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Protestants and Catholics on Philippine Church History

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Review Article

*Protestants and Catholics on Philippine Church History**

HERE is a book which can be considered the first of its kind in the Philippines, with all the merits and limitations that such a pioneering effort implies.

The ecumenical intention which directed the writing of these "Studies" and the selection of the writers is worthy of special mention. Of the eighteen authors, two-thirds are Protestants and almost all the others are Roman Catholic. This fact necessarily influences the character of the essays.

The composition of the panel of authors may give the impression that the book is written by foreigners since only three out of the eighteen writers are Filipinos, who, happily are truly capable and representative. The degree of competence among the fifteen foreign contributors is quite uneven.

The reviewer is faced with a dilemma: either to point out which articles are above or below the scholarly level and dignity the matter demands (but to some this may sound uncharitable or unecumenical) or to fail in sincerity and honesty if no mention is made of this deficiency. This unevenness may be a necessary handicap in such a collection of essays.

* STUDIES IN PHILIPPINE CHURCH HISTORY, edited by Gerald H. Anderson. New York: Cornell University Press, 1969. xiv, 421 pp.

The book is divided into three sections: *Part I* — The Spanish Church in the Philippine Setting (pp. 3-130); *Part II* — Nationalism, Dissent, and Disestablishment (pp. 131-276); *Part III* — Protestantism and Pluralism (pp. 279-386), followed by a bibliographical survey (pp. 389-412).

There is a certain progress in the presentation of the problematic which develops the logical aspects of evangelization with some of its historical, political, and religious implications even if a strictly chronological order is not followed. The book is splendidly printed and the paper is excellent.

The remark made in the accompanying circular that these eighteen essays are "written for this volume by outstanding historians" does not seem to be completely exact. Not all the authors are historians and only some are outstanding.

The fact that some of the essays have been reproduced as they were published several years ago without any correction or updating detracts from their value. All should have been brought up-to-date like "The Episcopal Jurisdiction in the Philippines" (pp. 44-64) and "The Development of the Native Clergy" (pp. 65-104) which have been revised and expanded for publication in this collection. A case in point: the article "PreLaptismal Instruction and the Administration of Baptism in the Philippines During the Sixteenth Century" (pp. 22-43) — valuable as it was — is printed here as it was published in 1955, presenting facts and omitting aspects that should have been reviewed in the light of Fr. de la Costa's book "The Jesuits in the Philippines (1581-1768)" (Harvard University Press, 1961).

The book is honored with a foreword by Anglican Bishop Stephen Neill. Although a man of international stature, the Bishop does not show in this introduction the knowledge that the history of the Church in the Philippines demands. His presentation is marred by several inaccuracies which could have been avoided.

It is not easy to see the criterion followed in the selection of the topics. Some are important, some — one would say —

rather unimportant and even irrelevant. For the whole picture, essays like the "Rizal's Retraction: A Note on the Debate" (pp. 133-151) are not only of little relevance but make the book appear controversial without any need for it. Something similar may be said for the essay on "Nicolas Zamora, Religious Nationalist" (pp. 325-336) and even for "An Engineer's Dream" (pp. 337-349), interesting or curious as they may be. Definitely there is a clear unevenness in the quality of the various essays.

It can be said without exaggeration that the book could have been reduced by one-fourth if not one-third. This is not only because of the need for relevance and comprehensiveness of some of the topics, but because of the frequent repetition of things either previously said or quite well known. Expressions such as power of the friars, abuses of the friars, abuses, injustices and domination of the Spanish hierarchy, failure of the Catholic Church in various fields, or similar expression, and the development of these ideas by various authors, are repeated *ad satietatem*, and start as early as the Foreword itself (p. viii). The ideas of failure and abuses link various portions of these essays like a thread, which is not exactly silky. What follows is an obvious—although *post mortem*—suggestion: authors treating similar subjects should have conferred with one another in order to avoid useless repetitions.

There is an *Index*; but it is difficult to see the criterion followed in the selection of names. Names which should be included cannot be found (for instance, Coquia or Abella), while names that nobody expects are listed (for instance, Cerri). Nor is the criterion clear in the citation of works by the same author. Whittemore, for instance, is cited only once in the *Index* (referring to p. 238n) although there are seven or eight footnotes where his book is mentioned. The *Index* is therefore incomplete and misleading.

