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## Revolutionary Clergy

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## Review Article

### Revolutionary Clergy

JOSÉ S. ARCILLA, S.J.

REVOLUTIONARY CLERGY. THE FILIPINO CLERGY AND THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT, 1850-1903. By John N. Schumacher, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981. 298 pages. ₱135 cb/₱84 pb/₱53 np.

It is 23 August 1896. Andrés Bonifacio, the founder of the *Katipunan*, stands before his men and asks if they are willing to die fighting. All answer they are, except one, his brother-in-law. "That being the case," the *Supremo* is quoted as saying, "bring out your *cédulas* and tear them to pieces to symbolize our determination to take up arms."

Today, that scene is commemorated every year with a holiday, the Cry of Pugadlawin. For it reechoed all over the country, and a not insignificant number of Filipinos, including priests, rallied with arms to topple the Spanish colonial government in the Philippines. By 1902, the flag of the United States was waving over the islands, and Spain's "Oriental Pearl" was being refurbished as the "showcase of democracy."

#### THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE FILIPINO CLERGY

Theories are not wanting to explain the revolution that ended three centuries of Hispanic presence in the Philippines. But it is only Fr. Schumacher's new book that examines the crucial role of the Filipino clergy to unlock key aspects and motivations that characterized that movement.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, for the priest has always been an integral element of Philippine life. Philippine town geography, with its central plaza faced by an imposing church on one

1. To appreciate the mind of Fr. Schumacher, it will not be out of order to suggest that his two other books should also be read: *Father Burgos, Priest and Nationalist* (Manila, 1972), and *The Propaganda Movement: 1880-1895* (Manila, 1973).

side and the less pretentious town hall on the other, confirms this. It was the priest, the missionary, the lone Spanish resident in the towns who initiated the Filipino people into an inchoate political entity. It was also the priest, as *Revolutionary Clergy* shows, whose support consolidated or prolonged local resistance to the Spanish colonial forces and, later, the more deadly American weapons.

The story is not always pleasant reading. Policy, institutionalized in the Spanish *Patronato real*, and racism, confirmed by sad experience in the first native ordinations in South America, barred the native Filipino from sacred orders until the middle of the eighteenth century. Once, however, the Filipinos were accepted into the priesthood, they proved just as capable as their Spanish peers, if not more so. But, not recognized as equals, the native priests were relegated to subordinate positions in the Church. No Filipino priest could ever aspire to a life beyond that of a friar's assistant.

The Filipino clergy did not remain passive. They soon found a leader in their fight for their rights, Pedro Pelaéz. Unfortunately, his career was cut short when he died under the ruins of the Manila cathedral destroyed by the earthquake of 1863. His place was taken by José Burgos, one of whose close associates was Paciano Mercado, the older brother of José Rizal. This and other similar personal links were the means by which the narrower campaign against clerical discrimination expanded into the full-blown nationalist propaganda of the 1880s. An ill-conceived effort of the authorities to suppress the clergy and their aspirations — dramatized in the execution of three priests after the Cavite mutiny of 1872 — had served only to fester the wound. And although the clergy subsequently receded into the background, the issue of clerical equality and justice did not die but was kept alive by a new set of leaders, the friends and associates of the muffled clergy.

#### ANTI-FRIAR, PRO-SECULARIZATION MOVEMENT

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, no doctoral degrees were granted the Filipino clergy. By and large, they seemed to have arrived at some *modus vivendi*, resigned to a secondary role in the Church and Philippine society. We have, however, Rizal's opinion that already there had been priests who were "great intellectuals" (p. 38); but, by his time, it was the educated lay man who was hugging center-stage. Educated abroad, he had also imbibed liberal anticlerical views. It was, therefore, inevitable that his nationalism should focus on the double issue of ridding the Philippines of the friars and secularizing the parishes.

There is no clear evidence that the clergy were involved in the propaganda movement, although it is not improbable that they showed sympathy for it. Their houses became centers of dissemination of copies of *La Solidaridad* and its ideas. In 1884, some priests in Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija were arrested,

their houses were searched, and they were charged with possession of subversive literature and membership in the masonic lodges. But because of the anticlerical posture of most of the propagandists, the Filipino clergy must have had second thoughts before lending their full support to a movement likely to boomerang on them.

