's commemoration of Christ Washing the Feet, the Maundy ceremony). The *Santo Entierro* itself remains at the Church after the procession, for devotees to pray and pay their respects to, just as in any wake. About 10 P.M. the *Dolorosa* is processed all alone with women only in attendance to commemorate the bereaved mother's solitude, the *Soledad*. The entire Good Friday night is a time for reflection on the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ and the sorrow of the Virgin Mother. It is this episode where much of what is peculiarly Catholic dogma is intensely celebrated: the mystery of God made man and human even unto death, and the mystery of life as filled with suffering such that even the Incarnate God and His Blessed Mother experienced severe torment and pain.

But Catholic faith also promises that with suffering comes glory and joy, and the ultimate human experience of death is overcome by the promise of eternal life. This is splendidly celebrated in the final two days of the Holy Week, Black Saturday and Easter Sunday. At night time of Black Saturday, at the celebration of the Easter vigil, the *vigilia*, the entire church is dark except for the Light of the Easter candle, signifying Christ, the Light of the World. The Old Testament readings all focus on God the Father's promise of a Redeemer—salvation history, and indeed the history of humanity at its most exalted. At the moment when the officiating priest intones the *Gloria*, the church bells are pealed, the lights in the church are switched on, the image of the *Señor dela Resurreccion* is revealed, the congregation sings the *Gloria*. The sayos remove their black veils, and the apostoles replace their black robes with white. It is the celebration of the triumph of Eternal Life over Death, of Light over Darkness, of God over evil.

This is celebrated further in an almost carnival atmosphere at dawn of Easter Sunday at the procession called the *Salubong*. Based

on the Gospel Apocrypha that narrated the meeting of the Risen Lord with the Virgin Mother, the first person to whom the Resurrected Christ appears (Musei Vaticani 1994), the event begins with two processions, the men accompanying the Risen Christ, the *Señor dela Resurreccion*, and the women the Mother of God, the *Madre del Señor*, whose face is still veiled in black and who is accompanied by the *Tres Marias*, in honor of their presence at the sepulcher on Easter Sunday morning (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1). At the appointed place in front of the church, a low tower called *casa santa* (or holy house, suggesting the house of the Virgin Mary where this event was supposed to have happened) is set up from where a child dressed as an angel is lowered when the Lord and the Mother meet and this child removes the veil of the Virgin. The event is greeted with fanfare and applause. In Taal, a special poem is addressed to the Virgin and in other Batangas towns, the men and women even dance. It is a celebration truly—the completion of the Holy Week commemoration which climaxes in the joyous promise of redemption and eternal life of the Resurrection.

The entire Holy Week celebration is therefore a dramatic lesson of the Gospel message, an instruction to the unlettered masses and lettered gentry of the Catholic Credo, *expecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi*.

### **The Santo and the Upper Classes in Rural Philippines**

Behind the clearly didactic element of these celebrations is the material bases for these occasions. These santo are all owned by families, and the ownership is inherited. Research in this field is sorely lacking; about the only mention of this fact was in Lynch (1959) which noted in passing that the upper class of Canaman, Camarines Sur owned the images in religious processions. A detailed and rigorous study has not been since undertaken except for an unpublished work by Zialcita (n.d.). The data here therefore shall be based only on anecdotal information and observations obtained by the author from his hometown, Labo, Camarines Norte, and from a few other places, notably Sual, Pangasinan; Bacolor, Pampanga; Malolos and Baliwag, Bulacan; Marikina, Metro Manila; Paracale, Vinzons and Daet, Camarines Norte.

The tradition of sponsoring a santo for the procession seems to date from about the midnineteenth century, when the Philippines was

creating a large, geographically dispersed municipal elite whose wealth was based on the export of primary commodities occasioned by the opening of the Philippines to free trade in 1820 (de Jesus and McCoy 1982). This could be gleaned from the family histories of santo-owners in Camarines Norte. How this tradition of private sponsorship of images started is not known and would require research from ecclesiastical documents. Guidebooks to Seville note that the santo of their famed Holy Week celebrations are owned and taken care of by the *Santas Hermandades* which are parish-based (Fotografia Industrial 1972). But one can speculate that the midnineteenth century parish priests in the Philippines may have prevailed upon the newly-wealthy landowners and merchants to provide for the Holy Week processions as a dramatic method of teaching the Catholic faith to the unlettered masses.

