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Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

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Notes and Comments

Christian Missions to China and the Philippines

JOSÉ S. ARCILLA, S.J.

ENTRY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Matteo Ricci, S.J., entered China in September 1583 to "open untamed forests" (*aprire i boschi fieri*). Once in the Forbidden Kingdom, however, he saw that the task was too vast for his own unaided efforts. He quickly realized his role was to prepare for the future when, in God's time, China would be ready for the Gospel. In the midst of local political intrigue, he kept himself and his work unsullied and he came to be known as a man of integrity and wisdom. He was able to effect some outstanding conversions because he proved that Christianity, far from being a destructive force, ennobled the best that China had to offer.

Two years previously, in September 1581, the first group of three Jesuits had already arrived in Manila at the request of the governor general of the Philippines, the farthest and newest colony of Spain. They had come to an archipelago ready for the laborers to gather in the Lord's harvest. But while China in 1581 was already a self-sufficient kingdom of long tradition, the Philippines was just a ten-year old colony haltingly taking its first steps toward political maturity. In the Philippines, therefore, the task was to politicize the native population first before one could Christianize it. In Ricci's China, the missionary challenge was adaptation; in the Philippines it was hispanization.

Evidence shows that Lavezaris, Legazpi's future successor in the government of the Philippines in 1572, was the first to urge on the Viceroy of Mexico the advisability of occupying the Philippines. Urdaneta, then an Augustinian friar in Mexico, helped detail

the project, assuring – and later proving – that there was a western route back to Mexico from the Philippines. But he was convinced that the latter lay on the Portuguese side of the demarcation line, and the Spaniards could anchor there only in order to rescue the stragglers of the Magellan and succeeding expeditions. When, therefore, in 1564, out at sea they opened the king's sealed instructions ordering them to the Philippines, Urdaneta felt betrayed. Had he known their destination beforehand, he was quoted as saying, he would not have joined the Legazpi expedition. Even before the fleet had reached the Philippines, then, there was already a difference of opinion regarding Spanish presence in the archipelago. And when, as usually occurs, the conquest of the Philippines occasioned suffering and a severe socioeconomic dislocation, the Spanish friars left no stone unturned in their effort to determine if Spain was acting properly in imposing Spanish rule on the native islanders. They wanted to answer the question: now that Spain had come to the islands, what did colonization entail?

FIRST MANILA SYNOD

By the time Fray Domingo de Salazar, O.P., the first bishop of Manila, arrived in 1581, the situation had so worsened that he felt he had to summon the heads of the religious orders and some knowledgeable leaders in the colony to what we now call the first Manila Synod. He wanted to find some way to end the crisis, despite initial objections that the fledgling colony was not yet fully organized and difficulties were to be expected. The synod fathers answered that they had to come together precisely to analyze these difficulties in the "light of truth," for otherwise they would be proceeding blindly. The synod was not going to enact new laws; that was the royal prerogative. Rather it hoped to draw up a brief that could be used as a guide for both missionaries and colonists as they went about their tasks in the new colony.

The underlying issue faced by the Manila Synod was the role of Spain in the Philippines. The fathers accepted the *de facto* Spanish occupation of the islands. They pointed out, however, that it was justifiable neither by inheritance or donation, nor by just war, but only by the papal delegation to spread the Christian gospel, in exchange for which the Spanish crown could discover and rule the new world. Neither the royal officials nor the soldiers had any title

to the islands except what the king had granted them. And the king had granted them only as much power as he had received, namely, the faculty to send preachers of the gospel throughout the world, but not to dispossess anyone of what belonged to him. The royal personage might also send others to protect the ministers of the gospel and their new converts, and they could impose temporal government over the latter in order to facilitate their conversion and confirmation in the new faith. But it did not follow that "they may, as they had already done, appropriate everything to themselves, for the Gospel does not deprive anyone of what belongs to him."¹ And in lands where there were no obstacles to the spread of the faith, where people were capable by themselves of leading a supernatural life, and where there were guarantees that the gospel would be preached — in these lands it would be an act of tyranny to overthrow the native government. For the gospel deprives no one of what he has; rather it "supplies what one did not have, preserves and perfects what he already has."²

