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New Guinea Mission: Savage Papua
A Missionary among Cannibals
by André Dupey- rat

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Fray Juan de Castro, with the approval of his companions. We know from other sources that it was written in 1586 while the group was in Mexico awaiting embarkation for Manila. The intention seemed to be not to frame any new regulations but to stress those aspects of the Dominican rule which would be of particular help to religious of the Order entering a new mission field.

Amid the rough and ready conditions of a frontier society, it is a natural enough tendency to "stick to essentials," such as the observance of the religious vows, and to be somewhat careless of the "accidentals" of external discipline. The *Ordinationes* issues a timely warning against this tendency, stressing the importance of these "accidentals" as the sure safeguards of regular observance; thus no relaxation must be permitted in what the Constitutions ordain in the matter of fast and abstinence, the use of the woollen habit, the rule of silence, and the rule of journeying on foot rather than on horseback.

Where there are only two or three in a religious community, as often happens in distant mission stations, there is a strong temptation to neglect the observance of the canonical hours, especially Matins and Lauds at midnight. This should be guarded against, for as the *Ordinationes* say with gentle irony, "the hour of rising does not become less proper, or more difficult, where there are only two or three brethren, than where there is a large multitude."

Fraternal charity should show itself in the strict observance of common life and in uniformity of doctrine; and particular reverence and obedience should be shown to bishops as the divinely appointed pastors of Christ's flock. However, the regular cure of souls, that is, parochial administration, should not be undertaken without making clear both to the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities that it was being accepted not as an obligation which could be imposed on the Order in justice, but only in charity. This is an important distinction which must be borne in mind in view of the controversies which later arose regarding parish administration both in the Philippines and in the New World.

By making this rare text generally available and enriching it with notes and the introductory essay, Father Gayo Aragón has once more put those interested in our Spanish colonial past very greatly in his debt.

H. DE LA COSTA

NEW GUINEA MISSION

SAVAGE PAPUA. A Missionary among Cannibals. By André Dupey-rat. Translated from the French by Eric and Denyse Dema-

nuny. Preface by Paul Claudel. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York. 1954. Pp. 256. \$3.75.

To a generation which twelve years ago listened anxiously to news of Port Moresby and the Coral Sea, the setting of *Savage Papua*, Catholic Book Club selection last August, will be familiar. Papua is the southeast section of the Island of New Guinea, since World War II a UN trust administered by Australia.

The mission which is the subject of this book was founded in 1885 on the little island of Yule, on the southeast coast of New Guinea, by Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Issoudun, a French Congregation. The first penetration into the interior took place about 1900. Father Joseph Bachelier, the crusty old *curé* and Military Medal veteran of World War I, who with the author is the principal character of this tale, came to Papua in 1925. Father Dupeyrat himself came in 1930.

It is the manner of modern "scientific" fiction (*sit venia verbo*) to sweep the reader away to strange planets, or by "time-machines" to precipitate him forward to remote stages of human development, or to helicopter him into some sealed-off pocket of prehistoric man. Father Dupeyrat has done the last. There are no dinosaurs in this story, but there is prehistoric man. And it is not fiction.

The Fuyughé tribes among whom the narrative is principally laid occupy the district of Mafulu, one of the eleven regions in which the Papuan Catholic Mission has built up Christian communities in the midst of a vast pagan population. The Fuyughés like their neighbors, the Tawadés, Kunis, Ononghés, etc., are incredibly retarded. The widespread existence of extreme barbarism, superstition, witchcraft, cannibalism, infant sacrifice, ignorance and filth in a land that must from time to time echo to the hum of Qantas and KLM luxury liners is almost beyond belief.

One indication of the general cultural and economic level of these peoples is the elevated position of the pig in the Papuan community. This animal is so important that it is accorded a kind of citizenship, and may not be eaten in the town in which it is raised, except by guests. In the non-Christian sections this veneration goes to depraved lengths. Father Dupeyrat tells of a tribe along the Kunimaipa River where the raising of the pig is the supreme test of housewifery. A young wife, therefore, must demonstrate her capacity for this important function by killing her own first-born child and suckling a young pig in its stead.

Savage Papua is a book of contrasts. Paul Claudel in his preface calls attention to the first. Of the Fuyughés 4000 out of 6000 are Catholics. Their spiritual regeneration however has not

made very much change in their outward manner of life. They remain dirty, naked, ignorant and unprogressive, still untouched as far as outward appearances go, in any notable degree, by the civilization of their preceptors.

And yet spiritually a miraculous transformation has taken place. Long lines of penitents at the confessional, altar rails (or what serves for them) thronged with communicants, the Mass and Benediction attended with fervor, acts of heroic faith and charity, testify how far advanced these people are from spiritual barbarism. Claudel says:

And yet between the missionary and these fallen creatures whom one would think to be half-animal there is an immediate recognition. To these stunted souls, the whole strange background of the Gospel—its abstract theology, its incomprehensible sacraments, the animals, plants, the customs unknown to them hitherto—present no barrier: they seem to seize immediately upon its essential message. In one swift leap, from being "half animals" they have become our brothers.