By tradition, the families would assign a portion of their landowning to the santo, the so-called *lupa ng santo*. The purpose of this land was to pay for the upkeep of the santo. This covers not just the actual expenses of clothing the image and cleaning and decorating the carroza bearing the image, but the upkeep includes providing food for those who carry the carroza, the *mag-uusong*, to use the Camarines Norte term. The original mag-uusong were the tenants of the santo-owners and this obligation is also hereditary, even when as happens in many cases, the modern-day mag-uusong no longer are tenants of the owner. The lupa ng santo tends to be riceland because rice has a ready and secure market. Moreover, in earlier times, in case of a specially bountiful harvest, a portion of the rice is expected to be distributed to the poor after the procession.

By tradition, this lupa ng santo is not meant to be sold or alienated. Stories are rife of misfortune bedeviling families who disposed of the lupa ng santo. Therefore, ownership of the lupa ng santo is not absolute by tradition, much like aristocratic estates in English common law, as will be argued later. Similarly there are cases of families engaged in bitter inheritance battles, especially over the rightful heir to the lupa ng santo. This is understandable because the sponsorship of a santo confers a special social status.

The hereditary tradition seems to remain quite strong. To this day, one notes families of santo-owners and the mag-uusong gathering in the hometown for the procession. Wherever they may be, either as professionals in Metro Manila, businesspeople in Davao, or overseas contract workers in the Middle East or Paris, they all return to the hometown to fulfill their inherited social obligation. As noted,

several of the present-day mag-uusong are no longer tenants. Indeed there are many cases of the mag-uusong already in a higher economic situation than the present-day heirs of the santo-owners, but they all keep to their inherited obligation in the processions.

With the increase in the number of families with economic means, many of the newly rich townfolk sponsor a santo in addition to the ones mentioned. This is especially the case in the higher-income Tagalog and Pampanga regions. At its extreme, one notes that Baliwag has about seventy-four santo being processed on Good Friday. This signifies a growing class of relatively well-off families who confer on themselves the special status that ownership of a santo brings, whose social meaning is well-understood in the municipality. But again this only underscores the fact that some are nouveau riche and the others are the true old-rich or at least aristocrats in the sense of ancientness of relative affluence.

The listing of the traditional santo above is based on the practices in Camarines Norte. The families who own these saints' images admit that these images have been theirs since at least the end of the last century. A number can trace it to about the midnineteenth century, especially the owners of the *Santo Entierro*, the *Mater Dolorosa* and the *pasos*. Since Camarines Norte is among the poorest provinces in the Philippines, there have been no substantial additions to these images since the postwar years. The economy has not expanded enough to create a large number of new relatively affluent families to sponsor other images. One can thus argue that in any of the older municipalities of the Philippines (i.e., municipalities already in existence by the end of the Spanish regime), the owners of these traditional saints were the aristocrats, in the sense of families having the longest history of relative affluence in the community and of having the oldest inherited social obligation in the town.

In the more economically dynamic Tagalog and Pampango regions, the newer santos include the *Tercera caída*, the Third Fall of Jesus Christ; *Santa Marta*; *San Lazaro*; *La ultima cena* or the Last Supper; and the *Pieta*. Even the material bases of some of these are quite different. For example, the *Pieta* of Marikina is not more than two decades old. This was sponsored by the family who became relatively affluent from shoe-manufacture. No *lupa* is assigned to this santo which is fully supported by the family's earnings from the shoe business. The mag-uusong are their paid employees. The family volunteered to sponsor the santo to establish their new social status. On a personal level, it is also believed by many santo-owners and mag-

uusong that taking care of a santo brings good fortune in exchange for assuming this social obligation.

### **The English Aristocracy and the Patron Saint in Medieval Italy**

One of the characteristics associated with feudal lords was the protection they extended the subject peasantry (Bagchi 1982). The lord provided the subject peasantry with access to farmland for their subsistence needs and with security from other competing lords in time of warfare, which was endemic during this era. In return, the subjects provided the lordly household with the produce of the farmland and with personal service, either as domestic servants in the castle, or even as foot soldiers. Within the manor, a more specialized and prestigious group emerged to provide special service to the lordly household: the manorial administrators, the lieutenants of the army, and the chambermaids. These were the ladies- and gentlemen-in-waiting, and loyal service to the lord would often be rewarded with a title and often a castle, especially if the lord happened to be, or ended up being the reigning monarch. The latter's dynastic house established strong centralized authority over a country which in time emerged as a modern nation-state (Girouard 1978).

