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**Scotty, Sage of Sagada**

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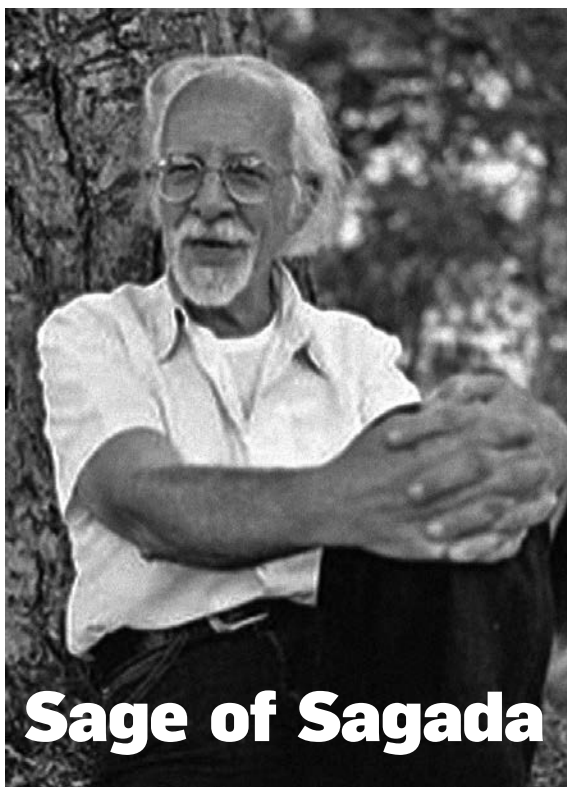
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# Reminiscences

STUART A. SCHLEGEL



## Scotty, Sage of Sagada

These reminiscences are personal experiences and anecdotes drawn from my decades-long close relationship with William Henry Scott (1921–1993), an Episcopal lay missionary in the Philippines who was famous in that land as a world-class historian and scholar, a prominent voice against the Marcos dictatorship, and one of the most unusual personalities that could be imagined.

**KEYWORDS: MOUNTAIN PROVINCE · IGOROT · PHILIPPINE EPISCOPAL CHURCH · FERDINAND MARCOS · MARTIAL LAW RESISTANCE**

At about 9 in the morning on the 3rd of October in 1993, the phone rang in my home in Santa Cruz, California. To my surprise, it was from the Philippines; a nurse at St. Luke's Hospital in Quezon City was calling to tell me that my dear friend, William Henry Scott, had just died there (where it was already the fourth of the month). She knew we were friends, because he had spoken of me warmly and had quoted to her some passages in a copy of one of my books that he had beside his bed. I just sat quietly after she hung up—sad, and very touched.

Scotty—as almost everyone called him—and I were indeed close friends and had been so since the 1950s, and I had an unbounded admiration for him and his work. He was a remarkable man, an unforgettable presence, and a brilliant scholar. I have known few people as compelling or interesting as him. He had a huge influence as a historian and essayist, but also left an enduring legacy by what he did as a human being.

His death resulted in many appreciative obituaries and tributes. *Great Scott* (Uc-Kung 2006) is a collection of his essays on the many various topics that interested him and tributes from several colleagues, students, and friends. I will mention, but not dwell upon, his life and work for those who are unfamiliar with them. In this essay I just want to share some of my personal experiences with Scotty over the years and memories of this fascinating man.

### Cordillera Assignment, 1953

Scotty was born in Detroit, Michigan, on 10 July 1921. When he graduated from Cranbrook School, he had decided he wanted to be an archeologist. However, after serving in the [US Navy](#) throughout the Second World War, Scotty took his discharge in Shanghai and joined the Episcopal Church mission in mainland China as a lay missionary, teaching English subjects at schools in Shanghai and Yangzhou. He plunged into serious Chinese studies in a Beijing university, but was expelled along with other foreigners in 1949 when the Maoists took over. In 1951 he received a BA in Chinese language and literature from Yale University, but very soon after graduating was recalled to active duty in the navy because of the Korean War. In 1953 he was appointed a missionary in the Philippines, where, early in the American colonial period, the Episcopal Church had developed extensive work in the



Fig. 1. Mission of St. Mary the Virgin, Sagada

Mountain Province of northern Luzon. He was assigned to teach English and history at St. Mary's School, part of a large mission in the Bontoc community of Sagada (fig. 1). From then on, he closely identified with the people of the Cordillera,<sup>1</sup> their culture, language, and history—living very simply, writing books and articles, and entertaining numerous foreign and Filipino academics.

### Scholarship and Politics

Among intellectuals, Scotty was renowned for his scholarship and trenchant writings, but he was best known—even lionized—by many ordinary Filipinos for his ardent love for their country and people and his strong public opposition to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.