The second contrast is in the missionaries themselves. Here are men from the most civilized country of Europe, men who can sit after a killing hike and read Claudel or Molière for relaxation, discuss 18th century painters while toiling and slipping through a jungle, who are quick to recognize any trace of beauty in the native ways—in their music, in their poetry; and yet they condemn themselves to lives of intimacy with people who are their complete opposite: to rub sweaty noses with them, sit in their stinking huts, suffer themselves to be pawed by them in their strange way of manifesting affection.

The third contrast is not mentioned in the book, but it comes forcibly to the mind of the reader. These heroes are from France; they love Christ and they love France. *France, France, thou that killest the prophets*. In 1905, the year the great missionary, Bishop Alain de Boismenu, sent the equally famous Father Paul Fastré into the country of the Fuyughés, the French Parliament passed its Law of Separation of Church and State, a declaration of war on Christ.

This book is one which ethnologists, anthropologists and mis-siologists will read with profit for the valuable information it contains relative to their sciences. It is a book for those who love to hear of exotic lands and primitive peoples, full of the smells, tastes, sounds and feel of jungle life. It is populated with snakes, beasts, birds and bugs. And above all it is a colorful book in the literal sense of the term. It flashes with the many hues of the flowering forest and field, with the gorgeous plumage of Birds of Paradise, with the glorious skies and mountains and valleys of the interior, with the white foam and jade pools of mountain torrents, with the

glistening copper, tan, chocolate bodies of the natives. Here is a typical sentence:

A clear blue light, a pearly light smiled on all the green with its thousand and one shades, from the velvet blackness of the pine groves in the hollows to the clear quivering emerald of the summits.

Father Dupeyrat has warned us in the beginning of his tale that he is giving a high concentrate, not a historical sequence of events. And therefore if in this symphony of jungle drums and haunting songs, of the pounding of cassowaries' feet and the thunder of mountain cataracts, in the riot of colors splashed from page to page, there is a faint suspicion at times of the presence of a long bow, the reader must attribute this to artistic emphasis, producing an effect—an effect that is at any rate authentic.

There are a few places where we suspect (we do not have the French) that the translators have rendered the original poorly. One instance is sure and has resulted in a mild "howler." In the foreword, speaking of Father Fastré's work in pioneering in this area, the author describes how the missionary opened up roads with the help of several brothers; the word must have been *frères* in the original. The translators have given us the following intriguing picture: "With the help of several admirable *Friars*, he opened a road across the mountains."

Also on page 146 a marriage problem is solved in a manner which seems difficult to admit. Perhaps the author has omitted illuminating details, but as it stands the decision is hard on Ain' u' Ku, the man who as a consequence of it changed himself first into a sorcerer and then into a cassowary.

Finally, insistence on the backwardness of the natives raises the question whether anything at all was being done for them materially. Obviously there was. The fact that in 1930 there were 5 native sisters (at least) is proof of this. Moreover, incidentally medical and educational work are mentioned *passim* in the book. Finally there are several official utterances of mission policy which indicate the same. Father Fastré was content to work for 20 years with only 624 converts to show, because "his real problem had been to *make men* out of these savages before he could hope to make Christians of them." And Bishop de Boismenu's instructions had ordered the establishment of "the Christian center, with its schools...training an elite to spread its influence more widely."

If these last reflections serve to blunt somewhat the sharp contrast pointed out above by Paul Claudel, there is still barbarity enough to go round. Father Dupeyrat is a word artist and he is

painting for an effect. He is writing about *Savage Papua* and he has given the reader its *savagery* with a ruthlessness that is reminiscent of the country itself. Paul Claudel, dipping into this book, was carried irresistibly to the last page. Others will have the same experience.

LEO A. CULLUM

ENGLISH PSALMODY

THE PSALMS IN RHYTHMIC PROSE. Translated by James A. Kleist, S.J. and Thomas J. Lynam, S.J. Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee. 1954. Pp. xii—236. \$4.00.

This is a translation in modern English of the "new" Latin version of the Psalms. Each Psalm is preceded by a short analysis of its contents, and brief explanatory notes are appended where necessary. Both the analysis and the notes, like the text itself, are translated from the authorized Latin version of the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Father Lynam, who collaborated with Father Kleist in preparing the version and supervised its publication after the latter's death, insists in his Preface that the English translation is not intended to be poetry. Yet it looks like poetry and reads with the measured rhythm of poetry. The Psalms are printed not in the running line and paragraph form of prose, but in verses and strophes. This arrangement has been borrowed from the Biblical Institute's Latin version, and is an attempt to reproduce the balance and parallelism characteristic of the original Hebrew poems. The rhythmical movement is the result of consistent use by the English translators of the iambic stress throughout.

The merits of the Kleist-Lynam version are many. It is frequently both felicitous and forceful. The regularly recurring stress lends the language a flow and charm and elevated dignity well suited to the Psalms. But it could have been brought to still higher perfection. The English is not always of the same high quality. At times it is strained, unusual, and, though rarely, of questionable correctness. This may have resulted from excessive concern for rhythm. Or it may possibly be justified by an appeal to the poetic character of the Psalms. But the Psalms are also prayers and in prayer one prefers sincerity and directness rather than poetic inversions and conceits. Some examples of what this reviewer found less pleasing in the language of the new translation are the following: