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The Bajau of Sulu-Fiction and Fact

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Reflection on this trend to justify ligation of the tubes will show that, if approved, other procedures also might logically deserve approval for we are concerned here with a broader view of the dominion that man has over his body. The expression of this dominion in *Casti Connubii* limited man's dominion to that which is necessary for the good of the whole body.

. . . private individuals have no other power over the members...and they are not free to destroy or mutilate their members, or in any other way to render themselves unfit for their natural functions, except when no other provision can be made for the good of whole body.

Pius XII used somewhat different language. In his 1952 address on the morality of surgery to a medical congress, he declared, "by virtue of the principle of totality, by virtue of his right to use the services of his organism as a whole, the patient can allow individual parts to be destroyed or mutilated when and to the extent necessary for the good of his being as a whole."⁶ In a later address Pius XII reverted to the "good of the whole body" as the norm but theologians interpreted the "good of his being as a whole" as meaning "the good of the whole person." This was the only acceptable meaning in a philosophy which did not divide man into soul and body, but regarded him as an integrated being.

The role of doctors and scientists in helping to formulate moral doctrine in those areas where they have special competence is noted in Vatican II when it recognizes the greater maturity and responsibility of the laity, and their primary responsibility for the temporal order. The resulting change in the epistemology of moral theology is noted by Springer.⁷

GERALD W. HEALY, S.J.

The Bajau of Sulu—Fiction and Fact

Recently a Bajau boy, a first year high school student in southern Sulu, asked me who was responsible for writing the published stories about his people. He had a complaint to make. That afternoon his literature teacher had read to his class a story entitled "Strange Customs and Traditions of Sulu" from a textbook which is apparently widely used in schools throughout the Philippines. Among

⁶ John T. Noonan, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 452.

⁷ Robert H. Springer, S.J., *op. cit.*, 311.

good deal of their language, and, in general, felt that I understood much of their culture. I make no pretensions to knowing all the intricacies and complexities of Bajau society, but I do think that I am qualified to answer some of the preposterous accounts of journalists and travelers who have written about these people. Although my statements are most applicable to the Tawi-Tawi and Sibutu Bajau, I feel safe in generalizing them to the rest of Sulu's Bajau population.

A clarification must be made concerning the name of these people. Within Sulu, "Bajau" is seldom used to identify the boat-dwelling people of the province. It appears that the name originated in Celebes and came to Sulu via Borneo (Sopher, 1965). It has been picked up by writers, including anthropologists, to distinguish these boat-dwellers (or former boat-dwellers) from the rest of the Sulu population. The name is misleading in that it suggests that the boat-dwellers are an ethnic group distinct and unique from the other native peoples of Sulu. Such is not the case. The "Bajau" are a division of the greater Samal population of Sulu. They call themselves Samal and they are recognized as Samal by the other people of Sulu. They speak a dialect of the Samal language and much of their culture is shared with the other Samal people. Their chief distinction, besides their boat-dwelling habit, is that some of them have not yet fully embraced the Islamic faith as have the other Sulu Samal.

The nomadic life of the Bajau has been greatly exaggerated. After reading the series of articles written about these sea folk, the reader is left with the impression that the Bajau spend their lives aimlessly wandering from island to island in their small houseboats. This is untrue. In the first place, only in the Tawi-Tawi vicinity of Sulu are large numbers of full-time boat-dwellers still found. In Zamboanga, Jolo, Siasi and Sitangkai, the Bajau have for the most part abandoned their boats as permanent living quarters for pile houses built near island shores. And even the boat-dwellers of Tawi-Tawi do not aimlessly wander in the seas. Each family usually claims a single village as its home moorage and movements away from that village are governed by fishing trips, ceremonials, and visits.

Perhaps the favorite story told of the Sulu Bajau is that recounted at the beginning of this paper, that is, as soon as a Bajau child is born he is thrown into the sea to initiate him into a life on the water. This fantastic story is amazingly widely believed. People in Sulu, living only a few hundred yards from Bajau villages, have told me the story, and it has found its way, in one form or another into various popular accounts written about the Bajau (e.g., Rodriguez 1964:120; Farwell:126). When I told this story to the Bajau, they were, of course, surprised that such a thing is believed of them. One

Bajau father remarked: "Even animals care for their young. Why should we do such a terrible thing to our children?" The story is complete fiction. I have seen numerous Bajau births, but have yet to see a newly born infant thrown into the sea.

