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Aglipay and His Church: Religious Revolution in the Philippines

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Book Reviews

AGLIPAY AND HIS CHURCH

RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES. The Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay. 1860-1960. By Pedro S. de Achútegui, S.J. and Miguel A. Bernad, S.J. Volume I. From Aglipay's Birth to his Death: 1860-1940. Manila, Ateneo de Manila, 1960, xiv, 578 pp.

The inside cover of this work says that it is a major contribution to Philippine history. That is no exaggeration. Though the subject matter is specialized, the leading characters exercised so far-reaching an influence in national events that the story is very nearly a history of the Philippines over the period in question.

Readers in the Philippines will need no introduction to Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan. But it may be helpful to readers of this quarterly outside the Philippines to say a few words about the man. Gregorio Aglipay was a Filipino Catholic priest born in Ilocos Norte, but belonging to the Archdiocese of Manila. With the outbreak of hostilities between Spain and the Filipinos in 1896, and with the consequent obstacles, psychological and physical, to government by the Spanish religious bishops and priests, Aglipay emerged, under the patronage of Aguinaldo and Mabini, as revolutionary "head" of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. He was really head of an inchoate schism, though it was not until August 3, 1902, after the cessation of the two wars, that the movement took corporative shape. At first Aglipay was only against the Spanish clergy, remaining otherwise Catholic in allegiance and doctrine. But little by little he turned against Rome and deserted Catholic teaching, moving in the course of years from his early position of orthodoxy far over to a unitarian rationalism.

The movement was very successful in the beginning. This was due to reasons that had little to do with religion. With the calming of the excited circumstances in which the movement took its rise, and

especially when it became evident that the Aglipayan schism was not the Catholic Church in the Philippines, and in fact was very far from being Catholic in any sense, when, moreover, the old Church retained its properties and with them its hegemony, and when finally under the favorable atmosphere of peace the Catholic Church launched a counter-offensive, the Aglipayan steam-roller was halted and little by little pushed back. Membership reached its peak about 1904 with perhaps 1,500,000 souls, which came close to being at that time a quarter of the population. In the ensuing fifty years the population of the country has more than tripled and the Catholic membership with it, but Aglipayan figures have just held their own at a million and a half.

A second person who is described at great length in this book is Isabelo de los Reyes, the true founder of the Aglipayan Church. It was this erratic and energetic figure who launched the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (the Aglipayan schism) and put Aglipay at its head. It was de los Reyes who wrote nearly all the books of the movement and pushed Aglipay and his church slowly but irresistibly from a schismatic Catholicity to a thoroughly heretical rationalism. Isabelo de los Reyes is an enigmatic character, neither clear nor forthright, but there can be no doubt that he was the organizing genius of the Aglipayan Church, though he was shrewd enough to use the more engaging personality of Aglipay to stand before the world. The irony of things is that de los Reyes returned to the Catholic Church two years before his death; but Aglipay put off the step until too weak to penetrate the impregnable wall with which he had surrounded himself. Despite unsubstantial rumors to the contrary, and despite what seems to have been his own desire, Aglipay almost certainly died outside the Catholic Church.

The present publication is Volume One of a two-volume work. Volume Two will tell the story of the Philippine Independent Church from 1940 until the present. It will also contain the Documentary Appendix.

Volume One is divided into four books. Book One carries the reader from Aglipay's birth through his seminary, parochial and military-guerrilla activities to his surrender to the American authorities in 1902. Book Two tells of the first and most flourishing years of the schism from its launching, August 3, 1902, until 1906 when it received a crippling blow in the Supreme Court decision that awarded church property to the Catholic Church. Books Three and Four carry the narrative to Aglipay's death in 1940. They tell of the Catholic Church's counter-offensive, Aglipayanism's internal discord, Aglipay's trips to the United States and Europe, his unsuccessful candidacy for president of the Philippine Commonwealth. Perhaps the most significant part of Book Four is Aglipay's quest of a remedy for the natal trauma that afflicted his progeny. For himself, he sought episcopal consecration from some validly consecrated bishop, and, for his church, affilia-

tion with some body of more respectable antecedents: Old Catholics, Greeks, Episcopalians. He even toyed with the idea of a personal and corporative return to Catholicity.

RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES is a model of painstaking historical research. The authors have brought together a copious collection of original documents hitherto unused. They have moreover gone through the existing literature, evaluated it judiciously, and incorporated in their work what was found credible, unmasking and refuting the balderdash which has collected over the years in Sunday magazines and official history. From now on all writing on Aglipay and his Church will have to begin with this book.

In their discussions, especially of the Revolution, the authors have had to treat events which reflect little credit on the perpetrators, but they have maintained an objective urbanity which should allay any resentment. Some readers will find the impression conveyed by the atrocities narrative less than complete.

The style carries the reader along effortlessly. The cover says with truth: "It is a learned book but written with a style so light (not unmixed with humor) that it reads in places like a novel." Moreover, the felicity of translation — of which there was necessarily much — is so consistent that the rendition "metallic question" (p. 400) for "question of cash" merely proves that *etiam Homerus dormitat*.

One cannot but feel a certain sympathy for Aglipay, especially in the beginning of his wanderings. He seems to have had no vocation in the first place, and was ill-prepared for the ordinary problems of priestly life, to say nothing of the complex crisis in which he found himself. The authors say that his rationalization of his position was a revival of the Caesaro-Papism of former centuries. There is no need to go back so far. Aglipay was applying principles he had seen operative all his life. Spanish civil officials ran the Church; when Spain fell, the civil rulers who succeeded also inherited power over the Church. It must have seemed very logical to him. Matías Gómez Zamora, a professor of Santo Tomás, in 1897 gave a long list of abuses of the *Patronato*. Speaking of a royal order of Mar. 3, 1856, almost within Aglipay's life-time, to the Governor-General of Puerto Rico, the Dominican scholar remarks with a certain dry irony: "Entre todas [usurpations of ecclesiastical authority] es famosa en grado superlativo porque ya no cabe ir mas allá." Like the regalists, Aglipay found some difficulty in constructing a satisfactory theory for his conduct. But he knew the practice, and in committing the usurpation first and looking afterwards for justifying reasons he was following standard state procedure for the preceding several centuries right down into his own time.

The authors, comparing the Aglipay period with the present, find great reason for optimism among Catholics. They several times mention the large number of archbishops and bishops, and how many of them are Filipinos. No doubt this is a certain mark of progress, but the grim figures cited from Cavanna will bid fair to stifle any intemperate cheering. In 1900 there were about 825 Filipino priests and about 7 million Catholics. Today there are somewhat less than twice the number of Filipino priests (about 1600) and almost three times as many Catholics. On the other hand, it probably would not be difficult today to swell the ranks with subjects as carelessly admitted as Aglipay.

The story of Aglipayanism is a sobering one. The Catholic Church came near to being reduced to the status of a minority sect. Aglipayanism had every advantage. It rode high on the wave of nationalism. It had strong, even violent, support from Filipino government officials. American authorities were to some extent friendly; Protestants welcomed it as a noble rejection of the Scarlet Woman. The Masons loved it. Against all these forces was the old Church labelled as foreign, captained by maligned Spanish religious. If it has survived in its present splendor, by an ironic quirk of history it is due principally to the fairness of a Supreme Court decision rendered by six Justices, three of whom were American Protestants.

RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES carries three appendices, a copious bibliography, chronological tables comparing dates in Aglipay's life with dates of national events, and finally three detailed indices, one of persons, one of places and the third of subject matter. This apparatus forms a fitting crown of scholarly perfection to a thoroughly competent job.

LEO A. CULLUM

CATHOLICISM FOR EVERYMAN

THE IDEA OF CATHOLICISM. An Introduction to the Thought and Worship of the Church. Edited by Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., and William F. Lynch, S.J. New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1960. 479p.

In the last few years a number of "introductions to Catholicism" have appeared in English; elsewhere in this issue one such introduction, CHRIST IN US, is reviewed in some detail. Now Meridian has given us THE IDEA OF CATHOLICISM, a book which, by all standards, deserves a place with the very best. "After all," the Preface tells us, "there can be a book on Catholicism for every man." The "serious