When Marcos declared martial law in 1972, he was accused of being a communist sympathizer, arrested, and placed in military detention because several young men—students of his from Sagada that he had informally adopted<sup>2</sup>—belonged to the militant anti-Marcos opposition.<sup>3</sup> At his trial all charges were dismissed due mainly to the loud support of many friends, colleagues, and former students, as well as his own brilliant arguments in

his defense. He continued to criticize and oppose the Marcos regime from Sagada, but as he had achieved such immense popular esteem he was not prosecuted further.

Scotty soon became one of the leading critics of US imperialism, colonial rule, and continuing US involvement in Philippine politics after independence, especially its support of Marcos. He argued that the Igorot people had preserved more precolonial cultural elements over a wider area than any other region of the Philippines, and he refused to accept the common view that the Igorot were fundamentally different from other Filipinos and should be protected in an ethnic preserve. Since all these views resonated with anti-Marcos activists everywhere, Scotty believed Igorot resistance to Marcos government projects in the Mountain Province should be a model for the entire country.

To academics and scholars all over the world who study the Philippines, Scotty was, above all, a writer of provocative revisionist scholarly essays and books. Throughout his life, in addition to pieces on his many diverse interests, he produced hundreds of passionate writings that sought to set the colonial record straight and defend the honor and dignity of the Filipino people from what he saw as outdated theories, wishful thinking, and even hoaxes.

His book, *Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History* (Scott 1984), was based on his PhD dissertation at the University of Santo Tomas. In it he meticulously debunked the widespread legend of Kalantiaw, the supposedly heroic ancient ruler of the island of Panay, and demonstrated that there was no evidence that any Filipino ruler by the name of Kalantiaw ever existed, that the penal Code of Kalantiaw was no older than 1914, and that the entire legend—prominently featured in all Philippine school textbooks—was a historical fabrication created in 1913 and uncritically accepted as actual history by generations of scholars still in the thrall of colonial consciousness. As a result of this book, Kalantiaw is no longer part of standard history texts in the Philippines today. Scotty had given Filipino historians an impressive example of critical research on the past.

In *The Discovery of the Igorots* (Scott 1974)—a history of the mountainous region of northern Luzon over several centuries of Spanish contact, constructed from contemporary Spanish sources—Scotty argued that the Spaniards had branded the Igorot maliciously as a “savage” race, different from the more submissive lowland Filipinos, because of their fierce opposition to colonial rule.

Similarly, his *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain* (Scott 1982) and *Barangay* (Scott 1994)—both classics—delineated a picture of precolonial Philippine society drawn from early Spanish sources, which Scotty argued inadvertently provided glimpses of native opposition to colonial dominion.

## Acerbic Wit

Like Scotty, I too was a missionary of the Episcopal Church. I first visited the Philippines in the early 1950s, when in the US Navy my ship pulled into Manila for a few days of rest and recreation from what we called the “Formosa Patrol.” I found it an interesting place, even if awfully hot and humid, but gave it little more thought than that; I had no glimmer that I would be closely identified with that nation for much of my adult life.

After my discharge, I went to the University of California for a bachelor’s degree with the plan of then going to seminary to study for the Episcopal priesthood. I graduated in January 1957, and since seminary would not start until late October I volunteered to go to the Philippines during the interim. I had heard a Bontoc priest visiting the US, Fr. Eduardo Loñgid, describe his work in the Mountain Province community of Tadian, and I was taken by his saying, “My father was a headhunter and my mother was a witch doctor,”

so I offered to go help (fig. 2). I had a truly memorable nine months or so in Tadian, where one of the first things I learned was that there was an unusual and charismatic lay missionary, William Henry Scott, teaching in the neighboring town of Sagada. About a month into my stay, I trekked there to meet him.

Sagada was a day’s hike over a rough mountain trail from Tadian, and I arrived late in the afternoon. My first encounter with Scotty fully lived up to his almost mythical reputation. Immediately after dinner, he directed a group of St. Mary’s



Fig. 2. Fr. Eduardo Loñgid and a Tadian man, c. 1957



School students in a performance of *King John*. I don't know what I expected, but it was not seeing a cast of Igorot kids put on a Shakespeare play! I stayed several days with Scotty and was personally introduced to his wit and rather acerbic manner.

For instance, many Sagada people were barefoot and still wore the traditional men's G-string and women's woven *tapis* skirt (fig. 3). I mentioned to Scotty that I had noticed how their big toes were splayed out at almost a 90-degree angle to their feet, and he said, "Yes, of course, their toes look that way, because unlike you and me they have feet that are shaped like feet, not feet that are shaped like shoes!"