Neither is it certain that priests took part in the initial hostilities of the revolution after the discovery of the Katipunan in August 1896. In Cavite, however, because the friars were able to escape, the Filipino priests took possession of the parishes left vacant. And whatever their motivation, they were soon actively sympathetic to the revolution, serving variously as counsellors or inspirers of the insurgents. Fr. Pedro Dandan, exiled to Guam with other priests in the aftermath of the Cavite mutiny, exemplified this kind of service during the first phase of the revolution (p. 54), and a source indicates that to a great extent he determined whether the revolutionary leaders in Cavite would "present themselves for amnesty, because of the great prestige this Father has among the revolutionaries" (p. 55).

#### THE NATIVE CLERGY AND THE FIRST PHILIPPINE REPUBLIC

With the establishment of the Philippine Republic in 1898, the native priests could no longer remain indifferent. Just as formerly, the Church and the Spanish clergy had worked closely with the Spanish colonial government, so now as a matter of course, they expected to play a major role in the new republic. This time, however, leadership had shifted to the educated laymen, most of whom were either anti-Catholic or anticlerical. Chief of them was Mabini who had become Aguinaldo's top adviser. Still, regardless of their personal attitudes toward the clergy, the revolutionary leaders saw that the Filipino priests could provide the religious and spiritual services in place of the friars. Contrary to stereotyped historiography, the people in general grieved over the loss of the friar parish priests, and the discontinuance of church services was a serious inconvenience. It also became quickly apparent that the priests could be used to drum up support, financial or otherwise, for the new government.

The situation, however, presented dilemmas of conscience for the native clergy. In towns where the friars had had a native priest as an assistant, they merely delegated the necessary faculties to the latter. Where there had been none, the problem was how or where to get the legitimate authorization to minister to the people. Should the native priests just go ahead without prior licence at the risk of invalidating the sacraments? Should the people continue without the ministrations of a priest? As pointed out (p. 69), for the "Filipino priests to appeal for jurisdiction now to the [Spanish] bishops who were considered enemies of the Revolutionary Government was obviously a delicate matter."

To resolve this quandary Aguinaldo, most probably at Mabini's suggestion, named Aglipay as Military Vicar General. Neither unacquainted with Aguinaldo nor unsympathetic to his plans, Fr. Aglipay caught the eye of Mabini when, against a group of priests and laymen, he espoused the insertion of a clause on civil marriage in the *Ordenanzas de la Revolución* after the Republic was proclaimed in June 1898. From this time on, the two worked closely together: Mabini, wanting a loyal clergy but under his control; Aglipay, aiming at a native church, even to the extent of throwing off the authority of Rome.

That was the difficulty, namely, how to remain obedient to the Church and still be loyal to a government that did not hesitate to repudiate that Church. Everyone agreed that a solution would have to start with the removal of the Spanish Archbishop of Manila in order to appoint an all-Filipino hierarchy. Apparently following the style of the Spanish *patronato*, a group led by Frs. Manuel Roxas and Mariano Sevilla wanted to send a delegate to Rome to negotiate with the Holy Father himself. Within months, however, the military advance of the Americans forced the Aguinaldo government to abandon its seat in Bulacan, and the Filipinos resorted to guerrilla tactics. News of Aglipay's excommunication spread and Mabini fell from power. Many of the clergy had already been alienated by the latter's stand on civil marriage and the laity finally refused to stand by the excommunicated Aglipay.

#### FILIPINIZATION OF PARISHES

American presence in the Philippines was not of much help to the cause of the native clergy, however. They were still only acting parish priests and the change of sovereignty did not clearly mean automatic Filipinization of the Church. This was dramatically shown during the few months that Archbishop Chapelle was in Manila as the new Apostolic Delegate. He openly associated himself with the friars and from the initial information he received of the involvement of the native priests in the revolution, he concluded that they were unfit to care for their own people. His two secret meetings with the Spanish bishops confirmed the worst fears of the Filipinos. During a reception tendered in his honor, there was a public demonstration against him. A few native priests might have taken part in it, but the majority were anti-clericals and masons, who most probably had planned everything. This served only to harden Chapelle's negative impressions, the result of which was his refusal to do something about the case of the native clergy.

