

philippine studies

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

Five Great Missionary Experiments, by Bernad

Review Author: Geoffrey King, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 39, no. 2 (1991): 251–252

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.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

and her laboratory is a garments factory just outside of the Metropolitan Manila area.

Dr. Torres' book consists of nine chapters. Early on she gives a portrait of Filipino culture, with an emphasis on kinship, social expectations, and social acceptance. She next describes the workers in her anonymous garments firm in terms of standard demographics as well as belief and value orientations. Finally she analyzes the relationship between industrial activity and various value orientations. From my reading of the book it would seem that at least in this particular factory Filipino values are still strong despite the effects of industrialization and so called modernization.

In my interpretation of Dr. Torres' work, Filipino values and belief systems have had the effect of humanizing the industrialization process. Throughout the book the author demonstrates quite convincingly from her data that "work in the factory is a means of living [and] is dissociated with what has meaning in life (p. 71)." But she also shows that workers are for the most part satisfied with their situation due in large part to cultural norms governing interpersonal relationships. A person's alienation from his or her work seems to have been widespread in all industrializing societies beginning with England's industrial revolution. But unlike the dismal and destructive alienation of England's working class as depicted by Dickens, the Filipino experience seems to be quite different. Therefore, Torres' analysis can be used to argue that the Filipino psyche has been very resilient in adapting to the contingencies of the modern era.

Although attacks on the Filipino psyche and culture abound, these criticisms ought to be weighed carefully. A culture very much concerned with interpersonal relationships can give rise to all sorts of economic inefficiencies. Nonetheless, I personally would prefer the cost of these inefficiencies, knowing that should economic disaster strike I would be protected by my immersion in a Filipino kinship structure. The alternative, it would appear to me, is the efficient and infamous poor houses of England's industrial revolution.

*Henry M. Schwalbenberg
Economics Department
Fordham University, New York*

FIVE GREAT MISSIONARY EXPERIMENTS AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN ASIA. By Miguel A. Bernad, S.J. Cardinal Bea Studies, XI. Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1991. xii + 181 pages.

From the very beginning the disciples of Jesus have felt impelled to share with others the Good News that Jesus shared with them. They have done this often with great heroism, sometimes in ways that starkly contradict Jesus' message, sometimes with remarkable and painstaking sensitivity to other cultures and religions. In *Five Great Missionary Experiments* Miguel Bernad has chronicled some of the outstanding (and, it might be added, in the best sense jesuitical) examples of sensitive and "inculturated" evangelization.

Bernad writes of Matteo Ricci's attempt to make Christianity intelligible to the *literati* of late Ming China; of Ricci's contemporary Bento de Goes' extraordinary and ultimately poignant journey from Agra in India to China (via Kabul!); of Alexandre de Rhodes, the "inventor" of the current Vietnamese script and a strenuous promoter of lay ministry; of Robert de Nobili who in south India in the seventeenth century adopted the lifestyle of a *sanyasi* (ascetic) and demonstrated that an Indian could become a Christian without becoming, in effect, a Portugese; and finally of the nineteenth century mission at Tamontaca near Cotabato, based in part on the model of the Paraguay "reductions."

Specialists in any of these fields will find little here that is new. But even those who already know something about some of these fields will find a succinct, felicitously expressed (indeed very enjoyable) and wide-ranging narrative. Extensive bibliographical essays (34 pages of them) provide both an invitation to and the possibility of further research. Both primary sources and recent books and articles are listed, together with brief critical comments.

Perhaps because I was less acquainted with them than with Ricci and de Nobili, I found the stories of Bento de Goes and Alexandre de Rhodes of considerable interest. Goes' journey is rather less of a missionary experiment than a human adventure, but it is quite an adventure — a five-year journey across the mountains and deserts of central Asia, replete with beautiful princesses in distress, bandits, disguise and deception, jewelled turbans and jade, garlic fed to horses as an antidote to altitude sickness, the foolishness of some religious superiors, and finally Goes' succeeding on his death bed in contacting Ricci by letter. In the process Goes proved that Marco Polo's Cathay was the same country as China. The journal in which he recorded all of this was torn to shreds by merchants who thought it was a record of their debts, but it was later pieced together in Beijing.

Bernad's story of de Rhodes is no piece of hagiography. He presents de Rhodes as far more doctrinally intransigent than Ricci or de Nobili: he insisted that the unbaptized invariably went to hell and he opposed certain "ancestor" rituals (such as reverence for the founders of professions like medicine). Yet he had a deep appreciation of much of Vietnamese culture: he found beauty in their cities, customs and language and his Dictionary has won him the status of a national hero). He spent years arguing with Vatican authorities in favor of a native Vietnamese clergy, and showed great creativity in encouraging local leaders of Christian communities and in training itinerant catechists. Strangely enough, he ended his life in Isfahan (in modern Iran) and it is said that the Shah attended his funeral.

The account of the "Tamontaca experiment" will be of particular interest to readers in the Philippines. Like the reductions of Paraguay it involved a "community approach" to evangelization. Bernad distinguishes four dimensions of this approach—the religious (catechetical instruction, prayer, sacraments), the training of children in literacy skills, vocational training (carpentry, stonemasonry, cooking, sewing and so on), and finally the social (preparation for living in a community as independent farmers). But the "reduction" model was not followed slavishly: in Tamontaca each farm was indi-

vidually owned, whereas in Paraguay all land was held in common. Unfortunately, the experiment came to an abrupt end in 1899, not because of internal problems but

. . . due to a war of other people's making, decided in Washington and Madrid, with which the people of Tamontaca had nothing to do except suffer its consequences. (p. 137)

Bernad's first intention is to provide a narrative, and he does it splendidly (although, on occasion, he falls into the trap of dividing his characters too neatly into the heroes and the villains). He also allows his subjects to speak (eloquently) for themselves, through generous but judicious quotation from their often fascinating journals and letters. When Bernad moves briefly to evaluation, however, he is less successful. On Ricci, for instance, he does little more than quote two virtually contradictory assessments of K.S. Latourette. Also, he calls the work of Ricci and de Nobili "inculturation" in too unnuanced a way (admittedly, a few footnotes hint at the complexity of the issue). The sensitivity and creativity of de Nobili and Ricci is now widely recognized, but limitations in their approach are also becoming apparent. It is seen still to labor under a European dichotomy between religion and culture, so that inculturation tends to mean the insertion of "the Christian religion minus European culture" into an "Asian culture minus non-Christian religion." But in Asia, especially perhaps in South Asia, such a dichotomy makes no sense. It would be unfair to expect Bernad to have addressed these issues in detail (his purpose is different), but some attention to them would have provided a more satisfying picture of both the missionary experiments and the cultural issues. Good history, after all, looks at the past from the perspective of contemporary questions. And the inculturation issue arouses some passionate interest today.

The book has been printed in a very readable format, and typographical errors are extremely rare. I noticed "advice" for "advise" on p. 54, and a footnote on p. 134 which has Bernad himself publishing a book in 1896 — even so prolific an author can hardly have begun so early!

Geoffrey King, S.J.
East Asian Pastoral Institute
Ateneo de Manila University

PRINSESA NG KUMINTANG AT IBA PANG KUWENTONG
PILIPINO. By Romeo P. Virtusio. Manila: Cacho Publishing House, Inc.,
1989. 150 pages.

Prinse sa ng Kumintang, Romeo Virtusio's collection of short fiction, treats the variousness of university intellectuals, public relations executives, the banqueting *principalia* of the old Commonwealth period, nightclub crooners, social climbing society columnists, sad bachelors, and ruminant nuns in the light of social significance and consciousness. His fiction probes deeply into