Another time he commented that two older American maiden-lady missionaries in Sagada were sneering at Fr. George Harris—the current priest-in-charge of the mission—because he and his wife had six small children. "They told me," he said, "that George must be so constantly randy he can't keep his pants buckled, but I pointed out that they had clear evidence of only six acts of intercourse over eight years, and that seems hardly excessive!"

A third example of his sharp tongue came when he asked if I had met Bishop Wilner, the Suffragan—i.e., Assistant—Bishop of the Philippines, who resided in the larger Igorot town of Bontoc. When I said I had not,



Fig. 3. Sagada women, late 1950s



Fig. 4. George Harris and the author on the Sagada Trail, c. 1957

Scotty launched into a rant about a recent visit with him and his wife. "Here I was, just back from being in the Stone Age, and all they wanted to talk about was the World Series."

Just about everyone who encountered Scotty face-to-face was aware that he had a sharp manner, said what he felt, and did not suffer fools gladly. His tongue was about as famous as his pen. One of his contemporaries and good friends—the novelist, writer, journalist, bookshop owner, and celebrated nationalist intellectual, F. Sionil Jose—said of him:

His candor rubbed some academics the wrong way and he certainly had a slew of detractors in [University of the Philippines] Diliman and elsewhere. At one time, one of these academics saw me and Scotty in a very lively conversation at my bookshop. We had punctuated our exchange with much laughter. This academic asked after Scotty had gone how it was possible for me to stand such an unsavory character. The remark surprised me, until another friend explained that Scotty did not get along well with those who were intellectually and emotionally insecure. (Uc-Kung 2006, 566)

## Respecting Local Languages

Over the many years I knew Scotty I came to think that his interpersonal manner might have arisen from believing nobody liked him. Therefore, he would say extraordinarily abrasive things to people and, when they got their backs up, be able to say to himself, “See, they don’t like me; I knew it!” I discussed this idea with Scotty’s close buddy, George Harris—who also became my colleague and a treasured friend for the rest of his life (fig. 4)—and he agreed it was probably an accurate assessment of Scotty’s personality. Whether it was accurate or not, the fact was that Scotty saw no virtue in “making nice” with anyone about anything.

Scotty strongly emphasized the importance of foreigners learning and understanding the local languages, partly to know what was really going on and partly out of respect for the human dignity of the Filipino people. He was an early advocate of the need for missionaries to become fluent in the language of their location and not expect to do everything either in English or through translators. So—when I later decided to return to the Philippines myself as an appointed missionary—I decided I would study Ilocano, the language of the nearby lowland people that was commonly used among the Igorot, who spoke mutually unintelligible languages. I saw Scotty briefly when he was in San Francisco on home leave and mentioned my intention to learn Ilocano; I felt certain it would please him, but it had quite the opposite effect! He immediately replied sharply, “By doing that, young man, you will confirm Ilocano cultural imperialism in the Cordillera, and set back the cause of Igorot self-respect by 300 years!”

He had a tender side, though, which shone most brightly when he was working with students and other Filipinos. “Scotty’s boys” in Sagada were a great illustration of his unique mind and character. When he was eventually required to live in one of the large missionary houses provided by the church instead of his preferred simple native home, he began moving in with him a selection of boys from the school year after year. He provided them with room and board, and a very positive adult example, along with paying their school fees, dressing them in the required uniforms, and curing any parasites they arrived with. This in itself was lovely to see, but there were other aspects of his mentoring those young men that went beyond anything I would have expected. He taught each of them to build a harpsichord from a kit advertised in the classified section of the *Saturday Review* and shipped to Sagada. Then, when they were finished, he taught each boy to play some of the classical



Fig. 5. Scotty (second from left) and the members of the translation team, Upi, Maguindanao, 1962

harpsichord repertoire. Scotty left behind many legacies from his years in his adopted home, but surely the dozens of young Igorot harpsichordists were the most unusual.

Another time I watched him work with others with empathy and gentleness, which came out of his concern for missionaries respecting and using the local languages. My wife, Audrey, and I were appointed official missionaries in 1960 and posted in Upi, Maguindanao, on the southern island of Mindanao, rather than the Mountain Province, where I had assumed I would be sent. Before the end of my three-year term there, I headed up a team to translate the Episcopal Mass into Teduray and invited Scotty to come down and help with this effort. He stayed with us for a week or two, and was a huge help selecting Teduray speakers to work on the project and teaching us how to check out potential wordings to be certain they were saying accurately what we wanted to convey.

