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A First Printing: Ordinationes Generales by Fr. J. Gayo Aragón, O.P.

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BOOK REVIEWS

A FIRST PRINTING

ORDINATIONES GENERALES. Incunable filipino de 1604. Facsimile del ejemplar existente en la Biblioteca del Congreso, Washington, con un ensayo histórico-bibliográfico por Fr. J. Gayo Aragón, O.P. Manila: University of Santo Tomás, 1954. 77 pp.

This is a facsimile reproduction of the earliest extant book printed in the Philippines from movable Roman type. The title page bears the imprint: "Binondoc. per Ioannem de Vera chinam Christianum. Cum licentia. 1604. (At Binondo, by Juan de Vera, Chinese Christian, 1604)." The reproduction, an excellent piece of work, is made from the unique copy in the Library of Congress, Washington. Father Gayo Aragón, the editor, accompanies the Latin text with explanatory notes and instead of attempting a modern translation wisely chose to reprint the richly evocative seventeenth-century Spanish version of Fray Diego de Aduarte, a gem in its own right.

The introductory essay by the editor is of the highest interest to bibliographers. It is generally agreed that the first book printed in the Philippines was the *Doctrina cristiana*, a catechism printed in two versions, Chinese and Tagalog, from wood blocks in 1593. It is also generally agreed that the earliest *extant* product of the Philippine press printed in Roman characters from movable type is the *Ordinationes generales*, published in 1604. Were there any books printed in the Philippines from movable type before 1604? If so, can they be identified and dated? These are the points still controverted among bibliographers.

The state of the question is lucidly put by Father Gayo Aragón. The first printing press in the Philippines using movable type was set up in Binondo by the Chinese Juan de Vera under the patronage of Fray Francisco Blancas de San José, a Dominican

missionary. Fray Francisco did not take up his residence in Binondo until 1602; we can therefore say with confidence that the press did not begin to function before this date. In 1604, Juan de Vera printed the *Ordinationes generales*. What books or pamphlets, if any, issued from the press between 1602 and 1604?

According to Mr. José López del Castillo, Chief Bibliographer of the National Library, there was at least one book printed by Juan de Vera before the *Ordinationes generales*. This was the *Libro de las Quatro Postrimerías* (Treatise on the Four Last Things) by his friend and patron, Fray Francisco de San José. It is extant only in a later edition (1734), but this edition preserves the original prologue, in which Fray Francisco states that "I have longer and more elaborate treatises which I wrote before this one, but the new printer did not dare to begin his trade save with this smaller treatise." Thus, the *Quatro Postrimerías* would seem to be the first publication of Juan de Vera's new, movable-type press.

Father Gayo Aragón, however, finds difficulty with this conclusion. In the first place, the printing press was founded for the express purpose of supplying missionaries with the catechisms and simple books of devotion which they needed in their work of evangelization, and so it is antecedently probable that the first publications of the press belonged to this category. Secondly, the earliest historians of the Dominican missions such as Fernández (1611), López (1615) and Aduarte (1640), all of them contemporary with the events narrated, categorically assert that the first book printed by Juan de Vera was the *Libro de Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, a devotional work in Tagalog, which came off his press in 1602.

Mr. del Castillo admits the earlier date of this book, but claims that since it used Tagalog characters, it must have been printed xylographically (from wood blocks) like the Chinese and the Tagalog *Doctrina cristiana* of 1593, and hence cannot be the first book printed from movable type. Father Gayo Aragón, however, questions the validity of the argument that a book in Tagalog characters had to be printed xylographically; it was quite possible, after all, that Juan de Vera had cast type in both languages. But since we do not have the original edition of the *Libro del Rosario*, the point cannot be decided by ocular examination, but only through indirect evidence. The considerable interest which the question has aroused among bibliographers gives good reason for believing that a definite solution will soon be reached.

The text itself of the *Ordinationes generales* has more than a bibliographic interest. These ordinances were drawn up by the Vicar General of the first Dominican mission to the Philippines,

Fray Juan de Castro, with the approval of his companions. We know from other sources that it was written in 1586 while the group was in Mexico awaiting embarkation for Manila. The intention seemed to be not to frame any new regulations but to stress those aspects of the Dominican rule which would be of particular help to religious of the Order entering a new mission field.

Amid the rough and ready conditions of a frontier society, it is a natural enough tendency to "stick to essentials," such as the observance of the religious vows, and to be somewhat careless of the "accidentals" of external discipline. The *Ordinationes* issues a timely warning against this tendency, stressing the importance of these "accidentals" as the sure safeguards of regular observance; thus no relaxation must be permitted in what the Constitutions ordain in the matter of fast and abstinence, the use of the woollen habit, the rule of silence, and the rule of journeying on foot rather than on horseback.

Where there are only two or three in a religious community, as often happens in distant mission stations, there is a strong temptation to neglect the observance of the canonical hours, especially Matins and Lauds at midnight. This should be guarded against, for as the *Ordinationes* say with gentle irony, "the hour of rising does not become less proper, or more difficult, where there are only two or three brethren, than where there is a large multitude."

Fraternal charity should show itself in the strict observance of common life and in uniformity of doctrine; and particular reverence and obedience should be shown to bishops as the divinely appointed pastors of Christ's flock. However, the regular cure of souls, that is, parochial administration, should not be undertaken without making clear both to the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities that it was being accepted not as an obligation which could be imposed on the Order in justice, but only in charity. This is an important distinction which must be borne in mind in view of the controversies which later arose regarding parish administration both in the Philippines and in the New World.

By making this rare text generally available and enriching it with notes and the introductory essay, Father Gayo Aragón has once more put those interested in our Spanish colonial past very greatly in his debt.

H. DE LA COSTA

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