More than one earlier writer have reported that the Bajau are so oriented to a life at sea that they become ill if they remain on land for extended periods of time (e. g., Rodriguez 1964:121; Orosa:69). Exotic and quaint though the belief is, it must be discarded as pure nonsense. Naturally the Bajau feel more comfortable on the sea since it is the only home they know, but they certainly do not become ill if they go to land. Many times I have accompanied Bajau on trips to the interiors of some of the Sulu Islands, and I know of several men who have spent three and four days at a stretch on land while cutting trees for boat-building. Not once have I known a Bajau to become ill during such a trip.

It has been noted several times in print (Taylor:483; Sopher:132) that although the Bajau spend their entire lives upon the sea they are, ironically, poor fishermen and bad sailors who easily become sea sick in rough weather. Bajau fishing techniques are relatively simple, but these sea folk are not poor fishermen; they use a great variety of methods to exploit their rich sea environment, and they are recognized as excellent fishermen throughout Sulu. Nor are they bad sailors. Only once during my many sailing trips with the Bajau in rough seas did I see a Bajau, a woman, become sea sick.

A recent writer (Farwell:126) reports that the Bajau bury their dead at sea. All Bajau burials are in graves on special cemetery islands, and burial at any other place—especially the sea—is unthinkable to the Bajau. Another burial fiction told of the Bajau is that as soon as they deposit their dead at the cemetery islands they rush from the grave, jump into their boats, and paddle furiously away from the cemetery since the last one to leave will be the next to die (Rodriguez:1964:121). I have seen many Bajau burials, but have yet to witness such behavior. A Bajau burial is an occasion of sadness, but not one of fear.

The same writer (i.e., Rodriguez) reports that when angered, Bajau resort to singing rather than physical aggression. According to this account, adult Bajau exchange melodic, insulting repartees until their anger subsides. The Bajau are a peaceful, mild-mannered folk, but when properly angered, they are not above a good fist-fight.

A recent article on Filipino cultural minorities subtitled "Little Known Ceremonies that Animate Life for our Minorities" (Rodriguez 1965:44) describes a thanksgiving ceremony supposedly held by the Bajau after a successful fishing trip. According to this story, after a large catch of fish, the Bajau parade through the village in their

boats, chanting prayers of thanks to the sea and wind gods. The story is fiction. The Bajau have a very practical, realistic attitude toward fishing, and life, in general. If they are successful in fishing, they know it is largely because of their own efforts, and they do not feel obligated to thank spirits for their good fortune. I have never seen a ceremony even remotely resembling the thanksgiving celebration described above.

Several writers have attributed supernatural feats to Bajau divers who, according to one article, can remain under water for as long as eight minutes. Such a statement hardly needs refutation. Because of their great experience in diving, Bajau men can stay under water longer than most casual swimmers, but their diving skills could be equalled by anyone with comparable experience.

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a full account of Bajau culture, but rather to dispel some of the major popular misconceptions about the Sulu Bajau. I trust that I have been able to illustrate that despite their unique life on the sea, the Bajau are flesh and blood human beings not greatly unlike other Filipinos. The interested reader is urged to investigate the anthropological literature for a more detailed account of Bajau society.

I hope that journalists will continue to write stories about the Philippines' little known ethnic groups, but more importantly, I hope they will become more critical of the data they receive. Exotic though some of these groups may appear on the surface, it is the similarities beneath their cultural differences that are truly remarkable. It is this similarity that the Philippine nation must seek out and nourish if it is to achieve unity within its great diversity.

H. ARLO NIMMO

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God Died in Germany

Modern theology preaches the gospel of the death of God. We are told that God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence. Titles like *The Shaking of the Foundations, Religion Without Revelation*, "The Absence of God," "The Dissolution of the Absolute," *The Death of God*, and *The Grave of God* show that the secular age and secular man have come into their own. On December 17, 1967, just one week before Christmas, the German counterpart of *Time Magazine*, *Der Spiegel*, told its readers that God was dead for every third German. According to this magazine only one half of the population still believed in a life after death and in the resurrection of Christ.

Such are the results of an extensive inquiry into the beliefs of the population of West-Germany. The survey was conducted by the Bielefeld Emnid-Institute together with market analyst Dr. R. Müller for the magazine, *Der Spiegel*. The interesting thing about it is the fact that an identical survey had been conducted by this Institute in 1960 for the Catholic and Protestant Church. The results, however, had been suppressed and the survey had ended up gathering dust on the bookshelves of the bishops of both denominations.

God Died Quietly in Germany

During the year 1967 the Emnid-Institute interviewed 2,037 Germans between 17 and 70 years of age, who were representative of 39 million Germans according to religious denomination, sex, educational attainments and family background. To do this a questionnaire of over 70 complex questions had been constructed covering the basic teachings of the Catholic and Protestant Church and general attitudes towards God, religion and Church.

To understand the results one must keep in mind that practically every German is either a Catholic or a Lutheran. He is baptized