The importance of his presence became evident when we were trying to translate a phrase in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer of the time that read: “through Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate.” I asked

the Teduray members of the team (fig. 5) how we would say that phrase in their language, and they recommended words for both “mediator” and “advocate” that were unfamiliar. We were about to put them into our draft, when Scotty—who spoke no more Teduray than I then did—asked them precisely what those words meant, and when they said, “They mean ‘mediator’ and ‘advocate,’” Scotty suggested we take a short break. He called in two Teduray students who were living in our house and recited the words we had been given, asking them what they meant. Both kids agreed at once; the first meant “a political fixer” and the other referred to “a person who informs on people to an authority figure.” So, we kept on looking until we found terms that really did have the proper connotation and were thereby spared from having priests henceforth pray “through Jesus Christ, our only fixer and stool pigeon” at every mass.

### **Locked Up by Marcos**

I had left the Philippine mission, been trained as an anthropologist, and done two years of field research among the Teduray when Marcos had Scotty arrested and locked up at the end of 1972. I saw him numerous times after he was released in mid-1973, and we frequently spoke of his prison experience. Scotty told me that government goons broke into his house and arrested him, using as clear evidence of his communist leanings that he had a copy of Mao’s writings in his bookshelf. He told them, “For heaven’s sake, I teach Asian history, and anyone who does that must be familiar with Mao’s work! It doesn’t mean I have abandoned Christianity and democratic politics; it just means I am a historian practicing his trade.”

His take on the experience of prison was unusual, but right in character. Scotty felt great pride in having been jailed, regarding it as a validation of his Filipino nationalist beliefs and commitments. He told me he had enjoyed every minute and considered the time in jail behind bars to be one of the best of his life because he was able to have long, in-depth conversations with all the most prominent anti-Marcos activists.

He gave some thought to becoming a naturalized Philippine citizen, but never did so. However, in prison he had to wear the inmate uniform of *maong* (denim) trousers and a blue work shirt; after his release Scotty continued to wear those same clothes as a badge of honor, at all times and in all situations for the rest of his life. He would refuse any invitation to a social or literary event if he could not wear his denim outfit.

I visited him whenever my life and work took me to Manila, where he was first on the faculty of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, living in a tiny shack with a dirt floor that looked to me like a converted bodega. He said that he had no need or desire to live in a fancier place than most ordinary Filipinos could afford. Later, when he taught at Trinity College, an Episcopal institution in Quezon City, I would stay with him in the quite nice apartment suite he was given at the adjoining seminary. But there too it was a vintage Scotty scene, with a constant stream of visitors, many of whom were anti-Marcos dissidents seeking a safe place to stay. Whatever the setting, he drew many interesting and like-minded people to come for a cigar, some cold San Miguel beer, and hours of serious discussion.

The two of us did not always talk about the Philippines. Scotty had a broadly ranging intellect and wrote lucid, evocative pieces on many subjects that had captured his interest—Homer, Celtic Christianity and the missionary methods of St. Patrick, Chinese culture, even a series of winsome open letters supposedly to one of his Sagada boys, entitled “Letters from Head Beagle” and addressed “Dear Charlie Brown,” which he published in a local church newspaper, *The Northern Churchman*. All these letters were collected and put into his book *Hollow Ships on a Wine-Dark Sea* (Scott 1976).

### **A Christian Life**

William Henry Scott was an unforgettable individual in my life, as he was for so many, and is one of my personal heroes as a human being, a scholar, a Filipino patriot, and a Christian. I believe that he, as much as anyone I have ever known, lived out St. Francis of Assisi’s dictum, “Preach the gospel at all times and, *when necessary*, use words.” He almost never moralized or spoke directly about his faith, but it was a profound part of who he was, and all his friends were aware that Christianity formed the core of his every thought and act. Scotty glowed with Christian concern and integrity, not by what he said, but by who he was.

He died unexpectedly at the age of 72, following gall bladder surgery that was supposed to be routine, and was buried in the cemetery of the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in his beloved Sagada.

Like so many others, I miss him terribly and admire him more than I can put into words.



## Notes

- 1 They were known collectively as "Igorot" in Scotty's day, and that is how he spoke of them in his writings, but that term is no longer considered respectful and had been replaced by the name of each specific ethnolinguistic group—for instance, people of Bontoc language and culture, once commonly referred to as "Bontoc Igorot," are now called "Bontoc" or members of the "Bontoc community."
- 2 Among Scotty's friends, they were known as "Scotty's Boys."
- 3 According to Florentino Hornedo (1984, 56), Juan Ponce Enrile, the Secretary of National Defense, issued the order to arrest Scotty on 29 December 1972, with deportation proceedings commencing in March 1973 for being "an undesirable alien"; by June 1973 he had been cleared by the deportation board.

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