There are a few typographical errors. Most of them are found in the spelling of Spanish names and books, and also in the way of hyphenating words. The Spanish system is different from the English.

Review of the Essays

Although it would be not only difficult but perhaps even unfair to grade each of these essays, we can make special mention of some of the more important ones.

The essay by J. Gayo Aragon, O.P., "The Controversy over Justification of Spanish Rule in the Philippines" (pp. 3-21) is an interesting and instructive chapter, a real eye-opener for many writers who are unaware of the various religious, moral, and political implications of the occupation of the Philippines by Spain.

The two essays by H. de la Costa, S.J., "Episcopal Jurisdiction in the Philippines during the Spanish Regime" (pp. 44-64) and "The Development of the Native Clergy in the Philippines" (pp. 65-104) are relevant, representative, and comprehensive. They are important for the understanding of problems regarding the secular clergy and the relations between bishops and religious, and issues of nationalism, together with the discussed problem of the formation of a native clergy so often misrepresented and taken out of context. Both articles had appeared previously in other periodicals, but have been expanded and revised for the present work. The clear statement of the problematic behind this two thorny questions and the balanced view of the author make it clear that *the* reason for the failure to train native priests was the system of the Patronato which created a situation of conflict. All in all, the second article is an illuminating exposition of the problem of the Philippine clergy and it puts the blame where it really belongs: not necessarily on the Church as such — as is often done — but on the *political set-up* in which the Church was involved. The summary presented in p. 104 should be kept in mind by any one writing on this touchy and less-known subject.

The writer does not see the relevance of "Some Aspects of the British Occupation of Manila" (pp. 113-130) for the history of the Church in the Philippines, nor how this represents a "unique chapter in Philippine Church" as the author

claims. Although fairly balanced in itself, this essay belongs in secular or political rather than religious or Church history.

The relevant article by Cesar Adib Majul "Anticlericalism during the Reform Movement and the Philippine Revolution" (pp. 151-171) presents a very good introduction to a real problem of the Church in the Philippines. It is definitely much more balanced than the previous one on "Rizal's Retraction" (pp. 133-151). He makes good points when he states that during this period "anti-friar" does not equate with "anti-Catholic" nor "anti-clerical" with "anti-Filipino clergy"; and that the revolutionaries "attempted to utilize the Filipino clergy as tools to strengthen the revolution."

Although somehow episodic and limited in scope, the essay by Leon Ma. Guerrero, "Nozaleda and Pons: Two Spanish Friars in Exodus" (pp. 172-201), becomes truly representative of ideas and attitudes at the turn of the century. It offers a picture of the period and reactions during it by building up around the figures of these two friars a unified and balanced reconstruction helpful for the understanding of events.

This essay presents a clear contrast with the one that follows it, "The Disentanglement of Church and State Early in the American Regime in the Philippines" (pp. 203-222) where much is repeated and developed which is already known and a certain polemic, anti-friar, and at times anti-Catholic, attitude seems to prevail. There is a definite partiality which does not seem to fit too well in a series of essays which are supposed to be ecumenically oriented.

The two essays by Mary Dorita Clifford, "Iglesia Filipina Independiente: The Revolutionary Church" (pp. 223-255) and "Religion and the Public Schools in the Philippines: 1899-1906" (pp. 301-324), are among the best in the book. Using primary and unedited sources abundantly — as no other author does in these essays — she offers a balanced and comprehensive view of a movement and a period which are important for understanding both the Philippine Independent Church and the serious problem with which America was confronted as a

consequence of the occupation of the Philippines. In her second essay the author remarks that it was against the background of religious belligerency, "that an inexperienced America embarked on her first colonial experiment, transporting a secular public school system to a predominantly Catholic country" (p. 302). The problem is of paramount importance for the consequent development of a *non-Christian Christianity* in the Philippines. This is an excellent article for American Catholics to read: they may find here how they were partly responsible for a "Protestant" situation in the Islands which they deplored and clamored against.

"Providence and Politics behind Protestant Missionary Beginnings in the Philippines (pp. 279-300) by Gerald H. Anderson, editor of these studies, offers a fascinating parallel to the first essay of Gayo Aragon, although in a different tone. It should be read by non-Roman Catholic missionaries coming to the Philippines, since it proves the existence of an "American-Protestant Imperialism" corresponding to the defunct "Spanish-Catholic Imperialism." The quotations on pages 297-298 make the Protestant evangelization of the Philippines appear as a nationalistic, messianic, even anti-Catholic endeavor, confirming the opinion expressed by Senator Davis that "America is the evangelist of the world." Perhaps Dr. Anderson proceeds as a philosopher of history or, even better, as a narrator simply presenting facts that are logically intertwined. But since he does not comment on them, more than one reader might draw the conclusion that this is also his view. On the other hand, a simple reading of this essay will leave more than one American rather uneasy and perplexed.

Another useful article in this collection is the article "An Appraisal of the Iglesia ni Kristo" (p. 350-355) by Albert J. Sanders, since this Church has become an important and powerful institution in modern Philippines. The essay, however, is not particularly scholarly, and is marred by such inaccuracies as: "the Spanish priests taught the people to despise the Bible" (p. 355); "the *Iglesia* is the largest of the multifarious indigenous religious groups in the Philippines" (p. 357). The

author has apparently forgotten that the Philippine Independent Church is definitely larger.

Dr. Douglas J. Elwood offers one of the most valuable and informative chapters in the book, "Varieties of Christianity in the Philippines" (pp. 366-386) although exception may be taken to some of its assertions. Both the merits and some of the shortcomings noted by this writer in Elwood's book *Churches and Sects in the Philippines* [cf. *Philippine Studies*, 16 (1968), 577-586] apply also to this article. The summary presented here, although not as up-to-date as the book that appeared ahead of it, is the best — and practically the only — good reference for a total view of non-Roman Catholic Christians in the Philippines. A slight tendency to exaggerate the constituency of non-Roman Catholic Christians, a not too clear distinction of groups and categories often overlapping with one another, and perhaps too great a confidence in figures given him, which are either guesses or inflated answers to questionnaires, force the reader to be somewhat cautious. This last chapter of the book is indeed relevant.

The book ends with a "Bibliographical Survey of Philippine Church History," the first part of it about the Roman Catholic Church by John N. Schumacher, the second by Gerald H. Anderson on the non-Roman Catholic Churches. As a whole, Schumacher is objective and does not hesitate to criticize authors and books. The list and his comments are truly impressive: he is dealing with a literary production which extends through over three centuries.

The second part of the bibliographical survey on the non-Roman Catholic Christian Churches is rather comprehensive, although by its very nature limited. One would like the author of this part to have expressed his opinions more clearly and at times perhaps more impartially. He would have been more objective in praising the book *Islands under the Cross* (p. 406) by adding in a footnote a reference to Schumacher's critical review of that book which appeared in *Philippine Studies*, 15 (1967), 524-529. The same may apply perhaps to the book, *Nationalism and Christianity in the Philippines* (p. 409).

The Journal of Asian Studies (Vol. 28, pp. 655-56) has published a rather devastating review which casts doubts on the seriousness of this work. The value of *The Philippines Calling* by L. C. Cornish is also not scholarly enough to deserve the long description it gets (p. 404).

In conclusion, the editor of these Studies should be congratulated for having brought to completion a difficult enterprise which represents perhaps the first ecumenical attempt in the Philippines on this scale. This writer, however, is of the opinion that the choice of the essayists should have been based on more strictly scholarly standards. This book may appear splendid or mediocre according to the article one reads. A better selection of writers and topics could have helped for a higher and more uniform quality and a more comprehensive (not so episodic and at times anecdotal) view of the Church in the Philippines. In the Foreword, Bishop Neill writes that "it will be recognised that this book has made its own special contribution, not only for the value of the material contained in it, but as a token and a promise of much that is yet to come." If honesty has compelled the reviewer to question the value of some of the material, he can at least heartily agree with the last part of the passage quoted above.

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