From these the hereditary aristocracies of Western Europe originated. These can be most vividly illustrated in the complex and still tradition-bound nobility of the United Kingdom. In theory, since the Norman Conquest, all England was the property of the sovereign so that the concept of absolute ownership of land was abolished. Preconquest estate-owners became tenants-in-chief and peerage since that was by grant of the sovereign called a patent (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 1958). To this day, for example, the Duke of Norfolk—the premier Duke of England (i.e., the highest-ranking duke outside of the ducal titles of the royal household)—still inherits the title and social obligation of the Earl Marshal and Chief Butler of England, much like the first Duke. One can indeed imagine the responsibilities of the first Duke in the household of the medieval Kings of England since to this day, his descendant is still officially tasked with the supervision of all state ceremonials and banquets in the United Kingdom. Similarly, the hereditary Lord Chormondeley still marches before the Queen at the State Opening of Parliament to guide the monarch to the chamber of the House of Lords (Richardson 1994). The Dukes of Marlborough and of Wellington every October pay to



the monarch their annual rent on their estates, Blenheim Palace and Stratfield Saye, respectively. Otherwise these estates may be withdrawn since these are the rewards of the first Dukes for the military victories against the French. The rents are fixed by tradition: for Marlborough, the standard bearing the arms of the King of France; for Wellington, the standard bearing the French tricolor (*Windsor Castle* 1992).

These forms establish the relationship between monarch and aristocracy, with the former still, in theory, providing protection and special favors to the subjects of the realm, the latter as extending direct personal service to the former. In this manner, the difference between the mass of subject commoners and the aristocracy is delineated. Even in form, function and structure, the House of Lords is still separate from the House of Commons. Moreover, subject commoners need not serve the monarchic household directly to advance their social standing. Even loyal service in a minor aristocratic household can be rewarded, not as handsomely as in the royal service, but still considerably enough to pursue a measure of professional success. To cite two dazzling examples, there are the patronage of William Shakespeare by the Earl of Southampton (Rowse 1964) and of Adam Smith by the Duke of Buccleuch (Skinner 1981).

In contrast, in medieval Italy, city-states were wealthy enough from their mercantile and finance activities so that they successfully resisted centralized despotic rule (Webb 1993). In their case, the patron saint of the city represented the monarchic principle. As with feudal monarchs, the saints were regarded as extending special favors to the citizens (i.e., the city dwellers) in return for their devotion, obedience and maintenance of the shrine and image. The protection expected could be military in nature, as in the case of the Milanese carrying the image of St. Ambrose to the battlefield at Legnano in 1176, before the army of Frederick Barbarossa (Webb 1993). Padua invoked the protection of the Franciscan St. Anthony in her successful resistance to the assault of the Archbishop of Ravenna in 1256. St. Anne cradles a model of the city of Florence at the Cathedral's altar, symbolic of her protection over the city which ousted the tyrannical Walter de Brienne on her feast day. In fact, prisoners of war were paraded through the streets of the victorious city and released upon presentation before the image of the patron saint.

The fascinating element in the Italian patronal cult was the conspicuous role that the prominent citizens or notables of the city

played in ceremonies. These notables exercised political authority and power in their respective cities. Their power, of course, had its origins in their wealth from the trade and banking that was a peculiarly Italian invention. But their authority was further cemented by their prominence in the patronal cults.

A strong central royal authority would have buttressed the authority of bishops and the clergy in the celebration of church rites. As an illustration, the canons of St. Martin of Tours maintained their control over the shrine largely because of the backing of the Kings of France, in spite of repeated attempts by the city's merchants and manufacturers to exercise greater participation in the patronal ceremonies. In contrast, the city notables of Italy lorded over the patronal cults (Webb 1993). Again in Florence, in 1380, a law forbade officials of the craft guilds or the merchant colleges to provide offerings to the patron saint on her feast-day, as this was reserved exclusively for the officials of the commune or the city council. In the grand procession of Corpus Christi, the patron was

to walk immediately behind the sacrament as it was carried in public procession under a canopy demonstrated their status; to pay for the candles that were borne about it, their piety; to take responsibility for the ordering of the procession, their authority (Webb 1993, 21).