The Philippines was not one of these ideal regions. First, as the Spaniards put it, the Filipinos were barbarians, oblivious of God and so blinded by their enormous sins that they had not the least notion of the natural law. Hence, in order that the Christian faith might enlighten them, the native government must be changed. In the second place, the natives were of a low and limited capacity such that, if left to themselves, they could not live up to the demands of the Christian religion. One might admit that in certain aspects, the native government was good, but that was not enough. On the other hand, in a Christian republic — presumably Spain's — material concerns were harmoniously subordinated to the spiritual. It would certainly do no harm to introduce the Spanish political system in the archipelago. Hence, the synod concluded, it was imperative not only to send ministers of the gospel, but also to provide everything for the spiritual upliftment of the native population. For the sake of the gospel, then, the Spaniards could govern the islands, despatch "cedulas, laws, just and truly Christian ordinances. . ."³

Having settled to their satisfaction the issue of Spain's duties to the Filipinos, the synod proceeded to the details of colonial

1. "Actas del Primer Sínodo de Manila (1582-86)," Libro 1, Cap. 1, *Philippiniana Sacra* 4 (1969): 435-38.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

government. The obligations of the royal officials were analyzed. But, for our purpose, we must answer the underlying question: how accurately had the synod fathers perceived the Philippine situation in the second half of the sixteenth century?

PHILIPPINE SITUATION

When the Europeans first reached Cebu in the spring of 1565, the Philippines did not yet exist. Pigafetta, Magellan's supernumerary-turned-chronicler, tells us there were several tribes with their own chiefs, but none with universal authority over all. They exercised jurisdiction only over their own immediate followers. Humabon was not sultan of the island of Cebu, but only of a relatively large group which accepted his authority. Magellan had to resort to military weapons to impose Humabon's authority over the other island chiefs who had refused to recognize the latter because they claimed they were "as good men as he."⁴ Even in the small island of Mactan fronting Cebu, more than one chieftain claimed independent rule, to remedy which Magellan met his untimely death. And fifty years later, when Martín de Goiti in search of food, reached Manila, he was welcomed with the ominous words that the Manilaños "were not painted Indians . . . they would not tolerate any abuse, as had the others . . . they would repay with death the least thing that touched their honor."⁵

In other words, the native islanders were not yet a single political entity. Forming independent tribal groups chronically at war with one another, they were a people *sin policia*, without a common public law, living as each tribe pleased, speaking its own peculiar dialect. In the words of the Jesuit historian, Francisco Colín, they were "barbaric," having never seen a Spaniard; a needle or an iron nail sufficed to attract them; and in their ignorance, they mistook the guitar or the harp for the human voice.

And yet he immediately adds, there was much refinement and courtesy in the native Tagalog speech. No native addressed his interlocutor directly, but always politely and in the third per-

4. Antonio Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World*, in Charles E. Nowell, ed., *Magellan's Voyage Around the World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), p. 158.

5. "Relation of the discovery of the island of Luzon, one of the Western Islands," in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, ed. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, 55 vols. (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cacho Hermanos, 1973), 3: 94-97.

son: "Coming, my lord, upriver, I say, my lord . . ." "The chief wants this."⁶

Not only was the native speech replete with polite circumlocutions, but native beliefs and cults had elaborate external rites. Unwritten traditions taught the people their own hierarchy of major and minor deities which they idolized and hoped to appease with various sacrificial offerings. There were no temples or specific sites set aside for worship and religious ceremonies; rather each private dwelling served the purpose when the need arose. But there was a priestly class, the "malvados *Catalonan* or *Babaylan*," dupes of the devil with whom they entered a "pact to assist and speak to them through their idols."⁷ But, Colfn writes, "everything is a lie, fabrications," based on false native traditions of the creation of the world and the origin of the human race.⁸