The issue was not as simple as it seems. The fight for equal rights and justice for the native priests implied an antifriar stance, no matter how moderate. And certainly, the Holy See could not agree with the proposal to expel all the friars, considering the perennial shortage of priests and the probability

that American protestant ministers would soon flood the Philippines. On the other hand, since a frontal attack on the Church would be counterproductive, the anticlericals and the masons supported Filipinization of the Church, the first step of which was the removal of all the friars. This unwittingly received support from not a few Filipino priests who, without wanting to, ended up by becoming their own victims.

#### FR. SEVILLA: CATHOLIC AND NATIONALIST

Before his appointment as parish priest of Hagonoy (Bulacan) in 1901, Fr. Mariano Sevilla had already emerged as a leader of the group of priests who fought for a Filipino hierarchy without breaking their ties to the Vatican. There were other groups in the other dioceses of the Philippines, but the main struggle was in Manila. Towards the end of January 1900, Fr. Sevilla presented a memorial to the Apostolic Delegate, emphasizing the need for church reforms. Besides exposing the faults of the friars, he also condemned the policy that had almost extinguished the native clergy. He had never done this in public, he claimed, but he was now bringing it to the attention of the "authority called to correct and curb the excesses of the friars." His only desire was that the "friars of the Philippines be restored to being true supporters of the Catholic faith" (pp. 201-202). His group was working so that Filipino priests should be put in charge of the parishes. This implied two things: the removal of the friars, and the assignment of Filipinos to positions of authority and preeminence in the Church.

Because there seemed no definite answer to their proposals, the Sevilla group finally decided to send two priest delegates to Rome. In February 1900, Frs. José M. Chanco and Salustiano Araullo sailed for Rome to plead the case of the Filipino clergy before the Pope himself.

Fr. Sevilla was also instrumental in one important task. He gave moral backing to many of the clergy and helped them arrive at a decision that did not compromise their conscience, weaning them away from the Aglipayan movement that was gradually becoming a schism.

#### COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF THE NATIVE CLERGY

Not the least of the merits of *Revolutionary Clergy* is the comprehensive view it offers of the native clergy at the beginning of this century. It analyzes not only the events in the archdiocese of Manila, but also in the four other suffragan sees, except Negros and Mindanao which were still mission territories under the Recollects and the Jesuits. The issues were the same, but the solutions varied.

In the Bicol region, there was very little antifriar feeling. After independence was proclaimed, the clergy accepted the Aguinaldo government

without much fuss. Significantly, lay leaders in the Bicol region refused to interfere with church affairs, and the friars were treated with traditional respect until General Lukban arrived to stir up one or two things. This does not deny that one or two priests abetted the Bicol guerrilla groups when the Americans came, either as chaplains or as active participants in the actual skirmishes. The people had fled to the hills, but when their priest returned to the towns, they followed him. Not unnoticed by the more perceptive of the American military officers, e.g., General Betts in Tabaco (Albay), this was seized upon to facilitate the normalization of life under the new regime.

The cooperation between the lay leaders and the Bicolano clergy Fr. Schumacher attributes to the fact that they had been close friends and classmates in the same school, the Colegio-Seminario del Santísimo Rosario in Naga City. The same was true in the Visayan islands, except Samar. In Cebu especially, the priests and the lay leaders had gone to the same seminary-college under the Vincentians. During the critical war years, there was practically no problem. The Filipino and Spanish clergy were on good terms. Many of the parishes there were under the charge of Filipino priests, and had there been more of the latter, they would also have been assigned as pastors. Whatever doubts the native clergy might have entertained with the advent of the Americans were due to the uncertainty whether the invaders would respect the religion of the people.

After all the activity for a Filipino-administered Church, the appointment of Americans instead of Filipinos to the various bishoprics must have occasioned quite a soul-searching in many of the native priests. Fortunately, the first American bishops assigned to the Philippines were equal to their task.

In Iloilo, besides the personality of Bishop Rooker himself, the laity, the social and intellectual elite of the province, were instrumental in the acceptance of the new prelate. Three of them especially (Conrado Hilado, Domingo Lacson, Victorino Mapa who subsequently was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court) wrote in no uncertain terms such as to embarrass the clergy. Hilado simply pointed out that on his priestly ordination, the candidate freely promised obedience to his bishop. What reason, then, he asked, did the clergy have to repudiate the new bishop appointed by the Holy See? Lacson wrote that despite the "new sectaries [who] inculcate in the masses of the people their false theories," the latter in general were not fools to follow them away from the "submission and respect due to the Roman Pontiff and to the bishops" (p. 259). And Mapa stated that no valid reason could support the effort of some of the priests of Jaro to cut themselves from all connection with Rome.