Whether in Italy or in England, therefore, medieval concepts of aristocracy showed a striking similarity. The nobility shared in their intermediary role between the common masses and the patron, whether a human being possessed of temporal power, or a saint with unassailable transcendent authority. The patron extended protection and favors to the masses who in turn displayed acts of obedience, loyalty and service. To illustrate, the English monarch would distribute alms to the poor or the Royal Maundy (precisely why the day is also called Maundy Thursday) and the Duchess of Marlborough would distribute the left-overs of ducal meals to the poor of Oxfordshire (Girouard 1978). Nobles or notables themselves could also extend a degree of protection and favor on those directly serving them, whether as territorial fiefs in England, or as city officials in Italy. Both had to possess wealth, either in land as in England, or from commerce as in Italy. Ultimately, their legitimacy as a ruling class derived from their special status in reference to a powerful entity—either the English King, or the patron saint of the Italian city.

## The Philippine Context

The social obligation of santo-ownership is akin to the special obligations that the hereditary nobility of England have towards the monarch. This is the theory underlying the privileges granted to the nobility, as rewards for their regular service to the Crown. One can argue that the santo-owners represent the aristocratic principle in rural Philippine society—at least, those who own the traditional santo that also have lupa. This is buttressed by the fact that the original tenants and their descendants inherit the menial tasks associated with the processions. Also, ownership of the lupa ng santo is a matter of stewardship since it may not be alienated and its fruits are supposed to be directed towards the maintenance of the santo, the feeding of the mag-uusong, and in case of a bountiful harvest, providing rice to the poor—much like the situation of the Duke of Marlborough. It is unfortunate that nowadays in rural Philippines (or at least in those places familiar to the author), again based on anecdotal evidence, the social obligation no longer seems to include charity towards the poor. The obligation begins and ends with the care to the santo as part of the procession which is a dramatic instruction to the commoners about the fundamentals of the faith.

Similarly this obligation is also akin to the role that Italian notables played in the patronal cults. The notables dominated the celebrations and manifested their apparent proximity to the saints as fonts of privilege, favor and grace in exchange for proper acts of obeisance and devotion by the masses. If the Italian patron saints represent the monarchic principle in these city-states that have always been—throughout the medieval era—autonomous of any royal authority, one can argue that the Holy Week santo represents the same in rural Philippines which has never been similarly dominated by a royal entity. Much like the notables of the medieval cities of Italy, the absence of a strong central authority to bolster the local power of the parish priest meant that the originally wealthy class of santo-owners could confer on themselves proto-aristocratic status. This was underscored at the extreme by the long and bitter struggle between the Augustinian clerics and the wealthy mestizo class in Cebu's Parian over the control of the latter's parish church (Cullinane 1982). Although this struggle ended in the demolition of the parish church, the fact that it occurred suggests that the control of the parish priests over their faithful—especially over their very wealthy parishioners—may not have at all been as complete.

Within the structure of the Holy Week procession, the traditional feudal social class structure is embedded. As stated by Lynch (1959, 62):

[R]eligious activities . . . made for family solidarity . . . [T]hese activities help to preserve the distinction between the prestigious and economically more secure on the one hand and the less honored and the economically less secure on the other. Community solidarity is achieved not by homogenization but by taking the class distinction as given and joining the upper and lower classes in a functional and mutually beneficial superordinate-subordinate relationship.

## Conclusion

English and Italian medieval institutions show a remarkable parallelism, even though the form may seem completely unrelated. England definitely developed what may well be the most sophisticated and complex centralized monarchic structure in Europe while Italian city-states remained for the most part autonomous and commercially-oriented. Feudal relations seemed to reign in the English manors well into the nineteenth century, while the Italian city-states already manifested the power of capitalism that would eventually supplant feudalism all over Europe, even in England.

However in both societies, an aristocratic class emerged that in many ways set the tone and the style for their respective societies. With the monarchy establishing itself as the central authority, the English aristocracy depended on the sovereign for legitimacy, but retained substantial privilege, including wealth and hereditary status. Social obligations towards tenants remained and continued to be fulfilled. The Italian urban elite held power over their own cities and were not answerable to any higher temporal power. However they appealed to the Transcendent—in this case their respective patron saints—to legitimize their status. Moreover they fulfilled the social obligation of paying for and administering the processions and other rituals dedicated to the patron saint for the commoners to participate in and pay homage to.