To the Spaniards, then, the Filipinos in the sixteenth century were minors to be gradually educated in the faith. Martn de Rada, one of the Augustinians who had come in the Legazpi expedition of 1564-65, while condemning the strong-arm tactics of the Spaniards, had no love for what he considered the native tyranny of native culture and society exemplified in the practice of usurious debt-slavery. Without any strong central government, travel was risky and the natives themselves had to be well-armed lest they be enslaved or killed by their merciless neighbors as they passed by. Such a society, with no cohesive social hierarchy or political organization made it necessary for the Spaniards, in Rada's opinion, to raise the natives to the level of Spanish civilization. Through the Spanish *patronato real*, they were to be taught the rudiments of social living, they were to be hispanized. Only then was it possible to christianize them. Significantly, much later a Spanish Jesuit in the last decade of the nineteenth century, referring to the Manobos of Agusan, Mindanao, said almost the same thing, namely, that his task was to make them "human beings first and then Christians."⁹

6. Francisco Colfn, S.J., *Labor evangelica*, ed. Pablo Pastells, S.J. (Barcelona, 1904), 1:58.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Saturnio Urios to the Jesuit Mission Superior, Butuan, 6 October 1891, in *Cartas de los PP. de la Compaia de Jesus de la Mision de Filipinas* (Manila, 1892), 10:271.

TYPES OF COLONIES

From another viewpoint, Spanish presence here entailed political control of the Philippines. Historians distinguish two kinds of colonies: the “farm” colonies, and the “exploitation” colonies. The first are usually in areas with the same climate as that of the mother country and produce the same products. Because these do not command a strong market at home, motivation to migrate to the colonies is not economic but political or cultural. The best example is that of the first thirteen states of the present United States. Their founding fathers left England not for economic reasons, but for political and religious differences with the home government. Necessarily a new political system developed in the colony, and even if it had taken some time, the colonists eventually won their political independence already implicit in the first decision to leave home.

“Exploitation” colonies are located in areas that have a different climate and produce different products that command a huge market at home. The reason for migration is largely economic. Obviously, it is to the advantage of the government to control these colonies. The same political system is imposed, colonial trade becomes a government monopoly, and there is a transfer of culture – in the Philippine experience, it is *hispanization*. Inevitably, in the process of colonization, conflicts will occur between the desire for economic gain and the altruistic demands of conscience to respect the rights of the conquered.

The Philippines was an exploitation colony, and economic motives strongly colored the original impulse to come here. Later, of course, the Philippines proved to be an economic nightmare for Spain, but initially, the reason for occupying the islands was to barter in the native products with a “clear conscience,” as well as the search for a return route. In the sealed instructions issued on the eve of his departure for the Philippines in 1564, Legazpi was told he was sailing to the Western Islands to make a survey of the towns, the wealth of the people, and the native way of life. Named governor for the discovery of the Western Islands, he was especially enjoined to befriend the native chiefs. He was to stay where the land was rich, well-inhabited, “befitting and advantageous for God, our Lord, and for the advancement of the Royal Crown . . . for the good and welfare of the men in the expedition and of

those who will go there in the future. . .” Nothing was said about colonization, except some vague allusion to establish a trading post from which a report with samples of native products should be immediately sent back to Spain, so that “the return route will be known here, which is the principal aim of the expedition. . .”¹⁰ It was only in 1569, five years later, that the king decided on the political appointment of Legazpi as the first governor and captain general of Cebu and the other settlements that would be founded later.¹¹ Significantly, Legazpi had already anticipated the royal will when, after peace was declared with the islanders, the latter were made “vassals” of the royal crown, with the primary duty of keeping and observing the royal mandates to be issued by their “king and lord.”¹²

The evidence is overwhelming that the Spaniards looked down on the native Philippine culture. Disagreement centered on who was to uplift the natives, the churchmen, or the colonizers or *encomenderos*. This was precisely why the synod of 1582-86 had been convoked.

It was not that simple, of course. If pursued to its logical conclusion, what Alonso Sanchez, S.J. (elected in 1586 to represent the colony before the king) said to Philip II was actually a tacit approval of rebellion if the royal representatives in the islands were left unpunished for their misdeeds. For despite official corruption and maladministration, the apostolic task delegated to the Spanish crown to send ministers of the gospel to the Philippines was not invalidated. Political rule, or its abuse, was distinct from the “spiritual rule” enjoined on the Spanish crown in virtue of the Alexandrian bulls.

NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL SOVEREIGNTIES

This was what Bishop Salazar meant by his doctrine of two sovereignties, the *natural* and the *supernatural*. Natural sovereignty was enjoyed by the king to administer justice and defend his peo-

10. Instructions to Legazpi in *The Colonization and Conquest of the Philippines*, Publications of Filipiniana Book Guild, vol. 8 (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1965), p. 23.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Gaspar de San Agustin, O.S.A., *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas*, ed. Manuel Merino, O.S.A. (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1975), 1, cap. 32.

ple. Spiritual sovereignty was in the hands of the pope for the purpose of leading all men to eternal salvation. In Spain, Philip II was the natural sovereign; not in the Philippines, however, unless he had been freely chosen or elected by the Filipinos or he had conquered them in a just war. But because of the Alexandrian bulls, he enjoyed spiritual sovereignty in the Philippines. These bulls, a positive act of the supernatural sovereignty of the pope, were issued on condition that the Spanish monarchs introduce the Christian faith to the Philippines. This was what the synod described as supplying what one does not have and preserving and perfecting what one already has. Thus, as we see, political lordship over the Philippines served as the point of departure in all decisions regarding the colonization of the islands. It gave full power to the king who was considered as something like an emperor of the Spanish dominions, that is, recognizing no superior.

How far this lordship over the Spanish dominions was understood is clear from the doctrine of Juan Solórzano de Pereira (1575-1655), perhaps the greatest Spanish jurist of seventeenth-century Spain. Author of two famous books, *De indiarum jure* and *De politica indiana*, his doctrine has been summed up in the legal dictum that royal cédulas concerning ecclesiastical affairs have a certain force even in spiritual matters in virtue of papal delegation. The king, invested with the apostolic task of spreading the gospel and converting the heathen, had also certain rights which included a certain amount of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss what this "certain amount" was taken to mean. What is noteworthy is the totality of royal control in the colonies. It was, in other words, totalitarianism in the name of God.

The Spaniards, of course, did not look at it that way. Heirs of the peculiar Iberian medieval tradition which identified civilization and culture with Christianity, they wanted to improve the lot of the Filipinos in the only way they knew, by hispanizing them. It is thus that in the Far East the Philippines is the only Catholic nation and the only one in which the Roman alphabet has superseded the native script.

Undoubtedly, the Spaniards have effected much good in the country. But it has already been pointed out that hispanization was only partially successful, namely, to the extent that the Filipinos accepted certain things, and rejected others. For example,

native forms of greeting have persisted: "*Saan ka pupunta?*" ("where are you going?") is more frequently and more spontaneously exchanged than the obvious foreign borrowing: "*Magandang araw.*" ("Good morning.") Apologies are expressed in the borrowed English formula, "Sorry for that," for which there is no equivalent in the dialects. Not that the prehispanic Filipinos did not know how to apologize; they did, but differently, through actions and gifts, rather than through mere words.

The other side of the coin must also be examined. Hispanization was a mixed blessing. Made possible through the *patronato real*, it has also occasioned many problems whose after-effects still persist up to the present. The most serious was the deliberate policy to discourage the growth of the native clergy. And yet, paradoxically, it led to the formation of a vocal élite that, initially fighting for equal treatment and opportunity for the Filipino native clergy, later broadened its concerns to fight for equality for *all* Filipinos and eventually for national independence.

It is perhaps not only idle, but impossible to answer adequately the question whether hispanization was in sum good or bad. History is never simply a picture of black and white, but always contains various shades of gray. Besides, the purpose of this short essay was to briefly sketch how different was the situation of the first Spanish missionaries to the Philippines from that of their counterparts to the Forbidden Kingdom. In China, one was faced with a self-sufficient kingdom which not only had the power to refuse entrance to the foreign messengers of a new religion, but were positively suspicious and averse to their coming. Here, the missionaries were part of the conquering party and their primary task was to restructure what they claimed their own by right of spreading the Gospel. In China, it was Christianity that had to be sinified; in the Philippines, it was the Filipinos who had to be christianized — and hispanized.