The movement in northern Luzon that finally ended up as the Iglesia Filipina Independiente ostensibly under the leadership of Aglipay is well

known. But Fr. Schumacher gives additional data that provide new insights into that episode. Before the advent of Isabelo de los Reyes who authored many of the dogmatic tenets of the new church, it was Mabini who was behind the actuations of Aglipay. To Roman Catholics, of course, therein lies the tragedy, for in collaborating with the "sublime paralytic," Fr. Aglipay helped neither the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines nor himself.

#### THE MANY REVOLUTIONS WITHIN THE REVOLUTION

It is an understatement to qualify *Revolutionary Clergy* as a good book. It is well written, objective, based on historical facts, singularly free of personal prejudices that mar practically all current writing on the Philippine revolution. Fr. Schumacher refuses to subscribe to any simplistic classification of those war years as a masonic or anti-Catholic movement aimed at destroying the Church in the Philippines, or as merely a Tagalog uprising, or an elitist movement that sold the country to north American imperialists. Such conclusions fail to take into account the essential role of the clergy. For it was the Filipino clergy

who brought nationalism to birth, who nurtured it, who, when they had to yield the leadership to others, continued to support the Revolution made by the others, even when it was betrayed or abandoned by many of its leaders. The Filipino clergy, at least a substantial part of them, provide the thread linking the nationalist movement into one whole, from the first sparks of nationalism to the stamping out of the last embers of the organized resistance by the Americans (p. 268).

From now on, one must reckon with the fact that there was a "plurality of movements which coalesced into the Revolution — the many *revolutions* within the one *Revolution*." (*Ibid.*) By the late nineteenth century, the Philippines was finally bestirring itself, and the process of education and industrialization led to the emergence of an elite that sought modern political and economic reforms. The failure to achieve these occasioned the violent revolution aimed at eliminating an archaic administration which was considered the main obstacle. Philippine society, however, has been so constructed that, without the clergy, the socio-economic élite could not have effected a change. They were just not numerically enough, whereas the parish priests, native or Spanish, were the powerful figures in almost every Philippine town. Thus we see how the narrower struggle within the Church for justice and equal treatment of the Filipino clergy broadened into the nationalist movement. Rightly or wrongly, the priests were blamed for the backward state of the nation.

## THREE OPTIONS FOR THE CLERGY

Three attitudes were possible for the native priests in this struggle. They could stay totally aloof, indifferent to the movement, taking no active role in the defense of their rights, but assured by a conscience that told them their duty was to obey the Holy See and await its decisions. Or they could go to the opposite extreme, formulated by Isabelo de los Reyes and carried through by Aglipay. Because the Holy See did not grant their demands, they ended all allegiance to the Roman Church and established their own independent church. And there was a middle course, the one followed by Fr. Sevilla, the "loyalist-nationalist" attitude (p. 275). The latter's group was just as nationalistic as the rest, but their patriotism was conditioned by their loyalty to the supreme authority of the Church, a higher loyalty they were convinced they owed to God.

Throughout the book, nationalism is clearly the *idée-force* behind the movement for recognition of the "rights (that is, legitimate preferences over the others) belonging to Filipino priests" (p. 247). But, like all other human values, it is never an absolute. Failure to see this explains why people like Mabini, de los Reyes, or Aglipay did not, in the long run, succeed in what they had originally set out to do; their actuations turned out to be a discredit to the Filipino clergy. On the other hand, priests like Frs. Sevilla, Roxas, Barlin, Singson, Gorordo — the last three among the first Filipinos raised to the episcopal rank — certainly deserve both the gratitude of the Filipino people and that they be better known. Outside of the information found in this book, there is practically nothing else written about them. One hopes their biographies would soon be available to the Filipinos, who as a matter of fact are the heirs of their nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

*José S. Arcilla, S.J.*

2. It now remains for the reviewer to point out whatever shortcomings he may have found in the book, in order that they be corrected in a second edition: on p. 94, *concern* should be "concern"; on p. 156, there is no footnote as indicated for n. 73; on p. 163 *Bacaycay* should be "Bacacay"; and on p. 225, n. 7 does not have its corresponding reference.