In the Philippines, this medieval tradition of hereditary privilege and social obligation seems best exemplified in the Holy Week procession. By tradition these images are inherited along with land that is meant to pay for the maintenance of the santo, feed the magu-song, and even provide for the poor in case of bountiful harvest.

The procession itself functions to instruct the devotees and other faithful about the elements of Catholic doctrine in a dramatic fashion. The procession itself establishes clearly who the Powerful is—Christ the Lord, King of Kings, and his retinue of saints, with His Mother being preeminent. In a sense the santo represents the monarchic principle in traditional Philippine society. By participating in such an exalted occasion, the owners of the santo therefore establish themselves as a quasi-aristocratic class, based not so much on material wealth (like the barons of capitalism) but on ancientness of family origins, affluence and social obligation.

As the Philippines attempts to industrialize and modernize its economy and society, it is worthwhile to understand these facets of its history and its society. There is a danger that aspects of its history and social fabric can disappear as capitalism becomes the dominant mode of production. Modernization has a strong tendency to homogenize goods and services. Many elements of traditional societies, therefore, tend to disappear specially goods and services that have no ready market. It is therefore not surprising why in the last two decades a number of books have emerged to document various aspects of traditional culture before these disappear because of homogenization. (E.g. Zialcita and Tinio on the Filipino colonial house [1980], Cordero-Fernando on cuisine [1992], and Jose on colonial ecclesiastical art [1993]).

Further research is needed on the extent of land ownership, expenditures, and ecclesiastical regulations attendant to these celebrations. The Holy Week procession itself requires more systematic research and documentation. It is rather pitiful that so essential an element in rural Philippine Catholic devotion is relatively unknown. A more effective catechesis and religious education could well result if this ritual were studied more carefully and integrated in theological studies. It might be worthwhile to clarify the number and sequencing of santos to be included in the procession. As pointed out, Baliwag reaches the apogee of excess with seventy-four carroza, which include Pontius Pilate, Lazarus, and Longinus. There might be a need to undertake a systematic study of hagiography to standardize the santos to be processed. Also the sequencing needs to be attended to because as happened in Labo, Camarines Norte, the parish priest in 1994 insisted on putting Veronica after the *Mater Dolorosa* and the *Santo Entierro* at the very end. By tradition the *Dolorosa* follows the *Santo Entierro* because the hymn sung by the processional

choir, the *Stabat Mater*, repeats the lines of Mary in sorrow as she sees the remains of her Son: *vidit suum dulcem natum*. With her ahead of the image of Christ, another sorrow is added to the Sorrowful Mother in that she could no longer see her beloved Son.

In the absence of historical research and clear regulations, the possibility of crassness can permeate this celebration, especially as more and more of the regions in the country undergo modernization and experience increasing incomes. A foretaste of this is the Immaculate Conception procession at Intramuros. Introduced in the early 1980s supposedly to revive a "traditional" event (Zaragoza 1990), the procession features several different images of the *Mahalina Birhen* which seem not so much to instruct the faithful as to showcase the wealth of the owners of these santas, by way of the ornamentation of the carroza, but more so of the gorgeousness of the gowns and jewels (and real jewels they indeed are) of the different santas.

The real tradition in Intramuros is for the *La Purisima* of the Franciscans to be processed from San Francisco Church to Santo Domingo Church accompanied by the images of the Franciscan saints, San Francisco de Asis, Santa Clara, San Roque and San Luis de Francia (Joaquin 1988). The didactic element is clear: St. Francis always believed in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception about which St. Dominic had reservations. But since this doctrine has become dogma some six centuries after their deaths, the Intramuros procession, in a sense, celebrates not just the Virgin, but also the doctrinal reconciliation of these two great medieval saints, founders of religious orders with lasting impact on Philippine society (Jose 1991).

The present revival does not revive anything but the tradition of fashion shows, with the Virgin as the unwitting supermodel. Indeed without systematic research and consequent informed catechesis and regulations, the Holy Week procession all over the Catholic islands might degenerate to this level of gorgeous tastelessness. Or worse, it could disappear altogether. Holy Week could end up being celebrated the way it would in New York or in London, as has already happened with the upper and middle classes of Metro Manila. It would be just another long weekend at the beach, in Hong Kong, or at some retreat house for those who still insist on observing the devotions. If this were to happen—and may heaven forbid it—then what was said of the death of Britain's formidable Queen Mary would be apt: "The world will be the poorer" (Aronson 1983, 192).

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